

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

From Community to Classroom: A Case Study of Principled Ethnic Studies in California's Central Coast

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/96t7z958>

ISBN

9798189298837

Author

Concordia, Artnelson

Publication Date

2026-09-02

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

From Community to Classroom: A Case Study of Principled Ethnic Studies in California's

Central Coast

A dissertation proposal in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Artnelson Concordia

2026

© Copyright by
Artnelson Concordia
2026

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

From Community to Classroom: A Case Study of Principled Ethnic Studies in California's
Central Coast

by

Artnelson Concordia

Doctor of Education

in Educational Leadership

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor Daniel G. Solórzano, Chair

In 2021, with the passage of Assembly Bill 101 (AB 101), California became the first state in the nation to make Ethnic Studies (ES) a high school graduation requirement. In conjunction with AB 101, the California State Board of Education (SBE) initiated the development of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC, 2022) to help “students see themselves as active agents in the interethnic bridge-building process we call American life” (p. 8). The graduating class of 2030 (incoming ninth-graders, fall 2026) is slated to be the first generation of students accountable to the ES mandate. The opportunity and potential to harness the energies and

aspirations of millions of young people in service to the re/construction and expansion of our multiracial democracy is immense.

Given the relatively little research on how to develop, implement, and institutionalize ES teaching and learning at the K-12 district level, and even less so at the state level, this study contributes to this area. Investigation of a medium-sized, suburban school district (13,000), reflecting comparable racial and class demographics (60% Latina/o/x; 30% White) to that of the state, merit examination. By reflecting upon their work to institutionalize ES, interviews with a range of classroom practitioners and administrators responsible for ES implementation can be a valuable resource to districts who are early in their development or have yet to begin. Additionally, analyzing student course satisfaction ratings and corresponding narrative feedback provide insight and perspective on the impact of their ES experience. Lastly, cross-referencing practitioner experience and student feedback with the grassroots community organization that fought for the initiative provide meaningful insight into institutionalization in relation to the liberatory purpose of the ES educational project.

The dissertation of Artnelson Concordia is approved.

Tyrone Howard

Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales

Patrick Camangian

Daniel G. Solórzano, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2026

DEDICATION

For my partner in this life journey, Paloma Labuena Belara Concordia. I give thanks for another day to live this life with you. We did it.

For my father (and ancestor), Antonio Castillo Concordia. You were absolutely right. I *am* that man.

For our ancestors, for ourselves, for our children, and for the generations yet to come. May this work honor and serve life, love, and our collective liberation. May it be of use to young people, this place, and our planet.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	ii
DEDICATION	v
LIST OF TABLES	x
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xi
VITA	xv
PROLOGUE	1
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	6
Statement of the Problem	7
K-12 Ethnic Studies Institutionalization—Gaps in the Research	9
Research Questions	10
Research Design	12
Site and Participants	12
Study Significance	13
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	15
Historical Context of Ethnic Studies	16
The Promise of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF)	17
Reframing the Achievement Gap: Paying the Debt	19
Paying the Debt: Ethnic Studies as Essential to Reparations	19
Politics of Conflict	21
Anti-Ethnic Studies Polemic: When Liberals are at Odds with Liberation	22
Impact of K-12 Ethnic Studies	26
TUSD: Mexican American Studies	26
SFUSD: Ninth-Grade Course	27
Transformative Ethnic Studies in School	28
Culturally Responsive Teaching, Cultural Mediation, and Student Achievement	30
Impact on White Students and Implications for Combatting Racism	30
Ethnic Studies Implementation	31
Preparing K-12 Ethnic Studies Teachers	31
K-12 Ethnic Studies Pedagogy	33
Defining Ethnic Studies for K-12 Implementation in CCUnified	34
Community Organizing for Ethnic Studies Education	38

Ethnic Studies and Critical Consciousness	39
Theoretical Framework.....	40
Freire’s Theory of Humanization and Critical Race Theory in Education.....	42
Summary: Ethnic Studies Institutionalization	45
CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	47
Research Design	50
Site and Sample Selection	50
Participants	51
Recruitment.....	53
Access	54
Role Management.....	55
Data Collection	55
Data Analysis.....	56
Positionality and Ethical Issues	57
Ethical Considerations	58
Credibility and Trustworthiness	58
Study Limitations.....	60
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	61
Critical Distillation and the Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies	62
Student Course Satisfaction Ratings.....	63
Critical Consciousness and Ethnic Studies.....	65
Reflections from Students of Color	69
Ethnic Studies and Indoctrination.....	71
Teacher Bad / Teacher Good: An Emerging Ethnic Studies Pedagogy	73
Ethnic Studies Practitioners	76
The Ethnic Studies Vision: “How are the children?”	76
Learning via the Praxis (action + reflection)	83
Teaching Students (and ourselves) to Transform our World.....	85
Structures and Supports: “Not by chance, but through (systems) change”	87
Ethnic Studies Now! - Central Coast.....	89
Critical context / Timeline	90
Assessment by ESN!-CC.....	92
Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement	92

Resource and Support for Implementation	95
Early Positive Student Response and Ongoing Student Activism.....	96
Tension of Institutionalization	97
ES and the Power of the Grassroots	98
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	101
Purpose and Overview: Principled Institutionalization, Seeding Systemic Change	101
Dissertation Objectives	101
Significance of the Research	102
Scholarly Significance	102
Practical / Social Significance	103
Summary of Key Findings.....	105
An Education for Humanization	105
Finding 1: The ES Student Learning Experience—From the General to the Particular	105
Finding 2: The ES Student Learning Experience—From the Particular to the General	106
Finding 3: The ES Practitioner—Alignment to the Origins and Purpose of the Ethnic Studies Field	107
Finding 4: The ES Practitioner—Teaching ES as Individual and Collective Praxis.....	109
Finding 5: Community Advocates—Advancing the Vision of ES in the CCUnified	110
Finding 6: ES Institutionalization—Proceeding with Critical Caution	111
Theoretical Framework Interpretation.....	112
Framework Overview: Humanization and Critical Race Theory in Education.....	112
Tenet 1: Critical Consciousness as Disruption of Inequity and Oppression	114
Tenet 2: Race, Racism and the Education Debt	115
Tenet 3: Critical and Collective Action and Reflection—Transforming Education	116
Ethnic Studies as Transformative Education Project.....	117
Problem of Practice: Initiating and Sustaining Principled Institutionalization	118
Principled Institutionalization and Status Quo	118
Solution 1: Bolster Ethnic Studies Teaching and Learning.....	118
Solution 2: Strengthen Structures to Sustain Principled Institutionalization.....	119
Solution 3: Establish and Maintain Avenues for Community Collaboration and Accountability	120
Toward Addressing The Problem.....	120
Walking the ES Road While Making it	120
Implications for Educational / Leadership Interventions.....	121

Challenges and Opportunities for Practice and Policy	122
Implications for Classroom / School Practice	122
Ethnic Studies-ifying the Institution: Implications for District / Organizational Leadership	123
Implications for Policy: “How are the Children?”	124
The Research: Parameters and Possibilities	125
Study Limitations.....	125
Future Research for K-12 Ethnic Studies	126
Unanswered Questions	126
Contribution to the Literature	127
Conclusion	128
APPENDIX A: ES PRACTITIONER (TEACHER AND LEADER) RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	130
APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY ADVOCACY FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT LETTER	132
APPENDIX C: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	134
APPENDIX D: DISTRICT/SITE LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	136
APPENDIX E: COMMUNITY ADVOCACY GROUP PROTOCOL.....	138
APPENDIX F: ETHNIC STUDIES PRACTITIONER ACTIVE CONSENT FORM (TEACHER).....	141
APPENDIX G: ETHNIC STUDIES PRACTITIONER ACTIVE CONSENT FORM (LEADERSHIP)	145
APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP ACTIVE CONSENT FORM.....	150
APPENDIX I: POST-SURVEY QUESTIONS	154
REFERENCES	155

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies.....	37
Table 2. Course Satisfaction Rating by Race/Ethnicity.....	65

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Filipino concept and essential understanding of *kapwa* was something that I imbibed as a child—often hearing the term used by elders, both in familial and community space. I understood it as “to get along because we’re the same.” Later, as I developed my educator practice, and eventually became an Ethnic Studies teacher, I learned of the Bantu concept of *ubuntu* (I am, because we are). I learned of the Mayan precept, *In Lak’ech* (You are my other me). I deepened my understanding of the native Hawaiian value of *aloha* (recognition of shared breath of life). And through my journey of teaching and learning, I deepened my grasp of *kapwa* to understand it now as our critically shared and interconnected existence.

These acknowledgements reflect my humble and deepest recognition of this interconnectedness and my eternal gratitude for the people who have nurtured, taught, supported, and mentored me to become both the scholar that I am, and the man I am becoming: a strong fiber in the beautiful tapestry of our shared humanity.

To my ancestors and to my family of origin. To my father, Antonio, who recently joined the ancestors, and to my mother, Leah Renin Odoño Concordia, whom I owe my very existence, I am grateful for the sacrifices you’ve made and the life you built for us. To the extended tribes that cared for me – the Tolentino, Odoño, Gardoce, Blacano, del Rosario and the De Asis families, and to all my Titas, Titos, and cousins who co-raised me, particularly my Tita Paz (Tita Cing), Tita Josie, Tita Nene, and Tita Nena – I will do right by our family, always / all ways. To my Kuya Mike, I witnessed first-hand from you what it meant to stand up to bullies, when as a second grader you fought back against Robert Smeel and his big brother as they tried to steal my bike. To my younger brother Johneric, the documentarian and principal story-keeper for our family, thank you for ensuring that our history is preserved and carrying on that critical

responsibility from our Tita Cing. To my baby brother, Christopher, you are the rock for us all that we look to for strength and wisdom. Collectively, you are my origin, my “who I come from.” I am, because *we* are.

To my immediate family, my wife and children—Paloma, my most amazing partner, what a life we have built together! You are an eternal source of steadiness, inspiration, and strength. To my children—Timyas, my first born, my “fat grain of rice,” my abundant harvest; Alon, my vast ocean tide that brings so much life to our shores; Kalayo, my blazing fire, your light, warmth, and wisdom shines through all ways; Amihan—my cool Northeastern wind that brings respite from the heat in time for the bounty to come, you are my forces of nature that will reshape this world. To Yaya and Yayo, Yoyo and Yoya, and Tia ‘Brina. Thank you for all your love and support.

My family, you are my heart, you are my home, you are my inspiration. You are my other me.

To my kasamas of the Central California community—the organizers, the classroom teachers, the community advocates, the critical scholars, the elected servant-leaders, the students I was blessed to do this research for, and with. Thank you for allowing me to document and tell the story of this incredible work —may y/our righteous struggle, sacrifices, and social movement continue to inspire and serve our children for generations to come—*hanggang sa tagumpay / hasta victoria siempre* / until we all get free. Salamat and solidarity, forever. You are the breath of life and the hope of our communities.

To my committee. Dr. Tyrone Howard, thank you for holding me down when I was at my most vulnerable and pushing me to make this dissertation about me, because that would ensure that it would be about us. Dr. Patrick Camangian, you are my DAY 1 homie scholar. Thank you

for always carrying the fire of the “wretched of the earth” and being my radical intellectual “physical trainer” for my mind. Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Godmother to my first born, you have been the constant in my career and so much of my life—from community (as your student), to classroom (as a teacher), to my earliest scholarly endeavors, always supporting me to shine. And to Dr. Daniel, “Danny,” Solorzano. You guided me through this line-by-line, pushing my thinking, and affirming my ideas. Your graciousness, critical wisdom, scholarship, humility, and brilliance IS the standard. I am humbled, honored, and blessed to have been collectively shepherded through this endeavor by you all.

To Jordan Beltran Gonzales, the people’s editor, and my (as well as the people’s) academic mechanic. There is no magical dust. You are the magic. And through you, the roughest edges of my writing became dust from which my ideas were able to shine through. Super Salamat.

To the direct connection to the spirit and legacy of my Katipunero ancestry – the movement for national liberation and democracy in the Philippines. Thank you for developing my internationalist and anti-imperialist values and praxis. I hold my learnings close and apply them every day in service to the people, always. To my Los Angeles Filipino community roots, particularly Uncle Royal Morales, Joel Jacinto, Joe Navidad, and Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA). Thank you for helping me find my way back to myself. To all the homies, eskolars ng Bayan (people’s scholars) and Freedom Schooling affiliates (Tracy, Jordan, Patrick, Jack, Francis, Pano, Ninang Auntie Ruby, Allyson, Arlene, Luis, and Jocyl) that pitched in to buy the prettiest dress a man could imagine—I looked amazing in my Bruin regalia on graduation day.

To my comrades and to the good people of San Francisco, Oakland, Daly City and the larger Bay Area that raised me (Burton HS, The Filipino Community Center, Pin@y Education Project, 5 Elements, the Law Academy, PULSE, WALC, and the entire Balboa HS family) and who taught me what it is to fight for and develop an education for liberation – salamat. To my former students from the Sucka Free—Vonga, Rosa, Violeta, Adan, Will, Donald, Danielle, Natasha, Rolan, Joey, Valerie, Janet, Bernadette, Matagi, Andrew, Sophia, Robin, Josie, Zach, Nicole, Jasmine, the Wilsons, Becky, Jeffrey, Latoya, Abdullah, Princess, Prince, Krystle, Kevin, Paradise, and Paradise and the 2,354 other students I’ve taught either directly or because you felt safe in my classroom, thank you for being my forever teachers.

WE DID IT. ISANG BAGSAK!

VITA

Education

- Single Subject Credential, History – Social Studies, University of San Francisco, June 2000
- B.A. in History and Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles, June 1996

Professional Appointments

- Instructional Support Specialist - Ethnic Studies, Santa Barbara Unified School District, 2020–present
- Curriculum Writer, Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, California Department of Education, 2016–2017
- Teacher on Special Assignment - Ethnic Studies, San Francisco Unified School District, 2014–2020
- Classroom Social Studies Teacher, San Francisco Unified School District, 1998–2001; 2002–2014

Publications

- Concordia, A. O., & Tintiangco-Cubales, A. (Spring 2024). Policy isn't enough: Learning from Ethnic Studies K-12 teachers. *AAPINexus Journal*.
- Cunanan, G., Concordia, A. O., & Jacob, T. (June 2023). "Ethnic Studies as a Social Movement: Resistance in the Face of Reaction." *Journal of Asian American Studies*
- Concordia, A. O. (November 2019). This district tapped students' histories to create an Ethnic Studies curriculum. *EdSurge*.
- Concordia, A. O. (January 2019). We don't want to just study the world, we want to change it: ethnic studies and the development of transformative students and educators. *Rethinking Ethnic Studies*.

Fields of Study

- Major Field: Ethnic Studies; Curriculum and Pedagogy; Teacher Leadership

Relevant Presentations

- "Foundations and Futures: Asian American and Pacific Islander Multimedia Textbook." Activism Chapter, Lead Curriculum Writer, 2024–2026
- "Ethnic Studies at a Crossroads. Palestine, Solidarity & the Soul & Substance of the Movement." Keynote Presenter, Institute for Teachers of Color (ITOC) Conference, June 2024
- "ACSA Summer Leadership Institute." Presenter, June 2024

- “Equity — Our Moral Obligation . . . Lead with Courage, Character & Commitment.” Panelist, ACSA Equity Summit, April 2024
- “Recommendations for Implementing Principled Ethnic Studies.” Presenter, ACSA Equity Summit, April 2024

Curriculum Development

- Lead curriculum writer for “Foundations and Futures: Asian American and Pacific Islander Multimedia Textbook” Activism Chapter. The AAPIMT is the most comprehensive collection of Asian American and Pacific Islander histories and perspectives available for free and online for high school, college, and lifelong learners (2024–2025)
- Co-created and implemented San Francisco Unified School District’s (SFUSD) groundbreaking, ninth-grade ethnic studies course that 1) increased student attendance by 21%, 2) improved GPA by 1.7 points, and 3) increased total units accumulated toward graduation by 23. “These surprisingly large effects are consistent with the hypothesis that the course reduced dropout rates and suggest culturally relevant teaching . . . can provide effective support to at-risk students” (*The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum*, Thomas Dee & Emily Penner, Stanford Graduate School of Education). (Fall 2010–October 2020)
- SFUSD History-Social Studies Core Curriculum Steering Committee: Collaborate with History-Social Studies (H-SS) Department and Stanford’s Center for the Study of Excellent Teaching (CSET) to conceptualize, develop, and implement a learning arc for a cohort of H-SS teachers representing grades 6–12, to develop SFUSD’s core curriculum for H-SS. (Fall 2019–October 2020)
- California Department of Education (CDE) Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC): Co-wrote draft of ESMC in collaboration with the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee (ESMC – AC) composed of ethnic studies practitioners and scholars representing districts and universities across the state of California. Sanctioned by the passage of AB 2016, the ESMC will be utilized to support the expansion of ethnic studies statewide. (Fall 2018–Spring 2019)

Professional Development

- Integrated English Language Development (I-ELD) Teacher workshop series, Co-presenter for Santa Barbara Unified School District (SBUSD) secondary humanities teachers (Fall 2024–present)
- Conceptualize, plan, and facilitate regular professional development to SFUSD and Santa Barbara Unified School District (SBUSD) ethnic studies teachers and teachers interested in infusing ethnic studies into their practice. (Fall 2015–present)

PROLOGUE

On February 13, 2025, my father, the direct descendant of staunch Filipino revolutionaries (Katipuneros¹) who fought against three historic forces of subjugation imposed upon the people of the archipelago known as the Philippines—Spanish colonialism, U.S. imperialism, and Imperial Japanese occupation—unexpectedly passed away. He was a true Filipino nationalist by birth, by blood. Yet, at the age of 16, he enlisted in the United States Navy (USN) as a stewardman—a role, even after desegregation of the military, typically assigned to Black and Filipino seamen whose function was to tend to White officers and prepare food for the warship (Swanson, 2021; *What Is a Steward?*, 2023)—in exchange for adventure (his word) and the opportunities afforded by U.S. citizenship. From this transaction, he sacrificed a degree of his dignity and pride for the goal of coming to and setting roots in the land that his forebears, only one generation before, engaged in a bloody armed struggle against—an apocalyptic event causing, by conservative figures the death of 200,000 civilians (by Filipino scholars’ estimations, over 1 million), and cemented the colonial relations that continue today (Constantino, 1972; Francia, 2010; Gates, 1984; Guerrero, 1991; Schirmer, 1972). For his family and community, he leaves behind a legacy, and possibly a roadmap, for actualizing and embodying change—the dialectical result born of the reconciliation of what Black scholar, W.E.B. Du Bois, identified as “warring bodies.”

Like many Third World peoples² seeking opportunities uniquely associated with the United States of America, my father found both semblance of success and belonging, as well as

¹ Kataastaasan Kagalanggalan Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan, translated as “the highest and most noble children of the nation,” organized and acted upon the growing sentiment of an emerging and unified national identity to initiate and lead the Philippine Revolution of 1896 against centuries of Spanish colonialism, and followed by the American occupation and U.S. imperialism.

² Today commonly known as people of the Global South

degrees of dehumanization and despair. He believed that this nation offered something that the Philippines could not. The irony not lost on him, he believed that what he longed for (opportunity and freedom), could only be found in the country that expropriated immense resources (both in labor and raw material) from the people and land of his birth. While he embraced his U.S. citizenship, he also understood that his proud Filipino ways of being might not always be understood, nor welcomed. At the same time, he was also adamant that his children would be full-fledged Americans—that they would have an opportunity to *be* everything that they are, both Filipino, as well as American.

While my father worked to instill a strong sense of self within me and my siblings, I was not as able in my younger years to fend off the ills of internalized racism and colonialism. I embodied a self-loathing that shaped my relationships (to self; family; community; world) and acted out on the deep shame I developed for my ancestral origin, culture, language, and ultimately the phenotype I embody. I don't recall the exact moment I learned how to, but I intimately know of living in the paradox of the Brown being in a White world (Constantino, 1970; David, 2013; Enriquez, 1978). Saturated by Sunday morning cartoons, summers of American soap operas, and a childhood of Hollywood storytelling, I, a Brown boy from the barrio housing “warring bodies” within, had my soul split. This self-hate directed me to aspire to be American, which I understood to mean to be White, which was synonymous with wealth, success, beauty, and opportunity. In application of W.E.B. Du Bois' (1903) articulation of *double consciousness*, in my inability to reconcile these identities to “be both a [Filipino] and an American,” I acted out in self-destructive, maladaptive ways not unlike many young people of Color.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, the groundbreaking contribution to Black liberation and

greater humanity, Du Bois introduces the world to the concept of *double consciousness* as reflective of the perplexing yet intimately familiar experience of existing within a society that despises and abuses you, while simultaneously needing you. Specifically, he analyzes and critiques the Black experience in the United States as a “two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p. 8). Du Bois further contextualized and defined this concept as:

. . . a longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. (p. 9)

Du Bois' foundation setting conceptualization of *double consciousness* helps develop within Black Studies, and by extension, the larger field of ethnic studies, critical tools to investigate, challenge and transform colonial (racialized) systems of power. Furthermore, and arguably most importantly, Du Bois concept of *double consciousness* invites an emancipatory interrogation of our ways of seeing (epistemology) and being (ontology) through an intensive reflection of self, family, community and society. I embrace and seek to embody Du Bois' invitation in my scholarship, public leadership, and liberatory education practice.

In hindsight, my childhood self needed examples of *my people's* ancient existence and brilliance (history). I was in need of tools to make meaning and engage in analyses of my, and my community's struggle and survival (criticality). I was restless and in search of something that cultivated my agency toward a future of possibility (knowledge with purpose + action)—bearing

fruit in America from an archipelagic past, Tagalog³ root. I was desperately in need of connection and community that upheld and affirmed my own inherent value as a person (community and solidarity). In short, I was searching for ethnic studies.

In his 1960 speech to the Charlotte, North Carolina chapter of the NAACP, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a speech titled “The Negro and the American Dream.” In it he describes a contradiction, a *double consciousness* if you will, and says “America has manifested a schizophrenic personality. She has been torn between [two] selves—a self in which she has proudly professed democracy and a self in which she has sadly practiced the antithesis of democracy.” It is my aim to further develop scholarship in service to the movement for ethnic studies as a way to reconcile both the moral schizophrenia of American society, and the resulting double consciousness and harm inflicted upon its young people—specifically Black / African American, 1st Nation, Asian and Pacific Islander, Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x)—and the communities from which they come.

What my father intuitively modeled for his children throughout his life when it came to interactions with power (specifically power embodied by White men), is what Black discusses as a multilateral double consciousness (MDC)—defined as the liberatory result where “white people, or those in dominant positions, learn to see themselves as white or dominant from the perspectives of people of color, or subjugated people” (Black, 2012, p. 301). Rather than succumb to a subordinate role (mentally, spiritually, and physically) in any context, I often witnessed my father exude Muhammad Ali-like confidence, actively and passionately edifying

³ The term originating from the descriptor, *taga ilog* (from the shore of the river), the Tagalogs represent one of the many ethnic groups from the archipelago broadly known as the Philippines, and was one of the eight provinces that initiated the revolution for independence against Spain.

White audiences by reflecting his perspective and experience of them.

The study described in the chapters that follow aims to edify—specifically, to equip district leadership, site administrators and teachers responsible for ethnic studies implementation, with useful insights gleaned from the experience of students, ethnic studies practitioners, and the community that mobilized to make the CCUnified an early adopter district.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ethnic Studies (ES) is a liberatory educational project⁴ (Freire, 1970/2000) born of a broad social movement (Hu-DeHart, 1993; Valenzuela & Epstein, 2023). This transdisciplinary field of research, teaching and learning is committed to justice, liberation, and humanity, with the express goal of eliminating racism and all forms of oppression and dehumanization (*Shared Principles*, 2025; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Racism, defined as “the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group” (Ture & Hamilton, 2011, p. 3), stands in stark contrast to our nation’s highest-stated ideals of equality, justice, freedom, and democracy. This phenomenon has been an intractable and pernicious issue plaguing U.S. American society (as well as our larger world) since its colonial inception and is alive and well today.

In 1969, at the Central Coast’s premier research institution, Chicane students laid out a blueprint for educational reform, El Plan de Santa Barbara, in response to the centuries of marginalization of people of Mexican descent in the United States. A key element of the manifesto asserted the right of Chicane students to access a college education that reflected the ancient histories, lived experiences, and aspirations of their community, and that would in turn equip them to serve their community. They envisioned this education as a “constellation” of Chicano Studies courses that would respond to their, and their community’s needs. In the spirit of El Plan de Santa Barbara, ES practitioners from the central coast school district centered in this dissertation, created a local plan to define and guide their efforts to institutionalize ES in fidelity to the origins and purpose of the larger field. This strategic plan was created to facilitate

⁴ Characterized by Freire as a necessary reform in concert with the oppressed, and those in solidarity with them, in the larger movement to transform systems of dehumanization and oppression.

the actualization of the district adopted definition of ES co-developed by ES scholars, parents, students, and teachers.

This dissertation tells the story of the work to institutionalize ES in fidelity to the transformative essence of the field in the Central Coast Unified School District (CCUnified). This study investigates the principled institutionalization (PI) of ES as it is defined by the district adopted definition of ES and distilled in what CCUnified ES practitioners wield as the Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies (*History of ESG; Criticality/Critical Consciousness; Knowledge with Purpose + Action; Community & Solidarity*). These cornerstones will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters. Additionally, the following chapters identify and examine the inherent tension of institutionalizing liberatory education, highlights the gap in the existing research on district-level ES implementation, and lays out the parameters of my research (research questions, design, study significance, site and participation).

Statement of the Problem

In 2021, with the passage of Assembly Bill 101 (AB 101), California became the first state in the nation to make ES a high school graduation requirement. The purpose was twofold: (a) teach students of the wealth of knowledge and experiences of historically marginalized communities of Color; and (b) equip young people with essential critical literacies and dispositions and engage them in the work of actualizing our nation's highest-stated ideals. In service to this end, and in conjunction with AB 101, the California State Board of Education (SBE) initiated the development of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC, 2022) to help "students see themselves as active agents in the interethnic bridge-building process we call American life" (p. 8). With the passage of AB 101, the graduating class of 2030 (incoming ninth-graders, Fall 2026) will be the first generation of students accountable to the ES mandate. The

opportunity and potential to harness the energies and aspirations of millions of young adults in service to the re/construction and expansion of our multiracial democracy is immense.

While this task is no small feat, California’s unique demographics, geographic location, and globally impactful economy, makes it strategically situated at the crossroads of politics, culture, and society. With nearly 6 million young people in its public schools, approximately 2 million of whom are in high school (*Fingertip Facts on Education in California*, 2024), its public education system is positioned to positively and powerfully impact both our nation, as well as the world. The state’s core curriculum of math, science, English language arts, history/social studies, physical education and an electives requirement, has been expanded to include ES—a course whose purpose is to equip students with critical knowledge and skills to engage in the building of our multi-racial democracy—with criticality, racial literacy, action research, and community engagement as foundational components (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Reyes McGovern & Buenavista, 2016; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014).

ES is a long-established field in the realm of higher education. However, research and understanding of how to appropriately implement ES courses at the K-12 public school district level is limited. There is a growing body of work that investigates the relationship between K-12 ES and areas of research such as critical consciousness (Cammarota, 2015; Chapman et al., 2020; de los Rios et al., 2016; Pinedo et al., 2024); academic achievement (Bisht et al., 2026; Bonilla et al., 2020; Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020); teacher preparation (Kohli, 2016; Sacramento, 2019; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014); and ES pedagogy and curriculum development (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). While these studies reflect multiple necessary elements to K-12 ES institutionalization (specifically teaching and learning),

and some studies have engaged in broad investigation of local education agency (LEA) preparedness (LaBriola, 2025; Penner & Ma, 2023; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023), no studies have examined district-wide efforts to implement ES.

With the state mandate requiring ES for graduation, several factors present significant challenges toward successful implementation. Specifically, the field's explicitly radical vision, history, and transformative potential (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Valenzuela & Epstein, 2022); the relatively new field of work related to teaching it in K-12 (Kohli, 2016; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014) the current political climate (Rogers & Kahne, 2022); and especially, the scarcity of qualified practitioners who have critically delved into the intersections of their identities (Concordia & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2024; Kohli, 2016; Penner & Ma, 2023; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023), make implementation a daunting task. Nevertheless, the prospect and possibility of mobilizing public education for actualizing our nation's highest-stated ideals remain exciting and worthwhile.

K-12 Ethnic Studies Institutionalization—Gaps in the Research

The movement for ES seeks to transform public education to address the history of injustice and marginalization of communities of Color while simultaneously equipping students with the knowledge and critical tools and sensibilities to develop an anti-racist consciousness (Black, 2007, 2012; Cuauhtin et al., 2019; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Valenzuela & Epstein, 2023). While the field has existed for well over 50 years (Black Studies for nearly a century before it) (Banks, 2020) its implementation has been concentrated to college and university institutions,

with sporadic and localized efforts at the K-12 public school level, and only recently growing within those contexts (Hu-DeHart, 1993; Kwon, 2021; Penner & Ma, 2023).

Despite vocal critics in opposition to ES (Aarons, 2021; Fensterwald, 2025; Figoten et al., 2021; LaBriola, 2025; Sander & Wyner, 2022), there is compelling evidence of its efficacy toward improving student outcomes for historically minoritized and vulnerable student populations (Bisht et al., 2026; Bonilla et al., 2020; Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Furthermore, studies show that ES course work has a positive impact upon White students in regard to their identity formation and anti-racist outlook development (Abrams, 2021; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Thus, despite the uncertain status of state funding for the graduation requirement (Fensterwald, 2025; LaBriola, 2025), school districts continue to prepare for it, engaging in professional learning, developing their course offerings and master schedules (Noriega, 2025; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023). While a growing body of research affirms the positive impact of ES upon young people, there is a dearth of research on how to develop, implement, and institutionalize ES teaching and learning at the district level. The gap in the research is even more heightened at the state level (LaBriola, 2025; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023).

This study seeks to examine this underexplored domain. Investigation of a medium-sized, suburban school district, reflecting comparable racial (63% Latina/o/x; 30% White) demographics to that of the state, and its effort to institutionalize ES, merit examination. Toward this end, I seek to answer the following questions.

Research Questions

One synthesizing Research Question (RQ) asks: What was necessary for the principled institutionalization (PI) of high school ethnic studies (ES) in Central Coast Unified (CCUnified)?

Explored through the following three sub-questions and alignment with the “Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies”⁵:

RQ1.1. Based on students’ post-survey responses, what made (or what would make) their ES courses an impactful learning experience?

RQ1.2. According to CCUnified ES practitioners (teachers and administrators), what was necessary for the PI of high school ES courses and/or programs in their district?

RQ1.3. How does Ethnic Studies Now!-Central Coast (ESN!-CC), the leading community organization in support of ethnic studies in Central Coast town, perceive the implementation of K-12 ES in the CCUnified?

RQ1.3a. Specifically, how does the current CCUnified ES program reflect their aspirations for ES in the school district?

To answer these questions, analyzing student course satisfaction ratings and corresponding narrative feedback will provide insight and perspective on their ES experience and its impact (RQ1.1). Interviews of a range of practitioners (classroom teachers, district and site administrators) responsible for ES implementation will address RQ1.2. Additionally, practitioner responses in relation to their work to institutionalize ES can be a valuable resource to districts who are early in their development or have yet to begin. Lastly, cross-referencing student feedback, practitioner experience, and the grassroots community organization that fought for the

⁵ Resource developed by the Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies, derived from the district’s ethnic studies definition—and other scholarly work, including Sleeter and Zavala’s 7 Hallmarks of Ethnic studies, Tintiangco-Cubales et al.’s definition of ethnic studies pedagogy—for the purpose of broad awareness raising of the field for those unfamiliar with ethnic studies, including, but not limited to, administrators (district and site), counselors, teachers; course development; and professional learning. The Four Cornerstones distills the district’s ethnic studies definition into four key areas: (a) *history* centering communities of Color in the first person; (b) *critical consciousness* development; (c) *knowledge with purpose + action*; and (d) *community and solidarity*. Discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

initiative, provide meaningful insight into institutionalization, specifically as it pertains to the radical purpose of the ES educational project (RQ1.3, RQ1.3a).

Research Design

I engaged in a qualitative descriptive case study of the ES work within CCUnified centering students' experience (via post-survey data) with the course/s (RQ1.1), the practitioners (classroom teachers, site and district administration) responsible for implementation (RQ1.2), and grassroots community responsible for calling upon the district to initiate and sustain the ES program (RQ1.3, RQ1.3a). The lessons gleaned both from challenges and opportunities of implementation in CCUnified while of immediate benefit to the district, can also act as a powerful resource and may be transferable to other school districts seeking to fulfill the state's mandate and implementation with fidelity to the field's anti-racist and liberatory origin and purpose.

Site and Participants

While no site can reflect the immense diversity of the entirety of California, CCUnified reflects key demographic elements of interest to school districts throughout the state responsible for ES implementation. The Central Coast's demographics, its political diversity, and CCUnified's early adopter experience, while unique to the central coast town, may provide a useful analog. In addition to student feedback via anonymous post-survey responses, the qualifications for participating in the study are defined here: (a) teachers implementing either stand-alone ES courses (i.e., English 9 Ethnic Studies, Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x Studies, Black Studies, etc.) or infusing ES within their respective courses (English Language Arts, Additional Language Development (ALD), history); (b) administrators and leadership responsible for overseeing district and/or site implementation; and (c) community/grassroots members of ESN!-

CC. Over the past seven years, each of these populations (students, ES practitioners, and community advocates) have been central to the development and implementation of ES in CCUnified and will be the primary source to address the above research questions. Invitation to participate was formally directed to each of these groups, not including students. Use of anonymous student post-survey responses was approved through the school district's research committee. The principal investigator's unique role as both district staff and researcher allowed for the conduct of general awareness raising about the study and active recruitment for participation for several months prior to initiation.

Study Significance

In December of 2015, a local grassroots organization, Ethnic Studies Now! - Central Coast (ESN!-CC) was formed by a broad cross-section of the Central Coast community demanding from the CCUnified an education that reflected and appropriately responded (pedagogically and epistemologically) to the histories, lived experiences and aspirations of its majority students of Color population. They sought this through initiating a campaign to make ES a graduation requirement for all CCUnified students (Fujino et al., 2019). From the initial demands brought forth by ESN!-CC, to those tasked with the development and implementation of ES, as well as the students who have completed the course and shared their feedback on their experience, these populations were and continue to be central to the principled institutionalization (PI) of ES. The findings from this study provide insight towards PI of ES from the experience of students, ES practitioners (teachers and administrators), and community advocates as it relates to the CCUnified.

Given the fact that ES in K-12 has typically been implemented as an intervention to disrupt inequity and marginalization of students of Color by fostering criticality and agency

(Cammarota, 2015; Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Dee & Penner, 2017; Valenzuela & Epstein, 2023), CCUnified's experience as an early adopter LEA requiring all students to take a semester of ES in order to graduate, provides additional value. While there is growing opposition to social justice initiatives rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion (Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling, 2025), there remains great interest around the potential impact of ES as an intervention to disrupt racism, anti-blackness, and racial tension and discord via teaching young people about the structural causes of oppression and dehumanization, and equipping them to take action toward addressing it (Chapman et al., 2020; Kim & An, 2024).

Immediately, this study provides the CCUnified with district specific insight born from its years of practice encompassing the perspectives of key elements (students, teachers, site administrators, district leadership) of the ES project (RQ1.1, RQ1.2). Additionally, this study aims to provide the community organization, who had demanded and organized for institutionalization, an opportunity to reflect upon their vision and implementation of the initiative they fought for—ES implementation that develops both critical knowledge and skills for young people that equips them to participate in problem-solving the range of pressing social issues in their family and community (i.e., racism), and fosters cross community solidarity (RQ1.3). Lastly, this study may provide a range of districts, and other LEA working towards ES implementation, useful insight and tools to navigate both the practical challenges, as well as the politics of their respective institutions, and community contexts, to ensure the development of an ES offering aligned with the origins and purpose of the field (RQ1.1, RQ1.3, RQ1.3a).

As the state of California grapples with a plethora of intensely challenging obstacles toward implementing its ES graduation requirement, a number of important questions remain: Who will teach these courses? Who will develop the scores of teachers needed to implement

these courses? How will they be developed? How will state and local institutions work together to support broad implementation? What will be taught and how will it be taught? How will courses, teachers, and students be evaluated? What criteria will be used to determine successful implementation? While this study cannot answer all these questions, it seeks to provide some degree of insight to them by focusing on CCUnified’s implementation (RQ1.1), and commitment to continuous improvement of the program (RQ1.2, RQ1.3, RQ1.3a).

The following chapters provide an overview of the existing research that investigates K-12 ES, including a summary of the political opposition facing institutionalization, how this study was conducted, and the subsequent findings and key points of discussion that were surfaced from the data.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

California is at a crossroads in relation to its promise and commitment (AB 101) to ES within its K-12 public schools. While efforts continue to both develop and demand that the state follow-through with institutionalization (Fensterwald, 2025; LaBriola, 2025; Penner & Ma, 2023), opposition to implementation true to its critical roots, mounts (Fensterwald, 2025; (Montaño, 2025; Nanguneri, 2025). In April 2025, the Academic Senate of the University of California voted to delay making ES a graduation requirement for the UC system, arguing that uncertainty of state funding of the K-12 requirement and claiming that criteria are “inherently political and divisive” (LaBriola, 2025, p. 8; Nanguneri, 2025; Winograd, 2025). Fittingly, this literature review provides context (both history and scholarship) that can help make sense of the unique, tension-filled space that the movement for K-12 ES institutionalization occupies.

Additionally, the findings from student post-survey responses can inform the discussion within the UC system.

I historicize ES as an educational movement committed to self-determination and humanization of Third World peoples⁶ in the United States (U.S.) and connect it to the long-standing tradition of democratic reform within U.S. American education. I examine current challenges, opposition, and opportunities for K-12 institutionalization. I then explore the existing research on the impact of ES within K-12. Lastly, I discuss examples of localized efforts, backed by grassroots community, to build ES within classroom, school or district contexts in fidelity with the purpose of the field. While ES has been steadily implemented over the last decade and is on the verge of much broader implementation (Kwon, 2021; LaBriola, 2025; Penner & Ma, 2023), what has been done in relation to K-12 institutionalization requires further investigation.

Historical Context of Ethnic Studies

Since the inception of compulsory public education broadly in the United States, there has been an equally long history of attempts to reform, redefine, expand, and improve the systems of schooling spanning well over a century (Anderson, 1988; Lowenhaupt, 2021; McNeil, 1986; Mehta, 2013; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1997). While the *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) ruling often headlines the efforts made to address injustice within public education that center students who have historically been the most vulnerable to systemic inequity, it is preceded by a long history of First Nation and Black liberation struggle (Anderson, 1988; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Estes 2019; Marable, 2015), and flanked by a broad range of efforts advocating for justice and equity based reform from communities relegated to the margins of

⁶ Refers to racialized communities of Color in the United States, reflecting the respective diasporas or descendants of former and/or current U.S. colonial territories; First Nations/indigenous communities dispossessed of their lands; and/or African peoples enslaved during our nation's colonial inception and eventual founding.

both the school system and society (Banks, 1993). These efforts, spanning the history of this nation, provide both the historical backdrop, as well as the moral and political foundation for the movement for ES today. It is from this history that this dissertation is firmly rooted.

The Promise of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF)

In the fall of 1968, a student strike led by the Black Student Union (BSU) along with the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF)⁷ disrupted operations at San Francisco College (today known as San Francisco State University). The organizers leading the efforts at SFSU as well as UC Berkeley identified with and wielded the language and corresponding analysis explicitly connecting racism to the practice and legacy of colonialism, calling themselves collectively, as the TWLF. Black scholars like Du Bois and Malcolm X theorized communities racialized as non-White in the United States to be internal colonies—with systems and relationships of power facilitating and maintaining a politically subordinated, economically exploited and dehumanized existence (Dahl, 2023; Edin et al., 2023).

The institution was shut down for nearly six months, the longest student strike in the history of the United States. Their demands consisted of admission of all Black student applicants, and other students of Color; a curriculum reflecting the histories of Third World communities in the United States; courses taught by professors reflecting those communities; and support for Third World students towards graduation. Their actions led to significant institutional reforms, most notably, the establishment of the first College of Ethnic Studies at SFSU. Simultaneously, students at UC Berkeley staged student walkouts and campus shutdowns, inevitably leading to the establishment of a Department of Ethnic Studies. Both the College of

⁷ The TWLF was composed of the Latin American Student Organization (LASO), the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), the Mexican American Student Confederation, the Philippine (now Pilipino) American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE), La Raza, the Native American Students Union, and Asian American Political Alliance.

Ethnic Studies and the Ethnic Studies Department were the first of their kind in the nation (*The Berkeley Revolution*, 2017).

While the descriptors of race (skin color and phenotype), and/or ethnicity (ancestral/continental origin) were used interchangeably with the concept of internal colony during this earlier period, today, they have replaced the language entirely. Importantly, without the historical context and critical analysis to make connections between race and colonialism, our understandings of the social construction of race and racism are susceptible to surface level identity politics that seek to restrict the purview of ES to the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion—a move that has significant implications to its liberatory origins, purpose, and practice (LYE, 2010).

In 1968, paralleling the efforts of the TWLF, students at Berkeley High School led a strike that culminated in the establishment of the first African American Studies Department in public K-12 schools (Orenstein, 2018). This historic period of ES, characterized by Banks (2022) as “phase one” include the 1968 and 1969 mass mobilizations of 15,000 Chicano students in mass walkouts from their respective Los Angeles high schools to protest both the oppressive learning environments (humiliation, corporal punishment, English-only policies, etc.) as well as the racist and Euro-centric curriculum they were subjected to (*A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States*, n.d.). This grass-roots action was mirrored in Denver, Colorado and Crystal City, Texas, as well (Barrios, 2009). In the same year, UC Santa Barbara students initiated a campaign calling for institutional accountability to the local Chicano community. The historic effort was grounded in a strategic plan called “El Plan de Santa Barbara,” and demanded that the university respond to the needs of the community and reorient higher education toward public service (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education,

1969). In the decades following, the field experienced exponential growth within post-secondary institutions. Today, it has expanded to colleges and universities throughout the nation (Banks, 2022; Hu-Duhart, 1993).

Reframing the Achievement Gap: Paying the Debt

In her 2006 Presidential Address to the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Gloria Ladson-Billings reconceptualized what had previously been understood as the “achievement gap.”⁸ The ensuing achievement gap language failed to capture the systemic root causes behind Black, Latinx, Native and certain Asian Students, persistently lagging behind their White counterparts in key academic indicators (Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Central to ES pedagogy is the development of student (and teacher) critical consciousness (Chapman et al. 2020; Pinedo et al., 2025; Sacramento, 2020; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2017), rooted in the centering of the histories of ethnic studies groups⁹ (ESG) told in the first person (Concordia & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2024). In the development of ES in CCUnified, criticality/critical consciousness is a key component to implementation (RQ1a). How critical consciousness is developed with both ES teachers and students so that complex analyses of structures and systems is central to teaching and learning, is a developing area of research.

Paying the Debt: Ethnic Studies as Essential to Reparations

In 2023, the state of California’s Department of Justice, released the California Reparations Report that set forth a slew of policy recommendations and identified key ways to

⁸ A term born from the 1966 Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS) confirming different academic outcomes between Black and White students. While the EEOS is lauded for documenting this national phenomenon, it is aptly criticized for its misattribution of family background as the leading factor causing this difference.

⁹ Ethnic studies centers the experiences, struggles, world views, and immense contributions of the core ethnic studies groups (ESG) - Native American; African/Black American; Chicana/o/x or Latina/o/x; Asian American (including Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Arab American), also known broadly as “communities of Color,” and more recently, Black, Indigenous, and other People Of Color (BIPOC). Importantly, these narratives are principally told in the first person.

address the legacy of enslavement, highlighting the impact of “separate and unequal education.” Specifically, the report explicitly called for, “Increase Funding to Schools to Address Racial Disparities; Advance the Timeline for Ethnic Studies Classes; Adopt[ion of] a K-12 Black Studies Curriculum” (Chapter 23, pp. 692–698). While the actualization of comprehensive reparations for Black people in California is beyond the scope of any one sector of society, the report acknowledges ES as an emancipatory educational project that must play a role in addressing educational inequities. Toward this end, the study gleans insights from ES practitioners. Specifically, CCUnified teachers are developed to facilitate meaningful application of learning (Knowledge with Purpose + Action) grounded in critical consciousness and the histories of ESG (RQ1.1, RQ1.2).

Despite the field’s stated purpose of transforming education systems broadly, ES remained concentrated within post-secondary institutions (Hu-Duhart, 1993). In recent years, this has changed considerably. In 2021, states throughout the country, including California, Texas, Michigan and Washington, passed (or were in the process of passing) legislation toward ES integration into the high school curriculum. Several other states including New Jersey, Illinois, New York, and Florida have passed legislation making African American history a graduation requirement. Furthermore, in Hawaii and Montana, legislation has been passed making the teaching of local indigenous history a requirement for graduation (Kwon, 2021).

In 2016, AB 2016 was passed by the California Assembly to develop the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) as a resource for LEA in anticipation of an ES graduation requirement. In October of 2021, Governor Newsom signed AB 101, making ES a graduation requirement for K-12 public school children in California for the graduating class of 2030. Prior to this landmark legislation, LEAs throughout the state established and/or expanded their

respective ES programs with board resolutions committing to making ES a graduation requirement in El Rancho, Oakland, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara (Fujino et al., 2019; Pawal, 2021). In 2018, as a result of AB 2016, a collection of the state’s leading ES scholars and practitioners were assembled into an advisory committee (AC) to create the ESMC. I was one of three co-writers contracted by the California Department of Education (CED) to work with the ESMC-AC, toward this task. The curriculum was to be used as a resource for LEAs in their effort to prepare their respective schools’ and districts’ implementation of the state’s anticipated ES graduation requirement.

Politics of Conflict

As discussed above, education reform via ES has historically met reaction and opposition. One of the more recent attempts to institutionalize ES at the district level occurred in Arizona. In 1997, in response to Latino parent organizing, Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) established the Mexican American Studies (MAS) program, initially called Hispanic Studies (Stephenson, 2021). At the time, TUSD’s MAS program was unique and stood as the only “full-fledged ethnic studies program” in the nation (Cabrera et al., 2014). Due to partisan attacks empowered by the passage of Arizona’s HB2281¹⁰, the MAS program was banned. Coinciding with the success of MAS and to its unconstitutional disbanding (Harris, 2017), communities in Texas, California, and nation-wide organized for ES integration into K-12 education (Kwon, 2021; Penner & Ma, 2023).

The work of educators to shepherd this initiative toward institutionalization is being done in an increasingly politically hostile climate of local, state, and national politics. While this most recent period marked an historic moment of promise for K-12 ES institutionalization, it also

¹⁰ https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/summary/h.hb2281_05-03-10_astransmittedtogovernor.doc.htm.

unleashed a storm of reaction and opposition (Bell et al., 2022; Cunanan et al., 2022; Fensterwald 2025). Over the last 7 years, ES institutionalization in California has been steeped in controversy (Bell et al., 2022). Related, Rogers and Kahne (2022) published a report concluding that public education and our diverse democracy faced an existential crisis. Specifically, they cited the growing number of partisan attacks on school districts, leadership, and teachers, leading to growing and intense trepidation around teaching about race, and racism; LGBTQI+ community experiences and issues; and the increasingly loud voices pushing for the banning of books, resulting in a “chilling effect” upon teachers at a time when teaching to these topics is needed more than ever (Rogers & Kahne, 2022). Since the publication of their report, our nation has swung even further to the right. In early 2025, President Trump signed an executive order to dismantle the Department of Education. In April, he signed Executive Order 14151, directing states to eliminate all DEI efforts.

Anti-Ethnic Studies Polemic: When Liberals are at Odds with Liberation

While there is political commitment to ES (evidenced by the passage of AB 101), there is also significant opposition. With ES slated to be required for the graduating class of 2030 (incoming ninth-grade class of 2026), there are questions and concerns about its potential impact upon White students’ social-emotional wellbeing. Importantly, there is significant indignation from vocal segments of the Jewish community to the field’s discussion and application of the concepts of racism and settler-colonialism to the state of Israel and the experience of Palestinian Americans in the diaspora (Fensterwald, 2025; Pawal, 2021). As President Trump engages in attacks against Black history, LGBTQ+ Studies, and anything deemed “woke”¹¹ the challenges to ES, ironically, stem not from the traditional right, but from segments of the liberal Jewish

¹¹ A term reflecting critical consciousness born from Black liberation struggle now used broadly to describe a general social political awareness (Robinson, 2022).

community, seeking to conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism (Montaño, 2025; Nanguneri, 2025; Winograd, 2025). The Jewish Caucus of the California State Legislature, with the backing of prominent Jewish lobby groups and non-profit organizations like the Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California (JPAC), along with the right wing AMCHA Initiative, support legislation seeking to significantly limit discussion of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, or eliminate it completely (CAIR California, 2025; Cunanan et al., 2024; Montaño, 2025; Nanguneri, 2025; Winograd, 2025).

The discourse below reflects the intensely contested nature of ES institutionalization in California. The criticisms, while written by scholars in their respective fields (not ES), take the form of open letters to the CA State Superintendent of Public Education, Tony Thurmond and the CA State Board of Education and an article in an internet-based tabloid with a clear political orientation hostile to ES.

In an open letter signed by 35 scholars reflecting a range of fields outside of ES to State Superintendent of Instruction, Tony Thurmond, Aarons et al. (2021) requested that the claim made within the ESMC that ES is beneficial for student outcomes be removed stating that it does “not provide sufficient empirical support for the specific claims regarding the benefits of ES courses that are attributed to them” (p. 9).

In response to this open letter, Sleeter et al. (2021) initiated a petition garnering support from 2300 educators and organizations and submitted it to Superintendent Tony Thurmond, and the CA State Board of Education. In it she outlines her rebuttal around three key points, plus recommendations for steps the state must take to continue to support the institutionalization of ES. Firstly, she states that, “as scholars with expertise in a wide range of research methodologies, we disagree with the letter’s narrow criteria for determining which types of study designs offer

‘evidence’” (p. 3). Secondly, Sleeter doubles down on the value of ES, specifically (a) positive academic impact on marginalized youth and (b) positive impact on all students, including White students toward disrupting racism. Thirdly, Sleeter emphasized the point that in the realm of ES, “we listen to our students when they say that ‘ethnic studies saved my life.’” (p. 4). The four recommendations to the Superintendent revolve around continued support of ES both financially and politically; teacher credentialing; centering experts in the field when decisions and policy are made.

In this response to Sleeter by 100 scholar signatories, this open letter to Superintendent Tony Thurmond, and the CA State Board of Education highlights two points. Firstly, they emphasize their previous position that there remains no credible study supporting the claim made by the ESMC section that was largely grounded in Sleeter’s meta-analysis of ES research that “well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies curricula have positive academic and social outcomes for students.” Secondly, that the response in actuality undermines its own stance that ES is even a credible field. Specifically, that the whole effort to institutionalize ES is a movement based on “oppression studies” and indoctrination of young people and:

that the petitioners are driven by an ideological agenda to promote Critical Ethnic Studies—a narrow and highly controversial conceptualization of ethnic studies that is firmly rooted in ideologies that divide society into oppressed and oppressor groups based primarily on race, and, as part of its disciplinary mission, coerces students into engaging in political activism to challenge systems of “hierarchy and oppression” as defined by the discipline’s practitioners. (Figoten et al., 2021, p. 2)

In the continued attempt to undermine ES research, Sander and Wyner take aim specifically on the two main quantitative studies (Bonilla et al., 2021; Dee & Penner, 2017) used to support the

claims that ES can disrupt the ongoing opportunity gap (achievement gap) between students of Color and their White counterparts. They challenge the studies as “fundamentally flawed along three different dimensions: the way their “experiment” was designed, the way they reported their results, and the interpretation of their results” (para. 4). The article concludes with strong language challenging the competence, and integrity of the scholars behind the studies. Words like “bogus,” “cherry-picked,” “fundamental absurdity,” “shrouded in . . . technical jargon,” among many others color this article less as a scholarly critique and more as a politically motivated attack. In a personal communication I had with Emily Penner, she questioned the motivation behind publishing the criticism in a tabloid rather than a peer reviewed journal, concluding that a response would legitimize their flawed analysis and corresponding criticism. She affirmed the findings of her and Thomas Dee’s study (E. Penner, personal communication, September 24, 2024). Notably, at the time of filing for this dissertation, a third study affirming not only the findings of both the Bonilla et al. (2021, and Dee and Penner (2017) studies, but asserting scalability and continued efficacy of ES, has been published (Bisht et al., 2026).

It is within this hotly contested space that K-12 ES institutionalization broadly, is occurring. While there are a growing number of school districts seeking to opt-out from institutionalization (Fensterwald, 2025; Wallach, 2025), many continue to work toward compliance (Noriega, 2025; Penner & Ma, 2023; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023). CCUnified is not only working toward compliance but is committed to implementation in fidelity to the liberatory origin and purpose, as well as the anti-racist and anti-oppression practice, of the field (*Ethnic Studies in ██████████ Unified School District*, 2020). CCUnified is operating within and navigating the intense socio-political climate that requires teachers and administrators to answer to periodic outside allegations of indoctrination, and of anti-White, and anti-Semitic teaching.

Practitioner interviews illustrate how they have effectively operated within these contexts (RQ1.2), and student post-survey responses (RQ2) provide meaningful insight to allegations of indoctrination and anti-White teaching, specifically.

Impact of K-12 Ethnic Studies

TUSD: Mexican American Studies

In an empirical analysis of the effects of Mexican American Studies on student achievement over a four-year period (2008–2011), Cabrera, Milem, and Marx sought to determine what, if any, was the relationship between taking MAS courses and educational achievement. Additionally, they sought to ascertain consistency for “different cohorts of students over the years” (p. 1). Defining success as passing the AIMS (Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards - state standardized test) and graduation, and using a “multivariate analytical strategy,” they concluded that MAS students passed each of the AIMS tests in writing, reading, and math, at a higher rate than non-MAS students. Furthermore, “Students who took MAS courses were between 51 percent more likely to graduate from high school than non-MAS students (2009) and 108 percent more likely to graduate (2009)” (p. 6).

As the program received significant attention (both in support and in opposition) reflecting the range of the political spectrum, it was ultimately deemed to be in violation of Arizona state law (HB2281) and soon after, banned. While the Cabrera, Milem, and Marx study revealed the potency of MAS on academic outcomes, it did not delve into explanation for the program’s efficacy. In a follow-up study, Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, and Marx (2014) sought to both provide insight into what made MAS so effective, as well as to revisit the previous Cabrera et al. (2012) study. They attribute key components to the program’s success, highlighting its attention to issues of power and oppression (Camarrota & Romero, 2014), and incorporation of

Sleeter’s observation of the field’s critical attention to identity, systems, history, agency and point of view within the K-12 context (2011). Importantly, they reaffirm the findings from 2012, asserting that “The estimated relationship between MAS participation and student educational attainment was surprisingly strong” (p. 1106).

SFUSD: Ninth-Grade Course

Culturally relevant, responsive and sustaining education are at the heart of ES instruction and have proven to be effective responses to dehumanizing education for students of Color (Paris, 2017). In 2017, Dee and Penner released findings of their study examining the impact of SFUSD’s ninth-grade ES course, validating long-held beliefs that ES could help improve student achievement, with special attention to those most struggling in school. The findings from the study were significant. In short, as a result of the ES pilot, students went to school more (21%), increased their GPA by 1.4 points, and earned 23 more credits—the equivalent of 4 courses (not including units earned from physical education and social studies (Dee & Penner, 2017).

In a follow-up study by Bonilla et al. (2021), her investigation of student data highlights the continuing positive effect of the ninth-grade ES course well beyond students’ ninth-grade year. Specifically, improved attendance and total credits accumulated toward graduation for participating students continued through the duration of their high school careers. As a result, students graduated at a greater rate than their peers who did not take the course. Additionally, the study found evidence that participation in the intervention suggested increased college attendance, further affirming the efficacy of ES as an effective intervention for students at-risk of poor academic performance (Bonilla et al., 2021). In both SFUSD studies, researchers urged caution against assuming generalizability beyond the unique context of the SFUSD ninth-grade course. Specifically, the researchers noted the unique and consistent level of participation by a

core group of classroom teachers, working with institutional support over a period of time, and targeting of a particular “at-risk” population (Bonilla et al., 2021; Dee & Penner, 2017) reflected by the effort.

In both TUSD and SFUSD and their respective MAS program and the ninth-grade course, studies affirmed the positive impact on student achievement and highlight general approaches to the initiative (i.e., development of student critical consciousness; cultivating student identity and agency; teachers engaging culturally relevant pedagogy; committed and sustained collaboration, etc.). However, they do not provide an in-depth investigation of *how* practitioners achieved these results. Centering CCUnified ES practitioners and highlighting their experiences in learning, developing and implementing ES courses in this study provide insight about necessary components for effective institutionalization (RQ1.1, RQ1.2).

Transformative Ethnic Studies in School

In 2020, Christine Sleeter and Miguel Zavala shared their findings highlighting numerous positive outcomes for students of Color and White students taking ES coursework.¹² They updated previous scholarship by Sleeter (2011) affirming the academic and social value of ES. They explored nearly three dozen studies discussing the impact of ES upon students in various contexts ranging from after school programs to academic offerings integrated within the core curriculum. All but one revealed positive outcomes (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Due to the relatively new practice of ES in K-12, there remains an unevenness in understanding of both what ES is, how to go about implementation, and how to evaluate success. While there is overlap, the existing differences in experience and knowledge of what exactly makes up an ES

¹² The name of this section is also the title of an ethnic studies resource book featuring Sleeter and Zavala’s updated findings on Sleeter’s (2011) previous study on ethnic studies, among other aspects related to ethnic studies implementation within K-12 (Sleeter & Zavala, 2022).

course present some challenges. As a result, Sleeter and Zavala identified four areas of investigation that represent key areas of ES teaching and learning in K-12 broadly: Sense of Self; Student Achievement; Asset Based Pedagogies; Culturally Responsive Teaching.

Sense of Self

ES practitioners uphold that there is a direct relationship between positive ethnic identity and academic identity. Reviewing seven studies examining this focus area, Sleeter and Zavala found that six programs had a positive impact upon students' sense of identity and empowerment. Importantly, they affirm that "Criticality was a central feature of all of the curricula, and descriptions of all of the projects featured culturally mediated, or culturally responsive pedagogy as central" (p. 6).

Student Achievement

Acknowledging the tension between defining ES success through traditional academic indicators, they scanned 14 studies examining the impact of ES teaching on student achievement. They found that 12 of the 14 programs had a positive impact on student achievement. In relation to the importance of ES content centering communities of Color, they also highlighted effective teacher development as a key element of student success. Referencing Beckham and Concordia (2019), they state that "We remain committed to the belief that anyone who honestly engages in developing themselves as a teacher of ethnic studies can become skilled at it" (p. 325).

Infus[sion] into Asset-based Pedagogies

Sleeter and Zavala investigated 13 studies and identified that the combination of high expectations and the wielding of asset-based pedagogy—broadly defined to include, but not limited to the honoring of student identity, experience, culture, language—to act as a useful bridge from which to connect students to their own intellectual selves and community.

Importantly, asserting it as the basis for reciprocal teaching and learning, where teachers are also required to learn (about themselves, their social conditioning, implicit biases, student identity, etc.) as they seek to teach.

Culturally Responsive Teaching, Cultural Mediation, and Student Achievement

I explored the findings of six studies and concluded that these approaches to teaching helped to bridge the lived experiences, ways of being, and multitude of assets children bring into the learning space as powerful mediating factors in teaching and learning. They concluded that “conceptualizing teaching as cultural mediation, shaping teaching processes around students’ cultural learning processes, engages students and leads to higher achievement” (p. 16).

Impact on White Students and Implications for Combatting Racism

While ES has historically been deployed as an intervention to disrupt the harm of racist and colonial ways of schooling, there is concern about how directly teaching about race and racism will impact White students. Sleeter and Zavala (2020) examined several studies that indicate that although it is difficult for White students to learn about systemic racism and the impact upon communities of Color, the research reflects significant and positive impact upon challenging “color-blindness,” equipping White students with the tools to understand race and racism, and generally becoming more aware of biased views toward people of Color.

The considerations and concerns regarding how ES content (particularly teaching about racism, White supremacy and its impact) might affect the psychological and emotional well-being of White students invite further examination. In a study by Laura Abrams et al. (2021), researchers sought to understand the “beliefs, emotions, and experiences around race and racism in order to inform the development of anti-racist pedagogies” (p. 3). They used survey data for 532 Masters in Social Work (MSW) students to examine the experiences for both students of

Color and their White counterparts. They examined the impact of racism upon students of Color and how White students perpetuate racism through unchallenged notions of color-blindness. “It is often challenging for white students to acknowledge that whiteness matters and the reality that it plays an integral function in distributing resources, including power, in society without relating it to their own experience” (p. 11).

They concluded that the development of ant-racist pedagogies via the challenging of the socio-political stance of colorblindness through the taking of ES courses can develop critical self-awareness among White students that lends itself toward developing anti-racist practice. As a result, the multifold benefits of ES as a requirement for graduation have significant implications for shifting White perceptions and disrupting harmful biases about people of Color (Abrams et al., 2021).

Ethnic Studies Implementation

Preparing K-12 Ethnic Studies Teachers

Preparing classroom teachers remains a key facet of institutionalization (Sacramento, 2019; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023). There is research that examines the unique needs and processes required to properly equip a teaching force that aligns with racial justice (though largely unfamiliar with ES). In contrast and of significance, due to the loose definition of who can “qualify” to teach ES, there may be cases where individuals lacking critical reflexivity, or who may even be explicitly hostile to the field, are assigned to teach the course. Reyes McGovern and Buenavista assert that “Teacher preparation in an Ethnic Studies context requires that the critical Ethnic Studies practitioner remain an active student of the field” (p. 4). Furthermore, they lay out a framework that must be learned and practiced by ES practitioners: (a) question white supremacist notions of ideological objectivity and neutrality in processes of knowledge

construction; (b) move towards anti-essentialist representations of racialized Ethnic Studies with K-12 Students' communities; (c) develop and practice a community-grounded praxis in the teaching of content; and (d) foster opportunities for individual empowerment and collective self-determination and social transformation (Reyes McGovern & Buenavista, 2016). This is a much higher standard for ES teacher qualifications and not reflective of hiring and placement of ES teachers at the LEA level (Santa Barbara County Education Office, Ethnic Studies Community of Practice, 2024, meeting notes; California ES TOSA formation, meeting notes; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023) and an area that is currently under researched (RQ1.2).

Importantly, the teaching force in the state of California is predominantly white, while the student population is majority of Color, specifically, Latinx. While research affirms the positive impact of teachers of Color on students of Color, there is a need to prepare the existing teaching force to address issues of racism, the majority of whom are White. Teachers who have delved into and continue to engage their racial, ethnic, cultural, and multidimensional identities that include gender, sexuality, class, and ability have strong connections to students (Concordia & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2024; Kohli, 2016; Sacramento, 2019; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). A teacher who has committed to a journey of learning about who they are, their family/community history, and their relation to power structures allow them to model and guide students in their own identity/ies journeys (RQ1.1, RQ1.2).

In her study of the development of SFUSD's ninth-grade ES course, Sacramento affirms the existing scholarship on ES teacher development. While she highlights the need for teacher critical reflexivity as an essential aspect of teacher development, Sacramento asserts the need for a critical collective consciousness. She describes this as the process "of shared reflection and critical race dialogue [where the] Collective respond[s] to the challenges of teaching Ethnic

Studies through a praxis-oriented professional development approach” (p. 179). This was an essential aspect of preparing ES teachers, many of whom did not have a background in the field, to effectively teach the course. Much of the professional development experience in SFUSD has informed the institutionalization of ES in CCUnified. How effectively this has been translated into equipping teachers in this LEA was a point of interest (RQ1, RQ1a) for this study.

Lee and Pham (2022) discussed the potential of wielding ES in teacher education to disrupt the harmful effects of teacher education programs that unwittingly (or wittingly) marginalize and dehumanize teacher candidates of Color (TCoC). In light of the research affirming the positive academic impact of ES teaching and learning on high school students of Color (Bisht et al., 2026; Bonilla et al., 2020; Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter, 2011), they posit that a similar approach may benefit TCoC. This has been, and continues to be, a point of conversation with the local (and main) teacher education program in the Central Coast, UCSB.

Considering the 7-year period of ES institutionalization in CCUnified, there is significant knowledge to be gleaned from practitioners directly relating to teacher preparation and development, and potentially transferable to other K-12 contexts. While important areas of need in relation to ES teacher preparation continue to be surfaced by both internal practice and the research, the CCUnified program continues to address many of them in real time (RQ1.1, RQ1.2).

K-12 Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

In “Toward an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy: Implications for K-12 Schools from the Research,” Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014) mapped out a course for the direction and movement

of ES institutionalization, broadly.¹³ Using the limited research on K-12 ES teacher development and pedagogy, they identify six studies that illustrate the range of effective ES practice. From this they surface four areas that require attention in defining effective ES pedagogy: (a) sense of purpose; (b) culturally responsive pedagogical orientation to their work; (c) ongoing engagement of “focal ethnic communities” grounded in community responsiveness; and (d) the opportunity for all teachers to be effective ES practitioners. This study contributes to the research about ES teacher development, grounded in the above description (RQ1.1, RQ1.2, RQ1.3).

Defining Ethnic Studies for K-12 Implementation in CCUnified

ES is a long-established field at the post-secondary level, but its expansion into K-12 education is relatively new (Agrawal & Blume, 2020). In my 17 years of experience co-constructing and implementing ES for two California public school districts, I came to the realization that awareness raising about the purpose, practice and origins of the field, while critically essential, is challenging. To this point, the district contracted ES consultants from the Chicana/Latinx Educators Association (CLEA) to lay the theoretical foundations for the district’s ES program. This work would ensure that the institution would develop, adopt, and use this as a guideline in the development of the district’s ES program. Toward this end, they facilitated teachers, students, administrators, and community advocates and co-constructed the following definition of ES for the CCUnified:

¹³ “. . . pedagogy, defined by its purpose, context, content, methods, and the identity of both students and teachers, includes an (1) engagement with the purpose of Ethnic Studies which is to eliminate racism by critiquing, resisting, and transforming systems of oppression on institutional, interpersonal, and internal levels; (2) knowledge about personal, cultural, and community contexts that impact students’ epistemologies and positionalities while creating strong relationships with families and community organizations in local areas; (3) development of rigorous curriculum that is responsive to student’s cultural, historical, and contemporary experiences; (4) practices and methods that are responsive to the community needs and problems; and (5) self-reflection on teacher identity and making explicit how identity impacts power relations in the classroom and in the community” (Tintiango-Cubales et al., p. 17).

Ethnic Studies is the interdisciplinary study that centers Asian American, Black/African American, and Chicana/Latina, and Native American¹⁴ peoples who have experienced, survived, and resisted hegemonic systems and structures of oppression. Ethnic Studies courses in Central Coast Unified School District aim to educate students to be socially, politically, and economically conscious about their personal connections to local and (trans)national histories. Students in these courses will study race through the intersections of social identities such as ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality, ability, language, immigrant status, and class. They will analyze indigeneity, aspects of (de)colonization, white supremacy, oppression and privilege, and work towards empowering themselves as anti-racist leaders who engage in social justice activism. Dialogue drives the learning and supports the belief that each person has important knowledge, experiences, and voices to share. Students will have the opportunity to cultivate intersectional solidarity with groups of people, locally and (trans)nationally, to foster active social engagement, radical healing, and critical hope.

While this definition is robust and true to the origin and purpose of the ES field, it presents challenges for my work to lead professional development, and answer questions and concerns from segments of the community both inside and outside of the school district (Concordia & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2024). A significant part of my responsibilities encompasses the need to teach significant numbers of people with very little (at times no) background in ES about the field. This audience included teachers tasked with implementing the district's graduation requirement, administrators, counselors, and school board members.

¹⁴ These are the groups traditionally included in Ethnic Studies courses at the college level and in the California State Model Curriculum (*What Is Ethnic Studies in Santa Barbara?*, 2020).

For this purpose, I developed a resource grounded in the CCUnified definition called “The Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies” (See Figure 1). The Cornerstones effectively distill and capture the essence of the field in an accessible and actionable way that guides curricular and pedagogical decisions. In our ES courses and PL, each of the Four Cornerstones act as pursuits for planning, as a means for reflection, and importantly, as the measure of PI. Additionally, these Cornerstones also provide administrators and counselors with a tool to determine whether courses taken outside of the district adequately fulfill the district’s ES graduation requirement.

Table 1

The Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies 15

History	Centers the lived experiences and world views of Native American; Black / African American; Asian and Pacific Islander American; Chicanx & Latinx peoples, in the first person, giving attention to both the histories of marginalization, as well as the long struggle of resistance to dehumanization, and wealth of contributions to our world, by communities of Color.
Criticality / Critical Consciousness	<i>Thinking causally</i> (cause and effect) helps students explore, identify, and begin to theorize on the “reason(s) for why things happen.” <i>Thinking historically</i> helps students make connections between all that is happening in the present, in relation to what has happened in the past. <i>Thinking systems and power</i> identifies the systems at the root of what is happening; it invites us to think about who has power within these systems; reflect upon the impact of structures and the decisions made within them; and equips individuals and communities to question, challenge, and confront injustice.
Knowledge with Purpose + Action	Central to ES is to steward all learnings toward meaningful application. Specifically, in this critically historic moment, what good is knowledge if it is not used to address our most pressing issues? ES calls upon everyone to bring their best selves in service of solving the problems before us. It is about humanity. It is about sustainability. It is about making real what we have yet to achieve. It is about love, life, and liberation for oneself, our communities, and the world.
Community & Solidarity	Emphasizes collective care, mutual aid, and interconnectedness as foundational to the fabric of a healthy, vibrant, multi-racial democracy. As we have well learned from our forebearers and key ancestors, the way out from problems, both big and small, is through collective support and unified action based on principles that uphold the well-being of people, place, and planet. Collective liberation is rooted in community actualization—meeting the basic needs of all, ensuring safety, and creating the conditions for connectedness (Ravilochan, 2021). We cannot, nor should we do this alone.

Source: Concordia and Tintiangco-Cubales (2024).

Community Organizing for Ethnic Studies Education

As a democratic and educational project born out of social movement, much has been written about how ES as a field came to be (Barrios, 2009; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Luna, 2019; Orenstein, 2018). Valenzuela and Epstein (2023) asserted the centrality of community with/in/for ES. The long standing and broad grassroots movement for ES, grounded in the express purpose of eliminating racism and all forms of oppression remain a driving force (Pinedo et al., 2025; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014; Valenzuela & Epstein, 2023). In several LEA that established ES programs prior to AB 101, grass-roots communities were often the driving force calling upon their respective school boards to institutionalize ES. In the late 1960s, cities like Crystal City, Texas, and Berkeley, California began to reform curriculum to better reflect the lived experiences of their Mexican and Black student bodies—with Berkeley High School establishing an African American studies department (Barrios, 2009; Orenstein, 2018).

In Central Coast town, teachers began advocating for and successfully developing and implementing ES courses like Mexican American Literature, Chicano Studies, Black Studies and Social Dialogues: The History of Racism in America, in the 1980s. These courses, however, remained electives. Notably, all but the Social Dialogues course ceased to be offered after the teachers tasked to teach them retired. In 2015, a grassroots effort led by students, parents, teachers, UCSB scholars and community activists representing a broad range of racial and ethnic groups, initiated the ESN!-CC. In a formal summing up of the establishment of the CCUnified ES graduation requirement, they recall their vision of ES as, “need[ing] to reflect Indigenous and Black epistemologies; to teach the histories of colonialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy; and to recognize the agency and the wisdom of aggrieved communities. An ethnic studies curriculum must also address pedagogical issues of how we learn and how we implement democracy in the

schools” (Fujino, et al., 2019, p. 81). This study provides an accounting of the 6-year period of implementation (2019–2025) thus far, in relation to this community vision (RQ1.3, RQ1.3a).

Ethnic Studies and Critical Consciousness

ES commitment to fostering critical consciousness is well-documented (Chapmen et al., 2020; Pinedo et al., 2025; Sacramento, 2019; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Scholars discuss the value and function of ES as being both impactful to critical consciousness development, as well as to student achievement (Chapmen et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tejada, 2016)—that surfacing the structural causes of the marginalization of communities of Color and equipping students with this knowledge, significantly positions and empowers students with the tools to make meaning of their lives, and to positively transform them (Camarota & Romero, 2009; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

In a 2025 mixed methods study, Pinedo et al., conducted three waves of student surveys involving 459 ninth-graders in the first wave, followed up by 346 in the second wave, and 333 in the last to investigate the impact of critical consciousness development on student holistic wellness (academic, social, critical agency). Additionally, they engaged students in focus groups to deepen their understanding of the impact of critical consciousness development from their ES class upon both their sense of self and agency. Findings affirmed:

that ninth-grade students enrolled in ethnic studies developed more critical reflection over the course of a semester, whereas non-enrolled students experienced no growth. Such growth is particularly impressive given that the non-enrolled students were high-achieving students in a college preparation program and the enrolled students reflected the general student population. (Pinedo et al., p. 127)

Importantly, the study surfaced themes from focus group responses highlighting the importance of critical content rooted in counter narrative, ES teacher preparation, and their ability to curate spaces of learning where students felt supported, especially in their development of critical motivation.

Taken together, existing research is beginning to provide answers to the question of *how* ES practitioners are effectively reaching their students. While this is promising, there remain a number of questions that must be addressed within the LEA context. By looking at student post-survey course satisfaction ratings and narrative responses (RQ1.1), the experiences of ES practitioners (RQ1.2), and cross-referencing this with the vision of the main community proponents of ES institutionalization (ESN!-CC) (RQ1.3, RQ1.3a), this study contributes toward that end.

Theoretical Framework

In my 15 years as an urban public high school social studies teacher, I came to a profound awareness very early on, of the tension filled space that is the classroom—a site of highly personal/individual experience shaped by a multitude of factors (culture, race, class, gender, location, generation, etc.), shaped by a series of interlocking systems (capitalism, white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, etc.), and shared in common with up to 40 other humans, each bringing in their own unique lived experience. My students embodied so much of our world (people, place, histories, politics, culture) occupying a 20' X 20' square-ish space filled with an abundance of mismatched furniture and often a dearth of resources. It is within this context that I sought to create a classroom and cultivate a culture of deep learning and meaning-making, with a clear commitment to our shared humanity, and to democracy.

As a new classroom teacher, I was not well-versed in the educational theory I needed to effectively guide my practice. What I did have was a wealth of knowledge and commitment to learning from radical Black thought (Huey P. Newton's theory of *intercommunalism*, Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity, Angela Davis's Abolitionism), national liberation movements (Vietnam, South Africa, Ireland, China, Palestine, Cuba, and of course the Philippines, among others), First Nation struggles (Seminole, Lakota, Cherokee, Apache, among others), and the Mexican and Meso-American peoples and their ancient relationship to this land. This collection of humanity and their respective histories undergirded my own sense of what it meant for me to be Filipino American. Learning about the freedom struggles of other peoples has always captured my internationalist imagination and deepened my connection to the larger world, while simultaneously grounding my own liberatory practice, locally. However, this knowledge often fell short of equipping me to be the teacher that my students needed. I found that through ES.

As with many, if not all new teachers, I struggled immensely. My first few years were a literal disaster, and after completing my third year as a classroom teacher, I was asked not to return in the fall. In my second opportunity, theory saved me—specifically, education theory wielded to develop and teach ES. It did so by helping me seek answers to some very critical questions: How do I reach all my students, particularly the most vulnerable and divested? How do I make history (content) matter? What knowledge, skills, and sensibilities must I foster within my students (and myself) that will equip them with what they need to navigate and succeed within the current system, while also preparing them to transform the system and our world into

what our collective humanity needs it to be? I found the answers to these questions, and more, through intensive theoretical study with SFUSD's Ethnic Studies Collective.

Public education is a microcosm. While there are instances of shared space, social interaction, and at times even moments and visible currents of mutuality, what persists within our public schools are realities of exclusion (sorting and tracking), and predictable outcomes—the result of systems doing exactly what they were created to do (Howard, 2024; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Howard (2024) stated that “systems and structures, not only individual efforts, are the primary explanations for today’s widening disparities” (p. 3). Therefore, having a critical analysis of dominant systems, values, and practice tethered to justice and democracy, and a commitment to collectively engaging with people (particularly the vulnerable, the oppressed, the marginalized) in what Freire (1973) described as a “practice of freedom,” is of utmost importance. Closing the so-called achievement gap by equipping historically marginalized young people to problem-solve their most pressing issues (i.e., racism, sexism, exploitation) is what some proponents of ES believe will actualize our nation’s highest-stated ideals.

Freire’s Theory of Humanization and Critical Race Theory in Education

For this study, I summoned the theories that guided (and continue to guide) me throughout my ES classroom and coordinator practice. Critical theory, specifically Freire’s theory of humanization reflected in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000), and CRT in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate; Solorzano, 2019) grounds my thinking as I continue to grapple with the inherent challenges of transforming entrenched systems. This point of tension is embodied within the institutionalization of ES—on the one hand, ES as a radical educational project working toward liberation (Freire, 1970/2020), and on the other hand, the present hegemonic nature (normalizing to dominant culture) of public schooling, specifically in

California. Education as the practice of freedom (Freire, 1973) vs. education as the means of “taming” students and conditioning them to find their place in the system (Giroux, 2010) is a constant theoretical, as well as practical, point of reference in the work to institutionalize ES in K-12 public schools in California.

With AB 101 (K-12 ES Graduation Requirement) as the backdrop, I investigated the challenges, and ultimately the feasibility of broad implementation. I believe that the results of the study will help district leadership, site administrators and teachers navigate the institution to ensure implementation in fidelity to the origins and purpose of the field (the elimination of racism and all forms of oppression). Freire’s application of *praxis* as a model for change was a central aspect of my (and SFUSD’s) ES teaching practice, specifically wielded in the teaching of youth participatory action research (YPAR). In that context we developed a unit of study that guided students through the process of *problem-posing* education where students (a) identified a problem of interest to them, (b) researched the problem, (c) created a plan to address the problem, (d) implemented the plan (action), and (e) evaluated the action/plan implementation to glean lessons for improvement. It was within this context that we (students and teachers) developed and deepened our *critical consciousness (conscientização)*.

Solorzano (2019) discussed the relationship between Freire and CRT and the essential ways they complement and support each other in addressing injustice through dialogue with community, fostering critical consciousness, action, and centering the lived experiences of communities of Color. To this point, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) directly apply CRT to education:

Our discussion of social inequity in general, and school inequity in particular, is based on three central propositions: 1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining

inequity in the United States. 2. U.S. society is based on property rights. 3. *The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity.* (p. 48)

Highlighting the third proposition, Ladson-Billings redefines “achievement gap” as “education debt” being the sum total of what is owed to communities of Color as a result of the long-standing history of structural inequities causing generational indignities and injustices experienced by students of Color and the communities from which they come (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The concept of the education debt better locates the problem of academic failure as inherent to long-standing racist systems of inequity, rather than being an inherent result of deficiencies of individual students and communities. Summoning the language of property rights, Ladson-Billings asserts that these systems must pay what it owes to past, present, and future generations of students of Color.

Wielding CRT and LATCRIT, Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) discussed two powerful historical examples of transformational resistance within the Latinx community that provide a useful schema to move from the theory of social transformation toward its realization. Central to student agency (and by extension, effective ES teacher practice) is what they name as a *critique of social oppression* (critical understanding of root causes and the fundamental role systems play in shaping society), as well as a *motiva[tion] for social justice* (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). In addition to being a foundational pursuit for student development, I wield it as a framework from which to build professional learning that cultivates both teacher criticality and reflexivity, as well as critical practice.

Together, for my theoretical framework, I wield Freire’s Theory of Humanization and Critical Race Theory in Education to analyze and make sense of how CCUnified has developed

and implemented ES (curriculum and pedagogy) within K-12 education. Viewing this effort to institutionalize ES from this lens that explicitly stands on liberatory and anti-oppression principles and practices (anti-racism, assets-based orientation, holistic wellness and development, *history* that centers ESG, *Critical Consciousness*, *KP+A*, *community & solidarity*) provided direction for my study and grounded my research.

Summary: Ethnic Studies Institutionalization

While there are vocal critics in opposition to ES, there remains compelling evidence of its efficacy toward improving student outcomes for historically minoritized student populations and broad popular support for its institutionalization (Bisht et al., 2026; Bonilla et al., 2020; DeBenedetti, 2025; Dee & Penner, 2017; Defend Ethnic Studies in SFUSD, Writers, 2025; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Wallach, 2025). Furthermore, studies show that the impact of ES coursework has a positive impact upon White students in relation to their identity formation and anti-racist outlook development (Abrams, 2021; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Thus, despite the uncertain status of state funding for the graduation requirement (Fensterwald, 2025; LaBriola, 2025), school districts continue to prepare for it, engaging in professional learning, developing their course offerings, and master schedules (ACSA webinar, April 2025).

Given the dearth of research on how to develop, implement, and institutionalize ES teaching and learning at the district level, and even less so at the state level, this study contributes to addressing this gap. Focusing on a medium-sized school district, reflecting comparable racial and class demographics (60% Latina/o/x; 30% White) to that of the state, merit examination. The interviews of a range of ES practitioners (classroom teachers and administrators) responsible for supporting ES implementation, reflecting upon their work to institutionalize ES, can be a valuable resource to districts who are early in their development, or

have yet to begin (RQ1.2). In addition, cross-referencing practitioner experience with the grassroots community organization that fought for the initiative, can provide meaningful insight into the impact of institutionalization upon the radical purpose of the educational project (RQ1.3, RQ1.3a). Most importantly, post-survey data illustrate the impact of ES upon students (RQ1.1).

In the following chapter, I discuss the details of my qualitative descriptive case-study that I used to answer the study's research question—analyses of relevant artifacts, student post-survey responses, and semi-structured interviews and focus group data.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter I speak in greater detail to the design of the study, defining participation, my process of recruitment, how I collected and analyzed the data, as well as my positionality and unique relationship to this work and any corresponding limitations.

In 2012, I was part of a community grounded (Reyes McGovern & Buenavista, 2016) teacher collective tasked with developing a ninth-grade ES course for the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). The initiative was in large part the result of the leadership of school board president, Eric Mar, representing long-standing grassroots community aspirations for ES education. With the facilitation and support of San Francisco State University, College of Ethnic Studies Professor, Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, we created an ES course to be piloted at several SFUSD schools as an intervention to address achievement gaps for the district's most vulnerable students (*Ethnic Studies Information for Families*, n.d.). Key participants in the ES teacher collective included Aimee Riechel (Mission High School), Kyle Beckham (Downtown Continuation High School), David Ko (Washington High School), JR Arimboanga, Mark Aquino, and Dana Altshuler (International Studies Academy), John Hutchinson (Lincoln High School), and Jocyl Sacraamento (UC Berkeley, PhD student).

Our working hypothesis was clear—if we develop a culturally relevant and responsive (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995) learning experience that would cultivate (a) strong academic identity, (b) cultural competency, and (c) critical consciousness, agency and problem-solving, we could position students to disrupt the predictability of demographics. Furthermore, as we refined our practice based on student feedback and teacher reflexivity (Ryan & Webster, 2019; Sacramento, 2019), we came to greater clarity on the need for developing opportunities for meaningful application of learnings—specifically, learning that engages young people in

problem-posing education (Freire, 1970/2000) and transformative resistance (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) rooted in community and solidarity across ethnic and racial groups.

Because the ES pilot was designed to be an intervention to address the so-called achievement gap, ninth-grade students with a GPA of below 2.0 in the eighth grade were identified for enrollment. Participating students were identified using the school district's Early Warning Indicator (EWI) system. Students with either a GPA of 2.0 or below, and/or a record of truancy during their eighth-grade year, were assigned to take the course. Given the racial and ethnic demographics of SFUSD, and the correlation of race and ethnicity to academic performance, the vast majority of participants in the ninth-grade ES course were of Color. In 2017, Dee and Penner released a study examining student academic outcome data from the ninth-grade course I co-constructed and taught (GPA, attendance, additional units acquired) affirming our hypothesis. Findings reflected that our ninth-grade ES course positively impacted academic achievement (GPA), attendance, and credits accumulated for our students (Bisht et al., 2026; Bonilla et al., 2020; Dee & Penner, 2017). Relatedly, two follow-up studies to Dee & Penner reflect that our ninth-grade ES course, in addition to positively impacting academic achievement (GPA), attendance, credits accumulated for our students, also had lasting effect through students' high school careers, and beyond (Bisht et al., 2026; Bonilla et al., 2020; Dee & Penner, 2017).

Given the passage of AB 101, ES is no longer a niche intervention, but a broad initiative that if implemented, will reach every high school graduate in the state of California. This qualitative case study investigated an LEA that approximates the population of the two largest ethnic and racial groups in the state of California (60% Latinx; 30% White) more closely than its urban centers. As the state of California prepares for (and a growing number of states consider)

ES institutionalization, this study was implemented within the particularities of CCUnified’s context, surfacing how ES practitioners (teachers and administrators) developed, implemented, and institutionalized ES practice, pedagogy, and policy (RQ1.2). This study also captured the perspective of grassroots community advocates, ESN!-CC, and provides insight to critical questions that must be addressed at a more systemic level: Who should teach these courses? Who will develop the scores of teachers needed to implement these courses? How will they be developed? How will state and local institutions work together to support broad implementation? What will be taught and how will it be taught? How will courses, teachers, and students be evaluated?

While this study cannot answer all of these questions, it provides immediate insight useful to institutionalization within the CCUnified, and potentially transferable knowledge for other LEAs. Specifically, this study answers the following synthesizing Research Question (RQ): What was necessary for the principled institutionalization (PI) of high school ethnic studies (ES) in Central Coast?

Explored through the following three sub-questions and alignment with the “Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies”¹⁶:

RQ1.1. Based on students’ post-survey responses, what made (or what would make) their ES courses an impactful learning experience?

¹⁶ Resource developed by the Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies, derived from the district’s ethnic studies definition—and other scholarly work, including Sleeter and Zavala’s 7 Hallmarks of Ethnic studies, Tintiangco-Cubales et al.’s definition of ethnic studies pedagogy—for the purpose of broad awareness raising of the field for those unfamiliar with ethnic studies, including, but not limited to, administrators (district and site), counselors, teachers; course development; and professional learning. The Four Cornerstones distills the district’s ethnic studies definition into four key areas: (a) *history* centering communities of Color in the first person; (b) *critical consciousness* development; (c) *knowledge with purpose + action*; and (d) *community and solidarity*. Discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

RQ1.2. According to CCUnified ES practitioners (teachers and administrators), what was necessary for the PI of high school ES courses and/or programs in their district?

RQ1.3. How does Ethnic Studies Now!-Central Coast (ESN!-CC), the leading community organization in support of ethnic studies in the Central Coast town, perceive the implementation of K-12 ES in the CCUnified?

RQ1.3a. Specifically, how does the current CCUnified ES program reflect their aspirations for ES in the school district?

Research Design

As the Instructional Support Specialist directly responsible for ES implementation (ISS - ES), I was in a unique position to immerse myself in work integrated learning. I engaged in a qualitative descriptive case study (Yin, 2014) analyzing ES student post-survey data; wielding semi-structured, open-ended interviews and focus group of ES practitioners and community advocates as a means of capturing the various experiences and practices that led to PI of ES in CCUnified. I interviewed practitioners responsible for development and implementation, the grassroots community organization that led the successful campaign to make ES a graduation requirement in CCUnified, and analyzed student feedback (via anonymous post-survey responses) about their experiences of ES course/s to identify from their perspectives, what made (or what would make) for a successful ES program and/or course.

Site and Sample Selection

Firstly, CCUnified is composed of approximately 13,000 students, roughly corresponding to the ethnic and racial demographics of the state's larger K-12, public school enrollment with roughly 60% of the school district being of Latina/o/x ethnic background (California Department of Education, 2023). Of further significance, approximately 30% of the student body is White,

which allows for an investigation of the impact of ES courses on a population it was not originally developed to prioritize, but nevertheless is now required to take. Lastly, this school district reflects a city with a range of political beliefs and affiliations reflecting the ideological spectrum. While the school district became an early adopter of an ES graduation requirement in 2018, well before the implementation timeline of AB101 (graduating class of 2030), it has also faced strong opposition to efforts to address implicit bias, cultural proficiency, diversity, equity and inclusion.¹⁷ The experiences of the participants in this study provide both insight to PI of ES for the CCUnified, as well as potentially transferable knowledge to other non-urban, small to medium sized school districts - contexts that represent a significant portion of the state's K-12 public school system.

Participants

Participants reflect three key populations (individuals responsible for implementation; students; community) central to ES institutionalization (development, implementation and improvement) in CCUnified. Within the district leadership and personnel grouping, a diversity of ES practitioners with a range of experience and knowledge (coursework, independent study, lived experience) were recruited. For the community advocacy group, a combination of three former student organizers, three parents of former students, 1 ES scholar from UCSB, and two community supporters of ES, participated in the community focus group.

- *District Leadership and Personnel* (9 total)

- *7 Leaders* - (2) District Trustees (one former); (2) District Administrators—superintendent and assistant superintendent (former); (2) Site Administrators—

¹⁷ *Fair Education Santa Barbara, Inc. v. Santa Barbara Unified School District, et al.*, Case No. 2:18-cv-10253, United States District Court for the Central District of California;
https://www.noozhawk.com/lawsuit_santa_barbara_unified_training_implicit_bias_cultural_proficiency/

(principal and assistant principal for curriculum and instruction) - responsible for system-wide implementation; (1) Instructional Support Specialist for ELA (former) responsible for supporting implementation

- 14 Classroom teachers responsible for course development, instruction, and improvement reflecting a range of experience
 - 3 teachers with *no to little ES experience and knowledge* defined as having less than 2 years of ES teaching and/or learning
 - 7 teachers with *some ES experience* and knowledge defined as having between 2 and 4 years of ES teaching and/or learning
 - 4 teachers with a *great deal of ES experience and knowledge* defined as having 5 or more years of ES teaching and/or learning.
- *Students* via (N 880) post-course survey responses to the “Build a Better Class” section (three things I liked best; three things I would change about the course; course satisfaction rating; narrative explanation of course satisfaction rating) from the 2024–25 school year, provided insight into student experience with their ES class. Pre- and post-surveys¹⁸ for all district ES courses, developed by the ES-ISS (principal investigator), and refined with feedback from the ES Department, have been implemented since the spring semester of 2021.
- *Community Advocate Organization (Ethnic Studies Now!-Central Coast)*: At the behest of community lead by ESN!-CC, CCUnified initiated its requirement in 2020, six years before the state’s timetable established by AB101. Given its explicit commitment to anti-

¹⁸ CCUnified’s survey was adapted from San Francisco Unified School District’s Pre-Post survey, which was developed (by the author) and implemented during the fall of 2014. It has been an example used toward the development of multiple other districts’ own surveys for their respective course offerings.

racism and justice for all, particularly for those most marginalized, ES is unique within the realm of public K-12 graduation requirements. ESN!-CC's sharing provides a community grounded source of data centering their perceptions of the district's program.

Recruitment

Three considerations and/or propositions were shared with potential participants during recruitment. First, for teacher participants, I leveraged the established culture of the ES department. The department has developed a practice of collaboration grounded in purpose and deep commitment to serving young people and their families, particularly those coming from communities that are, and have historically been, marginalized. For other district personnel, I leveraged long-standing professional relationships to encourage and confirm participation. Second, participants were provided with an overview of the study and its potential implications toward the further development and securing of K-12 ES within CCUnified, as well as the potential transferability of the study's findings. Participants' knowledge, experience, and expertise were honored and affirmed via their participation. Lastly, I emphasized my commitment to reciprocity. Valuing their time and labor, I minimized disruption of their daily routine by conducting interviews aligned to their availability and convenience. Additionally, for the classroom teachers, I provided a meal during the focus groups as a small token of appreciation.

For the community advocacy group, I wielded established and long-standing relationships to invite participation in a focus group. Eight members consisting of former students, parents of former students, an ES scholar from the local public university, and two ES

community advocates participated. I provided food for the focus groups as a small token of appreciation.

Access

In November 2018, CCUnified passed a school board policy making ES a graduation requirement. Central to the requirement was the need to develop ES courses and curriculum, as well as teachers grounded in culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy. As part of the school district's commitment to achieve this, there was an agreement to hire someone who could develop and implement professional learning and coordinate the work to develop CCUnified's ES program. The position remained vacant for nearly two years. In November of 2020, I began my role as the ISS for ES. Over the course of the last six school years, I have developed, implemented, and/or facilitated comprehensive professional learning (PL), engaging both teachers and administrators in building foundational knowledge of the origin, purpose, and practice of ES.

In my role as the ISS - ES, I am responsible for facilitating course and curriculum development; developing and implementing professional learning to approximately 30 classroom educators in support of anti-racist, culturally relevant, responsive and sustaining teacher practices; community relations (both internal and external to the district). Additionally, I provide periodic status reports to the school board, superintendent, and district and site administrators. My relationship to the ES work in CCUnified provided me with access to the various levels of the institution.

Furthermore, I have built relationships with key organizational and community partners invested in and committed to ES teaching. Both my immediate supervisors, as well as the superintendent, supported both my enrollment in the ELP program and my corresponding

research. I submitted my proposal to the “Online Application to Conduct Program Evaluation and Academic Research” for the district and was approved once I cleared my proposal with UCLA IRB.

Role Management

As stated above, teacher members of the ES Department and district leadership were aware and supportive of my dissertation. I practiced clear communication and transparency throughout the process as necessary to maintain both the integrity of my responsibilities to the district, as well as to my study. Lastly, while there was considerable overlap between my role as the ISS-ES and my research (ES data collection and analysis is an explicit aspect of my job), I maintained a reasonable separation between the two. Specifically, dissertation related work was conducted during my personal time and/or after official school hours.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study involved the following 3 methods:

- 1) *Student survey data* (RQ1.1) analysis of the most complete data set at the time of the study (2024–25 school year) of student evaluation of their experience in an ES course provides insight as to the impact of the course. The student survey disaggregated by race and ethnic background revealed a) course satisfaction rating (4 - highly satisfied, 3 - satisfied, 2 - unsatisfied, 1 - highly unsatisfied) accompanied by, b) narrative explanation of course rating.
- 2) *Semi-structured, open-ended interviews and/or focus groups* (RQ1.2) of 21 individuals representing the various school personnel responsible for ES development and/or implementation (6 administrators, 14 classroom teachers and the ISS

responsible for secondary ELA during initial implementation) reflecting a range of experience and ES background knowledge.

3) *Focus-group* (RQ1.3) with ESN!-CC, the leading community organization advocating for ES in Central Coast town.

Data Analysis

MAXQDA was used to analyze student post-survey narrative data (RQ1.1). Each of the interviews and focus groups (RQ1.2, RQ1.3) were transcribed and analyzed using this qualitative data analysis software. Both an inductive and deductive approach was taken. 1st cycle coding consisted of both descriptive and structural organization. The 2nd cycle of coding organized the data into several themes. Each of the Four Cornerstones (History of ESG; Criticality/Critical Consciousness; Knowledge with Purpose + Action; Community & Solidarity) provided the structural throughline, while also allowing for additional patterns to develop. What emerged from interview and focus-group transcriptions along with student-survey narrative feedback was used to identify important themes for analysis. Through this intensive process, I identified the findings that will be discussed in the following chapter.

The themes that emerged included effective professional learning, collaboration, teacher and district commitment, anti-racist practice, etc. as the basis for deep analysis. Specifically, this study identified key elements to successful ES implementation, including a discussion of challenges (and how and if they were overcome) toward implementation. The student survey data (RQ1.1), disaggregated by race and ethnicity, allowed for powerful insight into how district implementation was experienced by the students themselves, thus providing an opportunity for richer analysis. For the past six years, I have worked with teachers to process and make meaning of this data during summer professional learning at the end of the school year (reflection upon

teaching; lesson, unit and course development; improvement of practice, etc.). 865 (880) narrative responses ranging from short phrases to detailed paragraphs were provided by students elaborating on their course satisfaction rating.

Additionally, ESN!-CC (RQ1.3) demanded that the district commit to resourcing the support and development of curriculum and instruction to fulfill it. In light of the increasing and intensifying attacks against diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (of which ES is directly related) broadly, this data source provided insight into how district and community partnerships may help to bolster ES institutionalization, even in the face of intense political opposition. What was revealed from the data affirm both the challenges, and most importantly, the potency of teaching that centers the Histories of ESG through a critical intersectional lens that affirms the humanity and value of the young people in the class. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, “Findings.”

Positionality and Ethical Issues

In my work within ES institutionalization and my purpose to play a role in helping reconcile *double consciousness* and unite the “warring bodies” within our school system’s most marginalized, I stand on strong foundations. First and foremost, I was born and raised in downtown Los Angeles, son to working class Filipino immigrants. As a child, I developed essential knowledge and skills needed to survive Los Angeles in the 1980s, a context shaped by racist policies and inequitable systems, resulting in the immense and unconscionable suffering and dehumanization of Black, Latinx, and other working and poor communities (Davis, 1990). While I once perceived it as a liability, I now fully realize this “street” episteme to be one of my biggest assets. Secondly, I have a body of ES practice spanning well over two decades. In that period, I co-constructed and lead San Francisco Unified School District’s (SFUSD)

groundbreaking work translating university level ES scholarship and wielding culturally relevant pedagogy to disrupt systemic inequities (Bisht, et al., 2026; Bonilla, 2020; Dee & Penner, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Considering my positionality and intimate relationship to the developing work of ES institutionalization, I am ideally situated to investigate the intersection of ES theory and practice.

Ethical Considerations

Given the current political climate, my study was approved with the protocol of anonymization of participants and the institution. Voluntary participation was confirmed only after recruits were informed about potential risk. Anonymization of the study and its participants was engaged to protect both the individual participant's as well as the institution's privacy and security.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In the final analysis, validity threats are made implausible by evidence, not methods.

(Maxwell, 2013, p. 128)

The basic assumption entering this study is that the work to institutionalize ES in the CCUnified has been principled and positively impactful. The strong commitment by ES teachers responding to student and community advocacy, the pedagogical impact on their students as reflected in student post-survey responses, and district support in CCUnified to the development of a robust and impactful ES program was the basis for this assumption. Teachers are self-selecting to the work of teaching ES. Generally, they (a) wield an explicit anti-racist stance grounded in an assets-based perspective on student development and (b) a commitment to collectively and individually working to build foundational ES knowledge and practice. Their work is supported by district leadership from the top—School Board, Superintendent, District

Administration—through funding of the ISS-ES position, as well as for curriculum resources, professional learning, and extracurricular activities (field trips, release days, annual celebration, etc.). Because of this commitment, teachers engage in regular collective planning, quarterly cycles of reflection, and improvement, culminating in an annual, end of the year evaluation (informal - of both self and department) of their practice.

The existing culture of improvement, and commitment to justice via anti-racist teaching practice, and accountable to the adopted ES definition and the Four Cornerstones, act as the first safeguard to credibility. This culture, grounded in commitment to serving students, is a mitigating factor to hiding areas of improvement. Importantly, there is a mutually shared benefit of understanding that one's improved teaching is a boon to both the individual teacher and the collective. As teachers learn and develop from their reflective practice, they act as resources for their colleagues. In turn, teachers who benefit from the newly shared wisdom then become resources to other teachers in an ongoing cycle of praxis.

A second measure I wielded is member checks. After completing both interviews and focus groups, summaries of the data sets were shared with participants to ensure that their views are represented accurately. Related, an ongoing process of exploring “alternative” explanations of findings (Maxwell, 2013) were engaged throughout the study as a tool to surface and address unfounded assumptions. Specifically, the responses of site administration were key to comparing ES teachers from non-ES teachers, distinguishing what they perceived about ES teacher efficacy.

Lastly, the thick data composed of various perspectives are the basis of triangulation to surface areas of both unity and disagreement and/or tension. Both course evaluation ratings and narrative responses from the student-survey instrument allowed for a number of insights into the

impact, the challenges, and the opportunities of developing, implementing and refining ES teaching to high school students.

Study Limitations

Through my investigation of this site, I had the opportunity to explore the inherent tension between principled ES institutionalization in K-12 public schools that is consistent with what Paulo Freire defines as a radical educational project (1970)—an educational learning experience that transforms students’ (and teachers’) lives in partnership to transform the world—and the hegemonic nature (normalizing to dominant culture and status quo) of public schooling. By examining the various ways CCUnified has sought to develop, implement, and institutionalize practice and pedagogy, the study can act as a resource for other school districts seeking to fulfill the state’s mandate while also reflecting fidelity to the field’s anti-racist and liberatory origin and purpose, and ultimately shed light on the feasibility of broad implementation.

This study describes the particularities of one site’s institutionalization of ES teaching and learning. In doing so, this purposeful selection sets clear parameters for its value. While the study seeks internal generalizability and its findings may yield transferable knowledge, it makes no claim at external generalizability (Maxwell, 2013).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world.

– Paulo Freire, 1970

I had some sixth graders just the other day, on the playground standing around talking about how messed up it is that ICE is pulling people off the streets, shooting people and whatever. And, you know, these are 11-, 12-year-olds who are talking about these things, because it's their reality, it's their lived experience. They're not too young to talk about it, they're living it. And so, how might we help them start to put language to these things that are happening in our world.

– ES Practitioner (Elementary school principal), 2026

Since its inception, the Ethnic Studies (ES) movement has embodied a righteous indignation rooted in the commitment to confronting racism, inequity, and injustice, resisting oppression and transforming society. Given the entrenched nature of dominant systems, Freire (1970) asserted that such change cannot happen instantaneously. Rather, what is possible are educational projects that act as seeds of radical change within the very system that, by design, tends toward reproduction of the status quo. I, and the practitioners involved in this study, view ES as an example of such an education project. As the movement for ES approaches its 60th year of existence, ES has only recently expanded to reach beyond a relative handful of school districts. As discussed in Chapter 2, while there are a number of long-standing examples of localized implementation at the site level, district and state-wide efforts at broad institutionalization have only recently taken hold.

The work to institutionalize ES in the CCUnified is one example of this next, and growing phase, of the ES project. Over the past seven years, institutionalization in the CCUnified has directly impacted the learning experiences of thousands of students within their respective ES classrooms, and by extension, their families, and the larger Central Coast town community. The one synthesizing research question for this study—What was necessary for the principled institutionalization of high school ethnic studies in Central Coast town?—is explored through three sub-questions and alignment with the "Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies."

Critical Distillation and the Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies

As discussed in Chapter 2, a significant part of the development of foundational ES knowledge within the CCUnified, and a key aspect of PI, has been (a) the process of critical distillation of complex concepts, rooted in the rich histories of ethnic studies groups (ESG - California Native Peoples / Native Americans; Black / African; Chicanx / Latinx; Asian and Pacific Islander), as articulated by the district adopted definition of ES, and (b) the development of transformative practice (teacher and leadership). On one end is a robust and localized definition, grounded in ES praxis (theory and practice) identifying the critical concepts and aspects of the field as articulated by local ES scholars and ES movement activists at the beginning of PI. And on the other end is a succinct set of "Ethnic Studies Cornerstones" that ground professional learning and course development, as well as clarifying ES to broad audiences unfamiliar with the field.

The latter tool for PI was born out of the need to make ES accessible—to teachers, counselors, administrators, community, and most importantly, young people. These Cornerstones are apparent in student experience as reflected in their post-survey responses. Additionally, these Cornerstones are demonstrated in ES practitioner understanding representing the range of

experience and internalization of the field’s vision, purpose, and practice. As stated in Chapter 3, the Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies effectively distills the school district’s ES definition as co-developed by local community advocates and ES scholars and wielded to support teacher and district understanding of the field and is how PI is defined

The findings reflect critical insight to the principled institutionalization (PI) of ES from three key perspectives: (a) Student experience as articulated in post-survey responses; (b) ES practitioner, administrator, and distinct leadership reflection from individual interviews and focus-groups; and (c) Community advocate evaluation and feedback from focus-group participation. The critical learnings that follow are derived from each of the above data sets.

Student Course Satisfaction Ratings

The Central Coast Unified School District (CCUnified) is approaching the end of its sixth year of PI (not including a pilot year of two initial courses) and graduated its third cohort of seniors accountable to the ES graduation requirement in June of 2026. Over the first five years of district-wide implementation, students were given anonymous pre- and post-surveys for district personnel to track the impact of ES related to a number of areas, including course satisfaction. Over the course of the several years that surveys were administered, respondents to the course post-survey have expressed **positive course satisfaction ratings greater than 92% (N=4451)** as reflected in either a rating of “completely satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” across **all** racial and ethnic groups. The following findings focus on the data set from the 2024–25 school year (N=880), selected as it was the most recent complete year of post-survey data at the time of the study, and highlights both course satisfaction rating, as well as student narrative responses expounding upon their rating, representing the three largest student sub-groups (Mexican / Mexican American / Chicax; White / European American; Multi-ethnic / Bi-racial) in the

school district (RQ1.1). Generally, students surfaced a wide range of themes including appreciation for the course content, seeing oneself in the curriculum, the opportunity to explore diverse histories, and a strong sense of collaboration and community. While the vast majority of responses were positive, a number of critiques that students offered give valuable insight into how addressing issues of race, racism, and inequity can be difficult to engage and cause discomfort, even resentment and/or defensiveness. Both positive responses and critiques are investigated through a contrastive dialogue where student feedback (from both course satisfaction rating and narrative feedback) representing positive and negative feelings of their course experience are utilized to ground the analysis that describes the qualitative nature of the overall student experience in their ES courses.

For this analysis, I focus on the poles of the 4-point (forced choice) Likert scale used to surface course impact upon students, looking at student responses that reflect “completely dissatisfied” ($N = 38$) and “completely satisfied” ($N = 385$). Importantly, the two areas explored in the following analysis are grounded in the weight of responses (overall number of responses aligned to positive or negative rating), and correlation with student race and ethnicity—i.e., does student racial / ethnic background align with either positive or negative rating. For the first area of the 880 student responses, 39 respondents expressed that they were “completely dissatisfied” with the course (4.4%), with 62 (7%) reflecting “somewhat dissatisfied.” In contrast, 385 students rated their experience as “completely satisfied” (43.8%), with 394 (44.8%) expressing “somewhat satisfied.” In the second area, it is notable that while there is some nuance aligning to race and ethnicity, the generally positive rating reflects satisfaction (“completely” or “somewhat”) with their course experience across demographics.¹⁹ For Chicana/Latina students,

¹⁹ 3 subgroups = 788 / CS = 345 (43.7%) / CDS = 32 (4%)
Chicana / Latina = 443 / CS = 219 (49.4%) / SS = 198 (44.7%) / SD = 18 (4%) CDS = 8 (1.8%)

417 (94.1%) rated their experience positively (49.4% completely satisfied; 44.7% somewhat satisfied). Among White students, 226 (83.8%) rated their experience positively (36% completely satisfied; 47.8% somewhat satisfied), which was slightly lower than their Chicana counterparts, but still overall very high. Similarly, for mixed race students, 60 (80%) rated their experience positively (42.7% completely satisfied; 37.3% somewhat satisfied).

Table 2

Course Satisfaction Rating by Race/Ethnicity

<i>N</i> = 880	(<i>N</i>)	Completely Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Completely Satisfied
Chicana/o/x & Latina/o/x	(443)	1.8% (8)	4% (18)	44.7% (198)	49.4% (219)
White / European American	(270)	7.0% (19)	9.2% (25)	47.8% (129)	36% (97)
Mixed Race / Bi-Racial	(75)	6.6% (5)	13.3% (10)	37.3% (28)	42.7% (32)
All Other Racial and Ethnic Groups	(92)	7.6% (7)	9.7% (9)	42.4% (39)	40.2% (37)
% of student responses by rating (<i>N</i>)	(880)	4.4% (39)	7.1% (62)	44.8% (394)	43.8% (385)

Critical Consciousness and Ethnic Studies

It opened up a window in my head that made me see the world in a whole other way.

– Mexican / Mexican American / Chicana-identifying student²⁰

Overall, students across all ethnic and racial demographics expressed a positive course

White / European = 270 / CS = 97 (36%) / SS = 129 (47.8%) / SD = 25 (9.2%) CDS = 19 (7%)

Mixed Race = 75 / CS = 32 (42.7%) / SS = 28 (37.3%) / SD = 10 (13.3%) / CDS = 5 (6.6%)

²⁰ Hereafter I use the term Chicana.

satisfaction rating of their ES experience. This section examines narrative feedback expounding upon student rating in relation to the impact that their ES course had on their way of seeing the world. Student responses provide insight into the effect of ES' focus on the *history* of ESG and *critical consciousness* (defined as thinking causally; thinking historically; thinking systems & power), two cornerstones of ES teaching in the CCUnified. The following student, who identifies as Chicanx, stated:

I feel like this class has really changed my point of view and my knowledge about a lot of historical events and I feel like because of this class I will continue to be interested in the topic of ethnic studies which is something that I would have never thought of.

Critical consciousness is apparent in what the student is expressing. They appreciate the effect of how historical knowledge is impacting their perspective—a changing of their point of view is understood to be positive. Given the field's explicit commitment to teaching the histories of ESG, it reinforces the value of building historical knowledge, particularly for young people of Color. In contrast, a student identifying as White rated their experience in their ES course as “completely dissatisfied.” Additionally, they shared that they appreciate “Absolutely nothing.” The student further clarified, “I feel I would eliminate the effort to create white guilt by blaming the white race for all societal problems.” The interpretation that teaching the histories of ESG is an attempt to “blame the white race” for society's problems is a serious one and not a perspective to be taken lightly. These two diametrically opposed offerings reflect a dynamic in student experience that invites close attention.

In the student feedback examined, criticism of ES teaching tends to revolve around the following main issues: indoctrination to activism; anti-White/Liberal teachings; low/no interest in the topic; lack of academic rigor or value; dislike of their teacher. Of the 880 students who

responded to the post-survey, 39 students (4.4%) expressed that they were “completely dissatisfied” with the course. Of these 39, two directly indicated that their rating was related to feelings of indoctrination, three indicated that the course was teaching that White people were being blamed for oppression, and the remaining negative feedback indicated a range of issues including boredom or lack of relevance, lack of academic rigor, and/or dislike for their teacher. While 19 of the respondents sharing a “completely dissatisfied” rating were White, this was not universally experienced among White student respondents. Importantly, though, most White student respondents rated their experience positively (83.8%).²¹ To this point, the following White-identifying student shared that “I liked talking about the things that I hadn’t been able to before and starting to see life through another lens.” In reference to learning about both the struggles and oppression as well as the rich histories and contributions of ESG, the student expresses appreciation for their learning. They did not feel blamed but rather felt grateful for now having “another lens” from which to view the world. The student continued:

I had a great experience with my Ethnic Studies class, and it was honestly super refreshing to talk about problems within our society. I had never taken a class where we openly talked about how racism and oppression was still affecting us, and it was nice to be able to have that space, so it didn’t feel like we were just brushing over or ignoring it. I had a great time with my teacher and felt very respected and safe. This was a super fun class, and I had a great time learning in it!

Rather than seeing the centering of histories of ESG as a blaming of White people for “all societal problems,” the student shares an appreciation for being able to learn about and address topics of racism and oppression and its connection to the present.

²¹ (N = 270), **83.8%** (36% - Completely Satisfied; 47.8% Somewhat Satisfied)

While these topics are difficult to tackle, the students found the experience to be quite enjoyable, and one where they felt safe and respected by both their teacher and their peers. Another Cornerstone of ES in CCUnified is *community & solidarity* (defined as collective support, mutual aid, and unified action based on principles that uphold the well-being of people, place, and planet). Notably, this is reflected in students' appreciation for the space to be able to engage in these topics. Their learning of the legacy of racism and oppression and its relationship to the present did not leave them feeling targeted nor blamed. On the contrary, the student has an appreciation for being able "to see life through another lens."

In another example of the impact of the class upon one's critical consciousness is reflected by the following student identifying as Other Latina/o/x - Guatemalan:

It was a class that helped me understand the things that surround us, and all the trouble our people have to go through. This has opened my eyes to more things with more detail, and I realized that our people had fought a lot for our rights and until now we still have to keep fighting.

What emerges from student feedback is both an appreciation for being taught the histories of ESG that allow for a fuller understanding of the past, as well as the realization of the relationship that the past has with the present. Additionally, student responses reflect an emerging sense of indignation as well as agency when it comes to standing up for themselves and their communities. A Southeast Asian-identifying student goes as far as saying that the course was "very useful for the future, I can use what I learned to defend myself." And this Chicanx student shared, "I believe that this class will help me out in the future to know how to handle certain situations." While one student experienced the course as an attempt to blame White people, the majority of students expressed an appreciation for the learning, as well as a sense of agency in

addressing injustice toward building a better world. While the overall experience of students across demographics is positive, it is notable that this is for dramatically different reasons. On one hand, White students tend to appreciate learning about the histories of their peers of Color and the critical insight gleaned from these histories—helping them fill out their understanding of the past and its relationship to the present. On the other hand, students of Color appreciate learning about themselves and their communities, often for the first time.

Reflections from Students of Color

Because of the intensely political nature surrounding discussions of race and racism in the United States, there is tremendous scrutiny of ES as a newly established graduation requirement. As a result, much of the discussion of the impact of ES teaching is directly related to the experience of White students. However, given the origin and purpose of the field, it is critically important to keep attention to the impact of ES upon students of Color. The following section will examine the range of experiences of students of Color, who make up the majority of students in the district (approximately 60%), as well as respondents to the post-survey. While the overall course satisfaction ratings from students of Color were positive (> 90%), there were also notable critiques. Like the previous section, a contrastive dialogue between students critical of their ES experience and students appreciative of their ES experience will be engaged here in proportion relative to their course satisfaction ratings.

In a critique of the course, a Multi-ethnic / Bi-racial-identifying student expressed that they “feel that this class could have a good impact on students but the way that the course is built does not have a good impact and it just focuses on all of the bad things that people have done and does not try and inspire students to be better and make good changes in their lives.” This student’s assessment invites attention. ES pedagogy necessitates focus and consideration of

holistic wellness and development that fosters critical hope and agency, as a counter to learned helplessness and apathy. The third cornerstone of ES in CCUnified is *knowledge with purpose + action* (defined as the meaningful application of learning toward addressing problems both small and large, both locally and globally). This student's experiences did not align with this cornerstone and left them feeling that the course was not inspiring students to do better. While this is unfortunate, it is important to note that the vast majority of students of Color experienced the course very differently.

Another Chicana-identifying student shared a number of things they appreciated about their ES class:

We talked about things that I never even heard anyone mention. It made me love reading old books, especially about people's lives, and the projects we did. It made me feel more aware about my culture and what people back in the day went through, especially serious topics.

Rather than feeling disheartened by the content, though, the student valued its novelty, fueling continued appreciation for learning and connection-making between themselves, their cultural identity, and their people's history. Related, another Multi-ethnic / Bi-racial-identifying student valued learning new language and concepts to name and explain what is happening in our world.

They shared:

I learned a lot about people's backgrounds and different cultures. I didn't know a lot about things like anti-Blackness and all of the organizations that resist anti-Blackness, and it was really cool to learn about them and what they do. My knowledge of people's identities and real problems in the world has grown a lot.

The student characterizes their experience as highly enjoyable and relevant, rather than as

demoralizing, dispiriting, or discouraging. What is shared contrasts starkly to the previous student's response regarding the perceived focus "on all of the bad things that people have done." The following East Asian-identifying student's experience with their English 9 Ethnic Studies course demonstrates them wanting more. They expressed, "I feel like I learned a lot and it was fun to incorporate ethnic studies and English. I also am gonna take Mexican American Literature next year because I enjoyed this class." Interestingly, in their desire to take a Mexican American Literature course, the student reflected an intellectual curiosity that is being fed by their ES experience, rather than being stifled. Importantly, the student provides insight into the way their ES experience facilitates cross-community connection, rather than alienation. Relatedly, this Chicanx-identifying student articulated a counterpoint to the student who expressed that the course "focus on all the bad things" was detrimental to development. They shared, "I like this class . . . because they're life issues that happen today. I liked all the lessons . . . because it connects to the world today, which makes it understandable."

Given the diversity within ES class contexts (student; teacher; site; class; course), it is understandable that there will be a range of impact, both negative and positive. The nature of the topics discussed within ES ensures this and necessitates the most effective teacher practices. This will be discussed in a later section about ES teacher development.

Ethnic Studies and Indoctrination

In the four instances where students indicated (directly or indirectly) that they felt they were being indoctrinated, three were White-identifying, and the other was Multi-ethnic / Bi-racial-identifying. The following White-identifying student expressed their feelings about the perceived one-sided nature of the course and its lack of relevance to them. They stated, "We only really learn about injustice in the U.S. I felt I didn't learn anything besides what I already know,

it was time I could've spent on a more useful class, and like I was being indoctrinated into something." Interestingly, for this student, their prior knowledge of the injustices experienced by people of Color in the United States made the course redundant. Compounding their negative experience is their sense that what they were being taught was in some way untrue or lacking value. While this assessment is concerning, feedback from other White students whose perspectives reflect a starkly different experience is insightful. Importantly, these contrasting viewpoints reflect the overarching evaluation from White students.

While the prior student expressed feelings of indoctrination, another White-identifying student shared, "I feel that I am now more educated about the struggles some minorities have in our current world and my personal impact on those struggles. Additionally, I feel that I am less ignorant of my actions towards others and view on the world." Two areas stand out in the statement above. First, this student names the value of learning about the struggles of ESG (*History*). Second, they can make connections between themselves, their impact on others, and most importantly their responsibility to be "less ignorant" (*Community & Solidarity*). Another White-identifying student provided additional insight into the teaching and learning in their class:

I like doing projects that encourage me to learn more about a certain ethnic group. I like collaborating with my friends to learn more about what we are learning and how we interpret it. I also like the class because it is very open and fun to learn.

This feedback allows us a peek into the collaborative nature of the ES classroom, an environment that invites interpretation, rather than dictates beliefs. Where the previous student had expressed a feeling of indoctrination, this student articulated their appreciation for their class being "very open and fun to learn."

Another White-identifying student offered further insight into the teaching and learning environment. They shared their appreciation for the intellectually open space they had to engage their learning: “I like that we have a very three-dimensional conversation about ethnic studies topics, and we discuss all the different sides of a story. I also like how everyone feels included.” There are two areas that invite highlighting: (a) the student’s appreciation for the sharing of multiple perspectives; and (b) the student’s observation of the inclusive nature of teaching and learning. While feelings that one is being indoctrinated should raise flags about ES pedagogy, or any pedagogy, it is critical that those perspectives be placed in context and in dialogue with the experiences of the whole. The vast majority of White-identifying students as well as most of all students across demographics, provide this context.

Teacher Bad / Teacher Good: An Emerging Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

A significant theme that emerged from student narrative responses explaining their course satisfaction rating was their experience with their teachers. Numerous respondents directly cited their teacher as a main reason for either a positive or negative experience, surfacing 149 times from student narrative response. Seven instances characterized their teacher negatively, surfacing issues of “harsh grading” and boredom. The most notable criticism, however, was reflected by a White-identifying student: “I don’t see anything bad happening around me, and all that the class is doing is making me think about people’s races and have lots of unnecessary stuff go through my head that I can’t use.” What the negative feedback reveals is multifold—strong reaction to information that is incongruent with one’s own identity, experience, and understanding; cognitive dissonance; feelings of anguish or guilt about the history of ESG; distrust of the teacher, resistance to the information, or both; resentment of being required to take the course.

On the other hand, students credited much of their positive experiences with how their teachers had curated an environment conducive to learning. For example, this Chicana-identifying student spoke directly to the impact of their teacher upon their holistic development:

The inclusivity, learning things from a new perspective, the people I met. I felt like I learned everything very clearly and if I didn't understand something, my teacher would help me. I believe that this class will help me out in the future to know how to handle certain situations.

This student's experience is neither accidental nor an isolated one and speaks to the intentional development of ES practitioners that will be discussed in the following section. Teacher professional learning is anchored to the cornerstone of *community and solidarity* and reveals itself in this student experience. While not explicitly identifying their teacher, the following Multi-ethnic / Vietnamese & Mexican-identifying student's response reflected upon the learning environment cultivated by their teachers:

I'm able to open up about my culture. I'm able to talk about sensitive worldwide/social issues in a safe manner and get educated about them. I'm able to speak about my thoughts openly and feel comfortable amongst my peers and form friendships along the way!

Importantly, this student sharing reflects the four cornerstones of ES in the CCUnified (*History of ESG; Criticality / Critical Consciousness; Knowledge with Purpose + Action; Community and Solidarity*). As a student of Color, they feel affirmed about their ethnic identity. Their learning facilitates a global and critical awareness with attention to power dynamics. There is a palpable sense of a meaningful application or connection-making to and about their learning. And lastly, there is a clear articulation of the positive impact of both the learning environment

and community. Considering the ongoing work to address racial inequities and other issues of injustice, these student testimonies of the impact of principled ES institutionalization are significant. Of further evidence toward this point, a White-identifying student shared that “I enjoy working with classmates on group projects and discussions; it helps me learn different perspectives and feel more connected.” While negative feedback of the course reflects a sense of disconnection and alienation, this student highlighted the importance of community within the classroom, a result of an intentional ES teacher praxis. Providing additional insight to this point, a Persian / Persian American student shared that “you learn a lot so you are more concerned with learning the material than the grade.”

Across demographics, student feedback revealed significant and positive experiences with ES teaching and learning. Specifically, the impactful instruction—especially within dynamic, inclusive spaces of intellectual rigor—fostered mutual recognition and connection and evoked joy and student agency, ultimately affirming both the purpose and practice of ES within K-12 education. Why is this important? This is important because at a time when the ES project is represented as a threat to the well-being of children, particularly White children, this study affirms that truth telling does not mean reverse racism, reverse discrimination, reverse harm. Rather, it is a reversal of dehumanization, an education project that treats young people as intellectuals, capable of engaging difficult truths about our collective past. And about wielding knowledge for the purpose of addressing injustice and inequity. Returning to a previous statement shared by an ES practitioner discussing the imperative to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and sensibilities to face the realities of our society and to problem-pose, “They’re not too young to talk about it, they’re living it. And so, how might we help them start to put language to these things that are happening in our world.” ES as a radical education project

designed to position young people as agents of change and as central participants in building our multi-racial democracy begins at the intersection of critical consciousness and a commitment to social justice (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Highlighting the heart of the work, we return to this Chicana student's testimonio, "It opened up a window in my head that made me see the world in a whole other way." It is from this other way, this more critical way—grounded in humanization and a commitment to the holistic well-being of all people, particularly young people relegated to the margins of our world—that we may continue to make and walk the path toward a truly just and democratic society.

Ethnic Studies Practitioners

The one synthesizing research question for this study—What was necessary for the principled institutionalization of high school ethnic studies in Central Coast town?—is explored through three sub-questions and alignment with the "Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies." This section surfaces findings from ES Practitioners (RQ 1.2). While tensions abound in the work toward PI, a key aspect of PI is that program development and implementation remains (a) grounded in the origins and purpose of the field of ES and (b) aligned with the emerging and context-appropriate praxis within K-12 public schooling. Analogous to ancient Pasika navigators using the stars and navigational knowledge to find their way through vast ocean waters, critically reflective practice provides both direction and valuable tools for those engaged in the journey to actualize the vision for ES in K12 education.

The Ethnic Studies Vision: "How are the children?"

Practitioners within CCUnified are committed to actualizing this vision, which speaks to its fundamental relationship to both making the path of institutionalization, as well as traversing it. Ruth Nell, a member of the school board during the early stages of development, and later the

board president during implementation, invokes a Maasai²² saying that grounds her leadership and decision making. In relation to the work to codify ES as a graduation requirement, Maria shared:

The question becomes, “How are the children?” And the only way that we can answer is, “All is well with the children” as we maintain this, making sure that the children belong, all children belong. Let’s start there, and let that be how we do it.

From the beginning, the effort of PI was led at important levels of the CCUnified by individuals with a strong commitment to “making sure all children belong.” This was bolstered by community demands to disrupt the predictability of demographics and the marginalization of students of Color, via ES. Together, they form the basis of the student learning experience discussed in the previous section grounded in the vision of ES.

Importantly, efforts to define ES were also clarified with reflections of what ES is not. Cheryl Hahn, a high-level district administrator directly overseeing PI from the onset, shared, “I knew I had the heart for the work, but I didn’t know the words. I had the heart, but I needed help with understanding. I needed to be doing it in community, because I knew that it was going to take people coming with different skills and perspectives to be able to do something like implement ethnic studies.” Formative to both Cheryl’s development as an ES practitioner, and as a leader accountable to community demands, was support from ESN!-CC, the community formation behind the campaign for the ES graduation requirement. Her understanding of how to implement ES is evident in ESN!-CC’s conceptualization. Here, they laid out a series of essential questions that critically frame institutionalization:

²² African ethnic group indigenous to present-day Kenya and Tanzania.

In what ways do institutions, even with determined and well-meaning people within them, foster processes of absorption and co-optation that lead to diluted and simplistic versions of complex histories and culture? How do we work with institutions—and we must, if we want to change policies—while being accountable to broader communities, especially those most impacted by systems of domination? . . . We recognize that any quick solutions or easy fixes will likely produce only the kind of ethnic studies we do not want. Instead, we seek to develop processes and principles that involve listening to and implementing policies and practices that best serve the marginalized constituencies among us. (Fujino et al., 2019, p. 82)

The community vision and pragmatic understanding of institutionalization for ES provide the district with direction and accountability. The building of awareness of district personnel about PI provided the essential internal support within the district for course and teacher development. That is apparent in Hahn’s assessment: “It’s got to be centered as the lens as you plan and deliver the course. If it’s anything other than that, then it becomes this funky add-on. That’s not ethnic studies.” This dialogical relationship between community and district leadership laid the foundation for PI.

Furthermore, a central part of actualizing the vision for ES was the development of a district definition of ES that appropriately reflected both the essence of the field broadly, as well as a particularization to the local context.²³ The robust nature of the definition function is two-

²³ Ethnic Studies is the interdisciplinary study that centers Asian American, Black/African American, and Chicana/Latina, and Native American* peoples who have experienced, survived, and resisted hegemonic systems and structures of oppression. Ethnic Studies courses in Santa Barbara Unified School District aim to educate students to be socially, politically, and economically conscious about their personal connections to local and (trans)national histories. Students in these courses will study race through the intersections of social identities such as ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality, ability, language, immigrant status, and class. They will analyze indigeneity, aspects of (de)colonization, white supremacy, oppression and privilege, and work towards empowering themselves as anti-racist leaders who engage in social

fold: (a) it ensures that institutionalization is aligned to the ES field; and (b) it acts as a safeguard against implementation that does not uphold the field's core values, principles, and praxis. As discussed earlier, the Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies was developed as a tool by the Instructional Support Specialist (ISS) assigned to lead implementation, with special attention to course and curricular development; professional learning on ES content and pedagogy; awareness raising for district and site leadership, including counselors and support staff; and developing and maintaining positive community relations. The cornerstones were born from the urgent need to quickly develop critical knowledge and skills among the adults responsible for institutionalization, in an intensive, effective, and concise manner, while maintaining fidelity to the ES field.

These cornerstones are both surfaced and affirmed during practitioner interviews and focus groups. Teachers were asked about how they define ES to their students, parents, and/or audiences who are not grounded in the field. Jamie, a Jewish American participant in the *new ES teacher focus group* (defined as teaching ES for 1 to 2 years), is a junior high school ELA teacher infusing ES content and pedagogy into her practice. She shared:

I always think about our definition on the website that's like *this* long [physically gesturing to describe its immensity and density]. Yeah, I can't recite that actually. But I generally say it centers people of color in history, considering agency and power, with a big emphasis on critical action and what the students can do. I usually say we study some

justice activism. Dialogue drives the learning and supports the belief that each person has important knowledge, experiences, and voices to share. Students will have the opportunity to cultivate intersectional solidarity with groups of people, locally and (trans)nationally, to foster active social engagement, radical healing, and critical hope.

*These are the groups traditionally included in Ethnic Studies courses at the college level and in the California State Model Curriculum.

pretty dark stuff because that's been what's real in this country. And then we always end with what you can do about it.

Jamie provides insight into the ways ES teachers make meaning of complex scholarly concepts for teaching ES to students, who typically range from 12 to 18 years old. In this context, she is facilitating critical ES knowledge to eighth graders within her English course.

Miriam, a Chicanx teacher of Chicana/o/x & Latina/o/x Studies (ChiLat Studies) in the *intermediate ES teacher focus group* (defined as teaching ES 4 to 7 years), connected her teacher identity to the radical purpose of ES, stating, “We have a lot of this criticality because ethnic studies isn’t just an abstract subject we teach, it is deeply aligned with my core values as a human being.” To her, ES does not exist merely in the realm of conceptual knowledge but is a living praxis and embodiment of values and transformative principles. Further elucidating this point is the following reflection on how the ES vision and purpose shaped implementation. Speaking on the effort to de-track secondary English classes, Aspen, a Jewish American teacher and the ISS for secondary English Language Arts (ELA), who also directly supported PI during the initial roll out phase, shared:

There was a moment when we were creating that first [English 9, Ethnic Studies (E9ES)] course where there was meant to be an “honors” section and a “college prep” section of the course. And the teachers who were going to be teaching it basically said, “Nope, we’re not going to do that. That is antithetical to ethnic studies, we’re just not going to do it.”

From the beginning, E9ES teachers sought to transform both their teaching and the system from the inside-out, asserting a practice that is consistent with the liberatory values and purpose of ES. To them, adopting traditional structures and generally accepted practices like tracking students

based upon perceived potential, would perpetuate inequitable patterns—patterns rooted in racism and classism. Importantly, this accountability and commitment to ES not only disrupted tracking within the E9ES courses, but district-wide throughout all of secondary English.

Further reflecting deep practitioner (teacher and leader) understandings, Joanne, a participant in the *veteran ES teacher focus group* (defined as having taught ES 7 or more years), shared that ES “focuses on the four racialized groups inside of the United States, but also in community with folks around the world.” She attested to the field’s commitment to internationalism while making connections to student lives locally, nationally, and globally. She went on to assert that ES tells a “more complete story” of history and “talks a lot about systems of power” and its relationship to understanding the “cause and effect” of it on our lives.

Guadalupe is a second-year ES teacher in a continuation school context with a largely Latinx population. She said that what stands out is how ES resonates within both the students as well as their families:

I highlight that we’re learning about our people’s history, their history, and we’re making a space for that. We question the systems that we’re told to work through in life, to learn where you’re coming from and how you can move forward within community & solidarity.

While Guadalupe’s student population is significantly different in ethnic and racial composition, academic outcomes, and attainment of traditional achievement metrics than her counterpart, Joanne, both students remain consistent in their understanding of ES and how it informs practice. The emphasis on *history*, interconnectedness (*community & solidarity*), the impact of systems and power (*criticality / critical consciousness*), and student and community agency (*knowledge with purpose + action*) are central aspects of ES teaching.

Similarly, Itzel, a fifth-year ES teacher of mixed Latinx ethnicity from another comprehensive high school in the district, captured a fundamental aspect of the ES vision when she reflected:

So often what we hear from the dominant narrative about Chicanos and Latinos can be negative. I think it's important to talk about that, but also show positive resilience and strength and community and joy that's so often missing from our other non-ethnic studies classes.

Here, she captures something shared between the practitioner administrators and the practitioner teachers—teaching is not just about content and skills, but about locating oneself within history, as people with agency in the present, and affirming the humanity and dignity of all people, particularly people of Color.

Hahn's description of her development as an ES practitioner reveals a clear understanding of the role of *criticality* / *critical consciousness* in what makes ES distinct from other subject areas.

I can [now] very comfortably talk about ethnic studies being an interdisciplinary field focused on [ESG]. So, I can talk about how ethnic studies involves all kinds of critical thinking skills, and all kinds of other academic skills, but I can also not shy away from talking about it as unapologetically, not just the story of the experiences and contributions of [ES] groups . . . but also that it involves the study of power, and how power is held and shared, or not shared. And how the rationale for ethnic studies is to study those stories and the patterns they present so that we can better understand some of those relationship powers and fulfill what I think are some of the promises of what we would hope to see in a pluralistic democracy.

ES is often misunderstood as a number of things that it is not—i.e., ethnicity studies, multiculturalism, or critical race theory. Each of these misunderstandings presents a host of pitfalls toward PI. If institutionalization is guided by either surface-level knowledge, or outright incorrect understandings of the field, PI will remain elusive and unattainable. This case study reveals that early in the work to launch the ES program in CCUnified, practitioners responsible for implementation were clear about the field's purpose. If ES is to be a lasting and radically impactful project, then it must be built on the strongest of foundations. The work engaged within the CCUnified began and continues with a vision for ES consistent with its commitment to centering the *histories* of communities of Color; equipping students and practitioners alike, with critical knowledge and skills (*criticality / critical consciousness*); facilitating meaningful application of their learnings (*knowledge with purpose + action*); and building *community and solidarity* within each classroom, site and across the district.

Learning via the Praxis (action + reflection)

At inception of PI, the generally low-level of ES knowledge and practice amongst ES classroom teachers presented a significant challenge to implementation. Many of the classroom teachers assigned to the course had either no, or very little background in ES. The entire focus group of intermediate teachers and two of the veteran teachers were new to either teaching, or new to ES, often both. Much of their development occurred within periods of intensive professional development during initial program launch and over the early periods of implementation. Practitioners have had to learn and develop their ES teaching and leadership while simultaneously implementing their respective ES courses. Joanne shared, "I feel like most of my ethnic studies learning since then (inception) has been in community, has been literally sitting around working with Miguel in the summer, while they (district administration) were like,

you're going to be piloting this class." She speaks to the quick turn-around for implementation mentioned earlier, as well as the value of the emerging ES teacher practitioner collective. Joanne continues, "I feel like most of my learning has really been in community with other teachers, who are incredibly knowledgeable, through the professional developments that [the ISS] helped create, the folks [the ISS] brought into our spaces, the community, the endless zoom." Joanne's offering gives important insight about where and by whom her ES development had been facilitated—an internally developed program of learning and collective action structurally supported by the school district.

This perspective is affirmed by Aspen, the ISS for ELA who had been instrumental in launching the E9ES course:

We also had professional learning with the Chicano Latino Educators Association (CLEA), that summer, so we had some facilitation to help with the ES philosophy, content, and approach—what should be placed at the center for it to be an ethnic studies course.

A key aspect of PI was the contracting of CLEA, a community-based collective of seasoned ES scholars and practitioners. This was essential to facilitating clarity amongst the teachers and support staff. She continued, "And then we layered on the English 9 [gesturing to one side]. These are the standards for English 9, so how can we create units and assessments that will have students practicing these skills but through the ES content, lens, and approach." This is a recurring sharing among the teacher practitioners involved with the launch.

Ernestina, a queer Chicanx participant from the *intermediate teacher practitioner group*, recounted how she began to engage with ES: "So we were meeting via zoom summer of 2020. And then we were meeting weekly with ESN, in addition to that. That was my initiation to ethnic

studies.” Ernestina reflected, “And my learning came with developing the classes. And learning with the students as I was teaching. My learning [happened] with the six years that I’ve been teaching this class.” Similarly, Maribel, a participant of mixed Chinese and Mexican ethnicity from the *intermediate teacher focus group* followed up with her own introduction to her ES experience. “Mine’s the exact same. . . . I was offered the class because I was one of the only teachers of Color on this campus who was at least willing to [teach ES], and there were very few of them in general. I didn’t have any formal ethnic studies training beforehand.” While most of the teachers who were recruited to teach the ES courses did not have background in the field, they shared a universal commitment to learning by doing. In addition to resources, political backing by the school district, a robust set of professional learning, and structural support at site and district levels, teacher development was fueled by shared purpose and steadfast commitment. Aspen, the ISS for ELA and of E9ES development recounted:

They show up like clockwork, and they do this work that is so rooted in what is best practice in education, in terms of teacher collaboration, in terms of having such clarity on the skills that we want students to learn. And then being so intentional with, okay, so how are we going to plan this unit and these lessons?

Teaching Students (and ourselves) to Transform our World

A key aspect of ensuring PI is the ability of practitioners to provide culturally and community relevant, responsive, and sustaining teaching and learning. The CCUnified ES cornerstone of *Knowledge with Purpose + Action (KP+A)*, along with the other cornerstones, provides curricular and pedagogical guidance. Aligned to Tintiangco-Cubales et al.’s (2012) definition of pedagogy, KP+A anchors what is taught and how it is taught, with special attention to speaking to the students’ eternal question, “Why should I learn this?” At the core of ES in

CCUnified is content and pedagogy that stoke student interest, invite engagement, and ultimately facilitates meaningful application of learning, particularly from students who struggle to find meaning from schooling. Jamie, from the *new teacher focus group*, spoke to the potency of connecting teaching and learning to student interest:

This year we did a whole joy independent reading book unit, where they analyzed agency and power in their books. And every Friday we talked about agency and power in forms of protest. So we did a deep study of walkouts, thinking about the impact of forms of protest. And in my fourth period, there is a group of boys. They don't really produce much work to speak of but I can tell they're paying attention. On that day all the walkouts [happened] those boys used a bunch of the strategies that we'd talked about in class. The assessment that we were working on was to create an infographic from Canva. Those boys made an infographic for the walkout and then disseminated it on Snapchat to hundreds of students.

It is within these examples that we see the intersection of knowledge acquisition, skills development, meaningful application of learning, and student interest and agency. Jamie went on to share about the potency of the lesson, what bell hooks discussed as teaching to transgress:

Mario comes up to me, "I did it, I did it, I planned the walkout. It was so cool." So that was definitely a big moment for me . . . that's why we want to teach this stuff because they're applying it to their life in ways that matter and that they care about.

Speaking to how the values and purpose of ES resonates personally, more than merely seeking to teach it to others, Miriam, ChiLat Studies teacher from the *intermediate group*, shared: "I never saw myself becoming a teacher until ethnic studies became passed as a graduation requirement. There is no other subject that I could see myself teaching. Ethnic studies

is life-saving work.” ES in the CCUnified embodies this practice in its cornerstones, particularly as *knowledge with purpose + action*.

Structures and Supports: “Not by chance, but through (systems) change”

At the teacher level, practitioners speak to the vital role of district structures and support that have moved PI. From their local contexts, they provide insight into the tensions that exist in their work to develop and teach ES that at times present challenges, if not outright obstacles to their practice. Interviews and focus groups surfaced the understanding that formations like the ES Department, ES Professional Learning Communities, and the ES Leadership Group all provide structure for collective work grounded in shared purpose, including direct support from the District via the Instructional Support Specialist (ISS) as vital toward PI. They stressed the need for continued support. Notably, Aspen highlighted what is at the core of these structures:

[it] is this idea of the collective. That this is an interdependent collective. That if any one of us isn’t there, it’s . . . it’s not enough. What’s mine is yours, what’s yours is mine, all of our kids are all of our kids, all of that. And I think that is, again, this idea of the possibility model. That we are truly . . . truly Ubuntu, truly, truly In Lak’ech. Like, we are all part of this same organism, and we’re all necessary to it. And equally valued by it.

At the district leadership level, practitioners describe the ways the district’s push for ES, while at moments chaotic and not as organized as it should have been, was appropriately ambitious. Alyssa, an Assistant Principal for one of the district’s comprehensive high schools, emphatically stated:

I think we have done a good job at creating pathways for our Ethnic Studies courses. I appreciate that our district made it a priority to create these courses in a relatively short

amount of time, too. And I like that we have options for students to take a variety of courses. It is definitely a hot topic in education, right? ... for better or worse.

What surfaced here illustrates the critical function of the ES graduation requirement policy. She continued, “I get to say it’s a requirement.” Within the context of the political climate, there have been instances where parents and students have resisted taking an ES course. The graduation requirement makes it a moot point.

Alejandro Mireles, a former school board president and current trustee, examined the relationship of the board in having to make decisions under particularly challenging financial and politically divisive times. His role as a trustee has in large part been as an advocate of ES, providing political and moral support for the initiative. Importantly, he has clarity about the relationship between district priorities and the role that ES plays in their actualization. He shared, “There are so many through lines that go through ethnic studies that support so many other work efforts that we are trying to put in place, or that we have in place, at the school district.” As board president, he has met with ES teachers on multiple occasions and regularly checks in with the ISS on ways to strengthen and expand the program. Again, he articulated the function of ES as a change agent toward equity:

There is absolutely an intersectionality between Ethnic Studies and getting our students engaged in literacy . . . between ethnic studies and our combating anti-Blackness work . . . between belonging and creating affinity for students on campus at each of our school sites . . . between achievement that extends beyond just taking an ethnic studies class. So that is the story that I don’t think is being told very much . . . talking about how tied ethnic studies is to everything else that we are doing.

Mireles described what he observed of the work but lamented how both the potential as well as the actual impact of the work is not fully recognized. He stressed “that it’s actually integral to what we are doing, and where we are going as a school district, in every way possible.” In other words, this way of seeing the critical role of ES toward attaining the district’s equity-driven mission must reach more of the key stakeholders throughout the school system.

This highlights a significant challenge of PI: the need to raise awareness about what ES is, its impact on addressing inequity, as well as shifting mind-sets and practice across all staff. The role of the community in pushing for the graduation requirement comes to mind here. A participant in the community focus group—Lara Bond, parent organizer for ESN!-CC—shared, “The district needs to do more to educate the principals, teachers and support staff at the district to understand ethnic studies.” The relationship of the community to the successful launch of the ES program will be discussed in the next section.

In the context of CCUnified, principled does not mean without shortcomings; rather, PI is occurring because the initiative is clear, has built-in mechanisms for development, and is able to course correct in context, when needed. What the collection of interview and focus group responses from practitioners reveals is that PI occurred both because of *and* in spite of the system. PI in the CCUnified was and continues to be messy. Yet as tension filled as it can be and at times falling short of expectations, it continues because of a defined purpose, set of values, and consistent practice.

Ethnic Studies Now! - Central Coast

In response to sub-research question 1.3, How does Ethnic Studies Now!-Central Coast (ESN!-CC), the leading community organization in support of ES in Central Coast town, perceive the implementation of K-12 ES in the CCUnified? RQ1.3a. Specifically, how does the

current CCUnified ES program reflect their aspirations for ES in the school district?) -, a focus group of eight core members from ESN!-CC, the community advocacy group that led the campaign for the ES graduation requirement for CCUnified, composed of former students, parents, an ES scholar, and other community advocates, was conducted. This section surfaces findings from that focus group.

Critical context / Timeline

In December of 2015, a local grassroots organization, Ethnic Studies Now! - Central Coast (ESN!-CC), was formed by a broad cross-section of the Central Coast town community demanding from the CCUnified an education that reflected and appropriately responded— both pedagogically and epistemologically—to the histories, lived experiences, and aspirations of its majority students of Color population. Toward this end, the organization launched a campaign to make ES a graduation requirement for all CCUnified students (Fujino et al., 2019).

On a November evening in 2018, hundreds of supporters mobilized in anticipation of the passage of a new graduation requirement, holding students accountable for taking an ES course. The school board voted unanimously 5–0 to approve a semester of ES as part of the core curriculum. This was a culmination of years, arguably decades of organizing, and the attainment of long-standing community demands for an education that reflected and responded to the histories, aspirations, and needs of children, youth, and families of Color in the CCUnified. However, as noted, a great deal of work was required to align with the larger shift in the political climate and create a window of opportunity. Gabriela Ramirez, ESN! - CC student organizer during the campaign, reflected upon a time when ES was largely not supported by the system and those in power:

It was scary not only for the district, but also other nonprofit leaders that I reached out to. They were afraid of losing their funding to support, even though they were Latino led or Latino benefiting nonprofits. They told me to my face that they weren't going to jeopardize their funding to support this. It wasn't cool yet.

Ramirez went on to speak to the larger political context of the city as a significant factor: Everybody knows Central Coast town is liberal, but it's a facade. We like Earth Day, we like solstice fiestas, but we don't want to talk about anything race. I think the big piece was race. People were scared of anything having to do with race.

Focus group participants surfaced that progressive leadership within the school board, who they believed should have supported institutionalization, actually cautioned against the demands for a graduation requirement. It is within this backdrop that Malcolm Newton, parent-organizer of ESN!-CC, shared:

I have to say, without especially the younger people, their vision got so much broader, you would have never had the walkouts, the two massive walkouts without the ascent in the [student] leadership. The 2016 election, that was the first walkout in November, Trump won and they couldn't vote, but they voted with their feet.

Collectively, they affirmed that the power and potency of the campaign to overcome and transform the conditions in favor of the graduation requirement stemmed from the youth.

From the initial demands brought forth by ESN!-CC, to those tasked with the development and implementation of ES, as well as the students who have completed the course and shared their feedback on their experience, these populations were and continue to be central

to the successful institutionalization of ES. The following set of findings highlight the community's role (ESN!-CC), impact, and evaluation of PI in the CCUnified.

Assessment by ESN!-CC

Focus group participants were invited to examine a curated list of public-facing resources that include the CCUnified ES webpage, course overviews, and student video testimonial.

Without access to the entirety of the ES program, the ability to deeply assess implementation is limited. In light of these limitations, however, the general consensus by the organization is that the current program reflects an advance of the vision outlined in the ESN!-CC document (Circles of Organizing, 2019). There is initial appreciation and acknowledgement of significant strides toward the vision that ESN!-CC put forth in regards to institutionalization. While this evaluation is positive, it remains contingent upon the coming years of program implementation and is subject to change. In the present moment, this assessment reflects appreciation of three key areas of institutionalization: (a) Graduation Requirement—ES courses have been developed, implemented, and are part of the core curriculum; (b) Resources and Support for Program Implementation—As of this study, there is ongoing funding for the Instructional Support Specialist and professional learning; and (c) Student Response—Significant positive student experience reflected in 5 years of post-survey data affirming the efficacy of ES teaching. Additionally, the focus group of ESN!-CC participants surfaced key findings directly relating to continuing ensuring ongoing success of ES institutionalization.

Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement

Ramirez, a CCUnified graduate and founding member of ESN!-CC, shared her reflection about connections between her time as a student, her experiences as an organizer of the campaign, and the existing ES program:

At one of the forums we were at, we were dreaming about what could be possible. And I remember, there was an undocumented student at Central Coast High School saying that they would love to see a folklórico group at their school. I think the prompt was, “what should your school look like? Or what are things that you wish to see in your school?”

And then years later, that’s what we have.

Ramirez’ account spoke to the heart of the campaign for an ES requirement, its relationship to and sense of responsibility for current and future students and community. While she did not get to directly benefit from the graduation requirement, she is heartened to see current students are and will continue to benefit from it. “I think for me, I just get so worked up and my heart just gets so filled. Like, wow, to see that a lot of those dreams are things that seemed too big. Sometimes they happen.”

For Ramirez, the campaign for an ES graduation requirement was both personal and political—a labor of love spanning generations. She continued, “I kept thinking of this whole idea of planting seeds and how that’s a thread that captures the organizing part of it. And what has been developed up to this point, the seeds of the past generations before 2015, planting those seeds before us.” As an organizer of the campaign, she discussed a key observation from previous efforts to bring ES into the school district.

That meeting when we had Benny Torres come to Casa de la Raza. You know, he was a UCSB student who was part of organizing with teachers to get those original courses to be electives [20 years prior]. Coming to one of our meetings and letting us know that the biggest regret that he has in retrospect was not [making them] required courses, by them being electives. So I think those lessons learned from past generations make our movement more powerful.

ES is not new to the CCUnified. Courses in Black Studies, Chicano Studies, and Mexican American Literature had been part of course offerings since the 1990s. However, due to its elective nature, student access to them was subject to master schedule planning and the discretion of site administration and counseling. This eventually led to courses inconsistently being offered, and after several years, they ceased to be an option for students. As a result, the establishment of the graduation requirement, in and of itself, is a significant advance of the vision. Hannah Stevens, a student organizer from the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) who is White, also participated in the campaign and affirmed the tangible development: “The district it seems, has been successful at institutionalizing a high school graduation requirement. I think this success largely is due to them taking away barriers to taking an ethnic studies course.”

Similarly, Stevens emphasized:

the benefits that having been involved in the fight for ethnic studies had on me as a youth, and the benefits I have heard others speak about. I think [ethnic studies] has really uplifted the voices and humanity of the youth that have been pivotal in its organization and, speaking from experience, the love and acceptance I found in this group empowered me to have a voice in my school district and allowed me to positively impact this community. Being exposed to the pedagogy of ethnic studies and the power of community organizing is a huge benefit for young people in this community, who in turn take that and uplift others.

Focus group participants, reflecting upon the years of work collectively organizing the campaign for ES, universally affirmed the initial phase of implementation as a critical advance toward their vision of ES for all.

While speaking on the various pitfalls of institutionalization, Suzanne Takayama, ES scholar and parent of CCUnified students at the time of the campaign, also reflected on the possibilities of the requirement of ES for all:

That's because, on the other hand, we should have autonomous freedom schools. We should be doing that. But I mean there is something about it reaching a ton of students who go through public schools. What's lost by doing it? But also, I mean what's gained by doing it, but also what's lost by not trying to do it?

The school district has now graduated three senior classes under the requirement. As discussed in the previous section, something has definitely “been gained by doing it.”

Resource and Support for Implementation

Focus group participants highlighted the role of district commitment through both resources and structural support as key for institutionalization. A significant point of contention between the district and the community in the initial stage of implementation was the community's insistence on the need for both qualified teachers and an ISS grounded in the field of ES with experience leading professional learning, especially with the ambitious timeline the district set for program launch. Takayama shares insight to what she found to be essential support from the district.

I think that a critical thing really was hiring the ISS. We had confidence in [him] because of [his] training. We had a sense of [his] understanding of what ethnic studies is. And our fear was once we got it implemented, they would bring in people to teach a very diluted ethnic studies. But [he] came in and [he was] doing [principled institutionalization in San Francisco].

Lara Bond, parent organizer for ESN!-CC, added to this point: “That was one of our pushes. You have to hire qualified teachers. And you have to have a department.” While the district and the community shared the belief that institutionalization should begin post-haste, Takayama also cautioned: “It was important to them to do it quickly. We wanted it quick, but we said more than quick, it needs to be done right. They didn’t understand ethnic studies.” Bond recalled during one of the many weekly evening meetings with the district when they relented: “That was a pivotal moment when I think the administration realized that what we were saying was true.”

In order for there to be PI, the right teachers with the appropriate support, needed to be in place before program implementation. Additionally, Takayama stated, “And also at some point [AB101] passes and then you get money from the state.” With the passage of the statewide graduation requirement, the district effort was bolstered with an infusion of one-time funding used to further deepen existing teacher knowledge, while also continuing to expand course offerings at each high school, with expansion efforts at the junior high school level.

Early Positive Student Response and Ongoing Student Activism

As shared in the previous section discussing student post-survey responses to their ES experience, post-surveys reflect **positive course satisfaction ratings greater than 92% (N=4451)** as reflected in either a rating of “completely satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” across **all** racial and ethnic groups. Generally, students surfaced a wide range of themes including appreciation for the course content, seeing oneself in the curriculum, the opportunity to explore diverse histories, a strong sense of collaboration and community, and more. While most responses were positive, though, several critiques that students offered gave valuable insight into how addressing issues of race, racism, and inequity can be difficult to engage and cause discomfort, even resentment and/or defensiveness.

Tension of Institutionalization

While ESN!-CC focus group members expressed cautious optimism about institutionalization, questions and concerns remain, captured by the continued relevance of this quote from the Circles of Organizing article, “With the passage of the ethnic studies requirement on November 13, 2018, we are wrestling with the question of whether it is possible to work within institutions without falling victim to institutionalization.” Institutionalization embodies various meanings, implications, and connotations. Literally, institutionalization has led to the formal integration of the ES field within the public school system, represented at the local level by the CCUnified. Specifically, institutionalization takes the form of a requirement all students are accountable to fulfill via an established menu of courses as developed by school district staff under the direction of the school board. From the perspective of ESN!-CC and the broad community of support that galvanized the campaign, institutionalization reflected both a tremendous opportunity as well as triggering a deep sense of concern. Takayama expressed this trepidation here:

To what extent are teachers in the district really understanding ethnic studies? I think one of my concerns is that sometimes it’s all about facilitating discussion and storytelling. But the teachers themselves may not understand the more critical critiques of power. And I think you need both the knowledge and the pedagogy. So I’m wondering to what extent that is taking place in the classrooms. And then the next big question is like, what impact are you seeing on the students? Like not just great stories, which are wonderful, the videos, but I want to talk about a deeper kind of learning and knowledge. And are you satisfied with what’s happening and what else do you want to see happen?

Given the critical and historical awareness that the organization has about the pitfalls of institutionalization, concerns about assimilation and eventual neutralization of ES' transformative essence remain. There is a long history of the institutions as the places where reform and change efforts go to die.

And then there's institutionalization from the perspective of the community, initiating change efforts to hold public schools accountable to the needs of the young people in them, the families from which they come, and our larger democratic society. In the form of a Freireian education project of which ES is centered, this project aimed to bring about material change within the system. In turn, ES lays out a whole host of dramatically different ways of being, of seeing, of understanding, of doing.

ES and the Power of the Grassroots

The following questions about institutionalization remain. After the passage of the requirement, how will the school district ensure that ES implementation continues in a principled manner? In the face of heightened political reaction to equity and justice initiatives, will the district continue to uphold the ES policy? With the current budget shortfalls both at the state and local level, how will the district continue to support ES practitioner (teacher, counselor, site and district leadership) development? While there is an ISS responsible for community relations, there is also a degree of disconnection between community and the district due to a lack of formal structures to ensure communication about program implementation.

Much of the organization's awareness during the initial phase of PI stems from updates from the ISS. There has been significantly less communication in recent years due to individual capacity—of both community and district personnel. During the focus group, questions were raised by ESN!-CC and subsequently answered by the principal investigator. While this

approach has been adequate up to this moment, it highlights the need for formal structures that ensure communication and accountability beyond individuals. Unlike the areas of Special Education (SEAC) or Emergent Multilingual Learners (EMLAC), there is currently no advisory committee for ES. Therefore, updates on progress or challenges of institutionalization are relegated to informal and irregular sharing related to the question about how the district will continue to be accountable to the community.

The campaign for ES was a response to inequities in the education system. It was demanded by students, parents, members of the grassroots, and allies and centered on a commitment for racial justice and the commitment to work for an end to all oppression. It demanded from the system an education that was culturally and community relevant, responsive, and sustaining. While questions about sustaining ES remain, Ramirez aptly shared:

Although [community activity] tapered off it is kind of waiting in the wings because if at any point any of us reach out and say, hey, ethnic studies is under attack, it's being threatened, I firmly believe that it will pick right back up. You know that we'll be able to call on the people to come back and support.

This series of findings represents key elements of PI of ES in the CCUnified—students, district (ES classroom teachers, site administrators, district leadership), and community advocates. These data perspectives allow for a critical triangulation of participants and perspectives that respond to the research question. Toward that end, questions about what kind of ES was developed and how; who was going to teach the course and what system of development would ensure fidelity to the ES field; how the courses were received by students across race and ethnicity; how, if at all, the course offerings, teacher development, and district support aligned with community vision and demands for the ES institutionalization (graduation requirement)

were addressed in this study The analysis of findings will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Purpose and Overview: Principled Institutionalization, Seeding Systemic Change

The central purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge related to principled institutionalization (PI) of ethnic studies (ES) at the K-12 level within the CCUnified. Research about and understanding of how to appropriately implement ES teaching and learning within this context is limited. One synthesizing Research Question (RQ) asked: What was necessary for the principled institutionalization of high school ethnic studies in Central Coast town?

I wielded critical theory for this study—specifically Freire’s theory of humanization reflected in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) and CRT in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 2019)—as it grounds my thinking as I continue to grapple with the inherent challenges of transforming the education system.

The following chapter recaps the story of why and how community and district ES practitioners developed ES as a transformative education project. The data, surfaced from a series of interviews and focus groups, along with student survey responses and analyzed below, provide the essence of the findings for this case study. The following findings are the basis for recommendations to further advance the work within the CCUnified, as well as a potential contribution to the movement for PI of ES in K-12 public schools broadly. Lastly, this chapter is an invitation for additional scholarship to address remaining questions within the tension-filled space of transformative education projects within public schools.

Dissertation Objectives

This dissertation investigated the advances, challenges, and ultimately the feasibility of broad implementation of an educational project advancing racial equity within the CCUnified, as

part and parcel of the larger work toward justice and democracy. This descriptive case study illustrated the context and conditions needed for PI within the CCUnified. The results are intended to raise awareness of practitioners responsible for PI (district leadership, site administrators, and classroom teachers) about the various aspects of implementation in fidelity to the origins and purpose of the ES field (the elimination of racism and all forms of oppression). This dissertation accomplished the studies objective of culling critical insight and lessons from students, practitioners, and community in relation to PI of ES. Importantly, I explored how a community-initiated campaign became a school district's program that can both maintain and expand liberatory education within an institution (public schooling) that was historically designed to assimilate difference and maintain the status quo.

Significance of the Research

Scholarly Significance

A growing body of work investigates the relationship between K-12 ES and areas of research such as critical consciousness (Camarota, 2015; Chapman et al., 2020; de los Rios et al., 2016; Pinedo et al., 2024); academic achievement (Bisht et al., 2026; Bonilla et al., 2020; Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020); teacher preparation (Kohli, 2016; Sacramento, 2019; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014); and ethnic studies pedagogy and curriculum development (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). While these studies reflect multiple necessary elements to K-12 ES institutionalization (specifically teaching and learning), and some studies have engaged in broad investigation of local education agency (LEA) preparedness (LaBriola, 2025; Penner & Ma, 2023; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023), no studies have examined district-wide efforts of PI of ES. With the state mandate requiring ES for graduation, several factors present significant challenges toward successful implementation. Specifically,

implementing ES is a daunting task due to the following factors: the field's explicitly radical vision, history, and transformative potential (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Valenzuela & Epstein, 2022); the relatively new field of work related to teaching it in K-12 (Kohli, 2016; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014); the current political climate (Rogers & Kahne, 2022); and especially, the scarcity of qualified practitioners who have critically delved into the intersections of their identities (Concordia & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2024; Kohli, 2016; Penner & Ma, 2023; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023). While the existing body of research affirms the positive impact of ES upon young people, there is a dearth of research on how to develop, implement, and institutionalize ES teaching and learning at the district level, and even less so at the state level, in a principled manner (LaBriola, 2025; Sun-Hee Park et al., 2023). This study contributes to addressing this gap by investigating efforts to institutionalize ES in CCUnified, a medium-sized, suburban school district reflecting comparable racial and ethnic (60% Latina/o/x; 30% European American) demographics to that of the state (59% Latina/o/x; 20% European American).²⁴

Practical / Social Significance

Given the fact that ES in K-12 has typically been implemented as an intervention to disrupt inequity and marginalization of ethnic studies groups (ESG - California Native Peoples / Native Americans; Black / African; Chicanx / Latinx; Asian and Pacific Islander) by cultivating student criticality and agency (Cammarota, 2015; Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Dee & Penner, 2017; Valenzuela & Epstein, 2023), CCUnified provides additional value due to its experience as an early LEA requiring all students to take a semester of ES in order to graduate. While there is growing opposition to social justice initiatives rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion (Ending

²⁴ <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/ceffingertipfacts.asp>

Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling, 2025), there remains great interest around the potential impact of ES as an intervention to disrupt racism, anti-Blackness, and racial tension and discord via teaching young people about the structural causes of oppression and dehumanization, and equipping them to take action toward addressing it (Chapman et al., 2020; Fujino et al., 2019; Kim & An, 2024).

Immediately, this study provides the CCUnified with district specific insight born from its years of practice encompassing the perspectives of key elements (students, teachers, site administrators, district leadership) of the ES project. Additionally, this study provides the community organization that demanded and organized for institutionalization an opportunity to reflect upon and evaluate ES implementation in relation to the community campaign. Lastly, this study may provide other districts and LEA working towards ES implementation, useful insight and tools to navigate both the practical challenges, as well as the politics of their respective institutions and community contexts, to ensure the development of an ES offering aligned with the origins and purpose of the field.

A common slogan expressed within the broader movement for ES, “Ethnic studies saves lives,” highlights what is at stake. A growing body of research affirms the potency of ES teaching and learning to disrupt the predictability of demographics. Furthermore, given the avenue that education affords young people and communities toward greater paths to livelihood, self-efficacy, and agency, continued replication of the status quo within education all but ensures the perpetuation of suffering, particularly for those at the margins of society. As research continues to highlight positive academic outcomes amongst all students, particularly on ESG, this study explored the inner-workings of ES teaching and learning, particularly its impact on

strong and positive sense of self among students of ESG, as well as facilitating greater sense of solidarity and connection across communities.

Summary of Key Findings

An Education for Humanization

The data from this study reveals the impact of the work to institutionalize ES in the CCUnified and provides insight into how student learning was cultivated in alignment with both community demands and district policy. Over the past seven years, PI in the CCUnified has directly shaped the learning experiences of thousands of students within their respective ES classrooms. Student survey data affirm teaching and learning consistent with the ES education project's purpose and emerging practice to address racism, inequity, and injustice. The study focused on three key aspects reflecting PI within the CCUnified (students, practitioners, community) and six major themes emerged to highlight the impact of ES as well as points of tension within the work.

Finding 1: The ES Student Learning Experience—From the General to the Particular

Data revealed that 88.6% of students across demographics rated their experience with their ES course/s positively. To note, 385 students rated their experience as “completely satisfied” (43.8%), with 394 (44.8%) expressing “somewhat satisfied.” While there is some nuance aligning to race and ethnicity, the generally positive rating reflects satisfaction (“completely” or “somewhat”) with their course experience across demographics.²⁵ While the topics of race and racism are difficult to tackle, the students found the overall learning

²⁵ 3 largest subgroups = 788 / Completely Satisfied (CS) = 345 (43.7%) / Completely Dissatisfied (CD) = 32 (4%)

Chicanx / Latinx = 443 / CS = 219 (49.4%) / SS = 198 (44.7%) / SD = 18 (4%) CD = 8 (1.8%)

White / European = 270 / CS = 97 (36%) / SS = 129 (47.8%) / SD = 25 (9.2%) CD = 19 (7%)

Mixed Race = 75 / CS = 32 (42.7%) / SS = 28 (37.3%) / SD = 10 (13.3%) / CD = 5 (6.6%)

experience, including engaging such issues, to be quite meaningful, and one where they felt safe and respected by both their teacher and peers. Based on students' post-survey narrative responses, ES courses were an impactful learning experience not only because of the community of learning, but also because of the relevance of topics discussed.

This finding suggests that while engaging topics about race, racism, and the history of marginalization experienced by ESG is difficult, students are neither too young, nor are the topics too complex (as alleged by opposers of ES institutionalization) for them to confront. On the contrary, ES learning is both appreciated and internalized by students, oftentimes deeply so. Rather than shying away from teaching to the existence of systems of oppression, these findings suggest that more can and should be done to address student questions about race, racism, its impact upon our society, as well as our collective responsibility to both learn about and do something to disrupt it.

Finding 2: The ES Student Learning Experience—From the Particular to the General

While students across demographics appreciated their ES experience, Latinx students and White students (the two largest sub-groups) appreciated their experience for different reasons. Specifically, Latinx students tended to appreciate learning about their community and seeing themselves in the units of study, while White students expressed appreciation for learning about the histories of their peers of Color that helped give them greater insight into the concepts and impact of race and racism at a more personal level.

Adding on to this student's perspective about the overall value of the class, another Chicanx student shared, "I learned things that I didn't really know about and learned how I can come up with some solutions to mitigate current problems." Both the importance of the relevance of the subject matter, as well as the sense of agency from the course, highlights a

recurring experience of Chicana students.

The following White-identifying student provided additional insight into the impact of the teaching and learning in their ES class:

I like doing projects that encourage me to learn more about a certain ethnic group. I like collaborating with my friends to learn more about what we are learning and how we interpret it. I also like the class because it is very open and fun to learn.

This feedback allows us a peek into the collaborative nature of the ES classroom, an environment that invites interpretation rather than dictates beliefs. Where concerns about ES as indoctrination are often used to oppose ES, this student articulated their appreciation for their class being “very open and fun to learn.”

Similar to the previous finding, students perceived their ES experience as both relevant to their lives and as a space conducive to meaningful learning. Given the diversity within ES class contexts (student; teacher; site; class; course), it is understandable that there will be a range of experience and impact. This finding complements the previous one because while students appreciated the course for particular reasons, it affirms ES as a generally appreciated, meaningful, and impactful experience across demographics.

Finding 3: The ES Practitioner—Alignment to the Origins and Purpose of the Ethnic Studies Field

While tensions abound in the work toward PI, data revealed that alignment of program development and implementation to the origins and purpose of the field of ES to be a key aspect of PI. Ruth Nell, a member of the school board during the early stages of development, and later the board president during implementation, and a key leader in the Black community Central

Coast town, invoked a Maasai²⁶ saying, “How are the children?” that grounded her leadership and decision making broadly to working toward educational outcomes that could only result in the response being, “All is well with the children.” From the beginning, the effort of PI was led at high levels of the CCUnified by individuals with a strong commitment to “making sure all children belong,” acknowledging ES as a necessary response to the historic practice of the school system not reflecting and meaningfully responding to the identities and experiences of the majority of its students.

A central part of remedying this harm through the ES initiative was the development of a district definition of ES that appropriately reflected both the essence of the field broadly, as well as a particularization to the local context.²⁷ The robust nature of the definition function is two-fold: (a) it ensures that institutionalization is aligned to the ES field; and (b) it acts as a safeguard against implementation that does not uphold the field’s core values, principles, and praxis. In service toward these ends, the Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies (Concordia & Tintiangco-Cubales, 2025) was developed as a resource to expedite PI with special attention to course and curricular development; professional learning on ES content and pedagogy; awareness raising for district and site leadership, including counselors and support staff; and developing and

²⁶ African ethnic group indigenous to present-day Kenya and Tanzania.

²⁷ Ethnic Studies is the interdisciplinary study that centers Asian American, Black/African American, and Chicana/Latina, and Native American* peoples who have experienced, survived, and resisted hegemonic systems and structures of oppression. Ethnic Studies courses in Santa Barbara Unified School District aim to educate students to be socially, politically, and economically conscious about their personal connections to local and (trans)national histories. Students in these courses will study race through the intersections of social identities such as ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality, ability, language, immigrant status, and class. They will analyze indigeneity, aspects of (de)colonization, white supremacy, oppression and privilege, and work towards empowering themselves as anti-racist leaders who engage in social justice activism. Dialogue drives the learning and supports the belief that each person has important knowledge, experiences, and voices to share. Students will have the opportunity to cultivate intersectional solidarity with groups of people, locally and (trans)nationally, to foster active social engagement, radical healing, and critical hope.

*These are the groups traditionally included in Ethnic Studies courses at the college level and in the California State Model Curriculum.

maintaining community responsiveness and accountability. This resource was born from the urgent need to quickly develop critical knowledge and skills among the adults responsible for institutionalization, in an intensive, effective, and concise manner.

These cornerstones are both surfaced and affirmed during practitioner interviews and focus groups. ES practitioners provided insight into the ways ES teachers make meaning of complex scholarly concepts for teaching ES to students, who typically range from 12 to 18 years old. Additionally, to ES practitioners, ES does not exist merely in the realm of conceptual knowledge but as a living praxis and embodiment of values and transformative principles. Together, they reflect the basis of the student learning experience grounded in the vision of ES.

This finding affirms what practitioners understood both conceptually, and via practice, about what they saw as necessary for PI. Critical practitioner identity and their development then, is directly related to student experience and what is surfaced in Finding 1 (positive impact of ES on student experience and learning). Engaging students in the history of ESG, facilitating critical consciousness development with special attention to meaningful application of learnings, in a community grounded in mutual recognition and respect is not only possible, but is being done in a robust and systematic manner.

Finding 4: The ES Practitioner—Teaching ES as Individual and Collective Praxis

Data revealed that ES teacher development to be organized, thorough, and impactful. Holistic practitioner development is facilitated through individual and collective learning rooted in action (teaching), reflection (thinking about ES teaching), and improved action (making adjustments based upon experience with teaching). The numerous abilities of practitioners—to provide culturally and community relevant, responsive, and sustaining teaching and learning that is rooted in students' lives—anchors what is taught and how it is taught, with special attention to

speaking to the students' eternal question, "Why should I learn this?" At the core of ES in CCUnified is content and pedagogy that stoke student interest, invite engagement, and ultimately facilitate meaningful application of learning, particularly from students who struggle to find meaning from schooling. J

Throughout the practitioner interviews and focus groups, we see the intersection of knowledge acquisition, skills development, meaningful application of learning, and student interest and agency. This teaching was a direct result of the individual and collective learning about ES content and pedagogy, amplified by teacher purpose grounded in social justice and disrupting inequity.

While most of the teachers who were recruited to teach the ES courses did not have background in the field, they shared a universal commitment to learning by doing. In addition to resources, political backing by the school district, a robust set of professional learning, and structural support at site and district levels, teacher development was fueled by shared purpose, collective work, and steadfast commitment to the ES project. Through a dialogical relationship between teachers and students, the collective work grounded in ES scholarship and established K-12 ES practices have directly shaped students' experiences.

Finding 5: Community Advocates—Advancing the Vision of ES in the CCUnified

The consensus by ESN!-CC is that the current program reflects an advance of the organization's vision for ES in the school district. There is initial appreciation and acknowledgement of significant strides toward the vision that ESN!-CC put forth in regard to institutionalization. While this evaluation is positive, it remains contingent upon the coming years of program implementation and is subject to change. In the present moment, this assessment reflects appreciation of three key areas of institutionalization: (a) Graduation

Requirement—ES courses have been developed, implemented, and are part of the core curriculum; (b) Resources and Support for Program Implementation—As of this study, there is ongoing funding for the Instructional Support Specialist (ISS), programming, and professional learning for ES classroom teachers with intention for wider access to teachers, counselors, and administrators, beyond the ES department; and (c) Student Response—Significant positive student experience reflected in six years of post-survey data affirming the efficacy of ES teaching.

Gabriela Ramirez, student and organizer for ESN!-CC at the time of the campaign, ties the experience of current CCUnified ES students to a history of ES community advocacy. She shares, “I kept thinking of this whole idea of planting seeds and how that’s a thread that captures the organizing part of it. And what has been developed up to this point, the seeds of the past generations before 2015, planting those seeds before us.” Ramirez’ reflection affirms that the community, led by youth and student participation, initiated the call for ES, and directly led to the development and PI of ES teaching and learning in the district.

Finding 6: ES Institutionalization—Proceeding with Critical Caution

There remains significant tension within the effort of institutionalization. The everchanging political landscape and set of conditions require vigilance on the part of critical practitioners and community. While ESN!-CC focus group members expressed cautious optimism about institutionalization, questions and concerns remain.

From the perspective of ESN!-CC and the broad community of support that galvanized the campaign, institutionalization reflects both a tremendous opportunity as well as an invitation to pause. Takayama reminded us of the organization’s critical awareness of the potential for

shallow and uncritical institutionalization. Ultimately, she asserts that PI must always connect student lives to dominant systems at the root of society. Given the critical and historical awareness that the organization has about the pitfalls of institutionalization, concerns about assimilation and eventual neutralization of ES' transformative essence remain. At the outset of the ES campaign victory, the organization expressed this concern.

“With the passage of the ethnic studies requirement on November 13, 2018, we are wrestling with the question of whether it is possible to work within institutions without falling victim to institutionalization.”

There is a deep awareness by ESN!-CC of institutions as the places where well-intentioned reform and change efforts go to die. In this moment, Takayama leaves us with cautious optimism:

What's lost by doing it? But also, I mean what's gained by doing it? On the other hand, we should have autonomous freedom schools. But I mean, there is something about it reaching a ton of students who go through public schools.

This speaks to the heart of the tension of institutionalization of a radical project like ES. There are close to 2 million students in public high schools in California, with roughly 6200 in the CCUnified. Over the past seven years of ES teaching and learning in the CCUnified, thousands of students have taken at least one ES course. To Takayama's question about ES institutionalization, this study reveals a semblance of what is “gained from by doing it.”

Theoretical Framework Interpretation

Framework Overview: Humanization and Critical Race Theory in Education

For my theoretical framework, I wield Freire's Theory of Humanization and Critical Race Theory in Education to analyze and make sense of how CCUnified has developed and

implemented ES (curriculum and pedagogy) within K-12 education in response to community demands for an ES graduation requirement. Solorzano (2019) discussed the relationship between Freire and CRT and the essential ways they complement and support each other in addressing injustice through dialogue with community, fostering critical consciousness, action, and centering the lived experiences of communities of Color. To this point, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) directly applied CRT to education. With special attention to the materiality of race and racism in education Ladson-Billings redefines “achievement gap” as “education debt” being the sum total of what is owed to communities of Color as a result of the long-standing history of structural inequities causing generational indignities and injustices experienced by students of Color and the communities from which they come (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The consequence of race and racism is deeply material.

The following three core tenets are most relevant to my findings and ground my theoretical framework:

- (a) Critical consciousness (conscientização) is a key tool in disrupting inequity and oppression (Freire, 1970/2000).
- (b) Race and racism as a matter of materiality (property rights), is central to inequity and marginalization. Anti-racism, as the response addresses material loss (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 2019).
- (c) Transformation of injustice requires an intentional and cyclical process of action and reflection collectively engaged by those committed to justice, particularly by those in the margins (Solorzano, 2019; Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001).

This framework allows for critical meaning-making of the complex eco-system of public schooling and has guided (and continues to guide) me throughout my ES classroom teaching, coordinator practice, and now through this scholarly endeavor.

Tenet 1: Critical Consciousness as Disruption of Inequity and Oppression

Critical consciousness (conscientização) is a key tool in disrupting inequity and oppression. Freire (1970/2000) offered, "The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality, so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it" (p. 39). In the CCUnified, critical consciousness is defined as "thinking causally, thinking historically, thinking systems and power" as a way of "enter[ing] into reality . . . knowing it better" with the express purpose of transforming it.

Student narrative feedback in relation to the impact that their ES course had on their way of seeing the world gives insight into the effect of ES's focus on the *history* of ESG and *critical consciousness*, two cornerstones of ethnic studies teaching in the CCUnified. The following student, who identifies as Chicax, stated:

I feel like this class has really changed my point of view and my knowledge about a lot of historical events and I feel like because of this class I will continue to be interested in the topic of ethnic studies which is something that I would have never thought of.

Students appreciate the effect of how historical knowledge is impacting their perspective—a changing of their point of view is understood to be positive. Given the field's explicit commitment to teaching the histories of ESG, it reinforces the value of building historical knowledge, particularly for young people of Color. According to a Chicax student, "It [ES] opened up a window in my head that made me see the world in a whole other way." And it is this whole other way of seeing the world that ES is equipping young people with critical knowledge

and skills and positioning them to engage in transforming their realities. As practitioners, the numerous instances of critical consciousness development in the classroom affirm the transformative nature of ES teaching and learning.

Tenet 2: Race, Racism and the Education Debt

Race and racism as a matter of materiality is central to inequity and marginalization. Summoning the language of property rights, Ladson-Billings (2006) asserted that systems of inequity rooted in both White supremacy and the economic system must pay what it owes to past, present, and future generations of students of Color. The consequence of race and racism, namely the cumulative education debt owed to ESG, is deeply material. Denying children and families of ESG to an education that reflects their lived experiences and the immense contributions of their communities to our society, while simultaneously preventing White children from these histories and epistemologies, perpetuates the status quo.

The movement for ES is an attempt to contribute to redress and reform the system at the root of the education debt. To this point, it is important to note that the ES requirement was not handed down as a reform from the graciousness or vision of formal district leadership. A great deal of organizing work was required, particularly within the political climate of 2015 to create a window of opportunity. Ramirez, ESN!-CC activist, reflected upon this time when neither the system nor key leaders in the community based organization (CBO) realm supported ES. She states, “It was scary not only for the district, but also other nonprofit leaders that I reached out to. They were afraid of losing their funding to support, even though they were Latino led or Latino benefiting nonprofits.” Additionally, focus group participants surfaced that progressive leadership within the school board, who they believed should have supported institutionalization, cautioned against the demands for a graduation requirement. Discussions of race, and racism,

much less a requirement to engage such topics, was not feasible until community mobilization and demands for ES, created the political micro-climate that facilitated the conditions for support.

Tenet 3: Critical and Collective Action and Reflection—Transforming Education

Transformation of injustice requires an intentional and cyclical process of action and reflection collectively engaged by those committed to justice, particularly by those in the margins. Elucidating this point the following reflection speaks to the effort to detrack secondary English classes, Allison, the ISS for ELA who also directly supported PI during the initial rollout phase, shared:

There was a moment when we were creating that first [English 9, Ethnic Studies (E9ES)] course where there was meant to be an “honors” section and a “college prep” section of the course. And the teachers who were going to be teaching it basically said, “Nope, we’re not going to do that. That is antithetical to ethnic studies, we’re just not going to do it.”

From the beginning, E9ES teachers asserted a practice consistent with the liberatory values and purpose of ES. The teachers sought to transform both their teaching and the schooling system from the inside-out, and they did this work collectively. To them, adopting traditional structures and generally accepted practices—like tracking students based upon perceived potential—would perpetuate inequitable patterns rooted in racism and classism. Importantly, this accountability and commitment to ES not only disrupted tracking within the E9ES courses, but district-wide throughout all of secondary English. What emerges from the integration of critical consciousness and collective action is a small but significant contribution at reforming schooling from within and is aligned to Freire’s concept of transformative education projects.

Ethnic Studies as Transformative Education Project

This case-study sits at the intersection of the scholarly foundations of an ever-evolving and highly complex realm of knowledge that is the ES field (Dominguez, 2026), and a public-school district's implementation of a community demand for an ES offering that:

teach[es] the histories of colonialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy; and . . . recognize[s] the agency and the wisdom of aggrieved communities” and is grounded in the “. . . epistemological or knowledge-making systems of Indigenous, Black, and other communities of color; analyses of power; and new pedagogical approaches based on models of democratic education.” (Fujino et al., 2019, p. 82)

Classroom practitioners, with the human and material resources mobilized in support of them, set out to teach ES in fidelity to its liberatory origin, purpose and epistemologies. Implementation honors both the intellectual wealth of the ES field, while simultaneously responding to the demands of ESN!-CC to teach and equip young people with the knowledge and skills to read and act upon the world.

As these findings both affirm that this canto some important degree be done, they also surface numerous tensions in the work to sustain PI. What exists/ed within this district's context that facilitated successful implementation reflects strong grassroots community support, a cadre²⁸ of committed classroom practitioners, a highly qualified and seasoned ISS rooted in the ES field, and political and financial support from the district. Short of any of these critical factors, implementation most certainly looks different. As school districts continue to grapple with the various challenges of implementation of the state's mandate, and as ES scholars and communities of Color continue to demand authentic ES, these findings may be of use toward PI.

²⁸ Term used by highly placed district leadership to describe the cohort of teachers recruited to teach the course.

This study provides the ES field with a test-case in relation to the feasibility of institutionalizing ES, as no other known research has engaged implementation at a district-wide level.

Problem of Practice: Initiating and Sustaining Principled Institutionalization

Principled Institutionalization and Status Quo

This descriptive case study illustrates the context, conditions, and actions needed for PI in the CCUnified. The results are intended to raise awareness of district leadership, site administrators, classroom teachers, counselors, and support staff broadly about the various aspects of PI. This dissertation investigated the advances, challenges, and ultimately the feasibility of broad implementation of an ES project advancing racial equity within the CCUnified - specifically, how to maintain and expand liberatory education within an institution (public schooling) historically designed, and currently functioning to assimilate difference and replicate outcomes. What has been made clear is that such an endeavor, while daunting to initiate, is also challenging to sustain. However, the following solutions surfaced from lessons and insight culled from several years of intensive practice provide a strong basis for continued PI.

Solution 1: Bolster Ethnic Studies Teaching and Learning

Practitioner Development

The positive student experience as reflected in Findings 1 & 2 is the direct result of impactful ES teaching. A core of dedicated educators engaging in intensive, holistic, and critical learning is a significant factor in positive student outcomes. Under the guidance of district policy, and direct support by site and district staff, regular classroom teachers developed into seasoned and effective ES practitioners. This can only be sustained through continued prioritization of ES as a multi-purpose initiative— (a) address the education debt, (b) equip

students with critical knowledge and skills to combat racism, and (c) position young people as active participants in democracy building. It is a given that discussion, and the development of teachers to facilitate such discussion, of inequity and injustice is challenging. The findings affirm that it is not only possible, but a desired outcome by students, ES practitioners and district leadership, and the larger central coast community that supports racial justice.

Solution 2: Strengthen Structures to Sustain Principled Institutionalization

Meaningfully Integrate ES into the Structures of the System

Findings 3 & 4—Theoretical grounding of practitioners and teacher efficacy cultivated through collective work, foregrounds the following solution. This requirement is twofold. First, the institutional awareness (support staff, faculty, counselors, site administrators, and district leadership) of the origin, purpose, and practice of ethnic studies must be raised as an instrumental and integrated aspect of all teaching and learning. ES must be both understood and wielded as a powerful tool toward achieving district equity initiatives—fostering sense of belonging; cultivating connection and community; addressing racism, anti-Blackness, bias and racial discord; and effectively reaching and teaching students who struggle most within the system (Socio-Economically Disadvantaged, English Language Learners, Black and Brown Students, SpEd) as a humanizing, and culturally responsive initiative. Second, ES must be structurally supported by the school system at every level to address issues of appropriate staffing, professional/ES practitioner learning, counseling and course selection, master scheduling, and community relations.

Solution 3: Establish and Maintain Avenues for Community Collaboration and Accountability

ES Community Advisory Committee

From the perspective of ESN!-CC and the broad community of support that galvanized the campaign, institutionalization reflects both a tremendous opportunity as well as an invitation to pause. Given the critical and historical awareness that the organization has about the pitfalls of institutionalization, concerns about assimilation and eventual neutralization of ES' transformative essence remain. To address these concerns, establishing formal structures that facilitate direct avenues for community input and collaboration adds an important mechanism to support the district in sustaining PI of ES. This, coupled with the previous two solutions, provide a multiplicity of structures and supports toward PI so as to prevent "falling victim to institutionalization."

Toward Addressing The Problem

Walking the ES Road While Making it

Ethnic studies is a long-established field in the realm of higher education. Currently, many districts across the state of California are engaged in institutionalization. However, no studies to this point have investigated implementation at a district-wide level. As a result, research about and understanding of how to appropriately implement ES courses at the K-12 public school district level is limited. This study contributes to this critical area of practice and affirms that institutionalization in fidelity to the ES field can be done at a high level with the proper vision, support, and leadership.

Implications for Educational / Leadership Interventions

The study examined three key areas in relation to PI: impact on students; practitioner perspectives on ES implementation; and ES community advocate evaluation of institutionalization. Based on student findings, the teachers successfully cultivated a community of learning conducive to effectively engaging young people in the topics of race, racism, oppression, and resistance, while also developing agentic skills and sensibilities (empathy, collaboration, speaking & listening, multiple-perspectivity, action & reflection, solidarity) grounded in criticality, mutual recognition, and respect of peers. In regard to practitioner perspectives, professional learning and ES practitioner development facilitated within collaborative structures supported by the ISS was key to their effectiveness engaging ES content and pedagogy. Lastly, the leading community advocate organization cautiously affirmed the success of the initial phases of institutionalization while maintaining the need for vigilance as the ES project is maintained over time.

District leadership has played an active part in program implementation and as a result have a degree of awareness about PI and its impact. The findings from the study allow for a holistic view incorporating student experience, practitioner development, and the role the community played in PI. This study, while not generalizable, may provide transferable knowledge. On one end, education leaders broadly may find value in the case-study as it can be a model for similar implementation, given similar conditions. On the other hand, in dissimilar contexts, lessons learned in relation to the need for clarity of vision and the instrumental role of teacher development may still prove to be fundamental toward PI, universally.

Challenges and Opportunities for Practice and Policy

Implications for Classroom / School Practice

Classroom practitioners, as central to the continued efficacy of PI, must engage in ongoing learning that allows for holistic growth (as justice-oriented intellectuals, as curriculum developers, as teacher leaders). Their development must be supported and positioned to shape and expand course offerings that respond to student and community demands for additional ES teaching including Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies, lessons and units of study on California Native Peoples and 1st Nations, LGBT2QAI+ Studies, Women and Gender Studies, and upper division seminar classes that allow for deeper learning (i.e., Youth Participatory Action Research, or YPAR, Black Studies and/or Chicanx and Latinx Studies 102, etc.). These offerings, while new to most K-12 spaces, reflect only an introductory level of the vast and growing knowledge of the ES field and their implementation reflects an essential aspect of the democratization of American education.

Community College partnerships must be further cultivated, and the district should pursue the development of district dual enrollment offering at the site level from the growing number of ES practitioners with either a Masters degree in Ethnic Studies or fulfilling the equivalency. This can bolster ES expansion work to allow for greater access to college units from more advanced offerings developed from within the CCUnified ES department. This, coupled with the above-mentioned areas, establishes an increasingly robust menu from which students interested in taking more ES courses can draw from.

Under current conditions, according to high-ranking leadership, the impact of the work is not fully recognized. Mireles, a former board president shared that while ES is not recognized for its strategic significance, that it “is actually integral to what we are doing, and where we are

going as a school district, in every way possible.” This way of seeing the critical role of ES toward attaining the district’s equity-driven mission must reach more of the key stakeholders throughout the school system and more must be done to raise awareness about what ES is, its impact on addressing inequity, as well as shifting mind-sets and practice across all staff.

Ethnic Studies-ifying the Institution: Implications for District / Organizational Leadership

In addition to the two school district trustees interviewed for this study, there has been broad support for ES over the last several years. However, Mireles expresses an analysis beyond more than just support for the initiative. Rather, he emphasizes the role ES must play if the district is to achieve any of its equity issues.

There is absolutely an intersectionality between Ethnic Studies and getting our students engaged in literacy . . . between ethnic studies and our combating anti-Blackness work . . . between belonging and creating affinity for students on campus at each of our school sites . . . between achievement that extends beyond just taking an ethnic studies class. Importantly, he makes critical connections between ES and the need for the institution to embrace and leverage it to achieve broader goals. He continues, “So that is the story that I don’t think is being told very much . . . talking about how tied ethnic studies is to everything else that we are doing.” To this point, there is a need to engage the school district in awareness raising about the origin, purpose, and critical practice of teachers, and the key function leadership, counselors and support staff must play in ensuring PI.

Relatedly, the formation of an ES Community Advisory Committee (ES-CAC) can continue to evolve the district’s ES practice as it ensures both support for continued PI acting as critical partners helping maintain energy, enthusiasm, and accountability grounded in student learning. As ESN!-CC leader Bond stated previously, “The district needs to do more to educate

the principals, teachers and support staff at the district to understand ethnic studies.” This awareness raising must be on-going and exist as a fully integrated aspect of teaching and learning if it is to shift the culture and practice of the district in alignment with the potency of the ES initiative.

Implications for Policy: “How are the Children?”

As leadership at the local, state, and federal level is constantly in flux and operating within ever-changing political contexts, it is significantly important that district policymakers are grounded in democratic, community responsive and accountable values—equity, equality, justice, freedom, and the common good—and works to address the material, social, and emotional needs of all students, their families, and communities. Leadership matters, and it either maintains the status quo, or it can help shift it. As this study has affirmed, leadership was most responsive to strong and organized communities who actively engaged the system to help craft its commitment to equity. And it is critical that community engagement at the highest levels continues to demand that the institution maintain its commitment to ES.

Specifically, the following three areas are of particular importance, (a), continue to uphold the graduation requirement in the face of increasingly loud and disingenuous reaction, (b) commit to complete integration of ES in practice (content, pedagogy, culture, institution-wide professional learning) and decision-making (site and district leadership), and (c), integrate ES into the structure of the institution (ES Community Advisory Committee) to ensure both accountability to PI as well as partners in continuing its evolution.

The Research: Parameters and Possibilities

Study Limitations

This case study has merely begun to describe what has made institutionalization of ES in the CCUnified, principled. The study explored the particularities of one site's institutionalization of ES teaching and learning. In doing so, this purposeful selection set clear parameters for its value. The study sought internal generalizability and while its findings may yield transferable knowledge, it makes no claim at external generalizability (Maxwell, 2013).

My positionality as a researcher directly informed my approach. First and foremost, I am the son of working-class Filipino immigrants, born and raised in downtown Los Angeles. I developed essential knowledge and skills needed to survive Los Angeles in the 1980s, a context shaped by racist policies and inequitable systems, resulting in the immense and unconscionable suffering and dehumanization of Black, Latinx, and other working and poor communities (Davis, 1990). While I once perceived it as a liability, I now fully realize this “street” episteme to be one of my biggest assets. I see ES as a powerful force to disrupt institutional inequities.

Secondly, I have a body of ES practice spanning well over two decades. In that period, I helped to co-construct and lead San Francisco Unified School District's (SFUSD) groundbreaking work translating university level ES scholarship and wielding culturally relevant pedagogy to disrupt systemic inequities (Bisht et al., 2026; Bonilla, 2020; Dee & Penner, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Considering my positionality and intimate relationship to the developing work of ES institutionalization, I am ideally situated to investigate the intersection of ES theory and practice within the CCUnified.

Through my investigation of this site, I had the opportunity to explore the inherent tension between in K12 public schools that is consistent with what Paulo Freire defines as a

radical educational project (1970)—an educational learning experience that transforms students’ (and teachers’) lives in partnership to transform the world—and the hegemonic nature (normalizing to dominant culture and status quo) of public schooling. The study examined the various ways CCUnified developed, implemented, and institutionalized ES content, practice, and pedagogy. Again, while the study makes no claims at generalizability, the study can act as a resource for other school districts seeking to fulfill the state’s mandate while also reflecting fidelity to the field’s anti-racist and liberatory origin and purpose, ultimately shedding light on the feasibility of broad implementation.

Future Research for K-12 Ethnic Studies

Unanswered Questions

There are a range of questions that remain that could not be pursued within this study. For example, as June marked the seventh year of PI, only the most recent complete set (SY 2024–25) of data was wielded for this study. Additionally, the post-survey asks students a number of questions that can be revisited to look at factors in addition to race (i.e., gender, schools, comparison between courses, etc.) Other areas of interest include pre- and post- survey comparison, ES courses to other core curriculum course comparison, particular teacher experience, etc. Lastly, a number of other school districts throughout the state similarly engage their students with pre- post- surveys of their ES experience. Due to the collective and parallel development of several ISS throughout the state responsible for PI in various LEA, a study can be done to compare approaches, culling insight based on conditions and context. An area of

research could entail a case study looking at the impact of ES courses at a county, regional, and/or statewide context.

As the state of California grapples with a plethora of intensely challenging obstacles toward implementing its graduation requirement, important questions remain: Who will teach these courses? Who will develop the scores of teachers needed to implement these courses? How will they be developed? How will state and local institutions work together to support broad implementation? What will be taught and how will it be taught? How will courses, teachers, and students be evaluated? What criteria will be used to determine successful implementation? While this study has not answered these questions, it has provided some degree of insight to them by focusing on CCUnified's implementation.

Contribution to the Literature

As articulated in detail in the Scholarly Significance section above, a growing body of work investigates the relationship between K-12 ES and areas of research including ES and critical consciousness, academic achievement, teacher preparation, and ethnic studies pedagogy and curriculum development. While these studies reflect multiple necessary elements to K-12 ES institutionalization (specifically teaching and learning) no studies have examined district-wide efforts of PI of ES. This study contributes to addressing this gap by investigating efforts to institutionalize ES in CCUnified, a medium-sized, suburban school district reflecting comparable racial and ethnic (60% Latina/o/x; 30% European American) demographics to that of the state (59% Latina/o/x; 20% European American).²⁹

Given the fact that ES in K-12 has typically been implemented as an intervention to disrupt inequity and marginalization of ethnic studies groups (ESG - California Native Peoples /

²⁹ <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/ceffingertipfacts.asp>

Native Americans; Black / African; Chicanx / Latinx; Asian and Pacific Islander), CCUnified provides additional value due to its experience as an early adopter LEA requiring all students to take a semester of ES in order to graduate. Despite opposition to justice and equity initiatives, there remains great interest around the potential impact of ES as an intervention to disrupt racism, anti-Blackness, and racial tension and discord via teaching young people about the structural causes of oppression and dehumanization and equipping them to take action toward addressing it.

Conclusion

The practice and objective of “teaching to transgress,” bell hooks’ corollary to Freireian praxis, is at the core of ES. The cultivation of *knowledge with purpose + action*, a key cornerstone of ES in the CCUnified grounds ES teaching and learning toward meaningful application of learning, toward a justice oriented “way of being.” Specifically, in this historic moment, what good is knowledge if it is not used to address our most pressing issues? ES calls upon everyone to bring their best selves in service of solving the problems before us. It is about humanity. It is about sustainability. It is about making real what we have yet to achieve. It is about love, life, and liberation for oneself, our communities, and the world.

With the passage of AB 101, the graduating class of 2030 (incoming ninth-graders, Fall 2026) will be the first generation of students accountable to the ES mandate. The opportunity and potential to harness the energies and aspirations of millions of young adults in service to the re/construction and expansion of our multiracial democracy is immense. While this task is no small feat, California’s unique demographics, geographic location, and globally impactful economy, makes it strategically situated at the crossroads of politics, culture, and society. With nearly 6 million young people in its public schools, approximately 2 million of whom are in high

school (Fingertip Facts on Education in California, 2024), its public education system is positioned to positively and powerfully impact both our nation, as well as the world. The state's core curriculum of math, science, English language arts, history/social studies, physical education and an electives requirement, has been expanded to include ethnic studies—a course whose purpose is to equip students with critical knowledge and skills to engage in the building of our multiracial democracy—with racial literacy, action research, community engagement as foundational components.

ES classrooms in the CCUnified have been teaching young people to engage the topics of race, racism, and oppression and to make connections to their lives and larger society - issues that many of their predecessors in education have failed to address. ES as a liberatory education project has made strides to transform curriculum, pedagogy, and the culture of the institution. Cultivating the ES classroom has not been easy, nor has it been without its shortcomings, but these spaces are poised to be both incubators of democratic education and developers of agents of actualization for our multi-racial democracy. Young people who step into our world equipped with racial literacy, critical intersectional awareness, knowledge and love of self, solidarity, purpose, and hope are the intended outcomes of the ES project.

APPENDIX A: ES PRACTITIONER (TEACHER AND LEADER) RECRUITMENT

LETTER

Dear [intended participant/s],

I am writing to you to invite you to be part of my research about principled ethnic studies institutionalization in K-12 public schools. The purpose of the research is to glean lessons from the principled institutionalization of ethnic studies in K-12 public schools as experienced by ethnic studies practitioners, students (via anonymous post-survey responses about their experience in their ethnic studies course/s) and the main community advocacy group promoting an ethnic studies graduation requirement, [REDACTED].

As part of my dissertation, I am seeking to collect data through interviews. Your participation will involve:

- Participating in an approximately 60-90 minute individual interview in-person or via Zoom outside of school hours. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy. During the interview,

I will ask you about:

- Relationship to the field of ethnic studies
- Successes and challenges in your ethnic studies teaching and learning
- Institutional (District) support for your ethnic studies teaching and learning
- Personal identities and experiences that shape and/or show up in your work to develop, implement, and improve your ethnic studies teaching

Please note that you will have the chance to review a summary of your interview, as well as any quotations from you included in my final written dissertation, to confirm that your views were accurately captured.

Study Duration:

The study takes place over 14 weeks during fall 2025 through early winter 2026, with the interview conducted in November 2025.

Risks and Discomforts of Study Participation:

Risks are minimal, but may include:

- Performance anxiety from being recorded during the interview
- Discomfort sharing personal identities and experiences during the interview
- Professional relationship concerns given my dual role as researcher and Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies (ISS-ES)

Risk Minimization:

This research focuses on the institution and its role and responsibility to support teachers and their development so that they may be effective ethnic studies practitioners, rather than individual performance evaluation. I will also remind participants that the data collection for my study is separate from professional duties and will not be used for any evaluatory purpose. My positioning during the interview will be cordial and I will remind participants that they can ask to stop recording at any time. You may request recording cessation at any time. I will securely store all collected materials. At the beginning of

any research-based interaction, I will explicitly state that I am now collecting data as the study's researcher, rather than acting as the Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies. For more information, or to sign up, please contact me at the phone number or email address below.

Salamat (Gratitude),

Artnelson Concordia
Education Leadership Program
Graduate School of Education and Information Studies
University of Los Angeles, California
artconcordia@gmail.com
415-613-4745

APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY ADVOCACY FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear [intended participant/s],

I am writing to you to invite you to be part of my research about principled ethnic studies institutionalization in K-12 public schools. The purpose of the research is to glean lessons from the principled institutionalization of ethnic studies in K-12 public schools as experienced by ethnic studies practitioners, students (via anonymous post-survey responses about their experience in their ethnic studies course/s) and the main community advocacy group promoting an ethnic studies graduation requirement, [REDACTED]

As part of my dissertation, I am seeking to collect data through interviews. Your participation will involve:

- Participating in an approximately 60-90 minute **individual interview** in-person or via Zoom outside of school hours. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy. During the interview, I will ask you about:
 - Relationship to the field of ethnic studies
 - Successes and challenges in your ethnic studies teaching and learning
 - Institutional (District) support for your ethnic studies teaching and learning
 - Personal identities and experiences that shape and/or show up in your work to develop, implement, and improve your ethnic studies teaching

Please note that you will have the chance to review a summary of the focus group. Additionally, you will have a chance to review any quotations from you included in my final written dissertation, to confirm that your views were accurately captured.

Study Duration:

The study takes place over 14 weeks during fall 2025 through early winter 2026, with the interview conducted in November 2025.

Risks and Discomforts of Study Participation:

Risks are minimal, but may include:

- Performance anxiety from being recorded during the interview
- Discomfort sharing personal identities and experiences during the interview
- Professional relationship concerns given my dual role as researcher and Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies (ISS-ES)

Risk Minimization:

This research focuses on the institution and its role and responsibility to support teachers and their development so that they may be effective ethnic studies practitioners, rather than individual performance evaluation. I will also remind participants that the data collection for my

study is separate from professional duties and will not be used for any evaluatory purpose. My positioning during the interview will be cordial and I will remind participants that they can ask to stop recording at any time. You may request recording cessation at any time. I will securely store all collected materials. At the beginning of any research-based interaction, I will explicitly state that I am now collecting data as the study's researcher, rather than acting as the Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies.

For more information, or to sign up, please contact me at the phone number or email address below.

Salamat (Gratitude),

Artnelson Concordia
Education Leadership Program
Graduate School of Education and Information Studies
University of Los Angeles, California
artconcordia@gmail.com
415-613-4745

APPENDIX C: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Study Focus

The purpose of this study is to glean lessons from the principled institutionalization of ethnic studies in K-12 public schools as experienced by ethnic studies practitioners, students (via anonymous post-survey responses about their experience in their ethnic studies course/s) and the main community advocacy group promoting an ethnic studies graduation requirement, ESN!- [REDACTED]

Research Questions

RQ1. According to [REDACTED] ethnic studies practitioners (teachers and administrators), what is necessary for the principled institutionalization of high school ethnic studies courses and/or programs in their district?

RQ1a. How does this district's experience with institutionalization align with the "Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies"?

RQ2. Based on students' post-survey responses, what made (or what would make) their ethnic studies courses an impactful learning experience?

RQ3. How does Ethnic Studies Now!- [REDACTED], the leading community organization in support of ethnic studies in [REDACTED], perceive the implementation of K-12 ethnic studies in the [REDACTED]? Specifically, how does the current [REDACTED] ethnic studies program reflect, or not reflect, their aspirations for ethnic studies in the school district?

Introduction (Warm-up and Consent)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study that seeks to glean insight into the process of principled institutionalization of ethnic studies in [REDACTED]. The interview should take approximately 60-90 minutes but can go longer if needed.

If at any point you do not feel ready to answer a question, please feel free to pass on the questions and/or take a break to regroup. As mentioned in the initial interview invitation, I will be audio recording our conversation. Is this still okay with you?

If at any point you want to end the recording, please let me know and I will be more than happy to do so. During your interview, I may take notes to better capture your responses as keeping notes while I am listening will help me in transcribing later. Lastly, everything that is shared in this interview is for my dissertation. Any identifiable information will be altered using pseudonyms to ensure your privacy. While I will maintain your confidentiality to the fullest extent possible, there are legal limits to confidentiality. As public school employees, we are mandated reporters. If information is shared that indicates suspected child abuse or neglect, imminent harm to self or others, or other legally reportable situations, I am required by law to report this information to appropriate authorities. This may include Child Protective Services, law enforcement, or school administration as required by California law and [REDACTED] policy. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Background Information

1. Please share some aspects of your identity - gender; ethnic and racial background; nationality; age.
2. What is your role in the school district? How long have you been in your current position? Are there any other notable roles you play?
3. How would you describe your school and district context (student population - race, class, gender, nationality, etc.).
4. How would you describe the city's context (population demographics, political climate, etc.)?

5. Can you share how your context shapes and/or shows up in your socio-political-cultural ways of how you see and be in the world?

Ethnic Studies Development

6. What is your familiarity with the field of ethnic studies (ES)? Please describe your relationship to the field.
7. How would you define ethnic studies?
8. How did you develop your ES knowledge (pedagogy, curriculum, racial identity formation, criticality)? Where does this learning typically take place?
9. How does the district support your development to teach ethnic studies?
10. What recommendations do you have for improving ES teaching and learning in the district?

Ethnic Studies Practice

11. How do you go about teaching the histories of communities of Color? Can you describe how this impacts your students?
12. How do you go about developing student critical consciousness?
Can you share an experience that helps me see how you might go about teaching about race and racism? Other marginalized identities? Examples of oppression?
13. While it is widely accepted that teaching history, including harmful events, systems, and actions is a necessary part of education, students have expressed how that can negatively impact their sense of self, agency, and outlook. How do your teachers, and by extension, ES, highlight resistance to oppression within your teaching?
14. Can you share how you foster student application of their learnings? A cornerstone of ethnic studies is “Knowledge with Purpose + Action.
15. How does your practice build community and solidarity within your classroom? Can you share either some ideas or some examples?
16. Please share a moment in your ethnic studies teaching practice where you felt you were most successful? What went into that? How did the students respond?
17. Please share a moment in your ethnic studies teaching practice where you felt you were unsuccessful or underprepared? How could it have gone better? What specific professional learning could have helped you better respond to the situation?
18. Have you ever had to address questions, concerns, and/or opposition to teaching ethnic studies? Please describe this experience. How well did you feel prepared in your response? How, if at all, were you supported to address this?

Closing

19. If you were the ISS-ES tasked to support a teacher new to ethnic studies, how would you provide that support?
20. What changes at the site, system, or policy level would better support ethnic studies teaching and learning?
Is there anything I haven’t asked that you think is important to share about this topic?

Closing Statement

Thank you again for participating in this interview and sharing your experiences and insight. I want to remind you and reassure you that the contents of this interview will be used only within my dissertation and your name and any other identifiable information will be replaced with a pseudonym.

APPENDIX D: DISTRICT/SITE LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Study Focus:

The purpose of this study is to glean lessons from the principled institutionalization of ethnic studies in K-12 public schools as experienced by ethnic studies practitioners, students (via anonymous post-survey responses about their experience in their ethnic studies course/s) and the main community advocacy group promoting an ethnic studies graduation requirement, [REDACTED]

Research Questions

RQ1. According to [REDACTED] ethnic studies practitioners (teachers and administrators), what is necessary for the principled institutionalization of high school ethnic studies courses and/or programs in their district?

RQ1a. How does this district's experience with institutionalization align with the "Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies"?

RQ2. Based on students' post-survey responses, what made (or what would make) their ethnic studies courses an impactful learning experience?

RQ3. How does Ethnic Studies Now!-[REDACTED], the leading community organization in support of ethnic studies in [REDACTED], perceive the implementation of K-12 ethnic studies in the [REDACTED] Specifically, how does the current [REDACTED] ethnic studies program reflect, or not reflect, their aspirations for ethnic studies in the school district?

Introduction (Warm-up and Consent)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study that seeks to glean insight into the process of principled institutionalization of ethnic studies in [REDACTED]. The interview should take approximately 60-90 minutes but can go longer if needed. If at any point you do not feel ready to answer a question, please feel free to pass on the questions and/or take a break to regroup. As mentioned in the initial interview invitation, I will be audio recording our conversation. Is this still okay with you?

If at any point you want to end the recording, please let me know and I will be more than happy to do so. During your interview, I may take notes to better capture your responses as keeping notes while I am listening will help me in transcribing later.

Lastly, everything that is shared in this interview is for my dissertation. Any identifiable information will be altered using pseudonyms to ensure your privacy. While I will maintain your confidentiality to the fullest extent possible, there are legal limits to confidentiality. As public school employees, we are mandated reporters. If information is shared that indicates suspected child abuse or neglect, imminent harm to self or others, or other legally reportable situations, I am required by law to report this information to appropriate authorities. This may include Child Protective Services, law enforcement, or school administration as required by California law and [REDACTED] policy. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Background Information

1. Please share some aspects of your identity - gender; ethnic and racial background; nationality; age.
2. What is your role in the school district? How long have you been in your current position? Are there any other notable roles you play?
3. How would you describe your school and district context (student population - race, class, gender, nationality, etc.).
4. How would you describe the city's context (population demographics, political climate, etc.)?
5. Can you share how your context shapes and/or shows up in how you see our society (beliefs)? How you relate with society (actions)?

Ethnic Studies Development

6. What is your familiarity with the field of ethnic studies (ES)? Please describe your relationship to the field.
7. How would you define ethnic studies?

8. How did you develop your ES knowledge (pedagogy, curriculum, racial identity formation, criticality)? Where does this learning typically take place?
9. How does the district support your development to teach ethnic studies?
10. What recommendations do you have for improving the implementation of ES in the district?

Ethnic Studies Practice

11. How do you support the teaching of histories of communities of Color? Can you describe how this impacts your students?
12. How do you go about developing student critical consciousness?
13. Can you share an experience that helps me see how you might go about teaching about race and racism? Other marginalized identities? Examples of oppression?
14. From your perspective, can you share how ES fosters student application of their learnings? A cornerstone of ethnic studies is “Knowledge with Purpose + Action.”
15. From your perspective, can you discuss how community and solidarity is fostered in your school? Can you share either some ideas or some examples?
 - a. Please share an observation you have of ES teaching practice where you felt they were most successful?
 - b. What went into that? How did the students respond?
16. Please share an observation of ES teaching practice where you felt they were unsuccessful or underprepared?
 - a. How could it have gone better? What specific professional learning could have helped them better respond to the situation?
17. Have you ever had to address questions, concerns, and/or opposition to teaching ethnic studies? Please describe this experience.
18. How well did you feel prepared in your response? How, if at all, were you supported to address this?

Closing

19. If you were the ISS-ES tasked to support a teacher new to ethnic studies, how would you provide that support?
 20. What changes at the site, system, or policy level would better support ethnic studies teaching and learning?
- Is there anything I haven’t asked that you think is important to share about this topic?

Closing Statement

Thank you again for participating in this interview and sharing your experiences and insight. I want to remind you and reassure you that the contents of this interview will be used only within my dissertation and your name and any other identifiable information will be replaced with a pseudonym.

APPENDIX E: COMMUNITY ADVOCACY GROUP PROTOCOL

Study Focus:

The purpose of this study is to glean lessons from the principled institutionalization of ethnic studies in K-12 public schools as experienced by ethnic studies practitioners, students (via anonymous post-survey responses about their experience in their ethnic studies course/s) and the main community advocacy group promoting an ethnic studies graduation requirement, ESN!-█.

Research Questions

RQ1. According to █ ethnic studies practitioners (teachers and administrators), what is necessary for the principled institutionalization of high school ethnic studies courses and/or programs in their district?

RQ1a. How does this district's experience with institutionalization align with the "Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies"?

RQ2. Based on students' post-survey responses, what made (or what would make) their ethnic studies courses an impactful learning experience?

RQ3. How does Ethnic Studies Now!-█, the leading community organization in support of ethnic studies in █, perceive the implementation of K-12 ethnic studies in the █? Specifically, how does the current █ ethnic studies program reflect, or not reflect, their aspirations for ethnic studies in the school district?

Introduction (Warm-up and Consent)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study that seeks to glean insight into the process of principled institutionalization of ethnic studies in █. This focus group should take approximately 120 minutes but can go longer if needed. If at any point any of you do not feel ready to answer a question, please feel free to pass on the questions and/or take a break to regroup. As mentioned in the initial focus group invitation, I will be audio recording our conversation. Is this still okay with each of you?

If at any point anyone no longer wants to be recorded, please feel free to excuse yourself from the focus-group, and return if and when you feel ready. During our time together, I may take notes to better capture your responses as keeping notes while I am listening will help me in transcribing later.

Lastly, everything that is shared in this focus group is for my dissertation. Any identifiable information will be altered using pseudonyms to ensure your privacy. Before we begin, does anyone have any questions for me?

Vision for Ethnic Studies and Key Considerations for Institutionalization (Circles of Organizing, 2018)

With the passage of the ethnic studies requirement on November 13, 2018, we are wrestling with the question of whether it is possible to work within institutions without falling victim to institutionalization. In what ways do institutions, even with determined and well-meaning people within them, foster processes of absorption and co-optation that lead to diluted and simplistic versions of complex histories and culture? How do we work with institutions—and we must, if we want to change policies—while being accountable to broader communities, especially those most impacted by systems of domination? How does the passage of the requirement impact █ relationship with the school district and with students, parents, teachers, and the local community? We recognize that any quick solutions or easy fixes will likely produce only the kind of ethnic studies we do not

want. Instead, we seek to develop processes and principles that involve listening to and implementing policies and practices that best serve the marginalized constituencies among us—in our case, high school students, the Chican@/Latinx immigrant, Chumash, and people of color communities, the working class, trans and queer youth, and broader communities as well. We want to enlist the active participation of high school teachers and university professors with extensive knowledge of ethnic studies to develop the curriculum and criteria for hiring and training teachers. We want ESNSB and other community members to be involved in the process of implementing ethnic studies.

Background Information

1. Please share some aspects of your identity - gender; ethnic and racial background; nationality; age
2. Can you share some important responsibilities you hold within your family, your communities, and the larger [REDACTED] context?
3. What is your understanding of the school district's demographics (student population - race, class, gender, nationality, etc.)?
4. How would you describe the district's vision and mission?
5. What is your assessment of their actualization of the vision and mission?
6. How would you describe the [REDACTED] context (population demographics, political climate, etc.)?
7. What is your relationship (past and current) to the school district?

[REDACTED] & the Campaign for a Graduation Requirement

8. What is your familiarity with the field of ethnic studies (ES)? Please describe your relationship to the field.
9. How would you define ethnic studies? Please share why it is important to you? Is there an example you can share that reflects this that you feel comfortable sharing?
10. To the best of your recollection, please describe the significant moments, conversations, experiences that led up to the formation of [REDACTED] and the eventual campaign.

Ethnic Studies Institutionalization & Community Accountability

11. How would you characterize the organization's relationship to the district?
12. Please share how [REDACTED] has engaged and held the district accountable for the ethnic studies graduation requirement?
13. From your vantage point, what is your assessment of the district's implementation of ethnic studies? What are the strengths of the program? What are areas of improvement?
14. What recommendations do you have for further developing and strengthening the institutionalization of ethnic studies in the [REDACTED]?
15. What would you like to see in the short term (1-3 years) and long term (7-10 years) for ethnic studies?

Closing

16. If we could turn back time and have a do-over in relation to the campaign for the graduation requirement (institutionalization), is there anything you would change?
17. What changes at the site, system, or within policy at the local, county or state levels would you like to see in relation to ethnic studies institutionalization?
18. Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important to share about this topic?

Closing Statement

Thank you again for participating in this focus group and sharing your experiences and insight. I want to remind you and reassure you that the contents of this interview will be used only within

my dissertation and your names and any other identifiable information will be replaced with a pseudonym.

APPENDIX F: ETHNIC STUDIES PRACTITIONER ACTIVE CONSENT FORM
(TEACHER)

Research Title:

Promises, Politics, and Praxis: Lessons in Principled Ethnic Studies Institutionalization from [REDACTED] Unified School District

Researcher Contact Information:

Artnelson Concordia

Doctoral Candidate, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

Email: artconcordia@gmail.com

Phone Number: 415 613 4745

*You are being asked to participate in a research study that is **not** sponsored by [REDACTED]. Choosing not to participate in the research will **not** negatively impact staff employment or benefits.*

Data collection specific to this study will occur outside of work hours. The information collected as part of this study may be used beyond the purposes outlined in this consent form. Future research or other use of this information beyond the scope of the current study is permitted.

*Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do. If you decide to participate, please submit this consent form to the researcher no later than **November 7th, 2025**.*

Study Sponsor(s):

Chairperson of Committee	Dr. Daniel Solorzano Professor, UCLA Phone: 310 206-7855 Email: dsolorzano@ucla.edu
--------------------------	--

Study Purpose:

This qualitative research study examines the implementation, challenges, and successes of K-12 ethnic studies programming (institutionalization) within [REDACTED]. The study aims to document educator experiences, identify effective practices, and understand factors that support or hinder principled ethnic studies program development and sustainability. Findings will contribute to evidence-based recommendations for strengthening ethnic studies education within [REDACTED] and may provide transferable insights for other districts implementing similar programming.

Study Participation:

To conduct this study, I am seeking to collect data through interviews. Your participation will involve:

- Individual Interview (60-90 minutes outside of work hours, November 2025)

Participating in an approximately 60-90 minute individual interview in-person or via Zoom outside of school hours. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy. During the interview, I will ask you about:

- Relationship to the field of ethnic studies
- Successes and challenges in your ethnic studies teaching and learning
- Institutional (District) support for your ethnic studies teaching and learning
- Personal identities and experiences that shape and/or show up in your work to develop, implement, and improve your ethnic studies teaching

Please note that you will have the chance to review a summary of your interview, as well as any quotations from the interview included in my final written dissertation, to confirm that your views were accurately captured.

Study Duration:

The study takes place over 14 weeks during fall 2025 through winter 2026, with the interview conducted in November 2025.

Risks and Discomforts of Study Participation:

Risks are minimal, but may include:

- Performance anxiety from being recorded during the interview
- Discomfort sharing personal identities and experiences during the interview
- Professional relationship concerns given my dual role as researcher and Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies (ISS-ES)

Risk Minimization:

This research focuses on the institution and its role and responsibility to support teachers and their development so that they may be effective ethnic studies practitioners, rather than individual performance evaluation. I will also remind participants that the data collection for my study is separate from professional duties and will not be used for any evaluatory purpose. My positioning during the interview will be cordial and I will remind participants that they can ask to stop recording at any time. You may request recording cessation at any time. I will securely store all collected materials. At the beginning of any research-based interaction, I will explicitly state that I am now collecting data as the study's researcher, rather than acting as the Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies.

Benefits of Study Participation:

Participants may experience several direct benefits from participation in this study.

Professional Development Benefits:

Participants may benefit from their reflection on their participation in a transformative education project of ethnic studies institutionalization as an initiative that meaningfully disrupts predictability of demographics, racism and bias, and equips young people with critical tools to participate in our multi-racial democracy.

Leadership Development Benefits:

Intensive and facilitated reflection may benefit participants by highlighting a plethora of measurable outcomes related to their work to build ethnic studies curriculum and practice.

Reflective Practice Benefits:

The entire educational project that is ethnic studies requires practitioners and supporters to be deeply self and community reflective. This opportunity allows key stakeholders in the institutionalization of ethnic studies in [REDACTED] to document their participation and the overall progress and impact of the ethnic studies initiative.

This research also aims to advance educational equity by examining how ethnic studies is being effectively institutionalized within the K-12 context in California, thus improving the educational outcomes and experiences of students with marginalized identities, while also addressing how to equip students with critical knowledge and skills to disrupt bias.

Confidentiality:

I will do my best to make sure that your private information is kept confidential. Information about you will be handled as confidentially as possible, but participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured. Audio recordings will be used to develop an analysis of and related findings for ethnic studies institutionalization in the [REDACTED]. I as the principal investigator will erase the recordings after completion of my dissertation. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.

All data will be:

- De-identified using pseudonyms
- Stored in password-protected folders separate from school records
- Not shared with anyone, including school administrators or district personnel

Exceptions to Confidentiality:

While I will maintain your confidentiality to the fullest extent possible, there are legal limits to confidentiality. As public school employees, we are mandated reporters. If information is shared that indicates suspected child abuse or neglect, imminent harm to self or others, or other legally reportable situations, I am required by law to report this information to appropriate authorities. This may include Child Protective Services, law enforcement, or school administration as required by California law and [REDACTED] policy.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided for participation.

Right to Withdraw:

You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, even if you initially provided consent. You may:

- Withdraw consent at any time via email or in-person communication with me
- Withdraw without penalty or impact on professional relationships
- Request cessation of recording during the interview
- Decline to answer specific questions during the interview

Researcher's Dual Role:

I serve as both the study's researcher and the district's ISS-ES. To address potential conflicts, I will...

Ensure participation decisions remain confidential and do not impact professional standing, evaluations, or working relationships

Clearly distinguish when I am acting as the researcher and collecting data for the study versus when I am engaging in my normal professional duties as the ISS-ES

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than myself, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

Voluntary Consent:

Please read each statement below and mark the corresponding checkbox to acknowledge your consent.

☐ I have read and understand the information provided above. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Do you voluntarily consent to participate in the following data collection methods?

Audio recorded individual interview for accuracy purposes

Yes I do

No I do not

Collection of demographic data including:

Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Years of Experience, Role (i.e. Teacher, Administrator or District Leader)

Yes I do

No I do not

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences to my employment or benefits.

Participant Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Non-██████ E-mail: _____

Participant Signature: _____

You will be provided with a copy of this consent form. Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Artnelson Concordia, with any questions or concerns, using the information provided above.

APPENDIX G: ETHNIC STUDIES PRACTITIONER ACTIVE CONSENT FORM
(LEADERSHIP)

Research Title:

Promises, Politics, and Praxis: Lessons in Principled Ethnic Studies Institutionalization from
[REDACTED] School District

Researcher Contact Information:

Artnelson Concordia

Doctoral Candidate, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

Email: artconcordia@gmail.com

Phone Number: 415 613 4745

*You are being asked to participate in a research study that is **not** sponsored by [REDACTED] Unified School District. Choosing not to participate in the research will **not** negatively impact staff employment or benefits.*

Data collection specific to this study will occur outside of work hours. The information collected as part of this study may be used beyond the purposes outlined in this consent form. Future research or other use of this information beyond the scope of the current study is permitted.

*Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do. If you decide to participate, please submit this consent form to the researcher no later than **November 7th, 2025.***

Study Sponsor(s):

Chairperson of Committee	Dr. Daniel Solorzano Professor, UCLA Phone: 310 206-7855 Email: dsolorzano@ucla.edu
--------------------------	--

Study Purpose:

This qualitative research study examines the implementation, challenges, and successes of K-12 ethnic studies programming (institutionalization) within [REDACTED] Unified School District [REDACTED]. The study aims to document educator experiences, identify effective practices, and understand factors that support or hinder principled ethnic studies program development and sustainability. Findings will contribute to evidence-based recommendations for strengthening ethnic studies education within [REDACTED] and may provide transferable insights for other districts implementing similar programming.

Study Participation:

To conduct this study, I am seeking to collect data through interviews. Your participation will involve:

- Individual Interview (60-90 minutes outside of work hours, November 2025)

- Participating in an approximately 60-90 minute individual interview in-person or via Zoom outside of school hours. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy. During the interview, I will ask you about:
 - Relationship to the field of ethnic studies
 - Successes and challenges in your oversight and implementation of ethnic studies teaching and learning
 - Institutional (District) support for your role providing oversight and support ethnic studies implementation
 - Personal identities and experiences that shape and/or show up in your work to support ethnic studies institutionalization

Please note that you will have the chance to review a summary of your interview, as well as any quotations from the interview included in my final written dissertation, to confirm that your views were accurately captured.

Study Duration:

The study takes place over 14 weeks during fall 2025 through winter 2026, with the interview conducted in November 2025.

Risks and Discomforts of Study Participation:

Risks are minimal, but may include:

- Performance anxiety from being recorded during the interview
- Discomfort sharing personal identities and experiences during the interview
- Professional relationship concerns given my dual role as researcher and Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies (ISS-ES)
- Community response and accountability given the public and often politicized nature of this content area

Risk Minimization:

This research focuses on the institution's commitment and its role and responsibility to support teachers and their development so that they may be effective ethnic studies practitioners, rather than individual performance evaluation. I will also remind participants that the data collection for my study acknowledges the challenges of leadership and recognizes the significance of the ethnic studies work already undertaken. My positioning during the interview will be cordial and I will remind participants that they can ask to stop recording at any time. You may request recording cessation at any time. I will securely store all collected materials. At the beginning of any research-based interaction, I will explicitly state that I am now collecting data as the study's researcher, rather than acting as the Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies.

Benefits of Study Participation:

Participants may experience several direct benefits from participation in this study.

Professional Development Benefits:

Participants may benefit from their reflection on their participation in a transformative education project of ethnic studies institutionalization as an initiative that meaningfully disrupts

predictability of demographics, racism and bias, and equips young people with critical tools to participate in our multi-racial democracy.

Leadership Development Benefits:

Intensive and facilitated reflection may benefit participants by highlighting a plethora of measurable outcomes related to their work to build ethnic studies curriculum and practice.

Reflective Practice Benefits:

The entire educational project that is ethnic studies requires practitioners and supporters to be deeply self and community reflective. This opportunity allows key stakeholders in the institutionalization of ethnic studies in [REDACTED] to document their participation and the overall progress and impact of the ethnic studies initiative.

This research also aims to advance educational equity by examining how ethnic studies is being effectively institutionalized within the K-12 context in California, thus improving the educational outcomes and experiences of students with marginalized identities, while also addressing how to equip students with critical knowledge and skills to disrupt bias.

Confidentiality:

I will do my best to make sure that your private information is kept confidential. Information about you will be handled as confidentially as possible, but participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured. Only I as the principal investigator will have access to the audio recordings. Audio recordings will be used to develop an analysis of and related findings for ethnic studies institutionalization in the [REDACTED]. I as the principal investigator will erase the recordings after completion of my dissertation. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.

All data will be:

- De-identified using pseudonyms
- Stored in password-protected folders separate from school records
- Not shared with anyone, including school administrators or district personnel

Exceptions to Confidentiality:

While I will maintain your confidentiality to the fullest extent possible, there are legal limits to confidentiality. As public school employees, we are mandated reporters. If information is shared that indicates suspected child abuse or neglect, imminent harm to self or others, or other legally reportable situations, I am required by law to report this information to appropriate authorities. This may include Child Protective Services, law enforcement, or school administration as required by California law and [REDACTED] policy.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided for participation.

Right to Withdraw:

You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, even if you initially provided consent. You may:

- Withdraw consent at any time via email or in-person communication with me

- Withdraw without penalty or impact on professional relationships
- Request cessation of recording during the interview
- Decline to answer specific questions during the interview

Researcher's Dual Role:

I serve as both the study's researcher and the district's ISS-ES. To address potential conflicts, I will...

- Ensure participation decisions remain confidential and do not impact professional standing, evaluations, or working relationships
- Clearly distinguish when I am acting as the researcher and collecting data for the study versus when I am engaging in my normal professional duties as the ISS-ES

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than myself, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

Voluntary Consent:

Please read each statement below and mark the corresponding checkbox to acknowledge your consent.

☐ I have read and understand the information provided above.

☐ I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Do you voluntarily consent to participate in the following data collection methods?

Audio recorded individual interview for accuracy purposes

☐ Yes I do

☐ No I do not

Collection of demographic data including:

Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Years of Experience, Role (i.e. Teacher, Administrator or District Leader)

☐ Yes I do

☐ No I do not

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences to my employment or benefits.

Participant Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Non-██████ E-mail: _____

Participant Signature: _____

You will be provided with a copy of this consent form. Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Artnelson Concordia, with any questions or concerns, using the information provided above.

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP ACTIVE CONSENT FORM

Research Title:

Promises, Politics, and Praxis: Lessons in Principled Ethnic Studies Institutionalization from [REDACTED] Unified School District

Researcher Contact Information:

Artnelson Concordia

Doctoral Candidate, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

Email: artconcordia@gmail.com

Phone Number: 415 613 4745

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is not sponsored by [REDACTED] Unified School District. Choosing not to participate in the research will not negatively impact staff employment or benefits.

Data collection specific to this study will occur outside of work hours. The information collected as part of this study may be used beyond the purposes outlined in this consent form. Future research or other use of this information beyond the scope of the current study is permitted. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do. If you decide to participate, please submit this consent form to the researcher no later than December 1st, 2025.

Study Sponsor(s):

Chairperson of Committee	Dr. Daniel Solorzano Professor, UCLA Phone: 310 206-7855 Email: dsolorzano@ucla.edu
--------------------------	---

Study Purpose:

This qualitative research study examines the implementation, challenges, and successes of K-12 ethnic studies programming (institutionalization) within [REDACTED] Unified School District [REDACTED]. The study aims to document educator experiences, identify effective practices, and understand factors that support or hinder principled ethnic studies program development and sustainability. Findings will contribute to evidence-based recommendations for strengthening ethnic studies education within [REDACTED] and may provide transferable insights for other districts implementing similar programming.

Study Participation:

To conduct this study, I am seeking to collect data through this focus group. Your participation will involve:

- Focus Group (90-120 minutes outside of work hours, November 2025)

- Participating in an approximately 90-120 minute focus group in-person or via Zoom. The focus group will be audio recorded for accuracy. During the focus group, I will ask you about:
 - Relationship to the field of ethnic studies
 - Participation in the campaign to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement
 - Institutional (District) support for ethnic studies institutionalization
 - Personal identities and experiences that shape and/or show up in your work to support ethnic studies teaching and learning

Please note that you will have the chance to review a summary of your focus group participation, as well as any quotations from you from the focus group included in my final written dissertation, to confirm that your views were accurately captured.

Study Duration:

The study takes place over 14 weeks during fall 2025 through winter 2026, with the focus group conducted in November 2025.

Risks and Discomforts of Study Participation:

Risks are minimal, but may include:

- Performance anxiety from being recorded during the focus group
- Discomfort sharing personal identities and experiences during the focus group
- Community relationship concerns given my multiple roles as researcher, community member, and Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies (ISS-ES)

Risk Minimization:

This research focuses on the institution and its role and responsibility to follow through with their commitment to institutionalize ethnic studies by supporting teachers and their development so that they may be effective ethnic studies practitioners, rather than an evaluation of the advocate organization or its members. My positioning during the focus group will be cordial and I will remind participants that they can ask to stop recording at any time. Participants may request recording cessation at any time. I will securely store all collected materials. At the beginning of any research-based interaction, I will explicitly state that I am now collecting data as the study's researcher, rather than acting as the Instructional Support Specialist for Ethnic Studies.

Benefits of Study Participation:

Participants may experience several direct benefits from participation in this study.

Community Development Benefits:

Participants may benefit from their reflection on their participation in a transformative education project of ethnic studies institutionalization as an initiative that meaningfully disrupts predictability of demographics, racism and bias, and equips young people with critical tools to participate in our multi-racial democracy.

Collaborative Learning Benefits:

Specifically for the focus group, this opportunity to provide their reflection on the successful history of their organization's work to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement can affirm the impact of their long-standing commitment to equity and justice.

This research also aims to advance educational equity by examining how ethnic studies is being effectively institutionalized within the K-12 context in California, thus improving the educational outcomes and experiences of students with marginalized identities, while also addressing how to equip students with critical knowledge and skills to disrupt bias.

Confidentiality:

I will do my best to make sure that your private information is kept confidential. Information about you will be handled as confidentially as possible, but participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured. Audio recordings will be used to develop an analysis of and related findings for ethnic studies institutionalization in the [REDACTED]. I as the principal investigator will erase the recordings after completion of my dissertation. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.

All data will be:

- De-identified using pseudonyms
- Stored in password-protected folders separate from school records
- Not shared with anyone, including school administrators or district personnel

Exceptions to Confidentiality:

While I will maintain your confidentiality to the fullest extent possible, there are legal limits to confidentiality. As a public school employee, I am a mandated reporter. If information is shared that indicates suspected child abuse or neglect, imminent harm to self or others, or other legally reportable situations, I am required by law to report this information to appropriate authorities. This may include Child Protective Services, law enforcement, or school administration as required by California law and [REDACTED] policy.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided for participation.

Right to Withdraw:

You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, even if you initially provided consent. You may:

- Withdraw consent at any time via email or in-person communication with me
- Withdraw without penalty or impact on professional relationships
- Request cessation of recording during the focus group
- Decline to answer specific questions during the focus group

Researcher's Dual Role:

I serve as both the study's researcher and the district's ISS-ES. To address potential conflicts, I will...

- Ensure participation decisions remain confidential and do not impact professional standing, evaluations, or working relationships

- Clearly distinguish when I am acting as the researcher and collecting data for the study versus when I am engaging in my normal professional duties as the ISS-ES

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than myself, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

Voluntary Consent:

Please read each statement below and mark the corresponding checkbox to acknowledge your consent.

☐ I have read and understand the information provided above.

☐ I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Do you voluntarily consent to participate in the following data collection methods?

Audio recorded focus group for accuracy purposes

☐ Yes I do

☐ No I do not

Collection of demographic data including:

Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Years of Experience, Role (i.e. ☐ member)

☐ Yes I do

☐ No I do not

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences to my relationship to the researcher and/or with the ☐.

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Non-☐ E-mail: _____

Participant Signature: _____

You will be provided with a copy of this consent form. Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Artnelson Concordia, with any questions or concerns, using the information provided above.

APPENDIX I: POST-SURVEY QUESTIONS

Spring '25, Term 4, Ethnic Studies Student Post-survey

All changes saved in Drive

QuestionsResponsesSettings

BUILDING A BETTER CLASS

It would be very helpful for us if you gave specific examples of what you most appreciated and suggestions for improvement.

32. Three things that I like BEST about this class are: *

Long answer text

33. Three things that I would change about this class: *

Long answer text

34. Overall Ethnic Studies course satisfaction* *

-4- Completely Sati...-3- Somewhat Sati...-2- Somewhat Diss...-1- Completely Dis...

Row 1

35. Please explain your response to the above question: *

Long answer text

REFERENCES

- Aarons, V. (2021, January 21). *Scholarly review of research articles cited in the Third Field Review of the ESMC finds insufficient evidence for claims cited, request removal of claims.*
<https://cde.app.box.com/s/3j1ioadb28e0jwvlok9qtsna7fb8h8o/file/767226999501>
- Abrams, L. S., Garcia-Perez, J., Brock-Petroshius, K., & Applegarth, M. D. (2023). Racism, colorblindness, and social work education: An exploratory study of California MSW student beliefs and experiences. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 14(2), 385–410. <https://doi.org/10.1086/714830>
- Agrawal, N., & Blume, H. (2020, August 1). Settling a war over words; State revamps K-12 ethnic studies plan that ignited controversy. *Los Angeles Times*.
<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/settling-war-over-words-state-revamps-k-12-ethnic/docview/2429368146/se-2>
- Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Banks, J. A. (1993). Chapter 1: Multicultural education: Historical development, dimensions, and practice. *Review of Research in Education*, 19(1), 3–49.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X019001003>
- Banks, J. (2020). [Series Forward]. In C. E. Sleeter & M. Zavala (Eds.), *Transformative Ethnic Studies in schools: Curriculum, pedagogy, and research* (ix–xvi). Teachers College Press.
- Barrios, G. (2009, Spring). Walkout in Crystal City. *Learning For Justice*, 35.
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/spring-2009/walkout-in-crystal-city>

- Beckham, K., & Concordia, A. (2019). We don't want to just study the world, we want to change it. In T. Cuauhtin, M. Zavala, C. Sleeter, & W. Au (Eds.), *Rethinking ethnic studies* (pp. 319–327). Rethinking Schools.
- Bell, R., Perez, N., & Ruiz, M. O. (2022). Ethnic studies today: Battles and possibilities. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 44, 65–70. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48724520>
- The Berkeley Revolution*. (2017). [Digital Archive]. The Third World Liberation Front. <https://revolution.berkeley.edu/projects/twlf/>
- Bisht, B., Bonilla, S., Kim, G., Ha E., & Penner, E. K. (2026). Cultural relevance at scale: The effects of an Ethnic Studies expansion on academic outcomes. *American Educational Research Journal*, 63(3), 471–513. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312261426338>
- Bonilla, S., Dee, T. S., & Penner, E. K. (2021). Ethnic studies increases longer-run academic engagement and attainment. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(37), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2026386118>
- Cabrera, N. L., Meza, E. L., Romero, A. J., & Cintli Rodriguez, R. (2013). “If there is no struggle, there is no progress”: Transformative youth activism and the school of ethnic studies. *The Urban Review*, 45(1), 7–22. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-012-0220-7>
- Cabrera, N. L., Milem, J. F., Jaquette, O., & Marx, R. W. (2014). Missing the (student achievement) forest for all the (political) trees: Empiricism and the Mexican American Studies controversy in Tucson. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(6), 1084–1118. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3102/000283121455370>
- CAIR California. (2025, May 15). *After defeating AB 1468, a new threat emerges: AB 715*. <https://ca.cair.com/updates/after-defeating-ab-1468-a-new-threat-emerges-ab-715/>

- California Common Core State Standards English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. (2010, 2013). California Department of Education. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finaelacssstandards.pdf>
- Cammarota, J., & Romero, A. F. (2009). The Social Justice Education Project: A critically compassionate intellectualism for Chicana/o students. In *Handbook of social justice in education* (pp. 465–476). Routledge.
- Castillo, E. (2019, September 22). Delay in school ethnic studies plan would bring more voices to the table. *Cal Matters*. <https://calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2019/09/california-delay-school-ethnic-studies-plan-more-voices/>
- Chapman, T. K., Jones, M., Ramon, S., Lopez, D., Rogers, K. D., & Crawford, J. (2020). A necessary pairing: Using academic outcomes and critical consciousness to dismantle curriculum as the property of Whiteness in K-12 ethnic studies. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 53(4), 569–582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1791767>
- Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education. (1969). *El Plan de Santa Barbara*. La Causa Publications, Oakland.
- https://mechadeucdavis.weebly.com/uploads/9/7/0/4/9704129/el_plan_de_santa_barbara.pdf
- Concordia, A., & Tintiangco-Cubales, A. (2024). Policy isn't enough: Learning from K-12 ethnic studies teachers. *AAPINexus*, 21(1 & 2), 273–292.
- <https://www.aapinexus.org/2024/04/03/table-of-contents-volume-21-no-1-2/>
- Constantino, R. (1970). The miseducation of the Filipino. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 1(1), 20–36. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00472337085390031>
- Cunanan, G., Concordia, A., & Jaco, T. (2023). Ethnic studies as social movement: Resistance in

- the face of public reaction. *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 26(2), 233–241.
- Curammeng, E. R. (2020). Advancing teacher preparation through ethnic studies: Portraits of Filipino American self-identified male teachers. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(3), 454–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1664003>
- Dahl, A. (2023). Constructing colonial peoples: W. E. B. Du Bois, the United Nations, and the politics of space and scale. *Modern Intellectual History*, 20(3), 858–882. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S1479244322000464>
- David, E. J. R. (2013). *Brown skin, white minds: Filipino-/American postcolonial psychology*. Information Age Publishing Inc.
- Davis, M. (1990). *City of quartz: Excavating the future in Los Angeles*. Verso.
- De La Trinidad, M., Alvarez, S., Esquierdo, J., & Guajardo, F. (2021). Historias Americanas: Implementing Mexican American studies in K-12 social studies curriculum in the Rio Grande Valley. *Association of Mexican American Educators Journal*, 15(2), 36–63. <https://amaejournal.utsa.edu/index.php/AMAE>
- Defend Ethnic Studies in SFUSD, Writers. (2025, June 27). *Open Letter to Defend Ethnic Studies in San Francisco*. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1znPGVAR664i0IJuj4n2PURl80D4lsI7TXGqNOQ03VmU/edit?tab=t.0>
- Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2014). *An indigenous peoples' history of the United States*. Beacon Press.
- Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling, No. Executive Order 14190 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02232/ending-radical-indoctrination-in-k-12-schooling>
- Enriquez, V. G. (1977). Filipino psychology in the third world. *Philippine Journal of*

- Psychology*, 10(1), 3–18. https://pssc.org.ph/wp-content/pssc-archives/Philippine%20Journal%20of%20Psychology/2002/07_Filipino%20Psychology%20in%20the%20Third%20World.pdf
- Estes, N. (2019). *Our history is the future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the long tradition of indigenous resistance*. Verso.
- Ethnic Studies Information for Families. (n.d.). SFUSD.
<https://www.sfusd.edu/departments/curriculum-instruction/ethnic-studies-information-families#74139-ethnic-studies-curriculum>
- Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. (2022). California Department of Education.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/esmc.asp>
- Fensterwald, J. (2025, March 11). Renewed push to reshape ethnic studies with oversight and new standards. *EdSource*. <https://edsource.org/2025/renewed-push-to-reshape-ethnic-studies-with-oversight-with-new-standards/728155>
- Figoten, A. (2021, March 4). Over 100 university scholars and academics remain concerned with ESMC’s unsubstantiated claims. <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/100-Scholars-to-Thurmond-and-SBE-3.4.21.pdf>
- Fingertip Facts on Education in California. (2024, 2025). California Department of Education.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/ceffingertipfacts.asp>
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. Seabury Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (trans. Myra Bergman Ramos) (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.
- Fujino, D. C., Harmachis, M., Gonzalez, F., Lopez, C., Bazan, S., Fujino-Harmachis, K., Parmet, B., Swift, K., & Betita, J. V. (2019). *Circles of organizing: Collective leadership, social*

- relations, and intergenerational activism in *Ethnic Studies Now!* Santa Barbara. *Kalfou*, 6(1), 73–86. <https://doi.org/10.15367/kf.v6i1.232>
- Gates, J. M. (1984). War-related deaths in the Philippines, 1898-1902. *Pacific Historical Review*, 53(3), 367–378. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3639234>
- Giroux, H. A. (2010). Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(6), 715–721. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.6.715>
- Harris, T. (2017, August 23). Arizona ban on ethnic studies unconstitutional: U.S. judge. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/us/arizona-ban-on-ethnic-studies-unconstitutional-us-judge-idUSKCN1B32DD/>
- Howard, T. C. (2024). *Equity now: Justice, repair, and belonging in schools*. Corwin Press.
- Hu-DeHart, E. (1993). The history, development, and future of ethnic studies. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(1), 50–54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20405023>
- Kim, Y., & An, & S. (2024). Where are we now and how do we move forward? Voices of Asian American and migrant teachers on the K-12 ethnic studies movement. *The Social Studies*, 115(4), 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2023.2292670>
- Kohli, R. (2016). *Teacher education and teacher development: How do you prepare and develop teachers to teach ES?* UCLA Center X. <https://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/xchange/ethnic-studies-k-12/>
- Kwon, S. (2021). *Ethnic Studies Legislation: State Scan* (p. 18). Region 15 Comprehensive Center; WestEd. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED612757.pdf>
- LaBriola, M. (2025). *Assembly of the Academic Senate notice of meeting, agenda*. University of California, Academic Senate.

- https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/assembly/assembly-agenda-4-23-25.pdf
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 30–12.
- <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035007003>
- Lee, D., & Pham, J. H. (2022). Ethnic studies in teacher education: A transformative programmatic approach to centering the experiences of teacher candidates of color. In C. D. Gist & T. J. Bristol (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teachers of color and Indigenous teachers* (pp. 215–230). American Educational Research Association.
- <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2xqngb9.21>
- LESMCC. (2020, April). *Our LESMC Story*. Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium. <https://www.liberatedethnicstudies.org/lesmc-story.html>
- Marable, M. (2015). *How capitalism underdeveloped Black America problems in race, political economy, and society*. Haymarket Books.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- McNeil, L. M. (1986). *Contradictions of control: School structure and school knowledge*. Routledge.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534>
- Nanguneri, S. (2025, April 28). Dems push for “educational gag order” over Palestine lessons in

- California. *The Intercept*. <https://theintercept.com/2025/04/28/california-schools-ethnic-studies-israel-palestine/>
- Noriega, T. (2025, April 24). *AB 101: Ethnic Studies Implementation* [Expert Panel Presentation]. <https://onlinelearning.acsa.org/courses/ab-101-ethnic-studies-implementation>
- Orenstein, N. (2018, November 20). Berkeley High celebrates 50 years of African-American studies. *Berkeleyside*. <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2018/11/20/berkeley-high-celebrates-50-years-of-african-american-studies>
- Penner, E. K., & Ma, D. (2023). *Access to ethnic studies in California public schools* (EdWorkingPaper Nos. 23–886). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://edworkingpapers.com/ai23-886>
- Pollner, M. (1991). Left of ethnomethodology: The rise and decline of radical reflexivity. *American Sociological Review*, 56(3), 370–380. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2096110>
- Ravilochan, T. (2021, April 4). Could the Blackfoot wisdom that inspired Maslow Guide us now? *Gather For*. <https://gatherfor.org/blog/blackfoot-influence-on-maslow>
- Reyes McGovern, E., & Buenavista, T. L. (2016). Ethnic studies with K - 12 students, families, and communities: The role of teacher education in preparing educators to serve the people. *XChange*. <https://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/xchange/ethnic-studies-k-12/>
- Robinson, I. (2022, August 26). *How woke went from “Black” to “Bad.”* Legal Defense Fund. <https://www.naacpldf.org/woke-black-bad/#:~:text=And%20Black%20people%20have%20never,after%20several%20appeals%20and%20trials>

- Ryan, A. E., & Webster, R. S. (2019). Teacher reflexivity: An important dimension of a teacher's growth. *Rethinking Reflection and Ethics for Teachers*.
https://doi.org/DOI:10.1007/978-981-32-9401-1_5
- Sacramento, J. (2019). Critical collective consciousness: Ethnic studies teachers and professional development. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 52(2–3), 167–184.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1647806>
- Sander, R., & Wyner, A. (2022, March 28). Studies fail to support claims of new California ethnic studies requirement. *Tabletmag*.
<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/studies-fail-to-support-claims-new-california-ethnic-studies-requirement>
- Schirmer, D. B. (1972). *Republic or empire: American resistance to the Philippine War*. Schenkman Publishing Co.
- Shared Principles. (2025). San Francisco State University, College of Ethnic Studies.
<https://ethnicstudies.sfsu.edu/shared-principles>
- Sleeter, C. (2011). *The academic and social value of ethnic studies* [Research Review]. National Education Association. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED521869.pdf>
- Sleeter, C. (2021, February 22). *The benefits of ethnic studies* [Letter to the Superintendent Tony Thurmond, and CA State Board of Education].
<https://cde.app.box.com/s/fminr4xsq0foil8f8vga18grlol0uvc7/file/781882995373>
- Sleeter, C. E., & Zavala, M. (2020). *Transformative ethnic studies in schools: Curriculum, pedagogy, and research*. Teachers College Press.
https://books.google.com/books?id=nv_LDwAAQBAJ
- Solorzano, D. G. (2019). A Freirean journey from Chicana and Chicano Studies to critical race

- theory. In C. A. Torres (Ed.), *The Wiley handbook of Paulo Freire* (pp. 417–429).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119236788.ch22>
- Solorzano, D. G., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and LATCRIT theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education*, 36(3), 308–342.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085901363002>
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2010). Critical race and LatCrit theory and method: Counter-storytelling. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(4), 471–495.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390110063365>
- Sun-Hee Park, L., Sevilla, P. C., Mireles-Rios, R., & Zarate, A. (2023). *Ethnic Studies in K-12: Implementing AB101 in California's Central Coast high schools*. University of California, Santa Barbara ÉXITO Program.
<https://exito.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/E%CC%81XITO%20Policy%20Report%202023.pdf>
- Swanson, C. (2021, August 25). From steward to naval officer: Living the American Dream in the U.S. Navy. *Liberty Life Media*. <https://www.libertylifemedia.com/about-us/>
- Tejeda, C., Espinoza, M., Gutierrez, K., & Trifonas, P. P. (2003). Toward a decolonizing pedagogy: Social justice reconsidered. In *Pedagogies of difference* (pp. 9–37). RoutledgeFalmer. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203465547-2>
- Tintiango-Cubales, A., Kohli, R., Sacramento, J., Henning, N., Agarwal-Rangnath, R., & Sleeter, C. (2014). Toward an ethnic studies pedagogy: Implications for K-12 schools from the research. *The Urban Review*, 47(1), 104–125.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-014-0280-y>

Ture, K., & Hamilton, C. V. (2011). *Black power: The politics of liberation*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Valenzuela, A., & Epstein, E. M. B. (2023). Struggles for/with/through ethnic studies in Texas: Third spaces as anchors for collective action. *Teachers College Record*, 125(5), 12–24.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681231181793>

What is Ethnic Studies in Santa Barbara? (2020).
<https://www.sbunified.org/departments/educational-services/academics/secondary2/ethnic-studies>

What is a Steward? (2023). Intrepid museum. <https://intrepidmuseum.org/about-us>

Winograd, M. (2025, March 4). CA Israel lobby aims to police ethnic studies-Why? AB 1468: Don't say Palestine. *Code Pink*. ^[OBJ]

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.