

Practitioner's Essay

# Policy isn't Enough: Learning from Ethnic Studies K-12 Teachers

Artnelson Concordia and Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales

## ABSTRACT

Although there is a need to celebrate California's wins around Ethnic Studies (ES), including the signage of California State University's Assembly Bill 1460 into law, the passing of policy is not enough. In the rush to implement ES, there is a hyper-focus on which courses should be eligible to fulfill ES requirements based on curriculum content. This essay takes a different perspective and focuses on weaving the voices of ES practitioners to explore what we believe is necessary for a principled implementation.

## INTRODUCTION

Following the historic groundbreaking passage of Assembly Bill 1460 (AB 1460), California State University (CSU) campuses have been scrambling to figure out how to implement the policy requiring every student to take an Ethnic Studies (ES) course in order to graduate. Many of the conversations at the CSU level and California Community Colleges have primarily focused on deciding which courses should be eligible to fulfill this requirement. Although the political process of course approval is important and necessary, there has been little discourse about the purpose, pedagogies, and praxis of ES. Before 1460, ES policies in K-12 districts, including those in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), aimed to push public education to recalibrate and commit to an anti-racist curriculum that centers the experiences of communities of color. Although each of the

K-12 policies, now in twenty states, should be celebrated for each victory, the real win will be when we see the social impact that ES will have on the next generation. This impact will not come with course title changes or an additive approach to cosmetically change courses at the surface level to achieve ES aesthetics. ES is a shift in pedagogy, a shift in worldview.

In preparation for the implementation of ES requirements, there is a hyper-focus on curriculum and content development. California's Board of Education has also chosen to center the development of a K-12 model curriculum to guide the implementation of the statewide ES requirement. We also have begun to see organizations, textbook publishers, and content providers like Newsela, Gale, and SocialStudies.Com move toward curating content that can be purchased for classroom usage. Although there is a need for resources and educational materials, there are potential misrepresentations of the purpose and values of ES and also a lack of focus and time on the development of the identities and pedagogies of ES teachers. There is also a need for educational institutions to have principled strategic plans that are rooted in the values and worldview of ES.

This collaborative essay weaves the voices of ES practitioners—five who are teaching ES in public schools, and five who are teachers on special assignment (TOSA)—leading ES implementation, curriculum creation, and teacher development. Of the ten ES practitioners highlighted in this essay, nine identify as Asian American, one as Chicano, and two as mixed heritage. The practitioners have been teaching ES ranging from four to twenty-five years. Half have taught ES in Northern California, and the rest in Southern California. Also, throughout the essay, we weave our own personal experiences and views as practitioners of ES. Artnelson Concordia has been in K-12 education since 1998 and providing support for ES teachers since 2014. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales has been an ES professor and supported schools, districts, and teachers to implement ES since 2000. Both Concordia and Tintiangco-Cubales have facilitated and shaped teacher development throughout California and the United States. Here, we will also infuse our learnings from this teacher development work.

We hope that what we provide here not only speaks to the implementation of K-12 ES policies but also speaks to the implementation of AB 1460 and other ES requirements in post-secondary education. All of the practitioners here have experience implementing ES prior to the statewide policies and have been taking part in current efforts to roll

out district and state requirements. Each practitioner provides perspectives that show: (1) the need to make sure that definition of ES is clear, accessible, and rooted in its origin and purpose; (2) the importance of identity/ies development in becoming ES teachers; (3) the pedagogical purpose and nuances in their ES classroom practice; and (4) what needs to be considered for effective, principled ES implementation.

### **The Origin, Purpose, and Praxis of Ethnic Studies in K-12**

While the discipline celebrates over fifty years of existence, ES teaching in secondary schools (with some exceptions like Berkeley HS, James Logan HS, and Pin@y Educational Partnerships courses in SFUSD) is a relatively new and generally localized education reform. With the passage of Assembly Bill 101 (AB 101; ES graduation requirement for K-12) and in light of the exponential growth of districts working to develop and implement ES course offerings, there is an urgent need for broader awareness-raising on the origin, purpose, and practice of ES with the aim of clearly and concisely defining the field.

As districts prepare to implement their respective ES offerings, there will be a growing number of situations that require clear and accessible definitions that equip teachers and administrators alike to respond to questions (and concerns) about what ES is. The relative newness of the field, coupled with the general anxiety about engaging in discussions about race, racism, and its deep, lasting impact on society, particularly upon communities of color, requires developing broad clarity and understanding of ES. Toward this objective, we can tap into decades of experience. For those already engaged in institutionalization, this has been a clarifying period of practice that we hope will benefit those who are just beginning the process throughout the state. We begin by sharing this critical insight from Carlo Águila,<sup>1</sup> a teacher whose experience spans twenty-five years in our State's second largest school district and works in Central Office providing district-wide support for their ES program as a Resource Teacher:

For us to be effective, we must have a common language that is clear and coherent that everybody understands . . . I'm talking about a definition . . . purpose . . . outcomes. We, as a district, from our leadership all the way into our communities (our parents and our families), do we have the ability to articulate [what is ES]?

—Carlo Águila, Indigenous Chicano, 25 years teaching

Toward this end, we offer a definition derived from the reflected experiences of ES K-12 programs throughout California that captures the essence of what an authentic and liberatory ES offering must include. Furthermore, it is critical that any definition is accessible to both teachers and students, parents/caregivers and members of the community, and education leaders in traditional institutions as well as grassroots organizations.

Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary field focused on centering the voices of Ethnic Studies Groups (ESGs),<sup>2</sup> in the first person, with the goals of resisting and eradicating racism and intersectional forms of oppression. Originating from SFUSD’s Ethnic Studies Worldview, the core values of ES praxis are self-determination, critical consciousness, community actualization, solidarity & unity, wellness & wholeness, hope, love, & respect, and liberation & freedom (SFUSD, 2010). Rooted in these values, we offer Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies in Figure 1.

History	<p><b>ES centers the experiences and worldviews of ESGs in the United States—in the first person—who have been dispossessed, displaced, enslaved, exploited, marginalized and dehumanized.</b></p> <p>It is a history that reflects the generations of resistance, integrity, and humanity of communities of color in their fight for liberation.</p> <p>It is a history that <i>counters</i> the harmful narratives told by those in power and that <i>upholds</i> all people’s humanity and right to self-determination and freedom.</p>
Criticality/Critical Consciousness	<p><b>Thinking causally</b> (cause and effect) helps people identify and explain the “reason(s) for why things happen.”</p> <p><b>Thinking historically</b> helps people place all that is happening in the present in relation with what has happened in the past.</p> <p><b>Thinking systems and power</b> identifies the systems at the root of what is happening; it invites us to think about who has power within these systems; it equips individuals and communities to question, challenge and confront injustice.</p>

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Knowledge with Purpose + Action</p>	<p><b>Central to ES is to steward all learnings toward meaningful application.</b> Specifically in this critically historic moment, what good is knowledge if it is not used to address our most pressing issues? ES calls upon <i>everyone</i> to bring their best selves in service of solving the problems before us.</p> <p>It is about humanity.</p> <p>It is about sustainability.</p> <p>It is about making real what we have yet to achieve.</p> <p>It is about love, life, and liberation for oneself, their community, and world.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Community &amp; Solidarity</p>	<p>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.</p> <p><b>Collective liberation is rooted in community actualization</b>—meeting the basic needs of all, ensuring safety, and creating the conditions for connectedness (Ravilochan, 2021). We cannot, nor should we, do this alone.</p>

**Figure 1.** The Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies and their associated core values.

## ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHER IDENTITIES

ES teachers have identities. An ongoing debate in the field of education is whether or not teachers’ racial or ethnic backgrounds have an impact on their effectiveness in the classroom. In Education Week (EdWeek), they explored the impact of teacher’s race on student success:

All students benefit from having teachers of color, research shows. A report by the Learning Policy Institute revealed that when taught by teachers of color, students of color have better academic performance, improved graduation rates, and are more likely to attend college. Research from the Center for American Progress provides insight into these effects, noting Black teachers are less likely than non-black teachers to perceive Black students’ behavior

as “disruptive,” and more likely than non-Black teachers to have a higher opinion of Black students’ academic abilities. All students, regardless of race, report feeling cared for and academically challenged by teachers of color, according to the Learning Policy Institute report (Huebeck, 2020).

In the United States, there is an overwhelming presence of white teachers in schools that are predominately populated by students of color (Contreras, 2022). Although there are some reports, like that of EdWeek, that highlight the effectiveness of teachers of color, it feels like much of the educational research and development has focused on “preparing” white teachers to teach students of color. In implementing the ES requirement in California, the focus has been more on how to equip white teachers to teach ES versus recruiting and retaining teachers of color with ES backgrounds. These issues and tensions need to be reckoned with at both the CSU level in recruiting teacher education candidates, and also when school districts recruit and hire new teachers to support the growing number of ES courses needed to provide all students access to complete the requirement.

Regardless of whether or not an ES teacher is white or a teacher of color, there is a need for them to explore their identities. What we have seen, as ES teachers, practitioners, and consultants, is that 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 their students. A teacher who has committed to a journey of learning about who they are, their family/community history, and their relation to power structures, allows them to model and guide students in their own identity/ies journeys.

In our discussions among practitioners and in teacher development sessions, we found that the development of identities for ES teachers occurred on one of the following levels, or an admixture, of learning in multiple spaces, including learning about their identity through K-12 ES courses/curriculum, ES courses in college, in community education spaces outside of formal educational institutions, and some cases through ES teacher development in their district or teacher preparation programs.

### **Ethnic Studies Background in K-12**

It terrifies me to think who I would be if I never found myself in my Ethnic Studies class taught by Mr. J . . . I’m like the person

that I am, the mother that I am, the sister, the partner that I am, I mean not even just the teacher that I am. If I never found my way into his classroom and if he didn't challenge me, I would be a completely different person today.

—Gabby Silang, Filipina American, 18 years teaching ES

Gabby was one of the fortunate teachers who took an ES class in high school with a teacher who was one of the founders of the ES program in their district. Her teacher also taught some of the first ES courses at San Francisco State University (SFSU)—where the ES movement was birthed through the leadership of the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front, and home to the first College of Ethnic Studies. Gabby's identity as a Filipina from a family of immigrants was validated by her experience in her ES course. She also was able to dig into her personal trauma with regard to abuse and abandonment and also found reconciliation with family members who she learned to value, especially her mother. Much of this healing and identity development came from her ES class. She felt seen by her teacher, who was also Filipino.

During the time Gabby took her first ES course, there were not many schools that offered them, let alone were taught by a teacher of color who was part of the movement that started it all. As the California ES requirement gets implemented, a new generation of high school students will have the opportunity to take ES and learn more about their identities in relation to their families, communities, and world.

### **Ethnic Studies in College**

Prior to the CSU requirement, students took ES courses at CSUs that offered them. At some universities, there are ES courses, programs, departments, majors, and minors, such as in San Francisco State University's College of Ethnic Studies.

Taking my first ES classes in college gave me the language to explain what I was living. I didn't have a way to understand and contextualize my community, my context, and myself until I took ES classes.

—Don Bohul, Filipino American, 11 years of teaching ES

Students like Don, who grew up in impoverished neighborhoods with significant populations of communities of color living there for generations, first learned about the rich history of their communities in a college ES classroom. Some students, unlike Don, who grew up in

predominantly white communities, also learned about their histories from ES courses. Along with learning about familial and community stories that shaped their identities, the practitioners highlighted in this essay also describe their experience taking ES college courses as a place where they developed their political identities that have shaped a “critical lens” to “read the world” (Freire, 1970).

Those who took ES classes in college also described getting involved in student organizations and programs that connected them to communities. Don describes, “Being immersed in the community of folks trying to understand and make change really saved my life.” For many of the practitioners, ES in college not only meant taking classes, but also understanding how to apply what they were learning in the real world. Don, who was part of an ES teaching pipeline while in college, talks about his student and community organizing experiences as shaping the teacher he has become both inside and outside of the classroom. He and his colleagues teaching ES in the district for over ten years, along with their former students, were able to organize and advocate for the first Filipina/x/o American Studies class in their district.

Isabel Lee, an ES teacher who has taught for four years, said she did not major in ES but took the classes because “they affirmed me. Any chance I got to take an elective in ES or if I could take it to fulfill a requirement with an ES class, I would.” Although she went on to become an English teacher, it was not until she was afforded the opportunity to integrate her background in ES that she found fulfillment.

### Community Education

As we make ES accessible to all students in California, we should not forget the essential connection that the field has with communities. Some may attribute learning about their identity in their first ES K-12 class or at the college level, but many of the practitioners also talked about how community spaces outside of the classroom shaped who they are and who they have become as teachers. Diego Silang, a Filipino who has been teaching ES for twenty-one years, describes how ES showed up long before he took his first class in high school:

It wasn’t necessarily Ethnic Studies, the curriculum, the classes . . . but it was from the community. If I really think all the way back to middle school, ES was like slapping me in the face, like, *Hey, wake up!* And I would joke with my students, and I told them that, you know, *I think the ancestors had always been in my life trying to push me*



*in the right direction . . .* Going all the way back to sixth grade, folks from Filipinos for Affirmative Action (FAA) pulled me into the gang prevention program. That's where I met Mateo [pseudonym] when he was first doing the Filipino American history workshops.

—Diego Silang, Filipino American, 21 years teaching ES

Diego goes on to describe how this early exposure to ES through the gang prevention program, community organizations, youth conferences, and learning from community leaders and educators prepared him for ES in high school and college. This was integral to his origin story as both an ES student and teacher. Practitioners also mentioned ES includes learning from family members and caregivers, often the cultural bearers and storytellers who keep our narratives and practices alive. Community educators also play an important role in shaping the field of ES and those who become practitioners.

### **Ethnic Studies Teacher Development**

ES teacher identities are shaped by a multitude of experiences. As mentioned in the previous sections, some ES practitioners have taken ES classes while in high school and college; learning in community spaces shaped their personal, ethnic, cultural, and political identities. While it is ideal and potentially more likely in the future to have this background prior to entering the teaching profession, current ES teachers are more likely not to have had such deep exposure to ES learning experiences. This leads to an important entry point on how ES teacher development and teacher preparation programs need to create opportunities for teachers to have space and time to learn about their own identities.

Aspara Seng, who is an ES TOSA at one of the largest California school districts, did not see herself as an ES educator, but rather more of a social justice educator. It was only when she started learning the nuances of ES pedagogy that she realized that she was an ES practitioner:

I kind of felt like an impostor. I was like, I don't have any experience. But my former co-worker was like, *you kind of embody Ethnic Studies. So I think like you're doing it, even though you don't know that you're doing it.* So I kind of like leaned into that.

—Aspara Seng, Cambodian American, 18 Years teaching

Although Aspara saw the connections between her identity as a social justice educator and becoming an ES educator, this was not enough.

Aspara committed herself to becoming ES educated and attended every possible ES professional development opportunity—in and outside of her district—that was in her capacity. She eventually was able to co-facilitate with colleagues their own development for the teachers in her district.

In her dissertation, Jocyl Sacramento (2019, 170) writes about some of the early ES teacher development and the elements that worked to shape teacher critical consciousness. She found:

A critical race approach to dialogue sheds light on the reflective processes necessary to develop a critical race consciousness, which was evident among the teachers in the Collaborative. Ethnic Studies teachers arrived at shared foundational understandings of systems of oppression, privilege, and power through transformative discussions I call critical race dialogue (CRD) . . . Through political education and critical race dialogue, teachers developed their critical consciousness, which then led to a collective identity and shared views on major elements of ES' curricular perspectives and approach.

This collective identity through critical race dialogue, which some districts are dedicating time to, is becoming a major factor in successful and sustainable ES implementation.

ES teacher development varies from district to district. Some hire consultants to support their professional learning, and others have attempted to provide district-led or teacher-led opportunities to prepare teachers to teach ES. There are some districts that partner with universities in the creation of micro-credentials, certificates, and coursework where teachers get credit to support the development of their ES background and content knowledge. There is no doubt that there is a need to have professional development for the implementation of ES in both K-12 and at the university level. Based on the experiences and expertise of the practitioners in this essay, the following is suggested when considering developing ES teacher development:

1. **Start with teacher identity.** Provide them time, space, and facilitation around who they are, their families/communities' histories, and their relationship to power structures.
2. **Build systems literacy.** Provide critical race dialogue-based learning that supports the development of a teacher's critical lens.
3. **Community-based learning.** Create local opportunities where teachers can learn about their students, their communities, and also how to get involved in supporting them.

4. **Community partnerships.** Connect teachers to community organizations and scholars.
5. **Teacher mentorship/circles.** Foster communities of practice where teachers can mentor and support each other.
6. **Develop ES content and curriculum.** Teach teachers how to find resources and content to support their curriculum development. Also, invite scholars from communities of color to share their experiences and expertise.
7. **Focus on ES Pedagogy.** Have ongoing ES pedagogy workshops that both study the frameworks and values that provide a foundation for teaching and learning while also having ample time for teachers to collaborate and practice with each other and create a culture of providing and receiving feedback.

## ETHNIC STUDIES PEDAGOGY

Along with a lack of focus on ES teacher identity development, there is a lack of focus on developing teachers' ES pedagogical practice. While curriculum and content development are essential to the implementation of ES, they should not be separate from pedagogy—specifically an ES pedagogy that is centered on the core values of self-determination, critical consciousness, community actualization, solidarity & unity, wellness & wholeness, hope, love, & respect, and liberation & freedom (rooted in SFUSD's Ethnic Studies Worldview, 2010). Prior to the development of what scholars and educators now call multiculturalism, cultural relevance, cultural responsiveness, and even critical hope, ES activists, students, teachers, and scholars have been practicing these values.

### Relationships and Community Building

ES is not just about content. It's about how you teach and how you are with your students. From [my high school ES teacher] Mr. J, I learned that ES was about love and community.

—Gabby Silang, Filipino American

When asked about ES pedagogy, the practitioners in this essay emphasized the need to build authentic relationships and foster loving communities. Grace Chin, who has been an ES teacher for five years, connects her lack of caring relationships with her own teachers to the way she creates relationships with the students in her classes:

I felt like my teachers didn't see me and that they didn't really care. I didn't need them to fix anything, I just needed them to walk alongside me in my journey of pain and grief. This shaped who I am with my students. I tell students, *I don't know what experiences you have gone through, and our experiences may likely not be the same, and there may or may not be parallel themes, but at the end of the day, I want you to know that I'm here with you. I want them to think, She cares. She might not be able to relate exactly the same because our stories are often different, coming from different contexts, but she cares.*

—Grace Chin, Chicana Chinese American, 5 years teaching ES

One of the challenges that we face in the implementation of ES pedagogy is teaching teachers to develop relationships with students that are rooted in empathy and love. We have been trained to uphold hierarchies between teacher and student that uphold colonial relationships rooted in systems of power, systems that we critique in ES. ES pedagogy calls for a systemic shift in power relations and pushes for bidirectional learning between student and teacher.

In the same vein, Isabel speaks about creating genuine relationships with students. In reference to colleagues and community partners, "It's sometimes about breaking bread together. It's about really seeing your students as whole people, but also seeing people in your community as whole people." This strong sense of humility and commitment to humanization is foundational to ES pedagogy. Diego proclaims, "You know you're doing it right if you learn more from your students than you could ever teach them."

### Core Elements of Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

Rooted in ESG who have practiced the values of ES for generations, the development of a distinctive liberatory pedagogy considers the alignment between its purpose, context, content, and method (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2010). Aligned with the practitioners in this essay, what follows are the four core elements of ES pedagogy that need to be considered when implementing any requirement:

1. **Purpose:** Although there may be some similarities between ES and Multiculturalism, the purpose of ES is unequivocally to eliminate racism and intersectional forms of oppression. ES centralizes the first-person narratives of Communities of Color—within a critical discussion about power, systems, identity formation, self-reflection, agency, and action. The goal is for

- students in ES to leverage their education toward the betterment of their communities.
2. **Context:** Building on the purpose, ES educators need to consider the context in which they are teaching and develop their curriculum to reflect and respond to the experiences and needs of the community that they are serving. The context includes the historical and contemporary racialized experiences where the learning is taking place. ES courses should be responsive to students who are taking the course, which means that all ES courses will likely not be identical in content and method. Many ES courses include discussions about the students' families and communities. ES should value the cultures and livelihoods of the communities represented in the course.
  3. **Content:** It is essential that ES centralize the histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions of Communities of Color in the U.S. and that their stories are told in the first person. The content should also highlight social movements and resistance to oppressive systems that have impacted indigenous communities and communities of color. This content fosters the development of all students' identities, critical consciousness, self-determination, and agency by providing transformative opportunities for their growth inside and outside of the classroom.
  4. **Method:** Aligned with the purpose, context, and content, ES methods should model how students can use the content of ES to create positive change in their communities, in their other classes, and in their personal and familial lives. ES is intentionally interdisciplinary and draws from the liberatory practices modeled in social movements, community organizing, and community participatory action research. Some examples of methods used in ES courses are oral history, auto-ethnography, personal reflection, Socratic seminar, critical performance pedagogy, theater of the oppressed, and youth participatory action research.

By examining how ES aligns its purpose, context, content, and method, it is evident that pedagogy emerged from the ES movement. This pedagogy ultimately needs to answer three essential questions by the late Dr. Dawn Bohulano Mabalon: (1) Who am I?; (2) Who is my family and community?; and (3) What can I do to bring social justice to my community and the world? (Mabalon 2016). Each community that implements ES must tackle these questions in its own unique way.

## APPROACHING THE CENTER: URGENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE AND PRINCIPLED ETHNIC STUDIES IMPLEMENTATION

In 2021, California became the first state in the nation to make ES a graduation requirement. The class of 2030 (incoming 9th graders, Fall 2026) will be the first generation of students falling under this mandate. With nearly six million young people in its public schools, approximately two million in high school (CDE, 2023), the opportunity and potential to harness the energies and aspirations of legions of young people in service to the re/construction and expansion of our multiracial democracy is immense. At its core, ES—as a field whose origin is rooted in a social movement calling for justice, liberation, and democracy through the elimination of racism, and all forms of subordination and dehumanization—is an education project that can help actualize our nation’s highest-stated ideals.

Given several factors—Ethnic Studies’ explicitly radical vision, history, and transformative potential; the relatively new field of work related to teaching it in K-12; the current political climate; and especially the scarcity of qualified practitioners who have delved into their identities and developed Ethnic Studies pedagogies—implementation with fidelity to its critical purpose presents significant challenges. Nevertheless, the prospect and possibility of mobilizing public education for the above-stated purpose remain exciting and worthwhile.

In the groundbreaking study verifying the causal relationship between ES and improved academic outcomes (e.g., attendance, GPA, and credits earned) for its most vulnerable students in the SFUSD, Stanford researchers Thomas Dee and Emily Penner highlighted the potential of wielding ES in the effort to close the so-called achievement gap experienced by students of color. While the study helped to bolster grassroots efforts seeking to reform public education and bring forth community responsive and culturally relevant teaching system-wide, the researchers also cautioned education leaders about the challenges of bringing such an initiative to scale (Dee and Penner, 2017).

In the following concluding sections, we share important lessons from California educators tasked with leading their respective school district’s ES implementation efforts. Certain themes emerge, and we present them here as key considerations for successful implementation: *Critical Partnerships and Institutional Collaboration* and *Wield Systems and Policy to Shape Society*. As the state accelerates its efforts to prepare local educational agencies (LEAs)—districts, county offices of education, etc.—to implement the ES graduation requirement, it is critical that

these LEAs, as well as teacher education programs, heed the wisdom and advice of ES teachers and practitioners already engaged in the work to develop and implement courses in the K-12 context.

### **Critical Partnerships and Institutional Collaboration**

As greater clarity is established about what ES is (and is not), practitioners both in the classrooms and within the district/central office must engage education leaders at the district, county, and state levels to advocate for continued support and to resource efforts developing robust and rigorous ES courses. Simultaneously, teacher education programs must work in partnership with their institution's ES departments, programs, and/or scholars to enhance existing teacher pathways of development to prepare the scores of educators needed to teach ES courses in their respective districts throughout the state. At present, teacher education programs generally are not designed to adequately prepare pre-service teachers to become ES practitioners.

Returning to our earlier discussion about preparation for AB 1460 at CSU and California Community Colleges level, it is primarily focused on course eligibility toward compliance. It is critical to the work of ES institutionalization (K-college) to turn our attention to K-12 teacher development. The education system needed to equip youth and students of all ages to engage in problem-solving our society's most pressing issues—particularly racism—does not yet exist to match the urgent need at scale. Simply put, our institutions of higher learning, specifically our state's various teacher education programs, must quickly evolve to prepare the next generation of educators entering the profession with an effective anti-racist practice grounded in both ES content and pedagogical knowledge. As the practitioners in this essay have emphasized, this necessitates space for teachers to develop their identities and pedagogies as ES practitioners.

As the state's teacher education programs shift to develop our future teachers, it is incumbent upon LEAs to invest in professional learning and development that is strategically and intensively reoriented to meet this significant need. While we anticipate a move from education-focused corporations to provide materials and professional learning services, educational leaders must evaluate these offerings based on the definition and Four Cornerstones of Ethnic Studies discussed in this essay. Within K-12, special attention must be paid to both curriculum as well as pedagogy. As emphasized in the previous section, LEAs must take responsibility to provide teacher development

that is holistic and accounts for teacher identity grounded in continuous reflection and growth.

As our public school system develops the infrastructure to implement ES broadly, the multitude of community organizations and other grassroots formations that fought for many years to win ES as an essential education reform must continue to advocate and engage elected officials and educational leaders to ensure continued support—particularly with resources and professional learning opportunities to continue developing our teachers and providing effective instruction in fidelity to the origin and purpose of the field. High levels of community involvement have been instrumental in locally establishing ES. Before AB 101, this approach has also been the most common path toward the incorporation of ES into district offerings.

Luna Lee, the Chinese American daughter of two Third World Liberation Front organizers, embodies the generational work to create and develop justice-oriented systems of education for the express purpose of actualizing freedom and democracy for all. She began her work to develop ES in her district as a high school student. Those efforts eventually led to her district adopting ES pilots, leaning on the energy and initiative of committed teacher leaders. Despite the tremendous effort, its impact was on a relatively small scale, often insulated and isolated from larger district-wide initiatives. While this was a significant step forward, it also created challenges to broader system changes. Because of this, student exposure and experience with ES teaching and learning were not available to all students.

Recently, in her capacity as an ES consultant for a medium-sized, diverse, and middle-class serving school district in southern California, Luna experienced a stark difference in building ES as a district-wide offering. Lee states that “A district-wide approach to implementation is key. We need district leadership to support our site administrators to support our teachers.” In hindsight, and with twenty-five years of experience in the fight for ES, she now sees the advantages of having ES rolled out in unison between all levels of the school district.

### **Wield Systems and Policy to Shape Society**

Given the tremendous diversity within the towns, cities, and municipalities that each of our state’s 939 school districts serve (CDE, 2023), the success (or compromise) of this transformative educational project will be determined by a myriad of factors shaped by specific local conditions and particularities. In this context, effective



implementation of ES in K-college will require adept district leadership, unwavering community support from parents, students, and advocates, and strong teacher commitment and participation. Additionally, state and district-wide systems and structures designed to monitor, support, and improve rollout must be developed to leverage the resources and power of the state. Naomi Sasaki-Brown, a mixed race Japanese American teacher on special assignment with twenty years of experience in education, reflected, “Having a community both locally and broadly is key to development and not feeling isolated. It takes collective courage to do this work.”

While the state mandates in AB 101 and AB 1460 provide essential political backing, local and grassroots support for this initiative must be leveraged to bolster district efforts at institutionalization. Currently, these efforts evoke, and will continue to evoke, strong reactions from segments of the community. Local district leadership must effectively articulate a clear definition and understanding of ES and wield their political power to support the development of teachers to implement courses.

At the site level, administrators—principals, assistant principals, head counselors, and department chairs—must mirror the efforts of district leadership at each individual school by supporting teachers to develop as ES practitioners. This growth is rooted in critical self-reflection and positive and holistic and intersectional identity formation, allowing teachers to identify both their areas of privilege and marginalization, and leveraging the former for solidarity.

In support of implementation, the state has initiated California Regional Ethnic Studies Collaborative (CRESC) project to build LEA capacity to support ES teaching and learning. As existing systems and structures are being retooled to meet the need, new formations and structures must be developed to bridge gaps in capacity and expertise. On one end, ES practitioners must be tapped to become critical partners by state and regional policy and decision-making bodies. Simultaneously, ES practitioners must work to establish themselves in positions of policy and decision-making as it pertains to both ES as well as larger education reform.

Lastly, a universally shared practitioner insight is needed for a strategic plan that is sustainable, authentic (not performative), and starts with community input and participation. Structures taking the form of community advisory committees have been common practice with grassroots calls for ES. Central to these formations are

mechanisms to ensure student voices and input. Central to the strategic plan is partnerships with ES scholars and K-12 practitioners to prepare teachers with foundational content and pedagogical knowledge.

Ethnic Studies is a social movement. It is grounded in the knowledges, histories, cultures, and worldviews of Ethnic Studies Groups and is committed to the wellbeing and sustainability of humanity and our planet. The system of public schooling has not always shared these values and purposes. As colonial practices within our institutions have been challenged and, to some degree, reformed, there remain tensions between the transformative education project that is ES and the historically hegemonic institution of schooling. While many questions remain about how to effectively institutionalize ES, we hope that we have provided a useful starting point in the effort to meet the state-wide need for authentic and liberatory Ethnic Studies for all of California's students.

## NOTES

1. All ES practitioners in this essay have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.
2. This essay refers to *Ethnic Studies Groups* throughout the text. Ethnic Studies, from its inception in 1969, focuses on providing “safe academic spaces for all to learn the histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions of *Native peoples and communities of color in the U.S. in the first-person* and also practice theories of resistance and liberation to *eliminate racism* and other forms of oppression” (San Francisco State University). In this essay, when we refer to Ethnic Studies Groups, it is in reference to Black, Native American/Indigenous (with a special focus on the indigenous people of California), Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Arab Americans, Chicanas/os/xs, Latinas/os/xs/e’, and additional People of Color.

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ARTNELSON CONCORDIA was born and raised in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles (Tongva), California and is the son of working-class Filipino immigrants. He is the father of four Brown boys and is in cahoots with his wife to raise them to have deep knowledge and love of self and community. Fall 2023 marks the beginning of his twenty-fifth year in education and seventeenth year actively working to institutionalize Ethnic Studies (ES) in K-12 public schools that uphold its radical origins and liberatory purpose. Artnelson was a founding teacher of the San Francisco Unified School District's ES program, which was the focus of a 2016 Stanford study that highlighted the academic benefits of the district's 9th grade ES course. He was a co-writer of the ES Model Curriculum (ESMC), and a founding member of the Liberated ES Model Curriculum Consortium (LESMCC), and Coalition for Liberated ES (CLES). Today, Artnelson coordinates the Santa Barbara Unified School District's ES program.

ALLYSON TINTIANGCO-CUBALES was born and raised on Ohlone land with immigrant parents from Batangas and Tarlac in the Philippines. Dr. Tintiangco-Cubales is an award-winning professor in the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. Since 2000, she's been teaching in the Department of Asian American Studies and an affiliated faculty member in Educational Leadership. She has mentored hundreds of critical undergraduates, master's, and doctoral students teaching and working in schools, colleges, and community organizations across the nation. In 2001, she founded Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP), a "barangay" that provides Ethnic Studies (ES) courses and curriculum, develops radical educators, and creates resources for Filipina/x/o communities and similarly marginalized peoples. Dr. Tintiangco-Cubales has worked with many school districts, including the San Francisco Unified School District, to co-develop ES, Social Justice, and Filipino Language curriculum. She is also the co-founder and co-director of Community Responsive Education (CRE), a national firm supporting the development of responsive, equitable, and justice-driven educators and ES curriculum.