“SAVE ETHNIC STUDIES, SAVE OUR STORIES”: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION EXPLORING ETHNIC STUDIES' GENEALOGIES, POLICIES, AND INDIANA TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

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Since 2010, more than a dozen states have introduced legislation supporting K-12 ethnic studies. This three-article dissertation considers the historical and contemporary development of ethnic studies programs. Drawing on decolonial thought and policy enactment theory, I investigate (1) the origins of Chicano studies programs, a subdiscipline of ethnic studies; (2) the mission and goals of contemporary K-12 ethnic studies; and (3) the perspectives of ethnic studies teachers in Indiana. Data sources include primary and secondary documents, including program proposals, brochures, legislative documents, curriculum materials, and semi-structured interviews. Findings demonstrate that (1) ethnic studies programs from the 1960s were created to decenter Eurocentric models of learning; (2) despite valuable efforts to engage ethnic studies, current policy and curriculum materials contain serious shortcomings; and (3) ethnic studies teachers’ perceptions of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards are shaped by their level of experience, racial identity, local context and sociopolitical climate. Collectively, these papers offer new insights about the development and implementation of ethnic studies in K-12 school settings.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ix

FOREWORD 1
REFERENCES 4

MANUSCRIPT ONE: LOOKING INWARD TO MOVE FORWARD: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF 20TH CENTURY CHICANO STUDIES PROGRAMS 6
- Abstract 6
- Introduction 7
- Literature Review 8
  - History of Chicano Studies 11
  - A Genealogy of Chicana Studies 13
- Conceptual Framework 15
  - Eurocentrism: The Coloniality of Knowledge 15
  - Liberation: Decolonial Theory 16
- Methodology 18
  - Research Questions 18
- Methods 18
  - Data Sources 18
  - Data Collection 19
  - Data Analysis 20
- Findings 22
  - Reconstructing the Chicano Experience 22
  - Fostering a Positive Sense of Self and Critical Consciousness 24
  - Community-Rooted: Responding to the Needs of the Chicano Community 26
- Discussion 29
  - Carving a Common Denominator 29
  - Back to the Basics 32
- Conclusion 33

APPENDIX 34
REFERENCES 36

MANUSCRIPT TWO: BEYOND IN/VISIBILITY: A DECOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF 21ST CENTURY K-12 ETHNIC STUDIES POLICIES 53
- Abstract 53
- Introduction 54
- Literature Review 56
  - The Legacy of Colonialism in U.S. Schooling 56
  - A Brief History of Ethnic Studies 58
  - The Role of Ethnic Studies in Decolonizing Education 59
    - *Decolonial Frameworks* 60
    - *Student-centered Learning* 61

Community Responsive Practices 63
Conceptual Framework 65
Eurocentrism: The Coloniality of Knowledge 65
Liberation: Decolonial Theory 67
Methodology 68
Research Questions 68
Context 69
California Department of Education 69
Indiana Department of Education 70
Oregon Department of Education 70
Methods 71
Data Sources 71
Data Collection 73
Data Analysis 74
Findings 75
Visibilizing Historically Omitted Groups 76
Student-centered Learning 79
Community-centered Learning 80
Student Learning Outcomes 82
Discussion 85
Undoing Visibility, Cross-cultural Awareness, and Academic Achievement 86
Conclusion 94
APPENDIX 95
REFERENCES 97

MANUSCRIPT THREE: "TRIAL AND ERROR": A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF INDIANA TEACHERS' INTERPRETATIONS OF ETHNIC STUDIES STANDARDS 114
Abstract 114
Introduction 115
Literature Review 116
Ethnic Studies K-12 Teachers 117
Decolonial Approaches to Teaching and Learning 117
Student-centered Pedagogies 119
Community Responsive Pedagogies 121
Teachers' Critical Self-Reflection 122
Conceptual Framework: Interpretive Educational Policy Model 123
Teachers' Educational Policy Enactment 125
Methodology 125
Research Questions 126
Context 126
Methods 128
Participant Sampling 128
Participants 129
Data Collection 133
Data Analysis 135

Findings ... 137
Rigid vs. Flexible Standards ... 137
Not Specific Enough ... 138
Open-ended = Freedom ... 139
Identity Matters ... 142
Addressing the Elephant in the Room: White Teachers' Perceptions of the Ethnic Studies Standards ... 142
The Road Less Traveled: A Black Teacher's Understandings of the Ethnic Studies Standards ... 146
Local Context(s) and Sociopolitical Climate ... 148
Navigating Uncertain Times ... 149
Discussion ... 152
One Size Does Not Fit All ... 152
Reconciling the Missing (Racial) Piece ... 154
Traversing the Sociopolitical Context: A Bottom-up Approach to Policy Enactment ... 157
Conclusion ... 158
APPENDIX ... 160
APPENDIX A: Think Aloud Interview Protocol ... 161
APPENDIX B: Follow-up Interview Protocol ... 165
APPENDIX C: Sample Codebook from Second Round of Analysis ... 167
REFERENCES ... 168

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Collections Analyzed 19

Table 2. Documents Examined 72

Table 3 . Overview of Participant Profiles 129

Table 4. Examples of White Teachers Responses to the Role of Racial Identity 143

Table 5. Sample Codebook from Second Round of Analysis 167

FOREWORD

The imposition of colonial epistemology resulted in the rendering of third world peoples[1] epistemologies as primitive, inferior, and premodern (Said, 1995). Today, colonial epistemologies continue to shape the mainstream educational landscape of the United States (Brayboy, 2005; Calderon, 2014a; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012). From the erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems to the distortion and tokenization of Black and Brown histories to the privileging of European languages, popular mainstream education trends continue to promote the myth of Western exceptionalism (Hodgson, 2009).

Despite the systematic attempt to exterminate the knowledges constructed and produced by Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), our saberes (ways of thinking) survived and will continue to prevail alongside colonial models of education. Ethnic studies is an extension of this effort. Inspired by Black, Indigenous, and intellectuals of Color, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Grace Lee Boggs, Rodolfo Acuña, Carter G. Woodson, Carlos Bulosan, Vine Deloria Jr., Gloria Anzaldúa and others (Okihiro, 2016), ethnic studies moves against systems of imperialism, epistemic violence[2], and structural harm (Elia et al., 2016). In doing so, ethnic studies recovers ancestral ways of knowing and offers a space to imagine and transform the existing conditions of historically marginalized peoples (Hu-DeHart, 1993; Hu-Dehart, 1995; Okihiro, 2016).

Over the last decade, ethnic studies has gained increased attention in K-12 school settings, as school districts and statewide legislation have begun mandating ethnic studies

[1] The term 'third world peoples' can be traced to the works of Afro-Caribbean scholar Frantz Fanon. Fanon articulated the Third World as a collective subject, bound by the struggle for liberation. Specifically, the Third World includes the three continental spheres of Asia, Africa, and the Americas.
[2] Gayatri Spivak (1994) uses the term "epistemic violence" to characterize the silencing of marginalized peoples voices and knowledge systems.

requirements in K-12 settings (S. Kwon, 2021). With the insurgence of ethnic studies in K-12 school settings, the discipline has ignited hope for anti-oppressive education that centers the experiences, perspectives, histories, and ways of knowing of historically marginalized groups.

My dissertation is an attempt to build on the possibilities of ethnic studies while simultaneously inaugurating a radical response to the appropriations of the field. Drawing on qualitative methods, my three-article dissertation investigates 1) the origins of Chicano studies programs, a subdiscipline of ethnic studies; 2) the mission and goals of contemporary K-12 ethnic studies; and 3) the perspectives of ethnic studies teachers in Indiana. Collectively, the three papers in my dissertation invite us to consider the overarching question, how can K-12 ethnic studies expand within mainstream school settings while maintaining its radical mission and goals? Below, I explain each manuscript in more detail.

Manuscript One, "Looking Inward to Move Forward: A Critical Examination of 20th Century Chicano Studies Programs," engages in a historical analysis of the philosophical origins, principles, and goals of Chicano studies higher education programs in the late 1960s and 1970s. Using primary source documents from the late 1960s and 1970s, including program proposals, program brochures, and manifestos, my historical analysis illuminates Chicano studies' vision to reclaim cultural nationalism and the centrality of self-determination and community-rooted practices in the quest for liberation. Through a loving critique, I also complicate the existing literature by showcasing how Chicano studies programs reinscribe monolithic representations of nationalism. In closing, I call on the critical engagement of ethnic studies to serve the evolving needs of the communities it aims to serve.

Manuscript Two, "Beyond In/Visibility: A Decolonial Analysis Of 21st Century K-12 Ethnic Studies Policies," considers how ethnic studies is defined in K-12 ethnic studies policies and

how current conceptualizations of ethnic studies align with the intellectual lineages of the field. Through an analysis of ethnic studies legislation and state promotional texts in California, Indiana, and Oregon, my findings suggest that current iterations of ethnic studies policies in California, Indiana, and Oregon omit the decolonial leanings of ethnic studies. As one of the first studies to examine ethnic studies policies, findings provide early evidence of the consequences when colonial logics overshadow decolonial projects. For this reason, this paper not only contributes to ethnic studies policy scholarship but also serves as a cautionary note against colonial models of education.

Manuscript Three, “Trial and Error: A Qualitative Investigation of Indiana Teachers’ Interpretations of Ethnic Studies Standards,” spotlights the perspectives of ethnic studies high school teachers in Indiana, a state that has adopted ethnic studies courses. In particular, this paper poses questions about how teachers make sense of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards and what contributes to their understanding. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with seven Indiana high school teachers, my findings suggest that teachers’ interpretations of the standards are shaped by their level of experience, racial identity, local context and sociopolitical climate. These findings can be considered a first step in understanding the implementation of current ethnic studies policies in predominantly white K-12 contexts.

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MANUSCRIPT ONE: LOOKING INWARD TO MOVE FORWARD: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF 20TH CENTURY CHICANO STUDIES PROGRAMS

Abstract

Since 2010, more than a dozen states have introduced legislation supporting K-12 ethnic studies. Despite its growing popularity across K-12 educational settings, it has become evident that many still do not understand the purpose of ethnic studies. In this paper, I analyze the origin and purpose of Chicano studies, a subdiscipline of ethnic studies. Drawing on archival data from the late 1960s and 1970s, I explore two questions: (1) What principles and philosophies define the purpose of Chicano studies programs? (2) What desired results were established for students in Chicano studies programs? The findings in this paper illuminate Chicano studies programs' mission to challenge Western practices by creating a new Chicano experience. At the same time, my analysis of the findings uncovers a paradox. By forming a unique Chicano experience, I contend that Chicano studies programs created a homogeneous vision. I conclude with a loving critique of Chicano studies, and more broadly, ethnic studies.

Introduction

> A school district or charter school in this state shall not include in its program of instruction any courses or classes that include any of the following:
>
> 1) Promote the overthrow of the United States government.
>
> 2) Promote resentment toward a race or class of people.
>
> 3) Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
>
> 4) Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals (Arizona House Bill 2281, 2010).

In 2010, Arizona's Republican Governor Jan Brewer signed House Bill 2281, banning one of the most powerful ethnic studies programs, the Mexican American/Raza Studies (MARS) program in Tucson, Arizona. The excerpt above outlines the rationale for the bill. According to state officials, the program promoted the overthrow of the U.S. government and divisiveness. Misconceptions of ethnic studies, however, are not new (Schlesinger, 1998). Since its inception, ethnic studies has fought for legitimacy (Cacho, 2010). For instance, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (1990), one of the most outspoken critics of ethnic studies, wrote that ethnic studies promoted "cultural and linguistic apartheid." Today, ethnic studies remains the subject of debate in K-12 public schools (Elattar, 2021).

Despite critiques to delegitimize ethnic studies, the field continues to grow. Following the banning of MARS in 2010, more than a dozen states have introduced legislation supporting K-12 ethnic studies (S. Kwon, 2021). In 2014, for example, two large districts–Los Angeles Unified School District and San Francisco Unified School District–adopted a resolution to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement (Ceasar, 2014). Although interest in ethnic studies continues to grow across K-12 educational settings, it has become evident that many still do not know and

often misconstrue the meaning of ethnic studies. The continued misalignment of ethnic studies poses a challenge to current K-12 ethnic studies initiatives. To contextualize contemporary debates on K-12 ethnic studies policy, this study offers a historical analysis of the origins and philosophical underpinnings of Chicano studies, a subdiscipline of ethnic studies. Drawing on archival data from the 1970s, I examined the following questions:

1. What principles and philosophies define the purpose of Chicano studies programs?
2. What desired results were established for students in Chicano studies programs?

Literature Review

Ethnic studies emerged from a demand by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color[3] for a relevant, meaningful, and affirmative education (Hu-DeHart, 1993). ethnic studies has repeatedly fought for legitimization in academic institutions as a subversive educational project to colonial education. In this section, I provide an overview of the current literature on ethnic studies and Chicano studies, an extension of ethnic studies. First, I review the genealogy and ideological origins of ethnic studies in higher education. Second, I discuss the origins and undergirding ideologies of Chicano studies. Providing an overview of the origins of ethnic studies and Chicano studies helps us understand the field's current state. Finally, I review critiques of Chicano studies programs to shed light on the tensions in the field.

The ideological origins of ethnic studies date back as early as the 1900s. Several scholars suggested that marginalized peoples' histories, perspectives, and contributions, including African Americans, Asian/Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Chicanx/Latinx, and Native

[3] Throughout this paper, I use the umbrella term Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) to refer to people and communities who self-identify as such or are assigned this label by ongoing (settler) colonialism, capitalism, and other Eurocentric projects of domination. The term denotes the similar experiences faced by colonized peoples, while also recognizing the unique experiences of Native peoples and other people of color. Other terms that I use interchangeably in this paper are “historically marginalized peoples,” “racialized peoples,” and “colonized peoples.”

Americans, should be included in mainstream disciplines (Du Bois, 1996; C. G. Woodson, 1933). These scholars included W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Mary McLeod Bethune, Grace Lee Boggs, Rodolfo Acuña, Carter G. Woodson, Carlos Bulosan, Vine Deloria Jr., Gloria Anzaldúa, and more.

Although the ideological roots of ethnic studies can be traced as early as the 1900s, the fight for ethnic studies as an official academic field began in 1968. Inspired by the intellectual work of these scholars, along with the sociopolitical climate of the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. and abroad, a coalition of Black, Indigenous, and students of Color went on a five-month strike in 1968 at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University, SFSU). One of the events that sparked the strike was the firing of George Mason Murray, an English instructor at SFSU. Murray was an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War and the minister of education for the Black Panther Party. On November 1, 1968, George Mason Murray was fired from SFSU. Following the firing of Murray, the Third World Liberation Front[4], a coalition of students from different organizations at San Francisco State University, organized protests on campus. Collectively, they drafted 15 demands, such as creating a school of Third World studies (Umemoto, 1989). After a hard-fought battle, the College of Ethnic Studies[5] was established at San Francisco State on March 20, 1969, making it the first of its kind in the country.

Across other colleges in the U.S., similar actions were taking place. In the spring of 1968, the Afro-American Student Union (AASU) at the University of California at Berkeley proposed a Black Studies program (California Department of Education, 2021a). The AASU was soon

[4] The Third World Liberation Front was a coalition of students from different organizations, including the campus' Black Student Union, Latin American Student Organization (LASO), the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), the Mexican American Student Confederation, the Philippine American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE), La Raza, the Native American Students Organization, and Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at San Francisco State University.

[5] When referring to the title of a document or a specific department/program, I capitalize 'ethnic studies' or 'Chicano studies.' When referring to the academic discipline in general terms, I do not capitalize.

joined by other organizations on campus, such as the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC), the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), and the Native American Student Union (NASU). Together, they formed the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) chapter at the University of California, Berkeley. Similar to the TWLF at SFSU, they proposed the creation of the Third World College, comprised of four autonomous units: Asian American studies, Black studies, Chicano studies, and Native American studies. On March 7, 1969, the first ethnic studies entity at UC Berkeley was created. By 1993, over 700 ethnic studies programs existed in American colleges (Hu-DeHart, 1993).

Ethnic studies, however, was not limited to colleges. Many high schools in the U.S. also adopted ethnic studies. Berkeley High in California, for example, was one of the first high schools in the nation to require Ethnic studies in 1990 (Markovich, 2021). In Tucson, Arizona, the Mexican American Raza Studies (MARS) was also implemented in high schools. Mexican American Raza Studies (MARS) aimed to provide an area of study that highlighted the experiences, history, literature, and art of Chicanos (Cammarota & Romero, 2006). To date, the MARS program is considered the only program in the nation to have a full-fledged ethnic studies high school program (Sleeter, 2011).

Overall, the core understandings of ethnic studies can be credited to the early works of scholars like Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois that advocated for the study of marginalized peoples in the first person. However, the official establishment of ethnic studies is linked to the grassroots organizing of Black, Indigenous and Students of Color on college campuses in the 1960s. Today, 50 years later, ethnic studies continues to uplift BIPOC students' perspectives and offer critical frameworks for analyzing systems of oppression. Still, misconceptions about ethnic studies continue to exist. Common misconceptions about ethnic

studies include "ethnic studies only focus on race" or “ethnic studies classes might engage students, but I don’t see how they address real learning” (Zavala, 2019). In this paper, I challenge simplistic definitions of ethnic studies by examining the genesis and philosophies of Chicano studies, an extension of ethnic studies. Through my analysis of archival sources, I seek to offer historically grounded definitions of one of the disciplines of ethnic studies.

History of Chicano Studies

Chicano studies is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on the “life, history, and culture of Mexican-origin people within the U.S., as well as of other Latina/Latino and Indigenous populations in the Americas” (University of California, Los Angeles, College of Social Sciences, n.d.). Chicano studies is a byproduct of the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Chicano students organized protests across college campuses that demanded the establishment of Chicano studies programs in American college settings (Acuña, 2011).

More than a surge of organizing, though, the Chicano Movement represented a radical shift in Chicano consciousness that shaped Chicano studies. For the first time in history, a mass of Mexican-origin people rejected Eurocentric ideas of assimilation and integration (López, 2001). Instead, a large segment of Mexican-origin people adopted *Chicanismo* (San Miguel, 2001). According to Ignacio Garcia, Chicanismo can be understood as a “militant version of self-help and racial solidarity” (García, 1997). Inspired by this new Chicano consciousness, Chicano studies sought to instill a sense of pride in Chicanos (Acuña, 2011).

One of the most influential texts of Chicano thought is El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan, the 1969 manifesto advocating for nationalism and self-determination. In 1969, more than 1500 youth gathered at the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado. The

conference's goal was to unite the student movements and connect college students to barrio youth (working-class youth). It was here that El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan was first introduced. Read out loud at the conference, Chicano poet Alberto Alurista called on Chicanos to recognize their mestizo origins and connection to Aztlan, the Mexican territory lost to the United States. Through the adoption of Aztlan and Chicanismo, Alurista argued that self-determination and liberation for the Chicano were possible. El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan remains one of the most powerful symbols of Chicano identity (Delgado, 1995).

El Plan de Santa Barbara, the 1969 proposal for implementing Chicano studies educational programs throughout California, is also one of the critical documents to influence Chicano studies (Beltrán, 2010). In 1969, the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, a network of Chicano graduate students and professors, held a conference at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Inspired by events across the nation, including the Chicano Liberation Youth Conference and student protests on campuses, the Chicano Coordinating Council of Higher Education called on implementing Chicano studies programs throughout the California system. One of the guiding principles of this document was community control (Soldatenko, 2009). Through this principle, Chicanos critiqued American individualism and the 'American Dream.' Instead, the role of Chicanos would be to sustain their communities. Through El Plan de Santa Barbara, then, Chicano studies programs valued community transformation.

In sum, the rise of Chicano studies is linked to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. Contrary to previous generations, Chicanos adopted a new consciousness that emphasized cultural pride, community involvement, and liberation. The seminal ideas from the Chicano Movement are most reflected in El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan and El Plan de Santa Barbara.

Together, these documents advocated for Chicano nationalism and the establishment of autonomous institutions in the academy. In this paper, I investigate the key tenets of Chicano studies to understand better how these continue to shape ethnic studies initiatives today.

A Genealogy of Chicana Studies

While Chicano studies recovered and centered Mexican history, indigeneity, and culture, Chicano studies was not absent of criticism. One of the most significant limitations of Chicano studies was the exclusion and erasure of the experiences of Mexican descended women. As a result, Chicana feminist, who came of age in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, interrogated and recovered issues related to gender and sexuality, leading to the birth of Chicana studies (Orozco, 1990). As the field of Chicana/o studies continues to evolve, scholars continue to push the confines of the field to make them more inclusive.

The inception of Chicano studies omitted the experiences of Chicanas. Much of the early work from Chicano scholars focused primarily on analyses of classism and racism (Orozco, 1984). For example, Chicanas questioned the practices of Chicano scholars, who often relegated women to traditional gender roles, such as answering phone calls, making coffee, and taking notes (Blackwell, 2011; Espinoza et al., 2018; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Orozco, 1984). As Chicana activist-scholar Sonia López reminds us: "[T[hough Chicanas were active from the inception of the movement, they were generally relegated to traditional roles played by women in society" (Sanchez, 1978, p. 16). Calling out the male-centered tendencies of Chicano studies, however, came at a price. Chicanas were often accused of being agringadas (assimilated to the white American mainstream), malinchistas (as "La Malinche," traitors to their race), and marimachas (lesbians). (Chávez-GarcÍa, 2013). As a result, Chicanas created their own spaces and frameworks (Espinoza et al., 2018; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1988; Orozco, 1984).

Chicana studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that recovers and complicates the histories of Mexican descended women (Chávez-GarcÍa, 2013). Similar to the interdisciplinary tradition of ethnic studies, Chicana studies is diverse in its application of theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and source materials (Blackwell, 2011). Through the tradition of Chicana thought, Chicanas have reconfigured notions of gender, sexuality, race, class, and cultures as it relates to welfare, poverty, sexual autonomy, child and elderly care, education, reproductive justice, politics, prison reform and other issues (citation). Among these early works, for instance, is Vicky L. Ruiz's groundbreaking book *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* (1987). In this book, Ruiz, a founding Chicana historian, documented the history of Chicana workers in Southern California's canning and packing industries during the 1930s and 1940s. As one of the first historical monographs to focus on Mexican American women, Ruiz's text deconstructed the stereotype of the passive, home-based Mexican woman, bringing gender, activism, and class to the forefront of conversations. Altogether, the early works of Chicana historians have been instrumental to the ways we remember and conceptualize the historical contributions of Mexican-origin women.

One of the other important contributions of Chicana studies is Chicana lesbian thought. Ignored during the Chicano movement, queer Chicanas wrote about their experiences, challenging heterosexuality and patriarchal values in Chicano culture. These works, such as Gloria Anzaldua and Cherríe Moraga's *This Bridge Called my Back,* used first-person accounts to theorize and reconceptualize the experiences of Chicanas using a race, class, gender, and sexuality lens. Collectively, these early works set the baseline for Chicana queer studies and were pivotal to the transformation of Chicana/o studies, more broadly.

In summary, Chicana/o studies has been the subject of controversy among members of the field. Since its inceptions, Chicana scholars, writers, and activists, in particular, have interrogated Chicano nationalist ideologies. In this way, Chicanas have and continue to play a significant role in the longevity of Chicana/o studies. Together these critiques offer areas for growth. In this paper, I examine the mission and goals of Chicano studies. In doing so, I consider the critical traditions from Latinx scholars that allow for growth.

Conceptual Framework

I draw on decolonial theory to analyze the mission and objectives of Chicano studies programs. Broadly, decolonial theory describes the intellectual work articulating a rejection of Eurocentrism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). The goal of decolonial theory is to interrogate the social foundations of power emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath (Dei, 2000). In this framework, I explore two fundamental concepts for understanding decolonial thought: 1) eurocentrism and 2) liberation.

Eurocentrism: The Coloniality of Knowledge

To understand decolonial theory, it is necessary to confront the histories of domination that constitute the European colonial project. While a thorough review of the history of Eurocentric epistemic traditions is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to understand the effects of mainstream cannons of knowledge that led to the ascendancy of the Third World. Fanon & Philcox (2004) articulates the Third World as a collective subject bound by the struggle for liberation. Specifically, the Third World includes the three continental spheres of Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

To understand the dominance of Eurocentric canons of knowledge, we must first expose a hallmark of the European colonial project: cultural imperialism. In its most broad sense,

cultural imperialism refers to one country's domination over another through culture. As a phenomenon, cultural imperialism includes the subjugation, dehumanization, and erasure of Third World peoples (Fanon & Philcox, 2004; Grande, 2004; Said, 1995). One example of imperialism includes the removal and genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas. In what is now known as the U.S., Indigenous peoples were removed from their homeland and forced to adopt Eurocentric paradigms. Thus, Western cannons of knowledge were imposed by colonizing the Third World, marking European and imperial languages, including Italian, Spanish, German, French, and English, the dominant language. In this way, colonial domination is more than politics and economics. It includes the colonization of Third World peoples language practices, culture, and knowledge.

The effects of imperialism continue to impact all facets of the social order. From the continued erasure of Indigenous education (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013) to the policing and disproportionate incarceration of Black and Latinx people (Morris, 2015; Rios, 2011) to the pervasiveness of a Eurocentric curriculum (A. Brown & Brown, 2010; Calderon, 2014b; McNair, 2003; Noboa, 2013; Santiago, 2017), coloniality continues to permeate all facets of the social order in the past and the present. Ethnic studies aims to decolonize knowledge, rupturing what has been universally accepted (Umemoto, 1989). A decolonial lens, then, was essential for understanding how Chicano studies, especially, followed in the steps of anti-colonial traditions. In the next section, I explain the vital dimensions of a decolonial framework and how it applies to this study.

Liberation: Decolonial Theory

While an array of anticolonial perspectives exists (e.g., Young, 2016), I honor the decolonial articulations of Indigenous (Grande, 2004) and Latin American scholars (Lugones,

2010; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000), whose formulations of colonialism are overlooked in mainstream postcolonial studies. Rather than postcolonial theory, primarily taken up in the Western academy(Young, 2016), decolonial thought from the Indigenous and Latin American traditions interrogates the material and social conditions emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath (Dei, 2000). Although a linear approach to decolonization does not exist, Battiste (2013) describes decolonization as a two-prong effort.

The first fundamental goal of decolonial theory is to deconstruct Eurocentrism (Battiste, 2013). Eurocentrism is a cultural phenomenon where European or Western perspectives are viewed and accepted as a universal truth (Quijano, 2000). In the context of education, a decolonial lens represents a departure from Eurocentric canons of knowledge. As Argentinian decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo states, "produc[ing], transform[ing], and disseminat[ing], knowledge that is not dependent on the epistemology of North Atlantic modernity…but that on the contrary, responds to the need of the colonial difference" (Mignolo, 2009, p. 247). Furthermore, decolonial theory questions the ways schooling has been used as a tool to oppress colonized peoples (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Simmons & Dei, 2012). Thus, a decolonial framework implores us to think about how historical and contemporary educational institutions have contributed to the ongoing colonial violence of BIPOC (Cote-Meek, 2014).

The second fundamental goal of decolonial theory is to reconstruct affirming systems and restore the harm these systems have inflicted on colonized peoples. Through this lens, BIPOC have the agency to foster sites of resistance and transformation (Mignolo, 2009). This, however, requires a sincere engagement with decolonization. As Tuck & Yang (2012) stress, "[t]he too-easy adoption of decolonizing discourse (making decolonization a metaphor" (p. 3) supports settler moves to innocence which "ultimately represent settler fantasies of easier paths to

reconciliation" (p.6). For this reason, decolonial theory calls on all people to recognize their role in perpetuating colonial logics.

Methodology

The research presented here examined the mission and goals of Chicano studies programs in U.S. colleges and universities during the late 1960s and 1970s. Attempting to interpret the philosophical underpinnings of Chicano studies called for a qualitative historical investigation. According to Villaverde et al. (2006), the study of history is often "regarded and studied as a detached endeavor, a quest for facts and an objective disposition" (p. 1). Following their ontological stance, I drew on historiography to understand how philosophy, ideology, and politics mediate history (Villaverde et al., 2006).

Research Questions

This study engaged in a historical analysis of the philosophical origins, principles, and goals of Chicano studies. Specifically, I analyzed 20th Century Chicano studies programs in higher education. Using primary source documents, including program proposals, student organization statements and notes, program brochures, and manifestos, this study explored the following questions:

1. What principles and philosophies define the purpose of Chicano studies programs?
2. What desired results were established for students in Chicano studies programs?

Methods

Data Sources

Interested in examining the mission and goals of Chicano studies programs in U.S. colleges and universities during the 1960s and 1970s, I drew on primary sources. A primary source is an artifact created at the time under study. I examined primary sources from four

archival collections (See Table 1). Below, I explain each collection's contents, context, and significance in this study.

Table 1. Collections Analyzed

Collection Title	Description
Rodolfo F. Acuña Collection	In 1969, Dr. Acuña became the first full professor in the Mexican American Studies Department (now Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies) at California State University, Northridge. The *Rodolfo F. Acuña Collection* documents the academic career of Dr. Acuña. The collection contains works authored by Dr. Acuña during his tenure at CSUN, including books, early drafts of unpublished works, extensive research notes, correspondence, subject files, and proposal drafts for a Chicana and Chicano studies department. This collection was imperative to my research because it contains documents that were instrumental in creating one of the nation's first Chicana and Chicano studies departments.
Chicano Studies Research Center, Administrative Files Collection	This collection includes essential internal reports and correspondence regarding the planning and development of the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA (CSRC). Understanding the development of The Chicano Studies Research Center is crucial because the creation of Chicana/o Studies at UCLA first took the form of a research center in 1969. Therefore, this collection offered insights into the initial vision of the program. Also, the collection includes pamphlets and brochures from other campuses that created Chicano studies programs.
Administrative Files of Juan Gomez Quiñones	As the former director of the Chicano Studies program at UCLA, Juan Gomez Quiñones played a crucial role in establishing the Chicano Studies program at UCLA. The collection contains academic plans, program proposals, conferences, task forces, projects, other cultural studies centers, committees, and faculty recruitment and development. These documents provided my study with a window into the planning of the first Chicano studies major at UCLA in 1973.

Data Collection

Between 2018 and 2019, I collected archival data. I began data collection by reviewing the finding aids of different collections. A finding aid is a document containing detailed, indexed, and processed information about a specific collection of records (Society of American

Archivists, n.d.). Through this process, I identified three collections that provided important information about the origins of Chicano studies: the *Rodolfo Acuña Collection*, *the Chicano Studies Research Center Administrative Files Collection,* and *the Administrative Files of Juan Gomez Quiñones Collection*. In the summer of 2019, I visited the university library archives at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and California State University, Northridge (CSUN). During my visit, I collected materials, including Chicano studies program proposals, Chicano studies program pamphlets, brochures, academic plans, and correspondence from participants in the movement. As I surveyed materials, I wrote descriptive notes that documented initial observations of the data. After surveying documents, I photographed sources and uploaded the data to a secure digital drive.

Data Analysis

Data analysis describes the process of making meaning from the data (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) describes this process on two levels: 1) the first is the more general procedure in analyzing the data, and 2) the second would be the analysis steps embedded within specific qualitative designs (p. 108).

According to Punch (2009), studying documents in isolation from their social context deprives them of meaning. As such, I analyzed the social production of the materials I collected. In analyzing the social production of the documents, I considered a list of analytical questions (See Appendix A), such as *when was the document created? For what purposes were the document created (social, political, educational)? Who was the intended audience?* Through this initial analysis, I was able to gain a general sense of the data and reflect on a document's use, creation, and intended audience. As I reviewed the documents, I revisited the analytic memos I

wrote during data collection. By immersing in the previous memos I wrote, I captured observations I had previously made and composed new memos that described emerging patterns.

Following this initial review of the data, I began coding each document using NVivo qualitative software. Coding refers to the process of organizing the data by taking bodies of data gathered during data collection and labeling them into categories that represent a phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). To code my data, I applied a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory involves a constant comparison method of coding and analyzing data through three states: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A grounded theory approach was fitting for this study. Its goal is to develop an explanatory theory of basic social processes studied in the environments in which they occur (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In the first round of analysis, I open coded each document. The purpose is to examine, compare, and categorize large bodies of data. Guided by my two research questions, I primarily focused on words like mission, philosophy, purpose, principles, values, and objectives. Focusing on these keywords allowed me to create codes around my research questions. After this first round of coding, I generated 47 codes. Because the purpose of this first round was to begin grouping data, I created general codes like "mission of Chicano studies programs" and "goals of Chicano studies."

In the second round of data analysis, I conducted axial coding. The objective was to reassemble data intro groupings based on relationships and patterns within and among the categories. Here, I revisited each code I created in the first round of analysis and dug deeper into the relationship across codes. For example, under the general code "mission of Chicano studies programs," I recognized critiques of Eurocentrism. To tease this pattern, I reassembled and

grouped quotes that specifically reflected a critique of Eurocentrism. After I reclassified codes, I renamed this code "challenging eurocentrism." Through this process, I condensed my data and created more specific groupings in the data.

In the third round of data analysis, I conducted selective coding. Here, the purpose was to identify significant phenomena or "core categories" in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To support my interpretation of core categories, I returned to the core tenets of decolonial theory. For example, using the definition of Eurocentrism from decolonial theory, I identified "destabilizing Eurocentric education" as a core category in the data. I continued to use this lens throughout the categories until I could no longer streamline categories. As I began developing arguments from my data, I inquired members of a peer dissertation group and solicited feedback from faculty members to ensure the reliability of my interpretations. Finally, I arrived at three major themes.

Findings

This study aimed to examine the mission and goals of 20th century Chicano studies programs in U.S. colleges and universities. The findings reveal three major themes. First, the mission of Chicano studies programs was to reconstruct the lived experience of Chicanos. Second, one of the objectives of Chicano studies programs was to foster a positive sense of self and instill a critical understanding of the social order. Third, Chicano studies program sought to improve and empower Chicano communities.

Reconstructing the Chicano Experience

The mission of Chicano studies programs was to reconstruct the Chicano experience with new possibilities of freedom, identity expression, and community empowerment. The development of Chicano studies programs is linked to the forging of a new cultural and political

identity, *Chicanismo*, in the late 1960s. Chicanismo rejected Eurocentric and assimilationist ideologies. Instead, Chicanismo envisioned new forms of living for Chicanos. The core understandings of Chicanismo are reflected in the mission of Chicano studies programs.

The rise of Chicano studies programs is linked to the rise of a new cultural and political identity, Chicanismo, in the late 1960s. In the forging of a new identity, Chicanos critiqued Eurocentric ideologies and instead embraced a sense of pride in their cultural roots. One of the most influential texts to inspire Chicano studies programs was El Plan de Santa Barbara, a Chicano plan for higher education written in 1969 by the Chicano Coordinating Council of Higher Education. In line with the ideals of Chicanismo, El Plan de Santa Barbara challenged Eurocentric ideas by critiquing and rejecting Mexican American stereotypes and caricatures. For example, stereotypical caricatures like 'Frito Bandito' and 'Tío Tacos,' which portrayed Chicanos as bandits with long mustaches and sombreros, were critiqued (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969). Furthermore, El Plan de Santa Barbara challenged assimilationist ideologies, "for decades Mexican people in the United States struggled to realize the 'American Dream'…And some–a few–have. But the cost, the ultimate cost of assimilation, required turning away from el barrio (neighborhood)…" (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969, p. 9). Here, the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education critiqued the idea of assimilation, a symptom of Eurocentrism. While they acknowledge that this was a strategy to achieve the 'American Dream,' they questioned whether it was worth the cost of losing one's cultural identity. For this reason, they called those that succumbed to assimilation vendidos (sell-outs) (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969). In this way, Chicano studies programs emerged as an oppositional entity to the Eurocentric order.

Influenced by the values of Chicanismo, Chicano studies programs aimed to reconstruct the Chicano experience. In the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) proposal for the Bachelor of Arts in Chicano Studies, for instance, the description of the program states, "this multi-disciplinary program leading to the Bachelor of Arts degree in Chicano Studies is designed to provide systematic instruction for liberal arts and pre-professional majors who wish concentrated study of the Chicano experience" (Chicano Studies Research Center, ca. 1970). Similarly, the brochure for the University of California, Davis Chicano Studies program explains that the program's aim was "to develop new perspectives and a better understanding of the Chicano experience" (Rodolfo Acuña Collection, ca. 1970).

In short, the creation of Chicano studies programs results from the forging of a new nationalist identity. With the rise of Chicanismo, Chicanos in the U.S. no longer sought to assimilate into American society. Instead, through Chicano studies programs, they imagined new possibilities of freedom, identity expression, and community empowerment. In the next section, I describe how Chicano studies programs' mission came to fruition.

Fostering a Positive Sense of Self and Critical Consciousness

To reconstruct the lived experience of Chicanos, Chicano studies programs sought to foster a positive sense of self and instill a critical understanding of Eurocentrism. As stated in the program proposal of California State University, Northridge (CSUN) for Chicano Studies, "to instill a sense of pride, and a feeling of critical curiosity about everything around him. [and] secondly, to make the Chicano socially responsible to his Raza…" (Rodolfo Acuña, ca. 1969). The concepts of self-determination and critical consciousness played a significant role in creating this goal. Guided by the Chicano manifesto, El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, self-determination and critical consciousness rested on the idea that Chicanos had the autonomy to determine what was

best for them and a critical understanding of the social order was necessary (R. Gonzalez & Urista, 1969). Through this lens, Chicano studies programs were committed to reclaiming what was lost due to colonization.

Affirming students' sense of self consisted of exposing students to courses and literature that reflected their cultural identity and history. To affirm students' sense of self, Chicano studies programs developed courses on Chicano culture, literature, Mexican American history, Chicano politics, and race relations (Rodolfo Acuña Collection, ca. 1974). In these courses, students read first-person narratives on the Chicano experience. One of the most widely used texts in Chicano studies programs, for example, included the poem *I am Joaquin* by Rodolfo Gonzalez, a Chicano activist.

> I am Cuauhtémoc,
> proud and noble,
> leader of men,
> king of an empire
> civilized beyond the dreams
> of the gachupín Cortés,
> who also is the blood,
> the image of myself.
> I am the Maya prince.
> I am Nezahualcóyotl,
> great leader of the Chichimecas.
> I am the sword and flame of Cortes
> the despot
> And
> I am the eagle and serpent of
> the Aztec civilization (Gonzales, 1967).

In this text, Rodolfo Gonzalez invokes their pre-Columbian history to reclaim their mestizo and Indigenous identity. Through these kinds of texts, Chicano students reflected on their history and Indigenous roots, cultivating a greater sense of pride in their roots.

In addition, Chicano studies programs sought to instill a critical understanding of systems of oppression. To do this, Chicano studies programs adopted an interdisciplinary approach that

drew on multiple disciplines, including anthropology, economics, English, history, linguistics, philosophy, political Science, public Health, and sociology (Chicano Studies Research Center, ca. 1972; Rodolfo Acuña Collection, ca. 1969). By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, students were given opportunities to analyze social structures from different perspectives. For example, to explore language, the Chicano Studies program at UCLA proposed a course titled "Barrio Spanish." Through this course, students would be able to study the dialects of Spanish throughout the "barrios of the Southwest" (Chicano Studies Research Center, ca. 1972). Moreover, students would be able to analyze the facets of linguistic imperialism on Chicano peoples. To that end, the reconstruction of the Chicano experience embodied self-empowerment and critical consciousness.

Altogether, Chicano studies programs cultivated a greater sense of pride by exposing students to a curriculum that reflected their experiences through first-person accounts. Moreover, by engaging students in analyses of the social order, students were equipped with the "tools to cope with the system and realize his full potential as a member of this society" (Chicano Studies Research Center, ca. 1975). In the next section, I describe the second salient goal of Chicano studies programs.

Community-Rooted: Responding to the Needs of the Chicano Community

To reconstruct the Chicano experience, Chicano studies programs were also committed to improving Chicano communities by redistributing resources. Specifically, the concepts of community responsiveness undergirded this objective. Community responsiveness advocates for the autonomy of Chicano communities to implement their vision of social justice (R. Gonzalez & Urista, 1969). Through a community responsive framework, Chicano studies programs created

two goals. First, to prepare students to meet Chicano communities' demands. Second, to develop a new line of Chicano scholarship.

Chicano studies programs grew out of the grassroots organizing of Chicano activists and allies on college campuses. Rooted in critical understandings of community, activists and allies critiqued the limited power that Chicano communities had. For instance, El Plan de Santa Barbara stated, "the result of this domestic colonialism is that the barrios and colonias (neighborhoods) are dependent communities with no institutional power base of their own. Historically, Chicanos have been prevented from establishing a power base and significantly influencing decision-making." As such, the redistribution of resources called on Chicanos to assume full governance of Chicano studies programs, "it is the responsibility of Chicanos on campus to [e]nsure dominant influence of these programs" (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969, p. 3). Otherwise, Chicano studies programs could become co-opted. To put it simply, the redistribution of resources called on the restructuring of power.

One of the ways that Chicano studies programs sought to empower Chicano communities was by preparing students to meet the needs of Chicano communities. This, however, was not possible without the last goal I outlined above. That is, to improve Chicano communities, students first needed to gain a strong sense of identity and critical consciousness. By connecting these two goals, Chicano studies programs ultimately aimed to prepare students to contribute to their community. The proposal for a Chicano Studies program at UCLA, for example, mentions that students were to be prepared to serve bilingual communities.

> Opportunities are developing, in both the public and private sector, *[sic]* that call for men and women that are academically prepared and aware of history, culture, and current problems facing the Chicanos communities. The schools, governmental agencies social welfare institutions and an array of public service organizations are seeking bilingual Spanish-speaking applicants that have the knowledge of the Chicano, however, there are simply not enough trained individuals to meet the need. The B.A. in Chicano Studies

> would assure that you have language and cross-cultural studies background that would enhance your qualifications in this competitive job market (Administrative Files of Juan Gomez Quiñones, ca. 1976).

In this way, Chicano studies programs prepared students to take on different historically absent roles in their communities. In a similar fashion, CSUN created “Operation Chicano Teacher,” a program that would prepare students to “teach our schools” using bilingual education (Rodolfo Acuña, ca. 1970). To that extent, Chicano studies programs were more than “feel good” programs, as some critics argued (Schlesinger, 1998). They prepared a generation of professionals that would transform Chicano communities.

Finally, to improve Chicano communities, Chicano studies were committed to developing Chicano scholarship. Across multiple documents, proposals for master’s programs highlighted the significance of this goal, “encourage students to do creative and contributive research relating to Mexican-Americans” (Chicano Studies Research Center, ca. 1975). This was particularly important in universities like UCLA, which had no graduate program that “prepares students for specializing in cross cultural bilingual research in the Chicano community” (Chicano Studies Research Center, ca. 1975). In fact, the Mexican American Cultural Center (now known as the Chicano Studies Research Center) at UCLA was established in 1969 to encourage research that centered on the history and lives of Chicanos. Together, these efforts would correct the deficit-oriented research that inaccurately represented Chicanos, aiding the experience of Chicanos.

In summary, the creation of Chicano studies programs fundamentally involved two elements: the individual and the community. Rather than two separate functions, Chicano studies programs coalesced these two components as key to the Chicano liberation struggle. This began with developing a Chicano studies program centered on “the Chicano experience.” The goal was to affirm the identity of Chicanos through a process of self-discovery and instill critical

understandings of social structures. In turn, this would encourage students to contribute to the improvement of Chicano communities.

Discussion

This paper examined the mission and goals of Chicano studies programs in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The findings in this paper illuminate Chicano studies programs' mission to challenge western practices by creating a new Chicano experience. At the same time, the findings in this study expose a paradox. By forming a unique Chicano experience, Chicano studies programs created a homogeneous vision. First, Chicano studies programs created a male-centered vision of the Chicano experience, omitting the gendered experiences of Chicanas. Second, Chicano studies programs romanticized Indigeneity, ignoring the complexities of Latinidad.

Carving a Common Denominator

The fight for Chicano studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s is celebrated as an event in history of Chicano awakening (Galán, 2016). This narrative, however, forgets to ask what were the limitations of the movement for Chicano studies? and What lessons do the past offer for the future? The findings from this study suggest that Chicano studies crafted a homogenous vision of the Chicano experience. Specifically, my analysis of Chicano studies artifacts uncovers two dominant perspectives: male-centered ideologies and the mestizo subject. More than simply archival objects, I argue that the findings from the sources in this study invite us to consider alternative perspectives as an integral part of the process of reckoning with the future of Chicano studies and more broadly, ethnic studies.

One of the ways Chicano studies programs promoted a homogenous vision was by positioning the Chicano male experience as the central unit of analysis in programs. In the

widely used text, *I am Joaquin,* for instance, the author praised Indigenous male leaders such as Aztec leader, Cuauhtémoc. In contrast, female figures were assigned stereotypical gender roles, such as religious extremists, lamenting mothers, and community healers, "I am the black-shawled faithful women who die with me or live" (stanza, 110). In addition, Chicano studies often positioned males as the primary beneficiaries of their programs. El Plan de Santa Barbara, for instance, features males in graduation regalia, exposing the Chicano male imaginary (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969). Finally, the lack of recognition of Chicanas in course materials indicates a lack of attention to women's experiences. In my review of course catalogs, I only found one course dedicated to "women's studies" (Chicano Studies Research Center, ca. 1975). The limited attention to women's experiences in curriculum materials, then, reveals a Chicano experience imbued in the experiences of Chicano men.

A closed examination of archival sources, then, unearths the limitations of a homogenous vision. While the creation of a new Chicano experience brought a sense of empowerment for some, it simultaneously erased the experiences of women, who were pivotal to the establishment of Chicano studies (Espinoza et al., 2018). These results align with the well-established writings of Chicana feminists that have called on the theorization of gender, race, class, sexuality and culture in Chicano studies (Blackwell, 2011; Espinoza et al., 2018; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Orozco, 1984). By looking at the past, then, I argue that struggles for liberation cannot be liberating if they only benefit some members. In this way, the findings from this study teach us that for liberating visions to be truly liberating, they must consider the intersecting visions of all members.

Another important takeaway from my analysis of Chicano studies programs is the appropriation of indigeneity. The appropriation of indigeneity results from the adoption of

mestizaje, the mixing of races, as part of Chicanismo. Connected by a history of colonization, Chicanos attempted to recover a sense of pride in their Indigenous and Spanish roots by adopting mestizaje as a unifying emblem of Chicanimos. In El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán (1969), for instance, the manifesto declares a new form of nationalist consciousness rooted in mestizaje, "with our heart in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation."

The adoption of mestizaje, as a unifying emblem, reveals a misstep in the quest for Chicano studies. While Chicanos attempted to recover their Indigenous ties, they appropriated the Indigenous experience. This is because Indigeneity is more than having Indigenous ancestry (Blanchard et al., 2019). Further, by embracing a "common" experience under the colonial project of mestizaje, Chicanos failed to capture the complexities of Chicanos and Latinos, broadly. In other words, by employing the view that "we are all mestizos/as," Chicanos further marginalized the existence of different Chicano identities, including Afro-Mexicans. For that reason, I argue that the celebration of mestizaje, as a unifying principle for Chicanos, should not be conflated as a sign of racial unity.

Overall, the themes in this study show a paradox in motion. While Chicano studies programs sought to subvert Eurocentric paradigms, these programs reinscribed colonial ideas of gender, Indigeneity, and race/ethnicity. My analysis expands the existing research by showcasing the not only the gendered shortcomings of a Chicano studies vision, but the problematic nature of the colonial mestizaje project. To be clear, my analysis here does not attempt to divorce Chicano studies from the significant strides of the field. Rather, I highlight the contradictions within the institutionalization of Chicano studies to orient us towards an inclusive vision of liberation.

Ultimately, I argue that without an acute consideration of all the needs of a community, social transformation is beyond reach.

Back to the Basics

As ethnic studies programs continue to be adopted across the country, where do we look for guidance about the sustainability of ethnic studies? The findings in this study offer new directions about the future of Chicano studies and more broadly, ethnic studies. By looking at the past, I uncover the contradictions embedded in struggles for liberation. In alignment with Chicanx/Latinx scholars, I argue that the sustainability of ethnic studies is rooted in centering diverse and intersecting perspectives (Malabon, 2016; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021; Torres, 2019) To do this, however, requires a context-based approach.

For far too long, Chicano studies has been defined by Mexican-centered, male-centric, and heterosexual perspectives. As we see here, however, movements of resistance within the field are integral in the quest for freedom, which is a guiding principle within the field. To that end, I argue that a context-based approach is necessary if which wish to maintain the decolonial leanings of ethnic studies. A context-based approach considers the historical, social, political and economic forces that shape communities. For example, in a Chicano studies course, a context-based framework would mean looking at the ways Mexican-origin people and Central Americans have been racialized in similar and different ways. A context-based approach, then, asks questions about the historical origins of a group, the factors that shape the experiences of a group, and how this relates (or not) to the experiences of students in the classroom. In summary, a context-based approach refutes the notion of a singular experience, to make room for nuanced perspectives that add depth to the Latinx experience.

In designing future ethnic studies programs, then, educational policy makers, educators, and research need to consider how ethnic studies will best serve the needs of the students it seeks to serve. A context-based approach is suitable as it accounts for the material, social, political, and economic forces that shape the experiences of students. Doing so, pushes us to go beyond essentialized learning experiences that confine groups of people to a monolithic experience.

Conclusion

As we continue to move forward with ethnic studies education, I invite advocates and educators to interrogate the historical foundations of the ethnic studies movement. Revisiting the past helps us understand the mission of ethnic studies and, most importantly, provides a foundation for moving forward with the future. A foundation that forces us to question, complicate, and reimagine what liberation looks like in today's age. That is, to be genuinely counterhegemonic, our understandings, reflections, and actions must be based on the needs of community members as they are contextualized and revealed by them.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Analytical Questions for Data Analysis

Research Questions

1. What principles and philosophies define the purpose of Chicano studies programs?
2. What desired results were established for students in Chicano studies programs?
3. When was the document created?

Analytical Questions

4. For what purposes were the document created (social, political, educational)?
5. Who was the intended audience?
6. What was the document used for?
7. What does it say about the people who created it?
8. What does it say about the philosophy and values of Chicano studies?
9. Who is not the intended audience?
10. Who and what is not represented in the text?
11. What is omitted from Chicano studies programs?

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MANUSCRIPT TWO: BEYOND IN/VISIBILITY: A DECOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF 21ST CENTURY K-12 ETHNIC STUDIES POLICIES

Abstract

In the last decade, K-12 ethnic studies policies have been the face of both controversy and hope. This study examines K-12 policy and curriculum documents from three states that passed ethnic studies bills: California, Indiana, and Oregon. Drawing on a decolonial approach to policy analysis, I consider how ethnic studies policies define ethnic studies in K-12 and the extent to which current conceptualizations of ethnic studies align with the intellectual lineage of the field. Data sources include the legislative texts, state promotional curriculum materials, and media documents from California, Indiana, and Oregon. The trends in this paper demonstrate that despite valuable efforts to engage ethnic studies, policy and curriculum materials from California, Indiana, and Oregon contain serious shortcomings. These findings provide early evidence of the orientations that undergird ethnic studies policies in three leading states. This paper contributes to ethnic studies policy scholarship and serves as a cautionary note against colonial education models. In closing, I call on the critical engagement with the history and core tenets of the field.

Introduction

In 2021, the California Department of Education adopted the first-ever Ethnic Studies[6] Model Curriculum. The purpose of the model curriculum is to support the implementation of ethnic studies as either a stand-alone elective or to be integrated into existing history–social science and English language arts courses (California Department of Education, 2021a). However, early iterations of the model curriculum were not absent of criticism. The first draft of the model curriculum became the center of controversy in California in 2019. Although ethnic studies scholars designed a model curriculum that was based on the original intent of ethnic studies in 1969, critics, especially right-wing lobbyists, challenged the focus on the four foundational groups of ethnic studies: African Americans, Latinxs, Asian/Americans, and Native Americans (Fensterwald, 2020). Furthermore, concerns were raised about the radical and complex nature of ethnic studies language and concepts. As a result, the model curriculum was revised several times, leading to the resignation of original members of the California Model Curriculum Advisory Committee from the model curriculum.

Following the passage of the official model curriculum, the curriculum continued to be the face of controversy. In 2021, the Californians for Equal Rights Foundation sued the California Department of Education for allegedly including an Aztec prayer in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (Taketa, 2021). According to opponents, In Lak'ech imposes religious prayer and barbaric concepts (Dreher, 2021). However, ethnic studies scholars would argue that In Lak'ech, the Mayan philosophy, "Tú eres mi otro yo / You are my other me," is an affirmation that promotes the positive values of respect, self-reflection, and empathy among

[6] When referring to the title of a document or a specific department/program, I capitalize 'ethnic studies.' When referring to the academic discipline in general terms, I do not capitalize.

students (Acosta, 2007, 2014). Although state officials denied the lawsuit's allegations, they agreed to remove In Lak'ech from the model curriculum.

For many ethnic studies scholars, the controversy around the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum speaks to the broader political project of white supremacy. As we know today, education has become the battleground for what gets taught and how it gets taught. Policies have become both a tool and a weapon for public education. As researchers have suggested, education policy is a political activity (Afflerbach, 1994) in which groups "contest, mobilize, pressure, persuade and negotiate quid pro quo" (Johnson, 1999, p. 29).

As ethnic studies policies continue to grow nationwide, we must contend with the question of what is ethnic studies? And most importantly, the tension between policy and pedagogy, how will we live up to the legacy of the ethnic studies project? This paper seeks to gain greater insight into how ethnic studies is defined in K-12 ethnic studies policies and the extent to which current conceptualizations of ethnic studies align with the intellectual lineage of the field. Examining policy is vital as it shapes curriculum at the national, state, and local levels of education (Leonardo & Grubb, 2013). Thus, I ask the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of 21st century ethnic studies K-12 initiatives?
2. What principles define ethnic studies in K-12 legislative documents?
3. What are the learning objectives for students in K-12 ethnic studies policy documents?

To date, no research documents this phenomenon. The results from this study will inform public policy formation and state legislators seeking to create ethnic studies policy that aligns with the field.

Literature Review

Ethnic studies refers to the interdisciplinary study of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color[7] experiences, perspectives, and ways of knowing (Hu-DeHart, 1993). The field of ethnic studies emerged in the 1960s from a demand by Black, Indigenous, and students of Color for a relevant, meaningful, and affirmative education (Hu-DeHart, 1993). In this section, I provide an overview of the current literature on ethnic studies. But, before discussing the literature on ethnic studies, it is necessary to grasp the historical context that has shaped schooling in the United States. So, I begin my review by providing a brief history of the legacy of colonialism in U.S. schooling. Next, I review the history of ethnic studies in higher education to provide an overview of its origins and purpose. Then, I review research on ethnic studies instruction to provide a baseline of how the philosophies, goals, and values shape teaching and learning.

The Legacy of Colonialism in U.S. Schooling

The purpose of public schooling in the U.S. has been to "Americanize" those perceived as "other" (Ogbu, 1991) through the process of forced assimilation, deculturalization, and segregation (Anderson, 1988; Spring, 2016; Tyack, 1974). One of the primary instruments for maintaining the legacy of colonialism in U.S. schools is curriculum. The curriculum, that is, what is taught to students, has been used as a vehicle for social control and reproduction (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2004; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). In this section, I discuss the common trends or narrative tropes found in social studies curricula, specifically. A review of social studies literature illustrates the overrepresentation of White experiences, the illusion of progress, and simplistic representations of Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

[7] Throughout this paper, I use the umbrella term Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) to refer to people and communities who self-identify as such or are assigned this label within the racial taxonomies imposed by ongoing (settler) colonialism, capitalism, and other Euro-centric projects of domination. Other terms that I use interchangeably are "historically marginalized peoples," "racialized peoples" and "colonized peoples."

Analyses of social studies curricula demonstrate that mainstream social studies curricula continue to center White experiences. One of the ways this is done is through the overrepresentation of White figures. For example, in a study of 20 social studies and language arts texts, Sleeter (2016) found that Hispanos (European "conquistadors") held more reputable roles, like senators, soldiers and artists while darker-skinned Latinxs appeared in "less respectable" roles like field worker, labor union supporter and food server. In addition, analyses of social studies standards show the promotion of mainstream storylines supported by White patriotism. In the same study, for example, New Mexico's Social Studies Standards for 5th and onward emphasized storylines about the west that highlight U.S. presidents, acts of congress and wars.

Another common theme in analyses of social studies curricula is the illusion of American exceptionalism. Historians describe this phenomenon as the narrative of progress (Cronon, 1992; Foner 1999), in which history is framed as a linear process. The narrative of progress framework has especially been useful for analyzing discussions of race/ethnicity in U.S. history. Using this framework, research suggest a myth of racial progress, where racial equality is presented as a finished project (Banks, 1989; Barton & Levstik, 1998; Foner, 1999; Foster, 1999; Wills, 1996; Zimmerman, 2002). For instance, the Civil Right Movement in U.S. history textbooks is often touted as an event where racial equality was achieved (A. Brown & Brown, 2010; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). This narrative could be further from the truth, however, given the ongoing forms of systemic violence against Black people, specifically. The narrative of racial progress in social studies curricula, then, is a myth that positions the U.S. as a progressive nation, free of racism.

Research also shows that while visibility of BIPOC groups has increased, historical narratives continue to subscribe to simplistic ideas of these groups. Latinx peoples, for instance, are often presented as a monolith, with an overwhelming concentration on Mexican-origin peoples (Noboa, 2005). Other groups such as Arab Americans are often depicted as foreigners within the context of 9/11 (Eraqi, 2015). Indigenous views are also commonly erased or distorted by White settler ideas. A common historical account found in history textbooks, for instance, purports the myth that the U.S. is an "immigrant nation," erasing the presence of the original stewards of this land (Calderon, 2014).

Overall, a review of social studies curricula uncovers how "traditional school curricula teach the values, beliefs, and knowledge systems that support colonization" (Sleeter 2010, p. 194). As numerous scholars have pointed out, social studies curricula advance Eurocentric ideologies that are rooted in White experiences. Narrative tropes also include messages of racial progress that dismiss ongoing systemic oppression. Finally, although the visibility of historically marginalized groups has increased, these narratives rarely go beyond superficial references or celebrations. Together, these underlying assumptions about Black, Indigenous and people of color form part of a systematic problem that ethnic studies directly contest.

A Brief History of Ethnic Studies

The ideological origins of ethnic studies can be traced as early as the 1900s. Several scholars advocated that the histories, perspectives, and contributions of marginalized peoples, including African Americans, Asian/Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Chicanx/Latinx, and Native Americans, should be included in mainstream disciplines (Okihiro, 2016). Black intellectuals Carter G. Woodson and W.E. B. Du Bois, for instance, critiqued the educational system in the U.S. (Du Bois, 1996) and suggested the study of the African American experience (Woodson,

1933). To that end, the mere idea that marginalized peoples were worthy of shaping their history on their terms can be credited to the early works of many Scholars of Color from the 1900s.

Although the ideological roots of ethnic studies can be linked to the works of many scholars of color in the early 1900s, the fight for ethnic studies as an official academic field began in the 1960s. Between 1968 and 1969, Black students organized protests on nearly 200 college campuses (Kendi, 2012). They demanded support from institutions to (1) create a program based on the study of race, (2) that universities rethink the purpose of education, (3) that curriculum reflects the histories of Blacks, (4) that Black students be given a leading role in the production of scholarly knowledge (Kendi, 2012). Soon after, other ethnic groups followed suit (Okihiro, 2011). Chicanxs[8], Asian/Asian Americans and Native students critiqued the traditional curriculum, which did not account for their racialized experiences as Third World peoples[9] (Kendi, 2012; Okihiro, 2016). In this way, ethnic studies represented a pathway to challenge American institutions and reconstruct marginalized peoples historically omitted histories (Hu-Dehart, 1993; Kendi, 2012).

The Role of Ethnic Studies in Decolonizing Education

Ethnic studies seeks to recover and restore the perspectives, histories, and epistemologies of historically marginalized peoples (Hu-DeHart, 1993; Yang, 2000). Although ethnic studies emerged from a demand by Asian/Asian American, Black, Latinx, and Native American students for relevant education, it is more than the inclusion of communities of Color who "too had heroes and great civilizations" (Okihiro, 2016, p. 150). In reviewing the literature, I argue that the ethnic

[8] The term "Chicano" is used throughout the paper to pay homage to the radical contributions of the Chicano Movement in the 1960s. When I do not reference specific names of programs from the 1960s, the "x" is substituted for a/o as a way to describe the range of gender identities present within Mexican-origin communities.
[9] Third World Peoples is a term that many ethnic studies advocates used during the 1960s Ethnic Studies Movement. The term can be traced to the works of Afro-Caribbean scholar Frantz Fanon.

studies curriculum has three significant goals. First, ethnic studies aim to challenge colonial discourses of teaching and learning. Second, ethnic studies attempt to affirm students' development of the self. Third, ethnic studies aims to enact social change by centering the needs of the local community. In this section, I discuss the research on ethnic studies teaching.

Decolonial Frameworks

Ethnic studies aims to disrupt colonial paradigms of teaching and learning by centralizing the knowledge and perspectives of historically excluded groups. To achieve this, ethnic studies educators employ decolonial practices (De los Ríos & Ochoa, 2012; Halagao, 2004; Sleeter, 2011). Decolonial practices recognize "oppression in its multiple forms and then takes action in the classroom to interrupt cycles of oppression" (Fernandez, 2019, p. 34). Beyond interrupting cycles of oppression, teachers use decolonial pedagogies to challenge colonial ideologies ingrained in students to promote self-love (Acosta, 2007; M. Gonzalez, 2019).

A decolonial approach allows teachers to center narratives that have been historically excluded. For example, Valdez (2018), a fifth-grade teacher in Los Angeles, reconstructed the mandated curriculum to center Indigenous and African peoples. In doing so, students learned how Indigenous and African peoples worked together to resist the colonization of Latin America. A decolonial lens, then, allows ethnic studies educators to bring historically omitted narratives to the forefront, resulting in the destabilization of white supremacist narratives.

Employing a decolonial lens also grants teachers the opportunity to deconstruct settler colonial frames. For example, a kindergarten teacher in Oakland, California, created a year-long interdisciplinary curriculum that explored immigration and nativism through a multifaceted lens (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). As part of the curriculum, the teacher differentiated the meaning of migrant, immigrants, and native (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Decolonial practices, then, enable

teachers to reject settler colonial frames by recognizing the original stewards of the land (Calderon, 2014b; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). In other words, ethnic studies recovers and reconstructs what has been historically omitted within traditional discourse and institutions to rupture colonial paradigms.

Another way that teachers use decolonial practices is to challenge students' colonial perspectives and provide a pathway for healing (Acosta, 2007; David et al., 2017). Gonzalez (2019), a kindergarten teacher, for instance, used a decolonial lens to "interrogate self-hate, a primary strategy of colonization" (p. 235). This was important because, according to Gonzalez, it is not uncommon for students to draw themselves with blue eyes and blond hair. As such, Gonzalez engaged students in an activity where they mixed paint until they created a color that matched their skin and associated a positive adjective with their skin tone. Through this activity, students rejected Western beauty standards and recognized their power. A decolonial lens, in this sense, supports teachers' efforts to challenge hegemonic ideologies and rectify the harm that colonialism has systematically inflicted on historically marginalized peoples. Altogether, ethnic studies is not simply about replacing dominant discourses with non-dominant content. Challenging colonial paradigms include interrogating colonial systems and ways of thinking.

Student-centered Learning

To contest colonial models of teaching and learning, ethnic studies teachers also adopt student-centered approaches, including culturally relevant and asset-based pedagogies, that elevate student voice, knowledge, and culture (Cammarota, 2016; De los Ríos, 2013; Jocson, 2008; Romero et al., 2009; Sosa-Provencio et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2008). Coined by education scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant pedagogy advocates situating student culture and funds of knowledge at the center of the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

An asset-based approach focuses on the strengths that students bring to the classroom and uses those strengths to build on students' talent and potential. Through culturally relevant pedagogies and asset-based approaches, educators hope to affirm students' cultural identity and agency.

Jocson (2008), for example, reveals how a Filipino high school teacher in the South Bay of California drew on Kuwento, a Filipinx oral tradition, to make the learning relevant to Filipinx students. Using Kuwento, the teacher engaged students in narratives of historical events, such as the Spanish-Philippine-American War. Furthermore, it allowed students to explore the complexity of being Filipinx American in present-day contexts. In this way, Kuwento, as a culturally relevant tool, assisted in tapping into students' cultural assets while validating students' membership in the class.

Another way that teachers adopt student-centered approaches is by employing an asset-based approach. Through an asset-based approach, teachers build on student strengths, opening the doors for students to gain agency in their learning process (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). For instance, De los Rios's (2013) sheds light on an immigration unit where students planned a community procession to raise awareness about anti-immigrant sentiments in California. As part of this, students took the lead in contacting local laborers and planning the event. Through such engagement, students developed the confidence to lead social justice movements and felt a stronger sense of belonging in the classroom. Her study suggests that when teachers treat students as knowledge producers and change agents, students develop the agency to determine what is best for them and their communities. However, for this to be possible, teachers must be willing to restructure power relations in the classroom. Thus, powerful ethnic studies teaching involves reconfiguring colonial models of education.

Community Responsive Practices

Beyond decolonial and student-centered pedagogies that challenge Eurocentric paradigms, ethnic studies centralizes students' local context(s). To support students' local contexts, ethnic studies teachers adopt community-responsive pedagogies (Begay et al., 1995; Jocson, 2008; Lipka et al., 2008; McCarty, 1993; McCarty & Lee, 2014). Community responsive pedagogy is a method of teaching that is responsive to "the material conditions particular to a student's lived experience in their local community and the histories that created that experience" (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). By drawing on students' local context(s), teachers can better serve their classrooms' students, families, and communities.

One of the ways that teachers use community responsive pedagogies is by collaborating with members of the local community. For example, Lipka et al. (2008) report on the Yup'ik-centered math curriculum in Alaska, also known as the Math in Cultural Context (MCC) curriculum. The curriculum was designed with Yup'ik elders and teachers. However, the collaboration with Indigenous elders did not stop in the curriculum design. Yup'ik community elders also contributed to the evaluation of teachers. Through a community responsive lens, the ancestral, Indigenous, and familial knowledge take precedent in the design and implementation of ethnic studies. Similarly, in Arizona, the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) at Rough Rock Elementary invited community elders to share their perspectives on Navajo culture, language, and tribal sovereignty (McCarty, 1993). This collaboration provided teachers with a curriculum that included local knowledge about Navajo students' culture, such as insects and insect people in Navajo creation stories (Begay et al., 1995). Ethnic studies, then, invites community members and families to take an active role in developing ethnic studies learning.

Another way ethnic studies teachers use community responsive pedagogies is to encourage students to imagine new possibilities in their communities. To do this, teachers engage students in project-based activities that consider a systematic analysis of power and inequity (Akom, 2011; Cammarota & Romero, 2006; de los Ríos, 2017; Gutstein, 2007; L. Kwon & de los Ríos, 2019; Okihiro, 2016). The purpose is to equip students with the skills and abilities to enact change in their respective communities. Gustein (2007), for instance, engaged Latinxs seventh graders in an analysis of systemic racism using real-world math problems. As part of this investigation, students used proportional reasoning (decimals, fractions, ratios, and percentages) to explore how racism contributes to the disproportionate mortgage rejection rates for Blacks and Latinxs in Chicago. Community-responsive pedagogies go beyond teaching students to read, write, or solve math problems. Meaningful ethnic studies bridges real-life issues with subject area skills.

In sum, the research in this review provides compelling evidence about the potential of K-12 ethnic studies. First, ethnic studies is more than integrating non-Eurocentric narratives to replace the Eurocentric curriculum. Ethnic studies disrupts paradigms and discourses of power by drawing on decolonial practices. Second, ethnic studies aims to nurture self-empowerment by drawing on culturally relevant and asset-based pedagogies. Finally, a hallmark of ethnic studies lies in community responsive pedagogies, which situate the local knowledge and context(s) of racialized communities at the forefront of learning. Together, ethnic studies seeks to grow student leaders that can create change in their communities.

As ethnic studies continues to emerge in K-12 settings, research that documents the process of policy development and implementation is necessary. Most importantly, research investigating how policy captures the intellectual lineage of ethnic studies will be essential. That

is, how is the mission of ethnic studies conceptualized in K-12 policy? How are the goals (outlined above) defined in K-12 policy? This paper responds to this call by examining present-day ethnic studies policies through a decolonial lens. To date, no research documents this phenomenon. By gaining a deeper understanding of current ethnic studies policies, this paper seeks to offer insights into the construction and policy intent of ethnic studies.

Conceptual Framework

Considering that ethnic studies aim to rupture colonial discourses, I draw on decolonial theory to analyze the mission, values, and objectives proposed in K-12 ethnic studies mandates. Broadly, decolonial theory describes the intellectual work articulating a rejection of Eurocentrism (Lugones, 2010; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000). The goal of decolonial theory is to interrogate the social foundations of power emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath (Dei, 2000). In this framework, I explore two fundamental concepts for understanding decolonial thought: 1) eurocentrism and 2) liberation.

Eurocentrism: The Coloniality of Knowledge

Before examining the critical dimensions of decolonial theory, it is necessary to confront the histories of domination that constitute the European colonial project. I briefly discuss the dominance over the Third World, leading to the ascendency of dominant epistemic traditions. Fanon & Philcox (2004) articulates the Third World as a collective subject bound by the struggle for liberation. Specifically, the Third World includes the three continental spheres of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. While a thorough review of the history of Eurocentric epistemic traditions is beyond the scope of this study, it is helpful to consider the imprint of mainstream cannons of knowledge on the educational landscape.

To understand the establishment of Eurocentric canons of knowledge, we must first expose a hallmark of the European colonial project: cultural imperialism. In its most broad sense, cultural imperialism refers to one country's domination over another through culture. As a phenomenon, cultural imperialism includes the subjugation, dehumanization, and erasure of Third World peoples (Fanon & Philcox, 2004; Grande, 2004; Said, 1995). Indigenous people, for example, were stripped of their land and forced to attend residential schools. As part of this atrocious initiative, education was used as a tool of colonialism to impose Eurocentric cultural values on Indigenous peoples (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019). Thus, Western cannons of knowledge and schooling gained control by dominating Third World peoples, marking the knowledge of colonized peoples as inferior, premodern, and primitive. For example, European and imperial languages, including Italian, Spanish, German, French, and English, rose to power and became known as the ultimate forms of speech in universities. As Ashcroft et al. (2006) put it, education was a "technology of colonialist subjectification…It establishe[d] the locally English or British as normative…" (p. 426). In this way, colonial domination goes beyond the political and economic. It includes the colonization of Third World peoples language practices, culture, and knowledge.

Today, the symptoms of colonialism remain intact. From the continued erasure of Indigenous education (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013) to the policing and disproportionate incarceration of Black and Latinx people (Morris, 2016; Rios, 2011) to the pervasiveness of a Eurocentric curriculum (Brown & Brown, 2010; Calderon, 2014; McNair, 2003; Noboa, 2013; Santiago, 2017), coloniality continues to permeate all facets of the social order in the past and the present. Given that ethnic studies aims to decolonize knowledge, rupturing what has been universally accepted (Umemoto, 1989), it is essential to use a decolonial

lens to analyze how ethnic studies is adopted. In the next section, I explain the vital dimensions of a decolonial framework and how it applies to the implementation of K-12 ethnic studies.

Liberation: Decolonial Theory

While an array of anticolonial perspectives exists (e.g., Young, 2016), I honor the decolonial articulations of Indigenous (Grande, 2004) and Latin American scholars (Lugones, 2010; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000), whose formulations of colonialism are overlooked in mainstream postcolonial studies. Rather than postcolonial theory, primarily taken up in the Western academy (Hall, 1995) decolonial thought from the Indigenous and Latin American traditions interrogates the material and social conditions emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath (Dei, 2000).

The first fundamental goal of decolonial theory is challenging Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism is a cultural phenomenon in which European or Western perspectives are viewed and accepted as a universal truth (Quijano, 2000). Argentinian decolonial thinker, Walter Mignolo, provides a compelling argument for the departure of Eurocentric canons of knowledge, stating that challenging Eurocentrism involves "produc[ing], transform[ing], and disseminat[ing], knowledge that is not dependent on the epistemology of North Atlantic modernity…but that on the contrary, responds to the need of the colonial difference" (Mignolo, 2009, p. 247). A decolonial framework involves destabilizing dominant canons of knowledge by bringing the epistemologies of historically marginalized communities from the periphery to the center (Dei, 2000).

The second fundamental goal of decolonial theory is to transform systems of oppression and restore the harm that these systems have inflicted on colonized peoples. Here, the concept of futurism is useful. While a comprehensive account of the wide-ranging genres of BIPOC

futurism (Dillon, 2012; Womack, 2013) is outside of the scope of this paper, futurism denotes the ways colonized peoples "talk back to colonial tropes by reimagining space exploration from a non-colonial perspective and reclaiming our place in an imagined future in space, on earth, and everywhere in between" (Roanhorse et al., 2017). Engaging a futural imaginary, then, asks, what possibilities arise when current structures of oppression fall apart? By providing opportunities for colonized peoples to imagine, both figuratively and literally, alternate ways of living, we can liberate ourselves on our terms. Thus, a decolonial lens acknowledges the agency that Third World peoples have in fostering sites of resistance and transformation (Fanon & Philcox, 2004).

Methodology

To explore the educational problem of ethnic studies policies and standardization, I use a qualitative research methodology approach that examines the current framings of K-12 ethnic studies in three states: California, Indiana, and Oregon. Specifically, I analyze public records, including ethnic studies legislative bills, curriculum materials, and media articles. Next, I discuss the research questions, sampling, data collection, and analysis used to conduct this study.

Research Questions

This paper examines K-12 ethnic studies policies in three states. I consider the purpose, values, and objectives that predominate K-12 ethnic studies reform texts and the extent to which these align with the philosophical origins, principles, and goals of ethnic studies. Building on my prior study's question, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of 21st century ethnic studies K-12 initiatives?
2. What are the principles that define ethnic studies in K-12 legislative documents?
3. What are the learning objectives for students in K-12 ethnic studies policy documents?

Context

This study examines the legislative texts, curriculum materials, and media documents from three states that passed K-12 ethnic studies bills: California, Indiana, and Oregon. These three states are situated in different geographic locations and provide a unique opportunity to understand how different states address educational reforms. Next, I provide relevant background information to contextualize the texts studied.

California Department of Education

In 2016, California passed Assembly Bill 2016, a mandate requiring the development of a statewide ethnic studies model curriculum. The curriculum will allow students to explore their backgrounds and ethnicities (Fensterwald, 2020). Initially, curriculum model drafts focused on the four foundational groups of ethnic studies: African Americans, Latinxs, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. However, after facing backlash, the model curriculum expanded to include other racial and ethnic groups (Fensterwald, 2020). After several revisions, the model curriculum was approved in 2021. More recently, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 101 into law, requiring all California high school students to take ethnic studies to graduate, starting with the class of 2030 (Hong, 2021). The law is the first to require high school students to take an ethnic studies course to graduate. Situated on the West Coast, California is home to a highly diverse student population. In the 2019–2020 academic year, students in California public schools were 55% Hispanic, 22% non-Hispanic White, 5% Black, 8% Asian, 2% Filipino, 0.5% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 0.4% Pacific Islander (Bibbs, 2018). Thus, California provided an opportunity to explore the development of ethnic studies in a highly diverse state, where most of the student population is Brown.

Indiana Department of Education

In 2017, Indiana passed the Senate Enrolled Act 337, requiring all Indiana high schools to offer ethnic studies as an elective. The Ethnic Studies and Racial Groups bill was introduced "to provide opportunities to broaden students' perspectives concerning lifestyles and cultural patterns of ethnic and racial groups in the United States" (Indiana Department of Education, 2020b). In 2020, Indiana published ethnic studies standards, making it one of few states with approved ethnic studies standards. For many, the passage of ethnic studies in Indiana comes as a surprise. First, Indiana has a majority White student population. In the 2020–2021 academic year, the Indiana Department of Education reported a student racial composition of 66% White, 13% Hispanic, 13% Black, 3% Asian, 0.2% Native American, 0.1% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 5% Multiracial (Indiana Department of Education, 2020a). Second, Indiana has a long-standing history of racism (Fischer, 2016). In fact, according to the Indiana Historical Society, Indiana was home to at least 250,000 card-carrying members of the Ku Klux Klan (Tuohy, 2020). Thus, Indiana provided an exciting opportunity to consider the impact of ethnic studies in a majority White setting with a deep-rooted history of racism.

Oregon Department of Education

In 2017, Oregon passed House Bill 2845, directing the Oregon Department of Education to convene an advisory group to develop ethnic studies standards into existing statewide social studies standards. The bill seeks to provide "the histories, contributions and perspectives of ethnic minorities and social minorities" (p. 1). It is the first bill to require Oregon students in grades kindergarten through twelve to learn about ethnic studies. Still, some scholars find it ironic that Oregon, a state with a long trajectory of blatant racism and anti-Indigeneity, is a forerunner in the ethnic studies movement. In fact, Oregon was a whites-only state until 1922 at

least (Brown, 2017). According to Jackson (2019), this history is crucial as it informs the Oregon curriculum, promoting master narratives such as the migration of Whites via the Oregon territory during the Great Migration of 1843. Although the state of Oregon is experiencing population shifts, most students are White. In the 2019–2020 academic year, students in Oregon public schools were 61% White, 24% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 2% Black, 1% Native American, 0.8% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 7% Multiracial (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.). In this way, Oregon, being the only state to require ethnic studies in K-12, offers an opportunity to investigate how stakeholders outline the mission, goals, and values of ethnic studies for younger grades.

Methods

Data Sources

Data for this study consisted of three sources: policy texts, curriculum materials, and media documents (see Table 2). To select my data, I employed a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is a technique commonly used in qualitative research that identifies and selects information-rich sources that capture the phenomenon under study (Patton, 1999). My sample included primary documents related to ethnic studies bills, such as *Assembly Bill 2016, Assembly Bill 101, Senate Bill 337*, *House Bill 2845,* and press releases from each state's education department. I selected these documents because they provide first-hand information about the legislation, its purpose, target audience, and the implementation timeframe.

Second, I collected curriculum materials, including standards, curriculum guides, and frameworks, developed according to the ethnic studies bill. For example, I selected the *Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards, the Oregon 2021 Social Science Standards Integrated with Ethnic Studies,* and the *California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.* These documents provided

insights into how stakeholders translate policy into instructional materials and learning objectives.

Finally, I collected digital media and public commentary as secondary sources. Secondary sources are those created from primary sources that often describe an event's context, content, and/or authors (University of Illinois Library, 2006). These documents included articles from the *Los Angeles Times, EduTopia, neaToday, EdSource,* and others that report on the new bills in their state. Digital media were an important medium for helping me understand how the public interprets policy. I also collected letters and petitions written by organizations to policymakers. For example, letters and petitions were written by the *API Leaders for the Liberation of Youth, InnerCity Struggle, and Freedom Socialist Party* that called on the passage of an ethnic studies bill in their *state*. These documents assisted me in understanding how public commentary shapes ethnic studies bills.

Table 2. Documents Examined

California	Indiana	Oregon
• Policy: Assembly Bill 2016 • Policy: Assembly Bill 101 • Instructional Material: California Department of Education • Digital Media: Time • Digital Media: The Sacramento Bee • Press Release: California Department of Education • Open Letter: CA Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Teachers, Faculty, and Leaders • Digital Media: National Education Association • Digital Media: EdSource	• Policy: Senate Bill 337 • Instructional Material: Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) • Instructional Material: Apex Learning • Press Release: IDOE • News Release: NAACP of Greater Indianapolis • Digital Media: Chalkbeat • Digital Media: Indianapolis Recorder • Digital Media: The Herald Bulletin Indiana • Digital Media: Bloom Magazine	• Policy: House Bill 2845 • Instructional Materials: Oregon Department of Education (ODE) • Press Release: ODE • Digital Media: Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon • Digital Media: Oregon Public News Service • Digital Media: Medium • Digital Media: Oregon Metro • Digital Media:The Oregonian • Petition: Change.org

Data Collection

I collected the raw data electronically using various online mediums. I began by gathering my primary data samples, which included legislative documents. As I collected legislative texts, I reviewed these texts to understand the dimensions of the bills. For example, California passed Assembly Bill 2016, a mandate that required the development of a statewide model curriculum. In reviewing the legislative text, then, I was able to identify the instructional sources I should search for next. I visited the California Department of Education, Indiana Department of Education, and the Oregon Department of Education websites to locate instructional materials. There, I was able to identify any materials published by the department, such as the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

The digital media analyzed in this study were drawn from the database ProQuest. Using my university's library, I searched for media articles that followed the legislation in each state. As part of my search, I identified articles written by large education organizations like the National Education Association (NEA), as they provided an education perspective. I also identified local newspapers, like the *Indiana Herald Bulletin*, that allowed me to follow the news through the local context lens. As I surveyed digital media sources, I was able to identify organizations that were involved in the process. For example, the Indiana Herald Bulletin described the involvement of the NAACP in Indiana as a pivotal contributor to the bill. As such, I also visited the organization's web page to understand the role of various players in the passage of the bill. Altogether, I collected 35 documents. As I collected data, I wrote descriptive notes detailing important information such as author information, keywords, and emerging observations.

Data Analysis

This study sought to understand the philosophical underpinnings (mission, values, goals) that describe current K-12 ethnic studies policies and how these align with the multiple genealogies of ethnic studies programs from the late 1960s and 1970s. I employed a qualitative textual analysis method. One of the aims of textual analysis is to describe and interpret the content contained in texts (Frey et al., 1999). There are four major approaches to textual analysis. I applied a content analysis technique to understand the meanings associated with messages (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

I began data analysis by reviewing all the content I collected. To do this, I printed all sources and reviewed them, annotating keywords from my research questions, like “goal,” “purpose,” and “objective(s).” I also revisited the descriptive notes I wrote when I collected the data. This helped me refamiliarize myself with the contents and structure of my data.

After a preliminary analysis of the data, I began coding the data using the NVivo software. Guided by Johny Saldaña's (2013) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers,* I coded my data, looked for patterns, and wrote analytical memos to record initial observations that I drew from the data. To support my analysis of the data, I engaged a list of analytical questions I created based on my previous study on the origins and goals of Chicano studies programs from the late 1960s and 1970s (See Appendix A). The questions helped me to determine how current ethnic studies policies align with the intellectual lineage of ethnic studies. For example, a hallmark of Chicano studies and ethnic studies broadly lies in centering BIPOC experiences through first-person perspectives. Therefore, during data analysis, I considered, “how do ethnic studies policies center the experiences of BIPOC groups through the first-

person?" After the first coding cycle, I identified 32 categories (see Appendix B) resulting in codes such as "visibility" and "cultural awareness."

In the second cycle of analysis, I focused on redefining my codes. As part of this process, I relabeled, reclassified, and merged some codes. Abbott (2004) describes this process as "decorating a room; you try it, step back, move a few things, step back again, try a serious reorganization, and so on" (p. 215). For example, one of the codes that emerged from my first round of coding described the goals that were created as a result of ethnic studies policies. Here, I dug deeper to understand what exactly the goal(s) of ethnic studies policies were. This allowed me to identify three goals, including "interrogating systems of power," "build cross cultural awareness" and "foster critical thinking."

In the third cycle of analysis, I focused on refining my data and creating categories. To support this process, I drew on used decolonial theory (Lugones, 2010; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000). Decolonial theory served as a guiding lens to determine codes that described the ways ethnic studies policies challenge Eurocentric forms of teaching and learning, resulting in codes such as "interrogating systems of power" and "community-grounded learning." I repeated this process twice, until I could no longer collapse codes. Then, I asked two colleagues with expertise in this topic to conduct a peer examination of the raw data. As part of this process, my colleagues and I discussed the emergent findings and possible interpretations. This process enabled me to triangulate my data (Merriam, 1998), leading to three major findings.

Findings

My analysis of the data revealed three major findings regarding the current framings of ethnic studies in K-12 policies. First, the ethnic studies policies examined here posit that ethnic studies will serve to bring visibility to groups that have been historically omitted from

mainstream teaching and learning. Second, the two most salient principles that emerge from the three ethnic studies policies that I analyzed are student- and community-centered learning. Finally, the two most salient learning objectives found in these policies are to contribute to students' awareness of the contributions of historically excluded groups and understanding of systems of power.

Visibilizing Historically Omitted Groups

Across California, Indiana, and Oregon, the mission of ethnic studies is described as bringing visibility to historically excluded groups. Following the passage of ethnic studies in California, for instance, the California Department of Education released a statement that read, "today's historic action gives schools the opportunity to uplift the histories and voices of marginalized communities in ways that help our state and nation achieve racial justice and create lasting change" (California Department of Education, 2021b, para. 2) The inclusion of marginalized groups in K-12 is later reiterated in the introduction of the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum "at its core, the field of ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity, with an emphasis on the experiences of people of color in the United States" (California Department of Education, 2021a, p. 5). The curriculum primarily denotes the visibility of historically marginalized groups, including the experiences of people of color in the U.S. Ethnic studies, in this sense, provides an opportunity to bring visibility to racial and ethnic groups, whose voices have been historically omitted.

Similarly, Indiana describes the mission of ethnic studies as illuminating the perspectives and experiences of racial and ethnic groups in the United States. As described in Senate Bill 0337, ethnic studies refer to "the study of ethnic and racial groups" (p. 2). By focusing on the study of various racial and ethnic groups, according to the Indiana Department of Education, this

initiative will “provide opportunities to broaden students’ perspectives concerning lifestyles and cultural patterns of ethnic and racial groups in the United States” (Indiana Department of Education, 2020b, p. 3). Although the legislative bill and press release are less clear about which racial and ethnic groups the study will encompass, the list of resources that is later published on the website of the Indiana Department of Education suggests that these groups may include African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Sikh American and Asian Americans. In this way, the mission of ethnic studies in Indiana is also to provide a better understanding of racial and ethnic groups that have been historically excluded from K-12.

Finally, Oregon follows suit in framing the purpose of ethnic studies as an initiative that aims to elevate the histories, experiences, perspectives, and contributions of groups that have been omitted from education. As indicated in a statement released by the Oregon Department of Education, ethnic studies will “equip students with a more robust historical narrative that centers on the histories, contributions, and perspectives of historically, traditionally and/or currently marginalized communities and individuals” (Oregon Department of Education, 2020, p. 1). Unlike California and Indiana, however, Oregon includes not only racial and ethnic minoritized groups but also “social minorities.” As stated in House Bill 2845, “ethnic studies’” means instruction of public school students in kindergarten through grade 12 in the histories, contributions, and perspectives of ethnic minorities and social minorities.” According to the bill, social minorities include women, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, and individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (HB 2845).

By bringing visibility to historically excluded groups, these initiatives wish to affirm students’ identities, whose narratives have been excluded from K-12 education. This point is reflected in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, “through ethnic studies, students

will gain a deeper understanding of their own identities, ancestral roots, and knowledge of self" (California Department of Education, 2021a, p. 15). Furthermore, by uplifting the experiences of traditionally omitted or misrepresented groups, ethnic studies will provide white students with a deeper understanding of their counterparts. This claim particularly resonates in Indiana, where a high percentage of the white student population exists (Indiana Department of Education, 2020a). As one of the educators who contributed to the bill in Indiana commented, "ethnic studies will help white students avoid negative stereotypes and give students of color in small towns a feeling that they too matter" (Sheridan, 2017). In this way, ethnic studies initiatives will benefit students of color and white students as well.

Finally, in reaffirming student identity, ethnic studies will aid in the disproportionate academic performance rates in education. As stated in the California Assembly Bill 2016, ethnic studies will "increase[e] their performance on academic tests, improving their graduation rates, and developing a sense of self efficacy and personal empowerment." Indiana echoes this sentiment. In a statement by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a key contributor to the passage of the bill in Indiana, "students who are taught relatable, culturally focused lessons are more likely to have higher attendance rates and even higher-grade point averages" (NAACP, 2017). In fact, in persuading legislators and the public, lobbyists in all the states drew on research that points to the positive academic benefits of ethnic studies (California Department of Education, 2021a; NAACP, 2017; Tegethodd, 2017). Thus, ethnic studies will affirm the identity of historically marginalized students, increase cultural competency, and contribute to closing the "achievement gap."

Student-centered Learning

A core principle of current ethnic studies is student-centered learning. Across the states I reviewed, every state highlighted the importance of a learning model that meets students' individual needs. Two characteristics are especially noteworthy within this learning model: student knowledge and cultural assets. The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, for example, encourages ethnic studies educators to value the experiential knowledge that students have, "educators should view student-lived experiences as assets and understand that they themselves may not always have the answers and therefore should seek opportunities to learn from their students to create room for teachable moments" (California Department of Education, 2021). By recognizing student knowledge, educators must then be willing to let go of traditional models of learning that position the teacher as the sole expert and instead make room for students' lived experiences to guide instruction. The second characteristic of student-centered learning involves highlighting and tapping into student identities. Specifically, current ethnic studies framings underscore the importance of culturally relevant teaching. The FAQ – Ethnic Studies by the Oregon Department of Education, for example, says

> Ethnic studies, by definition, embrace the understanding of culture as central to learning. School districts and teachers should continue training in educational practice which acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures, to help offer equitable access to education for students from all cultures.

Thus, a student-centered model of learning means valuing students' cultural assets and actively adopting culturally relevant approaches that honor students' unique cultures and backgrounds. Ultimately, by prioritizing student-centered learning in ethnic studies initiatives, students can see themselves, especially those whose voices have been historically excluded, affirming their sense of belonging in school: "by affirming the identities and contributions of marginalized groups in

society, ethnic studies help students see themselves and each other as part of the narrative of the United States" (California Department of Education, 2021).

Community-centered Learning

The second guiding principle of current ethnic studies initiatives is community-centered learning. A community-centered model emphasizes the importance of connecting a community's needs to education. This was particularly prevalent in California and Oregon. Both California and Oregon explicitly name 'community' in their instructional materials. The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum states that "ethnic studies teaching and learning is meant to serve as a bridge between educational spaces/institutions and community" (California Department of Education, 2021a, p. 4). To promote a community-centered model of learning, three characteristics seem to be especially important: community needs, collaboration, and vulnerability. First, community-centered learning calls on teachers to become familiar with the context they serve. The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, for instance, provides numerous suggestions for applying community-grounded practices. One of these suggestions encourages teachers to survey the context in which they teach by engaging with the following questions:

> Is the course being taught in a district where parents or community members are unfamiliar with the field? Is the course being taught in a school with a widening opportunity gap? How comfortable and/or experienced are students with explicitly discussing race and ethnicity? Is the course being taught during a moment where racial tensions at the local and national level are beginning to impact students? (California Department of Education, 2021a, p. 8).

According to the model curriculum, gaining insight into the demographics, needs, interests, and current events of the community will allow teachers to craft a course that is responsive to the context they serve.

A community-centered approach also calls on teachers to cultivate a sense of community in the classroom. To develop a sense of community, teachers must value vulnerability and collaboration. Vulnerability in ethnic studies is critical because many of the issues raised are often closely related to the material realities of the students. Therefore, both students and teachers must be "comfortable with sharing pieces of their own identities and lived experience" when discussing "contentious issues and topics" (California Department of Education, 2021). This is different than traditional fields because it invites both parties to be vulnerable with each other, "unlike traditional fields, ethnic studies often requires both students and educators to be vulnerable with each other given the range of topics discussed throughout the course." In doing so, a greater sense of community is cultivated that allows for complex topics to be discussed. Finally, community-centered learning prioritizes collaboration. Collaboration is vital in an ethnic studies class because one of the ultimate goals of ethnic studies, as indicated in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and the Oregon Ethnic Studies Standards, is to provide students with opportunities to understand the issues facing their communities and the role they can take as community members to address the problems in their community. For example the Oregon standards indicate, "identify ways that students can take informed action to help address issues and problems at school and/or in the community" (Oregon Department of Education, 2021, p. 4). Therefore, teachers should create opportunities for students to collaborate in community-engaged projects, where they can work together to find solutions to the issues in their communities.

Student Learning Outcomes

While there was a range of learning outcomes, the two outstanding learning objectives in the three states for students were: 1) identifying and honoring the contributions of historically excluded groups and 2) interrogating systems of power.

As mentioned throughout this paper, the purpose of current ethnic studies policies in California, Indiana, and Oregon are to bring visibility to historically excluded groups. Doing so would allow students who belong to these groups to feel affirmed and validated, and white students to learn more about their peers. One of the ways these policies will bring visibility to historically marginalized groups is by exposing students to how these groups have contributed to the American fabric. As California Governor Newsom put it, "ethnic studies broadly examine the history, culture, politics, contributions, and prejudices facing ethnic and racial ethnic groups nationwide" (Fensterwald, 2020). The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, for instance, suggests that the contributions of Black Americans be highlighted by:

> Learn[ing] about Black excellence in all areas of American history by exploring the African American and African Diaspora experience, from the precolonial ancestral roots in Africa to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and enslaved people's uprisings in the antebellum South to the rich contributions in literature (California Department of Education, 2021).

Learning about the contributions of Black Americans, then, spans from the ancestral legacy that has shaped Black Americans to movements of resistance that have fostered change. Similarly, Indiana and Oregon emphasize the importance of students being able to learn how historically underrepresented groups have shaped society. Indiana, for instance, divided the ethnic studies standards into four themes. One of these themes is 'Historical and Contemporary Contributions.' Students learn about how racial and ethnic groups have contributed to the past and present. Specifically, the standards ask students to think about the economic, intellectual, social, cultural, and political contributions of these groups, "examine historical and contemporary economic,

intellectual, social, cultural and political contributions to society by ethnic or racial group(s) or an individual within a group. (Indiana Department of Education, 2021). Oregon also created ethnic studies standards for grades K-12 that focus on minoritized groups' historical and contemporary contributions. Oregon's approach to honoring the contributions of historically marginalized groups takes it a step further, though, by specifically creating standards that highlight the contributions of Indigenous peoples, "examine the historic and current contributions and relevance of indigenous cultures" (Oregon Department of Education, 2021). Together, these learning targets showcase what it means to bring visibility to historically omitted groups and what students should gain from such exploration.

The second learning objective of current ethnic studies policies is to engage students in examining systems of power. Exposing students to systems of power in an ethnic studies class is essential because these institutions inextricably shape everyone's lives. Oregon is one state to underscore the importance of examining power systems explicitly. The legislative bill mandated the Ethnic Studies Advisory Group to "promote critical thinking regarding the interaction between systemic social structures and ethnic minority or social minority status" (HB 2845). As such, the advisory group developed several standards across K-12 that seek to engage students in analyzing systems of power. Beginning with early grades, ethnic studies standards aspire to introduce students to important concepts, "define equity, equality, and systems of power." For high school students, the analysis of systems of power digs even deeper into different systems

> Analyze the impact of the use of slavery and other exploitative labor systems (e.g., indenture, peonage, convict leasing, sharecropping, bracero program, migrant labor, Chinese immigrants labor, contemporary prison labor) on the development of the U.S. infrastructure, wage-competition, trade, and standards of living in local, state, and global markets (Oregon Department of Education, 2021).

Compared to other standards, this standard describes the specific exploitative labor systems and pushes students to connect with how these systems impact other structures. Similarly, Indiana developed high school standards that specifically aim to provide students with the tools to assess systematic forces. In the 'Contemporary Lived Experiences and Cultural Practices' theme, one of the standards is "students assess how social policies and economic forces offer privilege or systematic oppressions for racial/ethnic groups related to accessing social, political, and economic opportunities." Based on this standard, students can draw connections between how social policies privilege some groups while underserving others. The California Department of Education also echoes other states' efforts to engage students in analyses of systems of power. The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum states that students will engage in "contemporary issues and systems of power that impact their lived experiences and respective communities. They will engage in meaningful activities and assignments that encourage them to challenge the status quo and reimagine their futures." Ultimately, by having students examine systems of power in ethnic studies, they hope that students will gain the tools to challenge dominant systems.

Beyond the learning objectives, Oregon and California also developed learning targets consistent with community-centered learning. As I mentioned in the previous section, engaging a community-grounded principle is ultimately concerned with addressing and transforming issues in communities. Both Oregon and California emphasize the importance of equipping students with the skills to take social action in their community. For California, this means engaging students in learning that allows them to investigate ways that they can improve their community. For example, the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum suggests:

> While being aware of these dynamics is important, working to address them within the course is also key. For example, an ethnic studies educator might create a lesson around

> education inequality and the opportunity gap that gets students to reflect upon the many factors that have contributed to disparate student success across racial and class lines. Students could analyze "student success," "college readiness," and standardized test data from their district or others across the state, read case studies that identify some of the community assets that contribute to student success, and reflect upon their own experiences, drawing connections to collected data or scholarly analyses, if any (California Department of Education, 2021a, p. 8).

This example helps illustrate how teachers can engage students in investigating social issues and how to connect these back to students' personal experiences. The Oregon Department of Education builds on this by developing standards that will assist students in understanding their community's practices and those of others. In the newly revised Social Science Standards Integrated with Ethnic Studies, for instance, one of the learning targets for first graders says, "identify, affirm, respect, and explain diverse cultural heritage, songs, symbols, and celebrations of my community and the diverse social and ethnic groups in Oregon and the United States of America" (Oregon Department of Education, 2021, p. 3). This standard emphasizes the value of students' ability to understand their community's practices and traditions. Furthermore, Oregon's standards encourage students to learn about their communities and communities other than their own, "describe how the local community's identity shaped its history and compare to other communities in the region." With this in mind, ethnic studies in California and Oregon involves engaging students in learning that can create material changes in their respective communities.

Discussion

In this manuscript, I examined the mission, principles, and learning objectives of current K-12 ethnic studies policies in California, Indiana, and Oregon. My analysis of state legislature and promotional materials illustrates that these policies do not live up to the vision of ethnic studies. First, current framings of ethnic studies aim to bring visibility to historically excluded groups. Yet, continue to subscribe to superficial ideas of simply visibilizing groups without any

diligent intention of centering their experiences, ways of knowing, and futurities. Second, my findings reveal that these policies aim to raise awareness of historically excluded groups. However, ethnic studies goes beyond cross-cultural awareness. Ethnic studies aim to instill a sense of solidarity across racial and ethnic groups. Finally, while research shows that ethnic studies has a positive impact on student achievement, a question remains: What does the success of ethnic studies look like, and how will the success of ethnic studies be measured? Such questions force us to grapple with the original intentions of ethnic studies. In this section, I focus on these three themes and what they reveal about the underlying orientation of current ethnic studies policies. I conclude with a call for ethnic studies scholars and allies to be vigilant of initiatives that overshadow the decolonial orientation of ethnic studies.

Undoing Visibility, Cross-cultural Awareness, and Academic Achievement

One of the ways in which ethnic studies policy materials fall short of their promise is by prioritizing visibility at the expense of authentically engaging the core groups of ethnic studies. Indiana Senate Bill 337, in particular, describes the purpose of ethnic studies as "the study of racial and ethnic groups." Based on this statement, it is unclear which racial and ethnic groups this includes. Authentic engagement with the history of ethnic studies would have acknowledged the four foundational groups that contributed to the establishment of ethnic studies. The birth of ethnic studies in American universities and colleges emerged from a demand by Blacks, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Chicanxs/Latinxs to unapologetically center their perspectives, histories, experiences, and ways of knowing. Through their demands, the establishment of Black Studies, Native Studies, Asian American Studies, and Chicano/Latino Studies as scholarly disciplines was possible. Visibility, in this sense, involves engaging

historically marginalized groups absent from the historical lineage of the ethnic studies movement.

The ambiguous categorization of racial and ethnic groups reveals a political strategy shaped by white interests. In not specifying who is included in ethnic studies no one can critique the curriculum of purposefully excluding a racial/ethnic group. This is a form of race evasiveness. Race evasiveness denies the significance of race (Annamma et al., 2017). By framing the study of minoritized groups in broad terms, policymakers and lobbyists likely sought to avoid resistance from agitators that often infiltrate social justice movements. In other words, the censoring of racial and ethnic groups renders ethnic studies more palpable for a white audience. While sidestepping may be a strategy to circumvent statewide resistance, this framing is fueled by White interests or what critical race scholar, Derrick Bell, called interest convergence. Interest convergence describes the process of change, only when it benefits the interests of Whites (Bell, 1980). Similarly, ethnic studies efforts obscure racial/ethnic categories for the sake of protecting White interests. Doing so, however, ignores the legacy of ethnic studies and, most importantly, continues to decenter the unique histories, perspectives, and ways of knowing of Blacks, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinxs. In this way, my findings unearth common characteristics found in modern forms of coloniality.

Further, current framings of ethnic studies aim to bring visibility to historically excluded groups without centralizing their experiences and ways of knowing. Across texts, words like “uplift,” “elevate,” “explore,” and “foreground” are used to describe the purpose of ethnic studies (California Department of Education, 2021; Oregon Department of Education, 2017). The Oregon Department of Education (2021), for example, describes the purpose of the policy as follows “ethnic studies seeks to elevate the perspective, contributions, and histories of

individuals and groups that are often neglected in the examination of social science topics" (p. 4). While this statement acknowledges the need to uplift historically omitted narratives, there appears to be a lack of investment in centering historically excluded groups through first-person accounts, as ethnic studies initially intended. The only document that explicitly includes the word 'center' is the California curriculum, "center and place high value on the pre-colonial, ancestral knowledge, narratives, and communal experiences of Native People/s and people of color and groups that are typically marginalized in society." In this way, the study of racial and ethnic groups becomes just that – the study of racialized objects.

My analysis, then, uncovers how ethnic studies policy materials bring visibility to BIPOC groups while simultaneously rendering them invisible. This lies in the approach to remedy the historical omission of minoritized groups by promoting the study of these groups rather than centering BIPOC groups as producers of knowledge. In doing so, this allows political elites to continue to exert power over the knowledge production of these groups (Said, 1995). In other words, admitting or accepting historically marginalized peoples as knowers can potentially upset the existing power dynamics that benefit dominant groups. Therefore, it becomes easier to promote 'the study of' rather than the production of knowledge by minoritized groups. Overlooking the knowledge production of BIPOC groups reifies the erasure of BIPOC outlined in Dotson's (2011) theorization of epistemic violence. According to Kristie Dotson, positioning colonized peoples as 'others' or objects of study is a classic feature of coloniality (Mignolo, 2007). For this reason, I warn against conflating exposure or visibility with progress.

My findings align with social studies scholarship that calls on a need to critically engage the narratives of African Americans (Busey & Walker, 2017; King, 2019; Vickery, 2017; A. N. Woodson, 2016), Latinxs (Cruz, 2002; Santiago, 2017), and Native Americans (Craig & Davis,

2015; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Shear et al., 2015). As one of the first studies of its kind, my findings similarly provide insights into the ways ethnic studies policies tokenize or erase the experiences, histories, and epistemologies of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Visibility, then, does not reach far enough to bring BIPOC groups to the fore as knowers and producers of knowledge.

Second, current definitions of ethnic studies evade social justice concepts for the sake of inclusion. These evasions are embedded in official legislative texts and state promotional materials, where solidarity is substituted with words like “appreciation,” “work across difference,” and “increase understanding.” For example, Indiana describes the rationale for ethnic studies as an effort to “broaden students’ perspectives” (Indiana Department of Education, 2020, p. 3). In a similar sentiment, the California Assembly Bill 2016 says that the objective of ethnic studies is to “prepar[e] pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures” (AB 2016). Ethnic studies, however, is not simply about broadening students’ perspectives or increasing an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures. Ethnic studies hinges on the concept of solidarity. Unlike cross-cultural awareness, solidarity encourages students to critique systems of oppression, understand their relation to one another, and join in transforming systems. The appeal to ethnic studies, then, is not to promote cross cultural solidarity but increase cross-cultural competencies necessary for the global world.

My analysis, then, illustrates how ethnic studies is hijacked to advance the purpose of globalization. Certainly, cross-cultural competency is a valuable skill in the 21st century. However, cross-cultural competency only begins to scratch the surface of raising awareness about peoples and cultures (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). The idea becomes “how will ethnic studies increase cross-cultural awareness to support the demands of a growing multicultural society?” Rather than “how will ethnic studies create coalitions and solidarity between racial and

ethnic groups to eliminate institutions of power?" The idea that ethnic studies will offer rewards and benefits toward globalization undergirds neocolonial logics by subsuming ethnic studies to an individual skill that students should possess to be competitive in the modern global economy. In doing so, questions of solidarity, equity, race, Indigeneity, and decolonial resistance are negated for the purpose of globalization. To that end, I argue that contemporary ethnic studies policies capitalize on social problems to benefit existing systems of domination.

The cooptation of social justice terms builds on previous studies that have uncovered the prevalence of white supremacy in multicultural and bilingual education policies (Flores, 2016; Gulson & Webb, 2016; Valdez et al., 2016). According to Melamed (2011), liberal justifications for multiculturalism provide "weak terms of social solidarity, enjoining Americans to affirm a positive cultural pluralism by recognizing that 'we are the world'" (Melamed, 2011, p. 35). From a liberal multicultural orientation, prejudice is viewed as an individual problem that can be ameliorated through education that focuses on the positive attributes of racial and ethnic groups (Sleeter, 1995). Through this tradition, then, it is not a surprise that ethnic studies is similarly framed as a resource for expanding globalism (Lindholm-Leary, 2000).

Finally, ethnic studies policies perpetuate colonial metrics of learning that compromise the decolonial leanings of ethnic studies. Colonial metrics of learning adhere to the belief that students are successful and well-rounded if they master academic subjects (Steele, 1997). This belief dates to the eugenics movement. While the history of the eugenics movement is outside of the scope of this paper, it is important to recognize its enduring impact on public education. Eugenic ideology, a symptom of coloniality, operates under the pretense that some groups of people are superior to others (Galton, 1883). One of the enduring effects of the eugenics movement is how we measure the intellectual worth of students. Coined by Francis Galton,

eugenic ideologies were used to develop tools in the 1910s, such as IQ tests, that measured the intellectual competence of groups of people. Eugenics disproportionately tracked students into separate and unequal education courses (Au, 2009). Although eugenic laws are repealed, symptoms of the eugenics movement continue to exist in public education, including the ethnic studies policies and materials I examined.

One of the ways that ethnic studies policies reproduce colonial metrics is by citing research that demonstrates the academic effects of ethnic studies. Across every state I examined, research is emphasized to indicate the potential of educational reform. The California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, for instance, has a section titled "the benefits of ethnic studies" that outlines the social and academic values of ethnic studies (California Department of Education, 2021, pp. 9-11). Here, research is used as a political strategy to justify the merit of ethnic studies. In doing so, however, ethnic studies is stripped of its decolonial possibilities and considered valuable only to the extent that it advances positive academic outcomes.

Another way that these policies reproduce colonial logics is by conflating the liberation of BIPOC students with academic achievement. The California Assembly Bill 2016, for example, says that ethnic studies will "increase[e] their performance on academic tests, improving their graduation rates, and developing a sense of self efficacy and personal empowerment. Similarly, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a key contributor to the passage of the bill in Indiana, declared that "students who are taught relatable, culturally-focused lessons are more likely to have higher attendance rates and even higher-grade point averages" (NAACP). In this way, mastery of academic subjects is prioritized over students' self-actualization. All in all, my findings reiterate what ethnic studies

scholars have said for decades, ethnic studies gains legitimacy only if and when it succumbs to standardization (Cacho, 2010; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021).

So, what happens when ethnic studies gets co-opted? When concepts like self-determination, solidarity, and liberation are reduced to palatable concepts like cross cultural awareness, we risk conflating progress with uncritical understandings of Black Indigenous and People of Color. On the surface, these may appear to be optimistic and good-intentioned. However, as historians and social studies scholars have contended, they are dangerous because they purport a façade of progressiveness while maintaining institutions of power intact (Barton & Levstik, 1998, 2004; Cronon, 1992; Foner, 1999; Levstik, 1995; Santiago, 2017). As such, I argue that while ethnic studies policies appear to be well-intentioned, the underlying ideologies produce more harm to decolonizing education.

When we apply colonial logics to ethnic studies, we also reinforce standard educational metrics that disproportionately affect BIPOC peoples. For example, although research on ethnic studies shows positive academic benefits, I am suspicious of lobbyists, policymakers, and even social justice scholars, who use empirical research to demonstrate the discipline's relevance and legitimacy. I fear this enlists us to become institutional gatekeepers to nondominant evidence, interdisciplinary epistemologies, and alternative ontologies. Furthermore, suppose we allow ethnic studies to gain a seat in public education only if it can increase academic achievement. In that case, we perpetuate Black, Indigenous, and Student of Color deficit orientations. In other words, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are only deserving of ethnic studies if it advances the competing demands of public education. So, we must ask, are we willing to trade off the anti-colonial leanings of ethnic studies for small gains? A decolonizing project refutes increasing academic achievement or raising cultural competency. The value and success of ethnic studies

lies in building new possibilities for post-imperial life rooted in transformative solidarity (Liberated Ethnic Studies, n.d.)

Overall, the trends in this paper demonstrate that despite valuable efforts[10] to engage ethnic studies, policy and curriculum materials from California, Indiana, and Oregon contain serious shortcomings. First, these texts fall short of centering historically excluded groups by simply bringing visibility to these groups. Second, policies compromise the integrity of ethnic studies by promoting cross-cultural awareness, rather than solidarity. Third, current iterations of ethnic studies advocate for academic achievement, rather than decolonization. Through a decolonial analysis, it becomes evident that a colonial agenda is prioritized. More precisely, I uncover the hidden discourses of whiteness, multicultural liberalism and globalization that undergird ethnic studies policy materials in California, Indiana, and Oregon. Although my research focuses on three states, my findings provide early evidence of the serious consequences when colonial logics overshadow decolonial projects. For this reason, this paper not only contributes to ethnic studies policy scholarship but also serves as a cautionary note.

In closing, I call on the critical engagement with the history and core tenets of the field. While the history of ethnic studies is beyond the scope of this study, I present the following guidelines as desirable understandings of authenticity. These understandings were developed based on my analysis of California, Indiana, and Oregon ethnic studies policy materials.

1. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Futurisms: A commitment to the liberation of historically marginalized peoples through first-person efforts.

[10] It should be noted that I provide the critiques in this paper not to dismiss the efforts of community members, educators, students, and policymakers, who have contributed to advancing anti-racist initiatives, but to accentuate a need for more critical treatment of the field of Ethnic Studies.

2. Community Accountability: A commitment to holding harmful systems of oppression accountable and working towards eliminating these systems.
3. Transformative Solidarity: The belief that people are interconnected and thus, have a collective responsibility to the well-being of a community.

Conclusion

By contextualizing the ethnic studies movement, both historically and contemporarily, I argue that current conceptualizations of K-12 ethnic studies compromise the integrity and intellectual capacity of the project. I suggest that if we wish to maintain the intellectual legacy of ethnic studies, we must unapologetically center the experiences, histories, ways of knowing, and futurities of historically racialized peoples. As one of the first studies to investigate the implementation of recent ethnic studies legislation, the findings from this paper offer policymakers' critical insights into how ethnic studies policies can capture the authentic essence of the ethnic studies decolonial project.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: List of Analytical Questions

1. **Challenging Eurocentrism**
    a. Whose perspectives are represented in ethnic studies policy?
    b. How are the perspectives of BIPOC communities centered (or not)?
    c. In what ways are the futurities/liberation of BIPOC groups imagined (or not)?

2. **Community-rooted Understandings**
    a. How is community defined in ethnic studies policy?
    b. Is community a valuable feature of ethnic studies policy materials?
    c. How does the text describe community needs?
        i. Local context? Related to pandemic? Demographic data? Religion? Literacy? Language? Race?
    d. Do instructional materials advise educators to apply a community-driven angle?

3. **Self-empowerment and student-centered learning**
    a. Do instructional materials suggest student-centered pedagogies? (i.e. culturally relevant, humanizing, asset-based)
    b. Do ethnic studies policies seek to affirm student's identity?

4. **Ethnic Studies Concepts and Themes**
    a. To what extent to the policies take up ethnic studies terms? (i.e. self-determination, self liberation, imperialism, colonialism)
    b. What themes are discussed in instructional materials?
    c. What core understandings are outlined in ethnic studies policy documents and instructional materials?

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MANUSCRIPT THREE: "TRIAL AND ERROR": A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF INDIANA TEACHERS' INTERPRETATIONS OF ETHNIC STUDIES STANDARDS

Abstract

Little is known about the challenges K-12 teachers face when establishing ethnic studies courses. This paper examines the perspectives of ethnic studies high school teachers in Indiana regarding the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards. I ask (1) What interpretations do teachers draw from the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards? (2) How do teachers' experiences, values, and beliefs influence their understandings of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards? (3) How does teachers' local context shape their perceptions of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards? The primary data source is two semi-structured interviews with seven high school teachers in Indiana. The data indicate that four factors play a role in how teachers interpret the standards: (1) level of experience (2) racial/ethnic identification (3) local context and sociopolitical climate. I contend that policy implementation is a complex arena and teachers, as policy actors, play a significant role in the enactment of policies. These findings suggest a need for locally based policy approaches to better support ethnic studies teachers.

Introduction

In 2010, Arizona's Republican Governor Jan Brewer signed House Bill 2281, banning Mexican American/Raza Studies (MARS) in Tucson. According to state officials, the program "promoted the overthrow of the U.S. government." State officials did not anticipate that the banning of MARS would incite a nationwide K-12 ethnic studies movement. Over the last decade, more than nine states in the U.S. have introduced statewide initiatives that establish some form of K-12 ethnic studies (Kwon, 2021). These states include California, Connecticut, Nevada, Oregon, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. Before statewide legislation, however, many school districts adopted their own ethnic studies courses or graduation requirements. For instance, El Rancho Unified School District became the first school district in California to pass an ethnic studies high school graduation requirement in 2014. Shortly after, two large districts–Los Angeles Unified School District and San Francisco Unified School District–also adopted a resolution to make ethnic studies a graduation requirement. In sum, the K-12 ethnic studies movement includes more than nine states that have introduced legislation supporting K-12 ethnic studies (Kwon, 2021).

In 2017, Indiana joined the movement to implement ethnic studies in K-12 settings, making it one of the first states in the Midwest to adopt ethnic studies legislation. After more than four years of organizing, Senate Bill 337 was passed, mandating all Indiana high schools to offer an ethnic studies elective course at least once every school year. A year later, the Indiana Department of Education released the nation's first statewide ethnic studies standards.

While statewide legislation and district resolutions can be considered victories, implementing ethnic studies policies comes with new challenges. First, there is a limited presence of teachers trained in ethnic studies (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Second, research

on effective preparation practices for ethnic studies teachers is still developing (Cammarota & Romero, 2014; Daus-Magbual, 2010). To that extent, how we prepare teachers is crucial to ensure core understandings of the discipline are reflected in the course. Furthermore, attention to how teachers enact ethnic studies in different school settings is necessary if we wish to support all teachers implementing ethnic studies policies.

This paper responds to the urgency of preparing teachers by examining the experiences of ethnic studies teachers in Indiana, a location that has received minimal attention in ethnic studies literature. Specifically, this study sought to understand how teachers interpret ethnic studies policies and what contributes to their understanding. This is important because, as research shows, teachers are not passive receivers of policies; they are active participants in policy initiatives (Riveros & Viczko, 2015). Thus, the research questions that guided this study include:

1. What interpretations do teachers draw from the Indiana Ethnic Studies[11] Standards?
2. How do teachers' experiences, values, and beliefs influence their understandings of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards?
3. How does teachers' local context shape their perceptions of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards?

Literature Review

Ethnic studies refers to the interdisciplinary study of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experiences, perspectives, and ways of knowing (Hu-DeHart, 1993). The discipline emerged in the 1960s from a demand by Black, Indigenous, and students of Color for a relevant, meaningful, and affirmative education (Hu-DeHart, 1993). This section provides an overview of the current literature on ethnic studies. Specifically, I review research on ethnic studies K-12

[11] When referring to the title of a document or a specific department/program, I capitalize 'ethnic studies.' When referring to the academic discipline in general terms, I do not capitalize.

teachers. My goal here is to provide insights into teachers' stances and how those shape their practices.

Ethnic Studies K-12 Teachers

Research on what ethnic studies teachers do in the classroom and how their personal and pedagogical development informs their teaching is still developing. Based on the limited research surveyed in this review, four outstanding practices of ethnic studies teachers became evident. First, ethnic studies teachers exhibit a strong sense of purpose in critiquing and dismantling systems of oppression. In doing so, teachers draw on decolonial approaches to interrogate systems of oppression in the classroom. Second, ethnic studies teachers value and nurture self-empowerment through student-centered pedagogies. Third, teachers emphasize building relationships with the community through community-responsive practices. Finally, evidence suggests that strong ethnic studies teachers engage in critical self-reflection on an ongoing basis.

Decolonial Approaches to Teaching and Learning

Ethnic studies is the only academic discipline to be conceptualized for historically marginalized peoples and by historically marginalized peoples. The discipline recognizes harmful systems of oppression and aims to disrupt these systems. The work of critical ethnic studies educators follows this vision. Ethnic studies teachers have a strong sense of purpose, whose responsibility is to disrupt dominant teaching and learning paradigms. To achieve this, ethnic studies educators employ decolonial practices (De los Ríos & Ochoa, 2012; Sleeter, 2011; C. Valdez, 2018). Decolonial practices recognize "oppression in its multiple forms and then takes action in the classroom to interrupt cycles of oppression" (Fernandez, 2019, p. 34). In

addition, teachers use decolonial pedagogies to challenge colonial ideologies ingrained in students to promote self-love (Acosta, 2007; M. Gonzalez, 2019).

A decolonial approach allows teachers to center historically excluded narratives. For example, Valdez (2018), a fifth-grade teacher in Los Angeles, reconstructed the mandated curriculum to center Indigenous and African peoples. In doing, students learned how Indigenous and African peoples worked together to resist the colonization of Latin America. Ethnic studies teachers, then, use decolonial frameworks to bring historically omitted narratives to the forefront, resulting in the destabilization of white supremacist narratives.

Ethnic studies teachers also employ a decolonial lens to deconstruct settler-colonial frames. For example, a kindergarten teacher in Oakland, California, created a year-long interdisciplinary curriculum that explored immigration and nativism through a multifaceted lens (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). As part of the curriculum, the teacher differentiated the meaning of migrant, immigrants, and native (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Decolonial practices, then, enable teachers to reject settler-colonial frames by recognizing the original stewards of the land (Calderon, 2014b; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013).

Another way that teachers use decolonial practices is to challenge students' colonial perspectives and provide a pathway for healing (Acosta, 2007; David et al., 2017). Gonzalez (2019), a kindergarten teacher, for instance, used a decolonial lens to "interrogate self-hate, a primary strategy of colonization" (p. 235). This was important because, according to Gonzalez, it is not uncommon for students to draw themselves with blue eyes and blond hair. As such, Gonzalez engaged students in an activity where they mixed paint until they created a color that matched their skin and associated a positive adjective with their skin tone. Through this activity, students rejected Western beauty standards and recognized their power. In this sense, teachers

use decolonial pedagogies to challenge hegemonic ideologies and rectify the harm colonialism has systematically inflicted on historically marginalized peoples.

Student-centered Pedagogies

Strong ethnic studies teachers also recognize the importance of building upon students' experiences and perspectives, developing students' sense of agency, and creating caring environments. To do this, teachers adopt student-centered approaches, including culturally relevant, asset-based, and humanizing pedagogies (Cammarota, 2016; De los Ríos, 2013; Franquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; Romero et al., 2009; Sosa-Provencio et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2008). Culturally relevant pedagogy advocates situating student culture and funds of knowledge at the center of the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995). An asset-based approach focuses on the strengths that students bring to the classroom and uses those strengths to build on students' talent and potential. Humanizing pedagogy humanizes students' experiences and casts students as critically engaged, active participants in the co-construction of knowledge (del Carmen Salazar, 2013). Educators hope to affirm students ' cultural identity and agency through culturally relevant pedagogies, asset-based approaches, and humanizing practices.

Ethnic studies educators also draw on students' cultural assets to affirm students' cultural identity and sense of belonging (Akom, 2011; Duncan, 2012; Jocson, 2008; Romero et al., 2009). Jocson (2008), for example, reveals how a Filipino high school teacher in the South Bay of California drew on Kuwento, a Filipinx oral tradition, to make the learning relevant to Filipinx students. Using Kuwento, the teacher engaged students in narratives of historical events, such as the Spanish-Philippine-American War. Furthermore, it allowed students to explore the complexity of being Filipinx American in present-day contexts. In this way, Kuwento, as a

culturally relevant tool, assisted in tapping into students' cultural assets while validating students' membership in the class.

Ethnic studies teachers also build on student strengths, opening the doors for students to gain agency in their learning process (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; De los Ríos & Ochoa, 2012; Romero et al., 2009; Sleeter, 2014; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). To do this, teachers adopt asset-based approaches. For instance, De los Rios's (2013) sheds light on an immigration unit where students planned a community procession to raise awareness about anti-immigrant sentiments in California. As part of this, students took the lead in contacting local laborers and planning the event. Through such engagement, students developed the confidence to lead social justice movements and felt a stronger sense of belonging in the classroom. Their study suggests that when teachers treat students as knowledge producers and change agents, students develop the agency to determine what is best for them and their communities.

Finally, the literature shows that effective ethnic studies teachers are invested in cultivating spaces of care and trust that are rooted in positive student relationships. To produce spaces of care and trust, teachers draw on humanizing practices (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; De los Ríos & Ochoa, 2012; Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; Romero et al., 2009; Sleeter, 2014; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar (2004), for instance, investigated how school structures and teachers’ confidence in students can encourage students’ academic success. Their 5-year ethnography study in a Colorado high school shows that a critical component of students’ success was the humanizing practices teachers enacted. In particular, the Chicano students in the study identified the following elements as key to their success: respeto (respect), confianza (mutual trust), consejos (verbal teachings), and buenos ejemplos (exemplary

models). Thus, powerful ethnic studies educators value positive learning environments where students feel cared for and safe.

Community Responsive Pedagogies

In addition to decolonial and student-centered pedagogies, ethnic studies teachers emphasize connecting the learning to students' local context and material realities. To support students' local contexts, ethnic studies teachers adopt community-responsive pedagogies (Begay et al., 1995; Jocson, 2008; Lipka et al., 2008; McCarty, 1993; McCarty & Lee, 2014). Community responsive pedagogy is a method of teaching that is responsive to "the material conditions particular to a student's lived experience in their local community and the histories that created that experience" (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). By drawing on students' local context(s), teachers can better serve their classrooms' students, families, and communities.

One of the ways that teachers use community responsive pedagogies is by collaborating with members of the local community. For example, in a study on the Yup'ik-centered math curriculum in Alaska, also known as the Math in Cultural Context (MCC) curriculum, Lipka et al. (2008) report that Yup'ik elders and teachers worked together to design a Yup'ik centered curriculum. Yup'ik community elders also contributed to the evaluation of teachers. By inviting community members, ethnic studies teachers can create a course that is better suited for their students.

Effective ethnic studies teachers also use community responsive pedagogies to promote civic engagement among students. The purpose is to equip students with the skills and abilities to enact change in their respective communities. To do this, teachers engage students in project-based activities that consider a systematic analysis of power and inequity (Akom, 2011;

Cammarota & Romero, 2006; de los Ríos, 2017; Gutstein, 2007; L. Kwon & de los Ríos, 2019; Okihiro, 2016). Gustein (2007), for instance, engaged Latinx seventh graders in an analysis of systemic racism using real-world math problems. As part of this investigation, students used proportional reasoning (decimals, fractions, ratios, and percentages) to explore how racism contributes to the disproportionate mortgage rejection rates for Blacks and Latinxs in Chicago. In this way, ethnic studies teachers go beyond teaching students to read, write, or solve math problems. Instead, they connect real-life issues with subject area skills.

Teachers' Critical Self-Reflection

Finally, research shows that ethnic studies teachers' effectiveness hinges on ongoing reflection about their cultural identities, relationship to the communities they serve, and the impact of eurocentrism on their perspectives and sense of self (Baptiste, 2010; Daus-Magbual, 2010; Gomez et al., 2008; Kohli, 2014; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Ullucci, 2011). For example, Sleeter and Zavala (2020) interviewed nine ethnic studies teachers. They found that both teachers of color and White teachers underscored the importance of identity and culture in ethnic studies pedagogies. One of the Black teachers in the study, for example, shared how they used their identity as a resource to elevate culturally relevant pedagogies. On the other hand, White teachers emphasized their responsibility to make anti-racism part of their White identity. Sleeter & Zavala's (2020) research is consistent with the scant available research on ethnic studies teacher. Overall, self-reflection and transformation are essential for ethnic studies teachers.

In sum, the research in this review provides compelling evidence about the strong practices that ethnic studies teachers employ. First, strong ethnic studies teachers have a strong sense of purpose, which includes critiquing systems of oppression. To do this, teachers draw on decolonial perspectives. Second, strong ethnic studies teachers value and nurture self-

empowerment through culturally relevant and student-centered learning. Third, research shows the importance of building relationships with the community through community responsive pedagogies. Finally, evidence suggests that strong ethnic studies teachers engage in ongoing critical self-reflection.

As ethnic studies research develops, it will be imperative to continue understanding ethnic studies teachers' practices. Furthermore, with the surge of ethnic studies policies, it will be crucial to know how ethnic studies teachers make sense of these policies. My research responds to this gap by examining Indiana teachers' interpretations of ethnic studies policies in high school. This paper sheds light on the challenges and strengths of ethnic studies teachers in the Midwest, which will allow us to serve better and prepare teachers.

Conceptual Framework: Interpretive Educational Policy Model

Traditionally, education policy has been examined through the implementation model. The implementation model perceives policy adoption as a hierarchical, top-down, and formal transfer of text into action (Colebatch et al., 2011). Recent scholarship, however, rejects linear views of policy that tend to simplify the processes of policy implementation into categories of design, implementation, and evaluation (e.g., Riveros & Viczko, 2015). Within the interpretive turn of policy analysis, scholarship highlights the complexity of policy processes in the field of education. This line of inquiry addresses the significance of multiple factors in education policy enactment, including teachers' prior knowledge, level of experience, and context.

One of the ways that recent scholarship has expanded education policy research is by examining the influence of teachers' prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences (Beck et al., 2000; Czerniak & Lumpe, 1996; Firestone et al., 1999; Riveros & Viczko, 2015). The studies suggest that teachers interpret policy in conjunction with what they already know. For example,

in a study of state and national assessment policy in Maryland, Maine, England, and Wales, Firestone et al. (1999) found that teachers constructed understandings of the reform ideas that fit within their existing models for mathematics and mathematics instruction (Firestone et al., 1999). As a result, the authors argue that teachers' preexisting understandings and experiences may pose a challenge to innovative policies of change.

Recent studies have also noted the significance of policy actors level of experience in policy interpretation (Gu et al., 2018; Lambert & Penney, 2020; Maguire et al., 2015). In a study of teachers' policy enactments in English secondary schools, for instance, Maguire et al. (2015) found that a teacher's role and position in their school influenced their enactment of policy mandates. For example, beginning teachers were often more focused on meeting the day-to-day responsibilities of a teacher rather than enacting policies. In contrast, the researchers noted that senior teachers were more invested in new policies that they often took the lead on. Their findings suggest that teachers will have different orientations towards policies, depending on their level of experience and roles in the school.

Finally, recent literature demonstrates that context contributes to teachers' sense of meaning and enactment of educational reforms (Braun et al., 2011; S. Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Cohen et al., 2018; Gulson & Webb, 2016; Woolner et al., 2018). In a study of an Africentric Alternative School in Toronto, Canada, Gulson & Webb (2016) found that policy enactment of multicultural reforms involved a negotiation process related to teachers' context. For instance, teachers in low-stake settings were more likely to engage with policies than in high-stake settings. The authors contend that policy cannot be understood outside of, or immune to, neoliberalism. Altogether, recent research points to the multi-dimensional process of education policy implementation.

Teachers' Educational Policy Enactment

In conceptualizing and carrying out this research, I drew on policy enactment. Policy enactment is a creative process during which "policy actors" involved in policy implementation interpret, translate and enact policy within their specific context (Braun et al., 2011). Through this conceptual orientation, normative notions of policy implementation that position policy as a singular and static event are rejected (Colebatch et al., 2011). Instead, policy is understood and examined as a collection of policy documents adapted through their enactment in a social context(s). In thinking about policy in this way, researchers embrace the "messiness" of policy activity (e.g., Maguire et al., 2015).

I began this study with the underlying assumption that policy interpretation is a process of negotiation influenced by multiple factors. Moreover, my conceptual approach toward policy enactment foregrounds teachers as key actors in the policy process rather than passive subjects. Rooted in this understanding, policy enactment as a conceptual and analytic tool helped me uncover the intricacies of policy implementation. By adopting a policy enactment perspective, I paid attention to not only the content of policy documents but also the way this content is taken up and understood by teachers on the ground. Thus, by acknowledging and examining the complexities of policy activity, I understood and captured the varying factors that influenced teachers' responses in this research study.

Methodology

The research presented in this study examined the interpretations of ethnic studies teachers in Indiana. Attempting to investigate teachers' understandings of ethnic studies policy called for a qualitative study. Through a qualitative approach, I collected interviews that

documented teachers' perspectives, thoughts, feelings, experiences, and sense of meaning (Archibald et al., 2019).

Research Questions

This study aimed to understand *what* interpretations teachers make and *how* they draw meaning from the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards. Guided by my conceptual framework, which positions policy implementation as an iterative and multi-dimensional process, I engaged in the following questions:

1. What interpretations do teachers draw from the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards?
2. How do teachers' experiences, values, and beliefs influence their understandings of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards?
3. How does teachers' local context shape their perceptions of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards?

Context

All of the data for this study was collected within the context of Indiana. I selected Indiana for three reasons: 1) statewide ethnic studies standards, 2) teacher and student racial demographics, and 3) sociopolitical context.

In 2017, Indiana passed Senate Enrolled Act 337, mandating Indiana high schools to offer an ethnic studies elective course at least once every school year. In 2018, Indiana approved ethnic studies standards, making standards available to Indiana teachers (Indiana Department of Education, 2018). The Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards include a definition of the ethnic studies course and four thematic standards: cultural self-awareness, cultural histories within the U.S. context and abroad, contemporary lived experiences and cultural practices, and historical and current contributions. Standards are likely to play an important role in implementing ethnic

studies for several reasons: 1) standards establish measurable goals, 2) standards inform instruction, and 3) standards are often used to measure achievement. Given that teachers' interpretations impact classroom instruction, this study investigated the meanings teachers attribute to the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards.

In addition to the standards, Indiana's teacher and student composition provided a compelling case for investigating the implementation of K-12 ethnic studies. Indiana is home to at least 78,000 full-time educators, most of whom are White (Indiana Department of Education, 2020a). In the 2019-2020 academic year, teachers in the Indiana Department of Education were 92.7% White, 4.4% Black, 1.7% Hispanic, 0.6% multiracial, 0.5% Asian, and less than 0.1% Native American. In terms of student racial demographics, Indiana is home to a majority White student population. In the 2020–2021 academic year, students in Indiana public schools were 66% White, 13% Hispanic, 13% Black, 3% Asian, 0.2% Native American, 0.1% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 5% Multiracial (Indiana Department of Education, 2020). Considering that teachers of Color have historically taught ethnic studies in primarily Black and Brown school settings (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015), the findings from this study offer insights how ethnic studies teachers make sense of ethnic studies policies in predominantly White school settings.

Finally, Indiana's sociopolitical context offered a suitable site to understand how ethnic studies is implemented in politically conservative contexts. Indiana has been a historically Republican state. For the last three consecutive presidential elections, for instance, most of Indiana's registered voters have voted for a Republican candidate ("Indiana Presidential Election Results 2020: Live Results and Polls," 2020). One of the factors contributing to Indiana's conservative context is its long-standing history of racism (Fischer, 2016). Indiana has been home to white settler colonialism and Ku Klux Klan activity. White protestant KKK members

established ideals of what it meant to be an "American" (Madison, 2020). These beliefs have a lasting effect in Indiana, as Indiana historian James H. Madison noted in *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*. In fact, during the period that I interviewed teachers, a bill was introduced that could potentially limit what teachers could say in the classroom about race, sex and religion. Although the bill died in the Senate, this effort speaks to the potential challenges of implementing ethnic studies in a majority Republican state.

Despite Indiana's history as a predominantly White and mostly Protestant state (Madison, 2016), Indiana is not absent of resistance movements that have challenged racism. For instance, Black communities in Indianapolis have historically pushed back against the political and social structure in Indianapolis (Pierce, 2005). In addition, Latinxs in Indiana have challenged anti-immigrant discourses by establishing spaces of belonging in Indiana (Vega, 2020). In this way, while Indiana has remained Republican, the organized efforts of marginalized communities cannot be ignored. Altogether, Indiana's sociopolitical background offered valuable insights into the ways ethnic studies policies are interpreted and enacted within this given context.

Methods

Participant Sampling

Recruitment and selection of teacher participants occurred in the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022. Because I was interested in exploring Indiana teachers' interpretation of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards, I recruited participants that met the following criteria:

1. Adult (18 years or older)
2. Be a teacher in Indiana
3. Currently or previously taught an ethnic studies high school course in Indiana

Based on these criteria, I carefully recruited participants that could provide insights into the perspectives of ethnic studies teachers who are engaging with ethnic studies texts for the first time or who already have.

To recruit participants, I used purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. Purposeful sampling is a technique that qualitative researchers use to recruit participants who can provide information-rich about the phenomenon under study (Patton, 1999). Snowball sampling is a technique that allows participants to identify other potential participants from their networks (Yin, 2014). Using purposeful sampling, I identified potential participants from the data sources in my previous study, which included local newspapers written about the ethnic studies policy. I then reviewed the high school districts' public-school directory and contacted those I identified via email. I also posted a flyer on media platforms that Indiana teachers engaged with, such as the Ethnic Studies K-12 Educators Facebook page and the Indiana Council for the Social Studies. Finally, I recruited one participant through a previous participant's network.

Participants

Table 3 . Overview of Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Years Teaching	Subject Area	School
Maddy	White	1–3	Social Studies	Metropolitan
Monica	Black	3–5	Social Studies	Suburban
Jason	White	6–8	Social Studies	Suburban
William	White	17–19	Social Studies	Metropolitan
Amelia	White	17–19	Social Studies	Suburban
Peter	White	3–5	Social Studies	Rural
Angela	White	9–11	Social Studies	Suburban

This paper focuses on seven teachers who agreed to participate in the study (See Table 3). Each teacher has been assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Each participant currently teaches or has previously taught an ethnic studies high school course in Indiana. All teachers

indicated that social studies was their core subject area. Below, I provide more details about each participant.

Maddy is a teacher in a midsize metropolitan high school in Indiana. Maddy began their teaching career during the pandemic as a middle school teacher teaching math and science. After realizing that teaching math and science was unfulfilling, Maddy applied and obtained a teaching position in a new high school. Prior to teaching, Maddy worked in several community-based organizations in Chicago, where they had the opportunity to organize against the incarceration of Black youth. These experiences, they said, provided them with an awareness of the disproportionate rates of incarceration against Black and Brown peoples. Maddy is now in their second-year teaching, teaching currents events and ethnic studies. Maddy is the only teacher in this study that serves primarily Black and Brown students. Their school's racial composition is 49.7% Black, 43.2% Hispanic, 3.8% Multiracial, 3% White, 0.1% Asian, 0.1% Native American.

Monica is a teacher in a small suburban high school in Indiana. After realizing that "it is extremely hard to get a teacher license in Illinois," Monica decided to move to Indiana, where they were hired to teach ethnic studies. The school they serve has a student racial composition of 45.1% White, 26% Hispanic, 22.1% Black, 4.6% Multiracial, 1.6% Asian, 0.3% Native American. As the only Black teacher at a Catholic high school, Monica emphasized how their personal experiences with racism and sexism served as the impetus for their ethnic studies course. Invested in tackling racism, Monica designs lessons that allow for the interrogation of white privilege, stereotypes, and different identities.

Jason is a teacher in a large suburban high school in Indiana. Having grown up in a affluent suburb of Illinois, Jason explained how their early childhood experiences– traveling from the suburbs to the city– were one of the first observations they made about the resource

disparities across different communities. Interestingly, though, Jason became an educator on accident. Initially, Jason entered college as a business major, but quickly grew a distaste for the field. So, when they decided to change their major to 'undecided,' they were instructed to select a major, and with little thought, they noted education. Immediately, though, Jason realized that education courses allowed them to dig deeper into the personal passions they had. Jason is now in their seventh-year teaching, including four years of ethnic studies. Jason's school has a student racial composition of 71.1% White, 8% Black, 8.4% Hispanic, 6.6% Asian, 5.3% Multiracial, 0.3% Native American.

William was a former teacher in a large metropolitan high school in Indiana. William began their teaching career at the age of 39. Prior to becoming a teacher, William worked as a program and executive director for two community-based organizations. Through these experiences, William grew a passion for working with youth and decided to pursue a teaching career. They were the first teacher in their school to design and offer an ethnic studies course for 18 years. William credits their social studies teacher for their motivation in ethnic studies. Their former teacher offered a "minority course" in the late 1960s. In this course, William had the opportunity to learn about different racial and ethnic groups, including Blacks, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans. One of William's guiding principles is building meaningful relationships of care and trust with their students. William's school has a current student racial composition of 74.2% White, 7.9% Multiracial, 7.1% Black, 6.4% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 0.3% Native American, and 0.1% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

Amelia is a teacher in a large suburban high school in Indiana. Having a background in anthropology, Amelia had a keen interest in working in museums. Although they had an opportunity to work at a museum after completing their master's, they quickly learned that a

career in museums were limited. As a result, Amelia decided to return to school and pursue a teaching career. They have been teaching for seventeen years, including four years of ethnic studies. Amelia enjoys teaching ethnic studies because it allows them to dig deeper into topics that courses like U.S. history normally do not cover. Other courses that they have taught include, sociology, current events, and AP U.S. history. Their school has a student racial composition of 92.2% White, 3.3% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, 0.7% Asian, 0.5% Black, 0.2% Native American.

Peter is a teacher in a large rural high school in Indiana. Like many of the teachers in this study, Peter did not initially choose to become a teacher. They graduated from college with a communications degree. Limited in career options, Peter decided to enroll in a transition program and earn a teaching license in social studies. They have been teaching for five years now, including three years of ethnic studies. Peter teaches in a school where the student racial composition is 92.5% White, 2.9% Hispanic, 2.7% Multiracial, 1% Asian, 0.4% Black, 0.3% Native American, 0.2% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. In the past, they have also taught world history.

Angela is a teacher in a large suburban high school in Indiana. Angela knew early in high school that they wanted to give back to their community or as they described, "make the world a better place," so they decided they wanted to go into teaching. Angela, who is in their eleventh-year teaching, says that they are committed to equity and decided to teach ethnic studies because they wanted to challenge themselves and teach a course that allowed for the inclusion of more perspectives that are not always prevalent in the other courses they have taught, such as comparative religions and world history. This is their third-year teaching ethnic studies. One of the quotes that Angela stands by is "knowledge is only as good as you share it with others."

Angela teaches in a school where the student racial composition is 72% White, 9% Black, 7.8% Asian, 6.5% Hispanic, 4.4% Multiracial, 0.2% Native American

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected using semi-structured interviews (Rabionet, 2011). Discussions were suitable for this study because they offered an opportunity to capture teachers' perspectives, thoughts, feelings, experiences, and sense of meaning (Archibald et al., 2019). I conducted a total of 16 interviews in the spring of 2022. Each participant engaged in two interviews. The data in this paper includes 14 interviews from the seven participants that completed the study. Conducting two interviews with each participant was necessary to explore my research questions, which concerned *what* interpretations teachers drew and *how* they created those meanings. Each interview was conducted on zoom and lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Below, I describe the process of each interview in more detail.

In the first interview, I sought to understand *what* meanings teachers drew about Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards. To do this, I used a think-aloud approach. Think-aloud activities helped gain insight into participants' working memory processes, which refers to the concurrent reasoning in verbal form (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). Thus, think-aloud activities allowed me to gauge teachers' initial thoughts and interpretations of the standards. The interview itself consisted of three parts (see Appendix A). In part one, I asked general open-ended questions, such as "what motivated you to become a teacher?" to build rapport with participants and capture general demographic data. By opening the interview this way, I established a human-to-human (interpersonal) relationship with the respondent, which has been shown to provide a greater breadth of data than more structured methods (Fontana & Frey, 2000). For part two, participants engaged in a trial of the think-aloud activity. The purpose here was to support participants'

familiarization with the think-aloud activity. Here, I asked participants to read (out loud) a brief excerpt from the standards and report the first three things that came to their minds. This was extremely useful as it allowed participants to "practice" the activity, but it also served as initial data for the study. After supporting participants' familiarization with the think-aloud task, I guided participants through the entire standards. Following Charters' (2003) suggestions, I divided the standards into units to allow participants to focus on one unit at a time. After reviewing all Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards, I invited participants to reflect on the standards. Sample questions included, "overall, what do you think of the standards" and "if you had to make one change to the standards, what would that be?" Throughout each interview, I wrote descriptive notes about my observations that I was able to use later in the second interview.

The second interview investigated *how* teachers construct meaning (see Appendix B). I conducted the second interview within a week from the first interview. I was interested in how teachers' values, beliefs, experiences, and local context shaped their perceptions of the standards. Thus, in the second interview, I engaged teachers in questions about their beliefs, values, and experiences in and out of the ethnic studies classroom. I began the interview by revisiting the main points from our previous interview, such as "what are some thoughts you have after our first conversation?" This allowed participants to share anything else related to the first interview. Furthermore, it allowed me to member check participants' responses by asking clarifying questions about specific elements from the first interview. Following this initial conversation, I asked questions about their motivations for teaching ethnic studies, professional development, and personal experiences that may have contributed to their perceptions of the standards, their local context, and their experiences in the ethnic studies classroom. Sample questions included "are there any personal experiences that contributed to your understanding of ethnic studies? If

so, do you mind sharing these experiences?" and "as an ethnic studies teacher, what are three takeaways you want your students to gain after taking your class? Can you describe them to me, please?" I concluded the interview by answering any additional questions that participants had. All interviews were then uploaded to a secured digital cloud. I completed data collection in March 2022.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis are an iterative process of making (Saldaña, 2013). The purpose is to find answers to the research question(s) by developing codes and categories from the data to formulate themes and, ultimately, findings (Merriam, 1998). In March 2022, I began data analysis using a thematic analytic approach (V. Clarke & Braun, 2014). Thematic analysis refers to the search for themes that emerge from describing a phenomenon in the data. The process involves identifying emerging themes through "careful reading and rereading of data" (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258).

I began by reviewing and editing each transcript carefully. As I reviewed each transcript and listened to the audio recording, I wrote descriptive notes based on ideas, connections, and data observations. The purpose was to familiarize myself with all the data and begin to synthesize patterns. After I edited all transcripts, I uploaded the transcripts to Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software program.

Upon completing the preliminary analysis, I began the first cycle of analysis which consisted of open coding each interview. The objective here was to group large bodies of data and begin to identify patterns. As I open coded each transcript, I drew on my conceptual framework. Through a lens that positions teachers as policy actors, I focused on the limits and possibilities of policy interpretations. For example, because I was interested in the role that

context played (or not) in teachers' interpretations, I paid particular attention to phrases that described the *local context, sociopolitical climate, or geographic location*. As a result, I created a code called 'local contexts,' which captured teachers' discussions of the local context. After I open coded all data, I created a qualitative codebook, a table that contains a list of codes. The purpose of the codebook is to provide definitions for codes to maximize coherence among codes (Creswell, 2013). The codebook included generated 49 codes and a general description of what each code meant.

In the second cycle of analysis, I engaged in line-by-line coding. Line-by-line coding involves digging deeper, refining my codes, and reassembling data intro groupings based on relationships and patterns within and among the codes I identified in the first round. The objective here was to analyze the data thoroughly to capture the phenomenon better. For example, under the code 'local context,' I began to tease the meanings teachers associated with the local context. In this case, teachers described how the local context shaped their curriculum, while other quotes described how the sociopolitical climate shaped their interpretations of the standards. Given this distinction, I reclassified codes and renamed codes to fit the pattern better. After engaging in line-by-line coding, I revisited my codebook to redefine my codes and keep myself organized (See Appendix C). I also wrote analytic memos throughout each cycle to conceptualize the main concepts and themes (Saldaña, 2013).

In the third cycle of analysis, I engaged in code categorization and theme identification. My goal was to develop "code families" or categories to reach themes. To do this, I reviewed all codes on NVivo and began identifying significant phenomena or "core categories" in the data. In doing so, I combined and collapsed codes to form categories. The categories included four main topics: context, race, level of experience teaching, and personal and professional experiences.

Following the core categories, I identified the main themes. Using a policy enactment perspective, I paid particular attention to the ways policy was interpreted differently and the factors that contributed to this. Through this frame, I articulated three themes that influenced teachers' responses to the standards: 1) level of experience, 2) racial/ethnic identification, and 3) local context and sociopolitical climate. To ensure the accuracy of my interpretations, I consulted an external auditor. Their role was to provide an objective assessment of my findings by asking questions about my data analysis, and reviewing the relationship between my research questions and the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

This study investigated teachers' interpretations of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards. The standards contain four thematic strands. Each standard represents one of the following strands: cultural self-awareness, cultural histories within the U.S. context and abroad, contemporary lived experiences and cultural practices, and historical and contemporary contributions. The findings from this study demonstrate that four factors play a role in how teachers interpret the standards: 1) level of experience, 2) racial/ethnic identification, and 3) local context and sociopolitical climate.

Rigid vs. Flexible Standards

"What I might do is define things a little bit more in the standards, but then, then I wouldn't because the more you define it then, the more restrictive it becomes." -William

The findings in this study reveal an evident tension in the standards. Based on teachers' responses, a question that stood out is whether the standards should be flexible or rigid? On the one hand, early career teachers found the standards vague and challenging. On the other hand,

mid-career and late-career teachers viewed the standards as open-ended, leading to more freedom.

Not Specific Enough

Maddy, an early career White teacher in a metropolitan city, frequently used “vague” to describe their opinion of the standards.

> One issue I've had with the standards is just how vague it was because it was designed to be able to be used for anything. So that means they couldn't be specific in, “hey, you should hit this when you're in this topic.” So that's something that definitely stands out to me.

For Maddy, the little detail in the standards made it more challenging to design an ethnic studies course as they[12] weren’t sure of the core understanding of ethnic studies or, as they defined, “big things to hit on.” As an added layer, they shared how the lack of professional support and the limited resources further contributed to their frustration with the standards.

> If I remember correctly, there is like a resource document somewhere within like the standard site on the Indiana website. But I have found it very hard. Like it's hard to just get a list of resources without it being specified of, like for studying civil rights history with, among the Latinx community. Like, go to this resource. For me, it's not helpful because I can't just go through every single source one by one.

The resource guide Maddy referred to is available on Indiana’s Department of Education web page, and it includes a list of resources about Black, Hispanic, and other groups. Although a resource guide is available for teachers, Maddy expresses frustration over what is expected of them and the limited time they have available to do what the standards require. As a result, Maddy often commented on the viability of exploring various racial/ethnic groups in one semester.

> I'm put in this situation where I'm trying to teach stuff that should be one semester. And like trying to figure out how to cut things out when I'm also like if I'm cutting this out. Like, for example, I felt really bad in particular about like, cause I just kind of went in the

[12] To promote gender inclusive language and the anonymity of participants in the study, I use gender neutral pronouns such as “they” throughout my findings and discussion.

> order and like ended up like, okay, we're gonna combine everything into the final, which was messed up, like I'm cutting out Asian Pacific Islander history.

Here, Maddy laments not being able to cover all “the racial/ethnic groups,” including Asian Pacific Islander history. For this reason, they expressed irritation towards their district for placing them in this position.

Open-ended = Freedom

Other teachers in the study indicated that the open-ended structure of the standards led to more teacher autonomy. Not surprisingly, the teachers that expressed positive remarks towards the standards were mid-to-late-career teachers. Angela, for instance, an eleventh-year White teacher in a suburb of Indiana, revealed that the open-ended standards allowed them to design a context-specific class, “I do like that it's kind of open-ended and that schools can go with what best fits the need of their population.” Similarly, Jason, a fifth-year White teacher in the same school district as Angela, commented that standards like “Cultural Histories within the U.S. Context and Abroad” allowed them to “localize” ethnic studies.

> It allows me to localize the lessons because it gives me themes, and then I can apply the themes to my context. And for me, that's very powerful because number one, it kind of protects any lesson you're gonna teach. It's really hard to tell an ethnic studies teacher that their lesson is not in the standards because the standards are really just themes. They're not specific content. And so, it's really hard to leave the realm of the standards. And then it just gives me the space I need to make relevant curriculum for my context. And you wouldn't be able to pick up this curriculum and teach it in California. Like it wouldn't work. It has to be contextualized.

Jason’s comment reveals that the thematic structure of the standards grants them the independence to decide what is best for their classroom, which, as they emphasize, is a powerful feeling. This, they argue, is what ethnic studies is about. That is, designing an ethnic studies course that meets the needs of their students. When I asked Jason to share an example of how

they took the standards and “localized” them, they immediately suggested one of their favorite lessons on redlining in Indianapolis.

> I show them the old redlining maps. And so, we map that out across the city and then they look at a racial dot map of the city. So, you can actually see how the lines across which it was redlined. It's actually still held in many, any of those neighborhoods. And then I take them to, I use, Google Street view and I show them the next step in this whole thing – gentrification. So, we teach what gentrification is and on the Google Street view, you can click what year you want the students to see. So, I show them my neighborhood in Indianapolis, and I show them, here's what it looked like in 2010. And then I can click to 2015 and then to 2020, you know what I mean? And we just drive through the streets and I show the gentrification and I bring them up to like the end of the gentrification. And then they compare back against the maps. They can see how the neighborhood changes, as it is gentrified. It's going from 80% Black to 80% White, and you can follow it like a line.

Jason’s example shows how they took the standard, which describes systematic barriers and applied it to their context in Indianapolis. House discrimination and redlining were common topics among the majority of teachers in the study. In this sense, the thematic natures of the standards provided teachers with the advantage of crafting a course that fit the needs of their students.

Other teachers expressed positive sentiments towards the standards as they allowed them to teach various content, including those considered controversial. For example, Amelia, an eighteenth-year White teacher in rural Indiana, described how they took the standards to dive deeper into immigration.

> And so, like instead of a blip of the day, great, great migration. I can spend three days on great migration and talk about the people and the stories and, you know, examples of education and church related items. I mean, all of that, like we don’t get to do any of that in U.S. [history].

Here, Amelia compares U.S. history to ethnic studies. Unlike U.S. history, the ethnic studies standards provided them with the advantage of delving into relevant topics. In a similar

sentiment, Monica, a fifth-year Black teacher in a catholic school, shared that the standards gave them the freedom to tackle so-called controversial topics at their school.

> The only group that I knew I couldn't teach because of the type of school I was in is the LGBT+. I knew I couldn't teach that. Given the context of my school, I knew that it was gonna be a working progress. It is a very conservative Catholic school. And I knew after a year of teaching almost two years that I will have to slowly integrate that group. And, and what is so funny is that a huge group of those kids in the school, LGBT, came to me and said, can you add this part of the curriculum?

Although the standards make no mention of intersectionality[13], which is a limitation several teachers recognized, teachers like Monica demonstrate how they use the flexibility of the standards to their advantage. In this way, teachers like Monica and Jason framed the standards as a source of protection against the backlash.

Teachers also made connections between the open-ended structure and the ability to draw on more student voices. Angela, for instance, said

> And again, because they're open ended, you can respond more to your students, yeah. And their backgrounds and their experiences, and also like what they want to learn and what they want to get out of the classroom, the journey that they want to go on. So I would say the class is the, the standards can allow you to be a little bit fluid with that.

For Angela, then, the standards allowed them to be more student-centered, which, as they expressed, is an essential principle of theirs. Likewise, Amelia described how the standards gave them more room to tap into student identity. In particular, Standard 1.2, "Cultural Self-awareness," which states "students identify and analyze their social, ethnic, racial, and cultural identities and examine societal," gave Amelia the freedom to use resources like the Identity Wheel[14] to explore student identity in the classroom. For the reasons above, when asked what they would change in the standards, William, a former ethnic studies teacher who is now retired,

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[13] The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how race, class, gender, and other characteristics intersect with one another.
[14] The Social Identity Wheel is a tool used in the classroom to encourage students to identify social identities and reflect on the ways those identities impact the ways other perceive or treat them. For more information, see **here**.

commented, "what I might do is define things a little bit more in the standards, but then, then I wouldn't because the more you define it then the more restrictive it becomes." The standards, in this way, were attributed to positive sentiments by mid-to-late career teachers.

Identity Matters

"Do I think anybody can teach ethnic studies? Yes, I do. But I also think they gotta check who they are first." –Monica

Teacher responses were highly impacted by their social positionings and experiences. Specifically, the findings highlight how teachers' racial identities shaped their interpretations of the standards and ethnic studies broadly. These interpretations, of course, looked different across participants. Teachers who identified as White emphasized the importance of transparency, intentionality, and humility in their process (See Table 4). The Black teacher in this study, on the other hand, often drew on her experiential knowledge to make sense of the standards and expressed a personal commitment to ethnic studies.

Addressing the Elephant in the Room: White Teachers' Perceptions of the Ethnic Studies Standards

A significant question that ethnic studies scholars have raised in light of the K-12 Ethnic Studies Movement is how will White teachers adopt and enact ethnic studies policies? As seen in Table 4, participants' responses show that White teachers' identity highly influenced their responses. Collectively, their responses reveal the importance of transparency, intentionality, and humility.

Table 4. Examples of White Teachers Responses to the Role of Racial Identity

Pseudonym	Examples
William	Well, I can’t present someone’s perspective. I can share what they said, but I can’t have, I can’t own their perspective. Um, I would rather do something like this and have them tell me their perspective as a person of that group than have me like, sort of take on that.
Amelia	I have to say, you know, number one, it’s ethnic and racial groups in the United States. We’re using their stories, their speeches, their commentary, you know, it’s, it’s not about, you know, and I hate to say it, but it’s, I, I, I always use this, but I’m like, it’s not about me as a middle class, sort of middle-aged White teacher.
Peter	I cannot for a single second and try to pretend like I've experienced hardly a single thing that we're teaching about. Um, frankly that I personally know a ton of people that have experienced some of the things that we teach about. And that's why I, I just felt like I I've immersed so much in literature and documentaries and conferences and things like that, just so that I can, it's just the closest thing that I feel like I have right now. And I have to cover every conversation kind of through those lenses.
Maddy	I was very conscious of and nervous, in particular, with teaching being a White person, teaching a course that’s supposed to not be super focused on telling White stories. And so, I think for me that like meant as I was researching as I was planning, being very intentional.

While engaging with the standards, every White teacher addressed the elephant in the room – I am a White teacher teaching ethnic studies. In doing so, teachers wrestled with this tension. For example, William, a now retired ethnic studies teacher, read the introduction of the standards, which states that the “course content should be presented from the perspective of the ethnic or racial group(s)” and immediately paused to give a disclaimer.

> Well, I can’t present someone’s perspective. I can share what they said, but I can’t have, I can’t own their perspective. Um, I would rather do something like this and have them tell me their perspective as a person of that group than have me like, sort of take on that.

From the outset, William rejected the standard’s description of the course because, as they said, “I can’t (as a White-identifying teacher) present someone’s perspective.” Alternatively, they suggest uplifting a student’s experience as a member of a historically marginalized group. In a

similar fashion, Amelia clarified early on in our interview that the course was not about them, a White-identifying person.

> I have to say, you know, number one, it's ethnic and racial groups in the United States. We're using their stories, their speeches, their commentary, you know, it's, it's not about, you know, and I hate to say it, but it's, I, I, I always use this, but I'm like, it's not about me as a middle class, sort of middle-aged White teacher.

Hesitant to make this statement, Amelia clarifies that the course is not about someone like them. It is based on the stories of historically marginalized peoples. Peter, a mid-career White teacher in a rural school district, also acknowledged their racial identity and went as far as to suggest that this was a limitation because they will never be able to pretend like they understand the experiences of the groups they teach. In sum, one of the first steps that the White teachers took as they engaged in the standards was to be transparent about their racial identity. By establishing their role within ethnic studies policy, the White teachers highlighted the importance of intentionality.

Intentionality, for these teachers, involved immersing themselves in the literature and believing in the mission of ethnic studies. Maddy, for instance, shared how they were careful when planning and designing the course.

> I was very conscious of and nervous, in particular, with teaching being a White person, teaching a course that's supposed to not be super focused on telling White stories. And so, I think for me that like meant as I was researching as I was planning, being very intentional.

Maddy, who was nervous about teaching ethnic studies as a White teacher, defined intentionality as a process of deeply engaging in research. Similarly, Peter, who admitted to never having the ability to understand historically marginalized peoples perspectives, highlighted the importance of engaging in literature because "it's just the closest thing that I feel like I have right now. And I

have to cover every conversation kind of through those lenses." In this way, submerging themselves in literature was a crucial step if they wished to be intentional.

Other teachers expressed intentionality by committing themselves to the mission of ethnic studies. When I asked Angela, for example, how they ended up with the course, Angela shared, "I also, um, wanted to make sure that it was handled with care and that the person who got the course was a person who cared about it was a person who believed in it." Here, Angela makes an important distinction between "handling the course with care" in terms of the content that is covered and a person's commitment to the mission of ethnic studies. Committed to ethnic studies, Angela often questioned the standards. For instance, when reviewing the standard, "Cultural Histories Within the U.S. Context and Abroad," which include words like "loss" and "forcible," they paused to deconstruct the meaning of this.

> So, for example, like I know last week we talked about like imagery and stories of, you know, history of people of color in the United States, particularly African Americans has a lot to do with like pain and the imagery that is there. And it made me think of like, oh, like in my effort to be like, you know, honest about the struggles that have happened in our country. I'm like, what is the text I am picking? What are the, the visual resources that we are using? Like, am I pulling up trauma for my students when I am teaching them? Like, that's, you know, just really kind of second guessing, you know, every image and everything that you are using, like the students have to look at. So, like making sure that it is, you know, something that is well thought out about the images and the things that you are, you are using.

Intentionality, in this way, required Angela to be critical about every aspect of the course, including the texts and resources that they used in their classroom. This was important because they did not want to reinforce deficit and homogenous understandings of historically marginalized peoples.

Finally, teachers emphasized the importance of humility in approaching the standards. Based on their responses, approaching the standards with humility meant redefining their role in the classrooms and tapping into students' funds of knowledge. Common among White teachers

were phrases like “I am not the expert” and “room for growth.” Maddy, for example, shared how it was vital for them to be honest with their students that they weren’t the expert in the classroom.

> And like being able to admit that and be like, okay, for this thing, we’re gonna do a more research-based activity that, um, where you’re gonna be teaching each other things. And just being honest of like, like this is a huge concept and a huge topic of things that we’re trying to, and I’m not a perfect expert.

For Maddy, it was important that they were not positioning themselves as the expert in ethnic studies. Instead, they designed a project in which students had the opportunity to learn from one another. Similarly, Peter regularly reminded their students that they were not an expert.

> Um, and so I regularly try to tell the students I am not an expert in almost anything we will ever talk about. I don’t even know a lot more than you and almost every single thing we will talk about. What I am is I’m a pretty darn good conversation facilitator.

Peter, who frequently emphasized engaging students in difficult conversations, considered themself a facilitator rather than an expert. By positioning themselves as learners, teachers accepted that they had a lot of room for growth. Teachers made more room for student knowledge through this disposition and often invited students to provide course feedback at the end of the year. Angela, for instance, stated that for one of their lessons on Black history, they solicited a Black student’s opinion to make sure they were not presenting inaccurate information. Angela noted that engaging student voices deepened their understanding of Black history. In doing so, Angela, like other teachers, expressed a commitment to ongoing learning.

The Road Less Traveled: A Black Teacher’s Understandings of the Ethnic Studies Standards

Ethnic studies research has demonstrated that Teachers of Color often use their identity as a resource in their ethnic studies teaching (Kohli, 2009). Similarly, the findings in this study

show that Monica, the only Black teacher in the study, expressed a personal commitment to ethnic studies and often drew on their experiential knowledge to make sense of the standards.

Monica, a Black teacher in a catholic high school in Indiana, shared a personal inkling to ethnic studies. After reading the introduction of the standards, which says that the goal of the course is to "prepare students for an increasingly diverse global community and participation in a democratic society," Monica immediately questioned why the course is not mandatory.

> So much of it screams mandatory. Like this should be a mandatory class that every student takes. It should not be an elective. If you want kids to go out in this world and have these understandings of the melting pot, so to speak diverse America that we have. Why is this class not mandatory?

Here, Monica exposes a contradiction in the standards. How does the Indiana Department of Education seek to prepare students for an increasingly diverse global community, if they do not mandate ethnic studies for all students? The significance of ethnic studies was not a question for Monica.

Monica's strong commitment to ethnic studies is rooted in their personal experiences, experiences as the only Black teacher at a predominantly White school reiterated their sense of purpose.

> I had probably the worst first year here because I was given the AP war history kids, and they questioned me on everything. Like where did you get your degrees from? What do you know? Why do you talk like this? Like, I think that was one of the biggest things. That is how they walked around. The school said she's so ghetto. And I'm like, "'that's the t-shirt I wear – most of you don't even know who I am,"' but it was a lot. It was a lot my first year here… it honestly just made me dig deeper and research more about, um, really my journey started with systematic racism. that's when my journey started.

As Monica mentioned, their personal experiences with systematic racism served as the impetus for their commitment to ethnic studies. Through these experiences, Monica felt a strong sense of purpose and responsibility to undo systematic oppression at their school. To challenge racism in their school, they often drew on their experiential knowledge. For instance, when responding to

standard one, cultural self-awareness, Monica shared how they leveraged their experiences in one of the first exercises of their ethnic studies course.

> I used myself. I said, I walk around with this shirt every day. I said, when I came to this school, this is a shirt that I wore. You didn't know my name. You didn't know what degrees I had. You didn't know where I went to school. You didn't know. I had three kids. You didn't know nothing about me. All you knew was that I was Black, I may have been loud. I may have lived in a ghetto. These are the things that you already, because the world has already trained us to do this. Right? Each one of us were trained to see color first, before we are trained to see the individual person.

In this way, Monica perceived their racial identity as an asset and one that granted them an advantage over their White counterparts, who they said do not experience racism.

At the same time, Monica admits that as a person of color, they often had to rely on research to give credibility to their claims. For instance, when teaching about white privilege, which is mentioned in one of the standards, Monica explained how they drew on White authors like Tim Wise and DiAngelo to engage White students in privilege. For this reason, when asked what core understandings they recommend for future ethnic studies teachers, Monica suggested, “If you of color and you're teaching it, I feel like you need to do more of knowing all of your facts versus knowing your identity.” Their experience influences Monica’s response in a predominately White space. Regardless, however, Monica emphasized the importance of identity in ethnic studies, “I'm like the, there's no way you can learn about anybody else unless you do some soul searching for yourself first.” From Monica’s point of view, identity is a crucial component of teaching. In other words, if teachers wish to teach ethnic studies, they must be willing to examine their identity and their relation to the themes in the standards. Otherwise, they say, they will not be effective ethnic studies teachers.

Local Context(s) and Sociopolitical Climate

“We have to do it, but we have to do it in a wise way.” – Jason

In February 2022, Indiana House Bill 1134 was introduced, prohibiting teachers in Indiana from discussing sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin. The bill died in the Senate, but the responses in this study highlight how the teachers' local context and sociopolitical climate significantly influenced their interpretations of the standards. The findings here showcase how teachers negotiated the standards within their local context. Together, their responses shed light on the challenges ethnic studies teachers face.

Navigating Uncertain Times

Teachers often pointed out how concepts from the standards, such as "privilege" and "systemic," stood out when reviewing the standards. Maddy, for example, commented

> So, some of the things that stand out to me with the first standard is in particular talking about bias and critical consciousness especially just because those are words that current laws are trying to prohibit from teachers being able to say.

In a similar sentiment, Angela commented how "certain terms [from the standards] have been made the boogeyman, even though that's not what they actually are." As a result, teachers shared how this made the teaching of ethnic studies much harder. Later in the interview, Maddy, for instance, expressed that "it is a very hard line to walk today with social studies… there's a lot of people trying to say what should and shouldn't be talked about in social studies classrooms." Still, Maddy emphasized their commitment to connecting the past to the present.

> That is something I've tried to emphasize in my class of making sure I am… As we're doing these, like walking through history, walking through the contemporary stuff, talking about local stories. So, those are some of the things that I've focused on with that, with the contributions.

Other teachers negotiated the standards by amending their curriculum. Jason, a White teacher in a predominantly White high school, for instance, used words like "trepidation," "caution," and "being wise" to describe their reaction to the first standard. When I asked Jason what they meant by these words, Jason provided an example of how they approach the standards with caution.

> You have to find a way, like if a teacher just stood up and was just talking about privilege, I mean, there'd be people with, you know, stakes outside the school, you know what I mean? Like it's tense right now. I actually have, for context here, I have a meeting tomorrow after school because a local anti-CRT parent who doesn't, he has pulled his kids out of the school, but he went to the superintendent and he said these standards that you're reading right now, he says that they promote critical race theory and he's gonna need the curriculum of the ethnic studies teachers. Well, there's only two ethnic studies teachers in the district, me and one at our other high school. And so, our superintendent who's brand new. I think she's trying to like to make some amends with the community. She said, well, we have nothing to hide. So, we'll pull that curriculum right now for you. So, he runs like this outrageous blog where he just like, he tries to like out teachers and he does all sorts of stuff. It's terrible. But I just found out last night that I need to sort of prepare a daily schedule. Every video I show in class, every PowerPoint needs to be handed over to him. Like I'm handing my whole curriculum over to this guy. Who's not a good faith actor. And so that's what I mean by – I have a, a lesson on privilege and I have to phrase it so carefully… So, like for example, when I was preparing my whole lesson plan thing to give to him, I caught myself like looking through him, being like, okay, I know what things are trigger words for this guy, who has no idea what he is talking about. I've read his blog for a year now. It's deranged, but I know like for example, the word intersectional is a trigger for him. I found that and I just found another way to describe the exact same thing needed the word intersectional. So, I found myself amending my lessons and changing my language because it allows me to tiptoe around these people and do the same work, but without the words that will trigger them.

Jason's testimony speaks to how they've negotiated the standards due to the sociopolitical climate. In Jason's case, amending their curriculum was a necessary strategy. This, however, does not mean reducing ethnic studies, rather it is a strategy to, as they describe, "tiptoe around" the standards while still fulfilling the goals of ethnic studies.

For other teachers, amending their curriculum was not necessarily on the table. Amelia, a seasoned teacher in a rural town of Indiana, adamantly shared that they will not change their curriculum.

> I feel like it is already much of what I teach is probably viewed in a negative way by the state. So, I teach dual credit U.S. history too. So, it's not, I, I don't really pull many punches. Like I, I literally talk about everything. So, for me, it's already sort of there. I'm like if you wanna, you know, come after me, you know, figure it out. I'm sort of to the point and I'm not saying that I don't love teaching and I don't wanna, you know, necessarily keep my job, but I signed, I don't know if you know [about] the Zen pledge that happened over the summer… I use a ton of their stuff and over the summer they had

> a pledge that was like, I will continue to teach honest history. And I signed it and the community went after me.

Like Jason, Amelia's experience reiterates the high stakes that ethnic studies teachers face. For Amelia, though, it is no longer a question about how to change their curriculum. Although they gave the nod to the sociopolitical climate, they are committed to teaching honest history by all means necessary.

Together, the teachers in this study show how they navigate or reject the backlash within their sociopolitical climate. Although the teachers felt a sense of relief when the bill was dismissed, they allude to future challenges in Indiana. Jason, for example, shared that they are not sure how much longer ethnic studies will exist in Indiana, given that they teach in a highly Republican area.

> I mean the more explicit the standards get about that, the better a chance there is that – We have a GOP super majority in Indiana, and I'm actually surprised that they have not threatened to eliminate ethnic studies from the state. So, I don't know how much longer ethnic studies in Indiana holds on because that super majority's not going anywhere. And the conversation I've noticed that shifting they find different boogie men. I mean every few weeks, and I felt it shift more towards ethnic studies, more so than ever before, just in the past month or so.

Here, Jason draws a clear line of the implications that highly Republican contexts have on the teaching of decolonial education projects. In a similar sentiment, Angela remarked that it does not matter what these terms mean. The right-wing will continue to misconstrue and co-opt concepts like critical race theory.

> It doesn't matter what it means it could be, I don't know, chocolate, rice and turkey and people are gonna be like, it's CRT. Like, that's the horrible thing that's being said. Like, you can put whatever you want attached to it in. Unfortunately, it's been co-opted, however you wanna phrase it.

Although Angela said this in a joking manner, Angela reiterates the larger tensions implicated in the teaching of ethnic studies in a highly Republican context.

Discussion

In this manuscript, I asked what meanings teachers draw from the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards and what contributes to their sensemaking. The findings provide significant insights into the interpretations and experiences of Indiana ethnic studies teachers. First, my findings reveal that teachers make different interpretations of the standards based on their level of experience teaching. Second, the findings highlight the significant role of race in teachers' interpretations of ethnic studies standards. Finally, my analysis of the data showed that the sociopolitical climate of teachers shaped their understanding of the standards. In this section, I will discuss the meaning of my findings and how they contribute to the field of ethnic studies. In closing, I provide the implications of my research.

One Size Does Not Fit All

As evidenced in this study, participants made different interpretations of the standards. Similar to Timmermans and Epstein's (2010) review, "loose standards" (p. 8) provided greater adaptability for the mid-to-late career teachers in this study. For example, Angela, a late career White teacher, noted that the flexibility of the standards allowed them to integrate more student voices. Jason, a mid-career White teacher, added that the standards allowed them to take the themes and apply them to their context. In contrast, Maddy, an early career teacher in a metropolitan city, described the standards as vague. According to Maddy, rigidly defined standards would have better supported their curriculum development.

One way to explain why early career teachers and mid-to-late career teachers construct the standards differently is that these two groups of teachers work in different schools where they have taught for short or long periods. Teachers who have been employed at their school for more than five years, for example, may have a greater advantage than early career teachers because

they have interacted longer at their school. For example, Angela and Jason, who expressed positive sentiments towards the standards, have worked at their school for more than five years. This has likely provided opportunities to learn about the students, their families, and the communities they serve. In comparison, Maddy is at a recently “consolidated” school. As a second-year teacher, Maddy is likely becoming acclimated to the demands of the teaching profession. In addition, as an employee of a new school in a metropolitan city, Maddy may also experience the pressure of meeting the demands of a newly established school that is likely undergoing structural and curriculum development. Overall, my findings suggest that the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards offer teachers opportunities to adapt and design curriculum that meets the needs of their students. However, adaptability is contingent on teachers’ familiarity with the community they serve.

This assertion stands at odds with Maguire et al. (2015) study. According to Maguire et al. (2015), early career teachers experience more challenges interpreting and enacting new policies because they are often less invested and complicit. Throughout our interviews, Maddy expressed commitment to the overall vision of ethnic studies, as they indicated, “I want them [students] to walk away with the idea of one that like each of their individual stories does matter. Like their background knowledge matters, their identity, their interests, like matter” (Maddy). Still, the loose standards made Maddy unsure if they were the “hitting big things.” Although this is limited to one participant, Maddy raises an essential question about the presence of ethnic studies frameworks. In this way, while the standards grant teachers the flexibility to design a curriculum that meets the needs of their students, Maddy reminds us that the standards alone do not offer teachers guidance on implementing the themes outlined in the standards.

My observation points to the dire need for guidance and support of ethnic studies frameworks in policy implementation. Unaware of core ethnic studies principles and practices, Indiana teachers in this study were left to figure out how to adapt the standards independently. As I noted earlier, research on ethnic studies teachers demonstrates that community responsive pedagogy is crucial for their success (Begay et al., 1995; Jocson, 2008; Lipka et al., 2008; McCarty, 1993; McCarty & Lee, 2014). Community responsive pedagogy is a method of teaching that is responsive to “the material conditions particular to a student’s lived experience in their local community and the histories that created that experience” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). Through a community responsive framework, teachers are better equipped to develop a curriculum responsive to students' cultural, historical, and contemporary experiences. With this in mind, I implore school districts to allocate funding to support current and future ethnic studies teachers in their base knowledge of the history of ethnic and pedagogical application of the concepts in the standards, like critical consciousness. Further, as I emphasized in this section, the adaptability of the standards is vital to the mission of ethnic studies. Therefore, priority to localizing ethnic studies policies is imperative.

Reconciling the Missing (Racial) Piece

Although mid-to-late career teachers expressed positive sentiments toward the standards, their level of experience does not absolve them from facing challenges. My analysis also indicates that race plays an essential role in teachers' interpretations. The teachers in this study often struggled, in varying ways, to reconcile the relationship between their racial identity and ethnic studies.

From the get-go, White-identifying teachers in this study situated themselves in relation to ethnic studies. After reading the introduction of the standards, William, a now retired ethnic

studies teacher, stated that they could not (as a White teacher) present the experiences of BIPOC groups. Recognizing their race, the teachers discussed the tensions of navigating ethnic studies as White teachers. The question for many was, how do I know if I am doing justice to all historically marginalized groups? For instance, throughout our discussion, Amelia, a late career White teacher, questioned their ability to honor all BIPOC groups over a semester.

White teachers' apprehension of honoring all historically marginalized groups can be explained by the common tradition that assumes inclusion is solely about teaching separate units about the cultures and histories of different ethnic groups. An example of this includes Black History Month or Asian American Pacific Islander Month. While these efforts aim to bring visibility to the omission of these groups, they are merely additions to the overall structure (Banks, 1989). Ethnic studies, however, is not simply about replacing Eurocentric content with BIPOC narratives. Ethnic studies, instead, pushes educators to consider the enduring legacy of colonialism and how the experiences of historically marginalized people are bound by a shared experience of colonization while also examining how these groups have been racialized in different ways (Cuauhtin et al., 2019). This requires teachers to engage in a critical analysis of colonization. Thus, while the standards enabled the teachers in this study to take a first step in recognizing their relationship to ethnic studies, it is important for White teachers to examine the impact of colonization and how they have benefited from being a member of a dominant system.

Monica, the only Black teacher in this study, similarly emphasized the role of race in their interpretations but navigated the significance of race in different ways. As a member of a historically racialized group, Monica expressed a personal commitment to the vision of ethnic studies. Further, Monica's interpretations of the standards were often informed by their experiences with racism. As they noted, students and parents repeatedly questioned their

credibility, and as a result, they often had to rely on research and White authored literature to teach about privilege, a concept included in the standards.

The significance of race, then, is not something that Monica bears the benefit of choosing. It is a factor that has been imposed and decided for them. Forced to confront racism head-on, Monica's interpretations of the standards are inherently tied to their identity and experience. For example, while Monica may have control over the development of ethnic studies curriculum, they have less control over how students and parents perceive them. These results build on existing research on the experiences of teachers of color (Kohli, 2009, 2014, 2018) and the ways ethnic studies teachers of color bring a greater degree of commitment to undoing racism (Acosta, 2007; De los Ríos & Ochoa, 2012; Halagao, 2004; Sleeter, 2011). However, what ethnic studies literature has yet to explore is the experiences of racially isolated BIPOC teachers in predominantly White contexts. This manuscript can be considered a first step in gaining insights into the perceptions of ethnic studies teachers of color in primarily White contexts.

In sum, the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards provided teachers an entry point to discuss the relationship between their racial identity and ethnic studies. However, it became clear that teachers struggled to reconcile how their racial identity affects their practice. My findings contribute to new understandings of the challenges teachers experience when critical analyses of identity and ethnic studies pedagogies, which are integral to the success of ethnic studies teachers, are missing in ethnic studies policy (Baptiste, 2010; Daus-Magbual, 2010; Gomez et al., 2008; Kohli, 2014; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Ullucci, 2011). Future research, then, should investigate teachers in contexts with different racial and ethnic demographics to better understand the professional and structural challenges of establishing ethnic studies.

Traversing the Sociopolitical Context: A Bottom-up Approach to Policy Enactment

Finally, my analysis highlights the impact of sociopolitical context(s) on Indiana teachers' perceptions of the standards. For instance, Monica, a Black teacher in a Catholic high school, knew that they couldn't teach LBGT+ topics at their Catholic school. They had to be cautious about how they incorporated those topics. Similarly, other teachers described how they carefully negotiated the rise of a bill that could potentially limit what they could say about race, sex, and religion in the classroom. For example, Jason, a teacher in a predominantly White suburb, described the process of negotiation as "tiptoeing" around the standards by amending their curriculum. Contrary to top-down policy research (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Ricento, 2005; Spolsky, 2004), my research emphasizes the unique role teachers play in enacting ethnic studies policies.

The teachers' interpretations of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards can be linked to Indiana's political and historical background. Indiana has a long-standing conservative status (National Election Pool, 2020). As a Republican state, Indiana joins the national movement to undermine critical race theory and ethnic studies concepts. Moreover, Indiana has a reputation for upholding white supremacy (Tuohy, 2020). With this in mind, it is not surprising that teachers were faced with the task of negotiating ethnic studies concepts like privilege and intersectionality. My findings build on the work by Gulson & Webb (2016), Heimans (2014), Kelly et al. (2014), and Sailor (2015), who have undertaken efforts to show how context impacts teachers policy enactment.

In short, my findings foreground the way ethnic studies teachers negotiate policy in the face of a sociopolitical climate that constrains their approaches to ethnic studies policy. My results affirm the power educators have to undermine or affirm policy (Ball et al., 2011; Maguire

et al., 2015). While the teachers' resistance to sociopolitical pressures merits recognition, I am skeptical of glorifying teachers' laudable actions as it may lead us to normalize the more significant conditions at play. In this way, I challenge the growing research on teacher policy enactment that portrays educators as superheroes and resilient purveyors of social justice. Instead, I invite future ethnic studies researchers to consider the impact of context on policy implementation, especially in conservative areas.

Overall, the findings in this manuscript reject the belief that policy documents are static (Shohamy, 2006) and that policy actors simply consume and implement policy (Colebatch et al., 2011). My analysis demonstrates that policy implementation is a complex arena shaped by varying factors (Ball et al., 2012; Levinson et al., 2009; Maguire et al., 2015). In particular, race/ethnicity and sociopolitical context contributed to teachers' interpretations of the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards. These findings can be considered a first step in understanding the implementation of current ethnic studies policies in predominantly White contexts. As school districts continue to adopt ethnic studies policies, the sustainability of ethnic studies can be increased if school districts prioritize the development of teacher knowledge on ethnic studies frameworks and locally-based policy. In addition, research that examines the relationship between context and policy will be necessary to understand the ongoing challenges and successes of ethnic studies teachers.

Conclusion

Ethnic studies presents an opportunity to transform the American educational landscape. Rooted in decolonial thought, ethnic studies seeks to eliminate systems of oppression and empower historically marginalized students. The classroom, however, is not a micro-ecosystem. As the findings in this study demonstrate, external factors contribute to incorporating ethnic

studies. So, while we cannot control how these factors will contribute to policy implementation, we can act on how we will respond to these factors. This paper responds to these factors by highlighting the challenges of ethnic studies teachers in Indiana. Through this research, I call on the continued need to invest in the professional development of ethnic studies teachers, who play a significant role in policy enactment.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Think Aloud Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hi, how are you? [Wait for response]
First of all, thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is Jasmin Patrón-Vargas. I'm a graduate student at Michigan State University. As I mentioned, the purpose of this interview is to learn more about your perspectives regarding Ethnic Studies in Indiana.
Before I proceed, is it okay if I record our conversation? [Wait for confirmation] Okay, thank you.

Just a few reminders:
- This interview will take between 45 minutes to an hour.
- Everything you say will remain confidential.
- You have the right not to answer a question or withdraw from participating at any time.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Part I

Warm-up questions

1. To get us started, do you mind telling me more about your teaching journey; What motivated you to become a teacher?
    a. How long have you been teaching?
    b. What school district do you teach in and what brough you there?
    c. What grades have you taught?
    d. How did you end up teaching ethnic studies?

Thank you for sharing a little bit about your journey.

Pre-task: Modeling a Think Aloud

So, let me explain a little bit more about how the rest of the interview will work. Today, we are going to reflect on Indiana ethnic studies standards, which I am sure you are probably already familiar with. To do so, we are going to engage in a think-aloud activity. I am going to ask you to read a text from the Indiana Academic Standards for Ethnic Studies. After reading the text, I want you to tell me whatever comes to your mind. This is called 'thinking out loud.'
Let's practice. I am going to share an excerpt from the Indiana Ethnic Studies Standards: [share screen and share excerpt]

> This course may either focus on a particular ethnic or racial group or take a comparative approach across multiple groups. Course content should be presented from the perspective of the ethnic or racial group(s).

Take a couple seconds to read it over and then tell me what are the first 3 things that come to your mind. [Wait for their response]
As you can see, there is no right or wrong way to "report out." It's perfectly okay if your thoughts are not complete sentences because what goes on in our head is abstract. In fact, I encourage you to share any keywords, emotions, memories, rhetorical questions, connections to

the sociopolitical climate, or stories that may come up as you read through the text. If it helps, you're welcome to also jot down the first 3-5 things that come to your head and then share them with me.
We're going to go ahead and get started on the main task now. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Part II

Think Aloud Introduction
We're going to go over the introduction for the ethnic studies standards.
[Show Introduction]

> **Indiana Ethnic Studies Academic Standards Introduction**
> Ethnic Studies provides a framework to broaden students' perspectives concerning historical and contemporary lived experiences and cultural practices of ethnic and racial groups in the United States.
>
> This course may either focus on a particular ethnic or racial group or take a comparative approach across multiple groups. Course content should be presented from the perspective of the ethnic or racial group(s).
>
> The course may include an analysis of the economic, intellectual, social, and political contributions of an ethnic or racial group(s), as well as the socio-political and economic forces that create systemic challenges to accessing resources and opportunities.
>
> As a result, this course will better prepare students for an increasingly diverse, global community and participation in a democratic society.
>
> STOP

Here is the first text. Could you please read what is on the screen out loud and tell me what you think as you read.
[Wait for participant to complete task]
Ask follow-up questions
[Move to standard one]

Think Aloud Standard One
Great. Now, we are going to move to the first standard. Whenever you are ready, share what you are thinking, please.
[Show standard one]

Cultural Self Awareness
Standard 1.1:
Students describe and defend the appropriate terminology including but not limited to race, ethnicity, culture, cultural practices, bias, implicit bias, and critical consciousness.

Standard 1.2:
Students identify and analyze their social, ethnic, racial, and cultural identities and examine societal perceptions and behaviors related to their own identities.

Standard 1.3:
Students evaluate how society's responses to different social identities lead to access and/or barriers for ethnic and racial groups in relation to various societal institutions, including but not limited to education, healthcare, government, and industry.

STOP

[If participant becomes quiet – suggested prompts]

1. I'd like to hear more what you're thinking.
2. Could you just say whatever thoughts come to your mind?
3. Please keep describing out loud what you're thinking.

Wonderful. Let's move on to the next one. Take the time you need. [Move to standard two]

Think Aloud Standard Two
[show standard two]

Cultural Histories Within the U.S. Context And Abroad
Standard 2.1
Students investigate the origins of various ethnic and racial groups, examining the historical influence of cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic contexts on those groups.

Standard 2.2
Students explain the reasons for various racial/ethnic groups' presence in the U.S. (Indigenous, voluntary, or forcible).

Standard 2.3
Students compare and contrast how circumstances of ethnic/racial groups affected their treatment and experiences (Indigenous, voluntary, forcible) as a response to the dominant culture of the time.

Standard 2.4
Students examine history and the present to make predictions about what role the dominant culture plays in the loss of racial/ethnic culture and cultural identity.

STOP

Think Aloud Standard Three
Alright. Here is standard three. Again, please share out loud any thoughts that come to your mind as you read this. Are there any emotions, memories, stories that the text evokes for you?
[show standard three]

Contemporary Lived Experiences and Cultural Practices
Standard 3.1:
Students identify and explore current traditions, rites, and norms of an ethnic or racial group(s) and how they have or are changing over time.

Standard 3.2:
Students assess how social policies and economic forces offer privilege or systematic oppressions for racial/ethnic groups related to accessing social, political, and economic opportunities.

STOP

Think Aloud Standard Four
Awesome. We have standard four. This is the last standard.
[show standard four]

Historical and Contemporary Contributions
Standard 4.1:
Students examine historical and contemporary economic, intellectual, social, cultural and political contributions to society by ethnic or racial group(s) or an individual within a group.

Standard 4.2:
Students investigate how ethnic or racial group(s) and society address systematic oppressions through social movements, local, community, national, global advocacy, and individual champions.

STOP
This brings us to the end of the main task for today. Before we end, I am curious to hear some of your reflections about the task.

Part III
Wrap-up Questions
4. In reflecting on the standards, what was interesting to you?
5. What stood out to you from the standards?
6. Is there something you feel is missing from the standards?
7. Thanks so much for sharing your thoughts around the ethnic studies standards. Before we end, is there anything else in relation to the standards that you would like to share?

APPENDIX B: Follow-up Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you so much for meeting with me again. It's been great learning from you. As I mentioned, the purpose of this second interview is to learn more about your motivation and approaches to teaching ethnic studies.

Before I proceed, is it okay if I record our conversation? [Wait for confirmation]

Okay, thank you.

Just a few reminders:

- This interview will take between 45 minutes to an hour.
- Everything you say will remain confidential.
- You have the right not to answer a question or withdraw from participating at any time.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

Do you have any questions before we begin? [Wait for response.]

Warm-up Question

1. So, I am curious to hear what are some thoughts you have after our first conversation?
    a. Is there anything that you missed sharing with me?
    b. Are there any questions that arose from our first conversation?

Defining Ethnic Studies Questions

2. Now, I am curious to understand what ethnic studies means to you. Using everyday language, how would you describe ethnic studies to someone that doesn't know what it is?

Personal Experiences

3. Are there any personal experiences that contributed to this understanding of ethnic studies? If so, do you mind sharing these experiences?
    a. How did they impact your teaching of ethnic studies?
    b. Why do you think they are relevant to the teaching and learning of ethnic studies?
4. Do you have any professional experiences that you think have prepared you for teaching ethnic studies? For example, professional development, higher education, workshops, webinars, etc.
    a. If so, do you mind sharing?
5. What about your local context – how has your local context contributed to your understanding of ethnic studies?
    a. In what ways has your local context influenced your teaching of ethnic studies?
    b. In what ways have sociopolitical context influenced your understanding?

Experiences in the Classroom

Now, I am interested in learning more about your experience teaching ethnic studies.

6. In reflecting on the ethnic studies classes you've taught, which has been the most engaging?
    a. Could you walk me through that lesson, please?
    b. What readings/texts did you use? How do you decide what texts to use?
    c. What activities did the students engage in?

7. In your opinion, what are three practices every ethnic studies teacher should be aware of if they wish to teach ethnic studies? Can you describe them to me.
    a. Why are these practices important in an ethnic studies classroom?
8. Some teachers think their identity plays a key role in successful teaching of ethnic studies. How would you reply to that teacher?
    a. What does identity mean to you?
       How do you identify yourself?
9. [IF LOCAL CONTEXT HAS INFLUENCED THEM] You mentioned that the local contexts has influenced your teaching. How do you consider the local context when planning an ethnic studies lesson?
    a. What comprises the local context?
10. As an ethnic studies teacher, what are three takeaways you want your students to gain after taking your class? Can you describe them to me, please?
    a. Tell me more about these three takeaways – why are these important?

Wrap-up Questions

11. If you had to convince a parent on why they should let their child take an ethnic studies class, what would you say?
12. Before we end, is there anything else you would like to share

APPENDIX C: Sample Codebook from Second Round of Analysis

Table 5. Sample Codebook from Second Round of Analysis

Code Name	Description	Files	References
awareness of systemic oppression	Teachers emphasize the importance of exposing students to systems of power and how they contribute to systemic issues in the past and present.	11	41
BIPOC experiences	Teachers discuss how they share the experiences of BIPOC groups in their ethnic studies class.	9	22
Build cross-cultural understanding	Teachers describe their efforts to build students awareness about other racial and ethnic groups and the importance of it.	7	14
Connecting the past to the present	Teachers describe the ways they make connections about the past to the present in their ethnic studies class.	9	18
Decentering Euro	Teachers describe ethnic studies as an opportunity to decenter Eurocentric ways of learning.	6	10
Demographic data	This code gather basic information about the participants, including how many years they have been teaching, what courses they have taught, etc.	6	18
Different perspectives	Teachers highlight the value of exposing students to different perspectives.	7	14
ES should be mandatory	Teachers discuss the importance of ethnic studies and how it should not be an elective class, but should be mandatory for students to take	6	9
Gotta know the history	Teachers describe the importance of students knowing about history and the experiences of racial and ethnic groups	11	23
Humility	Teachers describe how they approach or enter their ethnic studies class. For some, it is important to approach the class through a humble standpoint, especially being White and sharing the stories of BIPOC folk.	6	12

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