

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC STUDIES PEDAGOGY ON AFRICAN
AMERICAN STUDENT IDENTITY AND EMPOWERMENT IN OAKLAND

by

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Abstract

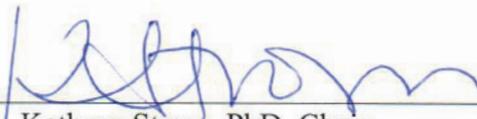
Ethnic Studies has emerged as highly impactful for bolstering academic expectations and outcomes for students of color in K-12 education. In 2018, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) implemented a mandatory elective ninth-grade Ethnic Studies course, citing research that affirms its positive impacts, including higher GPAs, better attendance and lower suspension rates. This qualitative study explores the impact of Ethnic Studies on African American high school students' perceptions of their own academic and cultural identities. Utilizing Ethnic Studies pedagogy as a conceptual framework, data collected from curriculum planning documents, professional development sessions, and student focus groups were analyzed to explore the impact of the course on students' perspectives, and whether the goals, purposes, and design of the OUSD Ethnic Studies program aligned with their experiences. This study offers insights that will help educators bolster African American student success with an effective Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy.

California State University, East Bay
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

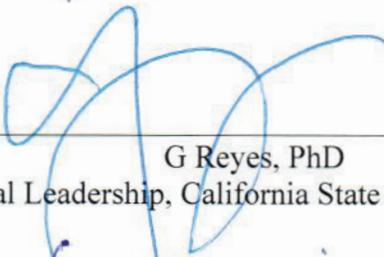
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DEDICATION

Ethnic Studies pedagogy has the power to transform K-12 education. I dedicate this study to past, present, and future Ethnic Studies scholars, educators, and activists that created the space for this research study to emerge. It is an honor to contribute to the necessary advancement of Ethnic Studies in K-12 and beyond. I also dedicate this study to those educators, social justice activists, and community leaders that remain committed to the liberation of Black Americans, whose ancestors helped build the richest country in the world for free, yet suffered the devastating ongoing effects of America's long-standing systems of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, redlining, and mass incarceration. We must continue to do the work, without apology. Along those lines, an extension of gratitude goes to Yvette Carnell, Antonio Moore, and the Breaking Brown/ADOS family, who encouraged me to utilize data to work toward liberating Black Americans from the systemic remnants of slavery and demand a program of restorative justice for Black Americans, beginning with reparations for descendants of American chattel slavery.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the ancestors, family members, friends, loved ones, colleagues, educators, cohorts, students, mentors, mentees, baristas, neighbors, community members, and mere acquaintances that supported my journey toward completing this study and earning my doctoral degree. There are far too many to name in this dedication, and I give thanks for each and every one of you. I would not have completed this study, however, without the love and support of my partner, Curtis "Boze" Riley, Jr., our daughters Yah Asantewaa and Layla Love, my Aunt Severa "Feva" Reed, "Grandma Joan" Winn, and my cousin Charlotte Johnson. Thank you! I love you!

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CHAPTER 1

ISSUE DEFINITION, BACKGROUND, AND STUDY PURPOSE

Despite decades of national, state, and local education reform efforts, far too many African American students are not accessing a quality education or equitable resources and as a result, lag rather far behind their peers in their academic achievement (Lee, 2002). 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data reflects that African Americans represent the lowest performing ethnic group across all subjects in K-12 education (NEAP, 2019), with only 7% performing at or above proficiency in math and 17% performing at or above proficiency in reading (NEAP, 2019). In fact, the difference in achievement levels between African American and White students in math and science has not changed significantly between 2005 and 2015, and between 1992 and 2015, the gap between African American and White students has widened in reading (NEAP, 2018).

In tandem with national data reflecting low rates of African American student achievement (performance), California's 350,000 African American students report as the lowest-performing ethnic or racial group in the state (Fensterwald, 2018), next to students with disabilities. Only 31% of California's African American students meet grade level standards in English language arts and 19% meeting grade level standards in math, well below the state average for both (Fensterwald, 2018). Similarly, on a local level, African American students in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) schools—the focus of this study—face the same daunting gaps in achievement reflected in the national and state data. California School Dashboard data reports that OUSD's African American students

as the lowest-performing ethnic group in English language arts and math, with the highest suspension rates and poor rates of graduation. In contrast, White students at OUSD are performing well, with high graduation rates and low suspension rates (California School Dashboard, 2018).

The consistently disparate national, state, and local African American achievement data suggests a systemic failure to identify the academic, economic, and human resources required to support African American student success, and further fails to recognize African Americans' unique identity as descendants of formerly enslaved people, who have been historically denied access to an adequate education, generation after generation. The ongoing sociopolitical, economical, and moral failure to invest in the education of African Americans over the past six decades has resulted in a persistent achievement gap, or what Gloria Ladson-Billings (2007) has described as an "educational debt" levied against them. Ladson-Billings defines the educational debt as the amalgamation of decades of resources systematically diverted away from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities across America, resulting in mounting social problems including poverty, high crime, low wages, and high unemployment.

For decades, the achievement gap has been one of the most talked-about issues in U.S. education (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As research data continues to uncover the systemic nature of U.S. public education's sweeping failure to equitably serve marginalized and oppressed populations, the term *achievement gap* has become problematic for many educators. Ladson-Billings (2007) noted that the term unfairly categorizes students as deficient and lacking, punishing students for their deficiencies without holding schools and other systems accountable. In 2007, during a keynote speech at the Urban Sites Network Conference in Washington, DC, Ladson-Billings offered a comprehensive analysis on the state of education, suggesting a reframing of the idea of

the racialized achievement gap as more of an *educational debt*, moving to a discourse that holds us all accountable (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Ladson-Billings (2007) explains that merely studying yearly fluctuations in achievement gap data is a dangerous exercise on assessing student performance on a particular set of achievement measures; however, analyzing the laws, policies, and decisions that created an educational debt provides a clear lens into how the gaping student achievement gap persists as the outcome. Diverting resources to address these social problems drains the system of much needed resources to narrow the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Ladson-Billings argues that the historic economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions, laws, and policies that shape the American public education system gave birth to the achievement gap and created an education debt. There has clearly been a systemic failure of public schools to adequately ensure that African American students are just as prepared as their White counterparts to perform academically. Glancing solely at the data, it appears that the opportunity for African American students to achieve in school at the same rate as their White peers remains out of reach on national, state, and local scales.

Indeed, *achievement gap* should be replaced with a more salient term like *educational debt* as future research evolves; however, for the purposes of this study the terms *achievement gap* and *educational attainment levels* will be used interchangeably to reference studies that document the persistent gaps in achievement between African American students and their peers. While the existence of a decades-long, sustained achievement gap is alarming enough, the persistence of the specific gap between African American students and their White peers is arguably one of the most alarming of the problems facing U.S. public education today, given the historical context of America's ongoing race problem. It is important to note that not just low-income or economically disadvantaged African American children have fallen into the gap. The

disparities between non-low-income Whites and non-low-income African Americans are just as wide, suggesting that more than poverty is at play with the achievement gap (Fensterwald, 2018). The dismal data suggests that a systemic disruption in current curriculum policy and practices is required to provide better opportunities for African American students to thrive in K-12 education.

Historical Background of the Problem

African Americans have endured relentless oppression in America, especially in relationship to access to and opportunities for education. Ladson-Billings (2006) notes that during the period of legal enslavement, beginning in 1619, African Americans were completely forbidden to learn. The emancipation of slaves in 1865 relegated African Americans to freedmen's schools, which were segregated schools established to serve the educational needs of formerly enslaved African Americans. Freedmen's schools were purposefully segregated and designed to maintain the servant class. During the long period of segregation in America, African American students were handed cast-off textbooks and materials from White schools, forced to learn in dilapidated buildings, and made to endure extreme conditions. In the South, the need for farm labor meant that an African American student's school year was typically only four months long (Ladson-Billings, 2006). It was not until 1968 that African American students in the South experienced universal secondary schooling (Anderson, 2002). Between 1863 and 1968, education legislation, public policy, and social acceptance of an unjust system helped establish and perpetuate the current inequities that persist in public education, relegating African Americans to the bottom of the education barrel and deeming them the least likely group to succeed.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (2004), in their article arguing the need for critical race theoretical perspective in education, discuss disparities in schooling from the understanding that race is still a significant factor for determining inequity in America. Despite the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, the evolution of diversity and inclusion initiatives, and public demands for equity and social justice in education and industry, trends in data from federal, state, and local assessment efforts like the NAEP, the California School Dashboards, and OUSD data dashboards, affirm that African American students are failing. This raises the question of whether the perpetual achievement gap and low educational attainment levels are rooted in systemic deficiencies in the public education system, as opposed to cultural and socio-economic deficiencies in African American students themselves.

Given the historically racialized relationship between Whites and African Americans, most of whom are descendants of American chattel slavery, the sustained academic failure of African Americans over the decades suggests that racism still persists in the education system. Failure to repair the damage, level the playing field, seek out the root causes, and create solutions to mitigate future damage has positioned African Americans as the poorest, least educated, least valued class of people in modern society. The least likely to obtain the so-called “American Dream” in a country that their ancestors built, with free slave labor. The catastrophic failure to invest the appropriate amount of political, financial, and cultural resources into African Americans comes with enormous moral and social costs. With limited access to a basic education, a failure to learn basic reading and math skills in elementary school and middle school, poor performance in high school, and minimal opportunities to attend college or learn a trade, African Americans are being ushered into a lifetime of poverty and struggle, with limited opportunities for economic or social mobility.

Many education experts examining the disparities in educational attainment levels for African American students have cited low academic expectations, racial bias, and other forms of education discrimination as contributing factors to the persistent lack of academic progress. For example, a recent study on K-12 teacher expectations by Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge (2016) found that non-African American teachers had significantly lower expectations for educational attainment for African American students. The researchers found that non-African American teachers were 12 percent less likely to expect African American students to finish a four-year college degree, relative to teachers of the same race as the student (Gershenson et al., 2016). The results emerged as systemic, with non-African American math teachers holding the lowest expectations for African American male students. The study noted that students' beliefs are likely affected by the expectations that teachers impart directly upon them. The study also affirmed that teachers' perceptions influence student performance. Low teacher expectations may cause students to disconnect from the school environment, stigmatize students into conforming to teachers' negative biases (Ferguson, 2003), or cause teachers to modify they way they, teach, evaluate, and advise students with that they are biased against, all leading to poor educational outcomes for marginalized students (Gershenson et al., 2016).

The systemic inequities that lead to the persistent gap in educational attainment levels for African Americans can later evolve into socioeconomic limitations that may impact them for a lifetime. Appearing as early as elementary school, this gap later evolves into marginal high school graduation rates, low college attendance and completion, and poor socioeconomic status (Slavin & Madden, 2006). Marginal academic performance, suspensions and expulsions, and the eventual failure to graduate from high school or attend college, affect one's lifelong ability to attain employment, generate income, build wealth, retire comfortably, and transfer assets to family members or descendants.

Shapiro, Meschede, and Osoro's (2013) research and policy study on the racial wealth gap found that contributing factors to the growing wealth gap between Whites and African Americans include inheritance, years of homeownership, household income, and a college education. Shapiro et al. found unemployment to be the single factor that depleted wealth. They also found unemployment to be much more prominent among the African American families in their study. Further, families with strong wealth portfolios in the study were highly educated (Shapiro et al., 2013), undeniably relating one's education to their wealth position. Considering these factors, an African American high school dropout is not likely to attend college or land gainful employment to generate enough income to build any amount of wealth. A fair and equitable public school elementary and secondary education should, at the very least, lead to the possibility of attending college or attaining gainful employment. Sadly, for many African Americans, it does not. According to the data, African American students are still failing at alarming rates.

Throughout the decades, various federal, state, and local district policies and programs have been developed in response to disparate achievement gap data. Whether these reform efforts are well-intentioned or politically motivated, many fail to produce the promised results (Choi, Humphries, & Villegas, 2016) and instead recycle the same, somewhat predictable narrative about African American failure. Most recently, the No Child Left Behind (2001) (NCLB) era made way for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, generating a mountain of data from national, state, and local academic performance, assessment, and equity reports that only affirmed what many educators have recognized for decades—our educational system still fails to adequately and equitably educate African American students and does not support their academic success. Despite years under NCLB and ESSA reforms, the African American–White achievement gap persists, without a substantial rise in achievement or closure of the gap (Lee, 2006). A

failure to invest in the financial, political, and human resources required to adequately prepare and support African American students in completing high school, entering college, or pursuing a meaningful career continues to yield the same dismal results.

African American student achievement at OUSD. In alignment with national and state data trends, OUSD dashboard data from 2011 to the present reflects low educational attainment levels for African Americans and a similar persistence in the racial achievement gap. OUSD's African American students are consistently attaining low achievement levels in English language arts and math, experiencing higher rates of chronic absence and suspension, and reflecting lower rates of graduation and A-G course completion than their White counterparts (OUSD Dashboard Data, 2017). In response to this alarming data, a multifaceted approach to solving this complex, systemic problem emerged as a key issue for OUSD. As a result, the district developed several targeted initiatives and programs between 2010 and 2017 to support successful outcomes for the district's lowest-performing subgroups. OUSD created two co-curricular student support programs specifically for African American students - the African American Male Achievement (AAMA) and African American Female Excellence (AAFE) programs. In 2016, OUSD established an Office of Equity charged with eliminating inequities in graduation rates and college and career readiness among diverse student populations. During that same year, the district initiated a Board policy expecting all high school schools to offer Ethnic Studies by the 2018–19 school year.

AAMA was established in 2010 “to dramatically improve academic and ultimately life outcomes for African American male students in Oakland” (OUSD, 2019e, para. 2) by analyzing the patterns and processes that are producing systemic inequities for OUSD's lowest-performing subgroup, African American males, and providing programs and services such as the Manhood Development Program, described by AAMA as an academic mentoring program, and the Student Leadership Council, a

leadership development program consisting of African American males from 14 middle and high school across the district that participate in a variety of local, state, and national leadership activities. Similarly, AAFE was developed in 2016 to “create a highly visible and proactive collaborative to accelerate academic achievement among African American girls and young women in OUSD, and to address the disparities in educational and social outcomes for African American girls and young women from preschool through high school” (OUSD, 2019a, para. 1). AAFE offers one major program per year, a youth forum for African American females, and focuses a considerable amount of time in the area of strategy. The AAFA website notes, “the initiative will work with a core Advisory Group and a team of thought partners to develop strategies, structures, and guidance regarding how to improve the culture, climate, and conditions of female students of African descent from preschool through 12th grade” (OUSD, 2019a, para. 2).

Recognizing the need for a multi-layered approach to addressing and resolving persistently low educational attainment levels for low-performing subgroups in throughout the district, the Office of Equity was launched “to focus on improving systemic culture, conditions, and competencies across the district in order to better serve children and families situated farthest from opportunity” (OUSD, 2019c para. 1). OUSD defines equity as the provision of the academic, social and emotional supports that each student needs to prepare for college, career, and community success in the future (OUSD, 2019c). According to OUSD, the Office of Equity was established to eliminate the correlation between social and cultural factors and probability of success; examine biases; interrupt and eliminate inequitable practices; create inclusive and just conditions for all students; and discover and cultivate students’ unique gifts, talents, and interests (OUSD, 2019c).

OUSD Ethnic Studies: A board policy. During the 2015–16 school year, the OUSD Board took further action in support of student academic success, and passed a

policy expecting all district high schools to offer an Ethnic Studies course by academic year 2018–19. The decision was driven by the results of a study by Stanford researchers Dee and Penner (2016), studying the effects of a ninth-grade Ethnic Studies course in San Francisco Unified School District, which revealed several positive benefits and impacts for youth, including higher GPAs, better attendance, and lower suspension rates. An Ethnic Studies Leadership Team was then assembled, consisting of seventeen K-12 teachers charged with increasing access to and improving the quality of Ethnic Studies curriculum for all students in OUSD. The team met monthly during the 2015-16 school year, launching a three-year implementation timeline and plan, and by Fall 2018, eight district high schools offered a mandatory elective Ethnic Studies course: Castlemont, Coliseum College Preparatory Academy, Fremont, Life Academy of Health and Bioscience, Madison Park Academy, McClymonds, Oakland Technical, and Skyline.

Study Purpose

While significant research exists about the presence of an African American-White achievement gap and the persistence of disparate educational attainment levels for African American students, more research supporting the inclusion of Ethnic Studies pedagogy and curriculum to support and bolster African American student achievement is necessary to build upon existing research that affirms the academic, personal, and social benefits of Ethnic Studies. Education researchers have noted that Ethnic Studies has the potential to improve attendance, lower suspension rates, and boost GPAs for high school students—especially for students of color. While co-curricular programs like AAMA and AAFE are effective and necessary, more specific inquiries into the pedagogical and curricular needs of African American students in support of their academic success are overdue.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to document the experiences of African American students regarding the ways the Ethnic Studies course impacts their academic and cultural identities, and to explore Ethnic Studies as a curricular approach to addressing disparities in African American achievement. Utilizing Ethnic Studies pedagogy as a conceptual framework, this qualitative study explores, through narrative and the analysis of curricular artifacts, African American students' perceptions of the impacts of the Ethnic Studies course on their cultural and academic identities. All of the Ethnic Studies teachers in this study developed their lesson plans from the same pedagogical framework. As such, the knowledge constructed from this data can later be utilized to inform decisions about pedagogical approaches and program designs that best support African American students.

The study is guided by the following research questions: What are African American students' perceptions of the ways the OUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum impacts their academic and cultural identities? How does the purpose, goals, and design of the OUSD Ethnic Studies program align with students' perspectives?

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

In my examination of OUSD's Ethnic Studies course and its impact on African American students, Ethnic Studies pedagogy is utilized as a conceptual framework to examine the purpose, goals, and design of the OUSD Ethnic Studies program and how the course impacts African American students' perceptions of their academic and cultural identities. Ethnic Studies, by design, seeks to mitigate the Eurocentric curriculum and racist pedagogy that had permeated schools until the 1960s (Tintiango-Cubales, Kohli, Sacramento, Henning, Agarwal-Rangnath, & Sleeter, 2014). Inspired by the work of Fanon, Sartre, and Farrington (1963) on decolonization, early Ethnic Studies scholar-activists defined it as the physical and conscious act of freeing a territory from external control of a colonizer, and as freeing the consciousness of the native from the alienation caused by colonization. Since its inception, the concept of decolonization as liberation has always been central to Ethnic Studies pedagogy (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014), allowing for a systematic critique of colonialism as traumatic to native and Third World people, as well as space for healing from colonial trauma, including "the trauma of having learned to see oneself as academically incapable" (p. 112).

Ethnic Studies pedagogy liberates teachers *and* learners from racist, colonial, Eurocentric paradigms, and creates space for healing through knowledge discovery,

creation, and exchange. The definition of pedagogy as presented by Tintiangco-Cubales (2010) informs the development of Ethnic Studies pedagogy:

Pedagogy is a philosophy of education informed by positionalities, ideologies, and standpoints (of both teacher and learner). It takes into account the critical relationships between the PURPOSE of education, the CONTEXT of education, the CONTENT of what is being taught, and the METHODS of how it is taught. It also includes (the IDENTITY of) who is being taught, who is teaching, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to structure and power. (viii)

In de los Rios, Lopez, and Morrell's (2015) exploration of critical pedagogy of race in high school classrooms, they traced the 1960's Ethnic Studies Movement back to its inception as a frame for their work, noting that while critical pedagogy has much to offer, "it lacks the specific attention to race and racial relations that is at the center of Ethnic Studies" (de los Rios et al., p. 86). Ethnic Studies, building on the pioneering work of African American scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) and Carter G. Woodson (1990), as well as radical Third World decolonization movements (Fanon et al., 1963), assumes that race and racism have in the past, and will continue in the future, to serve as strong cultural forces in American society (de los Rios et al., 2015). Indeed, racism will continue to serve as a strong cultural force in K-12 education, without a culturally sustaining pedagogy such as Ethnic Studies infused into the edu-ecosystem.

Ethnic Studies pedagogy is rooted in resistance and seeks to bring truth to power. As such, Ethnic Studies scholars and K-12 Ethnic Studies teachers are tasked with tapping into the hidden curriculum, untold stories, and untapped knowledge production of communities of color that are often missing from K-12 and postsecondary mainstream curriculum (de los Rios et al., 2015). Informed by critical race theory (CRP) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), Ethnic Studies pedagogy seeks to move educators

away from understanding, teaching, and learning Ethnic Studies curriculum as a static topic about race, but rather to consider the art of teaching and learning Ethnic Studies through the operationalization of a pedagogy informed by both the teacher and learner (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014).

Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014), in their investigations of effective K-12 Ethnic Studies teachers and practices, identified four key operating principles of Ethnic Studies pedagogy. First, effective Ethnic Studies teachers understand the purpose of Ethnic studies, which is to critique racism and its impacts on one's self and society, as well as to challenge systemic inequities and oppressive conditions. Second, effective Ethnic Studies teachers are oriented in culturally responsive pedagogy, with a strong belief in their students academically. They know how to contextualize their students' inquiries and lives within Ethnic Studies content, as well lead students through the process of identity exploration and transformation in relationship to Ethnic Studies. Third, effective Ethnic Studies teachers use community responsive pedagogy as a framework to engage with focal ethnic communities, recognizing the importance of relationship building with their students and their students' families and community, creating curriculum around those relationships. Fourth, being a person of color is an asset when it comes to effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy, although there are strong White and non-White teachers. Their effectiveness ultimately rests on their ability to continuously reflect on their own cultural identities, the impact of a Eurocentric system on their sense of self and their perspectives, and their relationships with the focal ethnic communities, regardless of their race (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). These four key operating principles, as a conceptual framework, guide the development and practice of strong Ethnic Studies pedagogy.

In the spring of 2015, funding was secured for Oakland Unified School District to launch an Ethnic Studies Leadership Team, with the task of developing a pedagogical framework for Ethnic Studies in OUSD that would serve as the backbone for current

Ethnic Studies curriculum development and instruction (Choi et al., 2015). The team went through a series of exercises during this process, which included meeting with Dr. Jose Cuellar, Professor of Raza Studies at San Francisco State University; convening Ethnic Studies practitioners including a teacher from Manhood Development course; observing Ethnic Studies teachers in OUSD and Richmond; and meeting with Ethnic Studies colleagues in SFUSD. From there, they developed a definition of Ethnic Studies that passed the Board, with consensus. OUSD defines Ethnic Studies as “content and pedagogy that humanizes and empowers all people by honoring histories and cultures of historically marginalized groups, by employing multiple disciplines and perspectives to critically analyze systems of oppression, and by promoting action in solidarity with others to transform students’ lives and communities” (Alderete & De La Cruz, 2017, para. 21). After establishing the definition of Ethnic Studies, the team then revised the district’s 2011–12 Ethnic Studies framework and used it to develop current K-12 lessons and units.

The operating principles and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies at OUSD are based on San Francisco State University professor Dr. Jose Cuellar’s Xicano/Latino Ethnic Studies Paradigm, which calls for the critique of dominant ideology; diversion of needed resources to the community; incorporating multidisciplinary/holistic methods, series, models, perspectives, approaches; fostering reflexivity and negotiating outsider/insiderness; celebrating communal and individual assets; and building community and promoting healing (OUSD Ethnic Studies Framework, 2017). Key themes driving the curriculum are Origins, Identity, Culture; Power, Privilege, Oppression; Resistance and Liberation; and Action.

Since their inception, Ethnic Studies programs have challenged the race-neutral positioning of America as a melting pot, full of voluntary immigrants desiring to assimilate (Vasquez & Altshuler, 2017). The idea of the “melting pot” dissolves the voices of historically marginalized groups like African Americans. In school settings,

it purports the idea that they must forego some part of their identity to fit in (Vasquez & Altshuler, 2017). In Ethnic Studies classrooms however, teachers defer to and lift up those traditionally marginalized voices, narratives, and experiences (Yosso, 2005). By challenging the dominant narrative, Ethnic Studies educators help students develop a sense of self-identity (Vasquez & Altshuler, 2017). Ethnic Studies pedagogy, as a conceptual framework, draws from culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and critical race theory (CRT) to guide its development. Next, we explore the literature related to how Ethnic Studies is informed by CRT and CRP.

Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory. Ethnic Studies scholars in the field of education have long used critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework to analyze racial inequities in schools and develop curriculum that centralizes the experiences of communities of color (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). With race as the primary unit of analysis, the purpose of critical race theory is to challenge oppression at all levels (Vasquez & Altshuler, 2017). Though many theories exist about the purpose and value of Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline, Ethnic Studies curriculum has always been designed to confront and eliminate racism (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). African Americans report discrimination in schools as a common experience, according to findings by Hope, Skoog and Jagers (2015) noting that as early as six years old, African Americans begin to experience and understand racial stereotypes in schools, and as early as eight years old, they begin understanding and expect to experience racial discrimination in other settings (Hope et al., 2015). Aronson and Laughter (2016) also found that despite critiques of high school history curriculum, teachers continue to reinforce dominant narratives about American history, avoiding any relevant discourse about non-White people and reinforcing social stereotypes of people of color as

burdensome and insignificant to the development of America's democracy and a strain on the economy (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Informed by CRT's tenets, Ethnic Studies curriculum analyzes and mitigates the devastating impacts of institutionalized racism and systemic oppression, challenges the value of a Eurocentric based curriculum in a multicultural nation, and encourages the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices to support the success of teachers and students (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). As the literature review will inform, the five tenets of CRT can be used as a lens to understand African American students' racialized experiences in school and how Ethnic Studies informs and supports their cultural and academic identities.

Ethnic Studies and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy emboldens students and teachers to challenge institutional, internalized, and interpersonal racism, while recognizing how each of those levels of racism impact the other (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). Studies have shown that African American students are more likely to thrive when teachers deliver culturally relevant content that engages them in critical thought and narrative inquiry (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013). Thus, it follows that the combination of Ethnic Studies curriculum and culturally responsive pedagogy can yield positive and powerful results. For example, De Pry and Cheesman (2010) researched embedding culturally responsive teaching practices to address academic achievement and to foster a positive school climate, finding that these practices benefit students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Similarly, de los Rios et al. (2015) found that Ethnic Studies curriculum has many positive impacts on students, including increasing their confidence in academic writing, improving their critical thinking skills, and developing their identities. Examining teachers' experiences at Wilson High School in Los Angeles, de los Rios et al. (2015) found that those who taught through an Ethnic Studies lens saw improvement in their students' writing

abilities, and developed positive and caring student–teacher relationships. A synthesis of research by Aronson and Laughter (2016) addressing the relationship between culturally relevant pedagogy and the achievement gap found that African American students often do not connect to the curriculum, which exacerbates the problem. Ethnic Studies offers both teacher and student the opportunity to connect, engage, and transform with teaching and learning that challenges the normalized expectation of failure for African American students.

Summary

Ethnic Studies pedagogy challenges teachers and students to develop critical consciousness, resist Eurocentric-dominant narratives about race, develop cultural competence, reject stereotypes, and raise academic expectations of both teachers and students. Ethnic Studies curriculum, combined with culturally responsive teaching practices, has demonstrated that it can positively impact student achievement and identity (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Investigations of Ethnic Studies teaching and learning among K-12 teachers and students have revealed that effectively operationalized Ethnic Studies pedagogy can disrupt racist curriculum practices in schools and support African American student success, by delivering relevant curriculum rooted in culturally responsive teaching practices. Culturally relevant content positively impacts student learning, engagement, and empowerment (Dotts, 2015).

National, state, and local reform efforts aimed at improving performance indicators and educational attainment levels for African American students continue to yield the same marginal results, leaving African American students in a perpetual lag behind their peers in all areas of academic performance and achievement. Across America and throughout California, African American high school students suffer from higher

suspension rates, chronic absenteeism, and lower graduation and college-going rates than their peers. Oakland, California is no different—OUSD’s African American students are the lowest performing ethnic group in the district. While co-curricular programs like AAMA and AAFE are undoubtedly impactful for African American students outside of the classroom, the case can be made for Ethnic Studies as a critically bold and culturally responsive pedagogical and curricular response to the persistence of African American students reflecting the lowest GPAs, highest suspension rates, and lowest graduation and college going rates than any of their peers.

Literature Review

A review of the literature illustrates the effectiveness of Ethnic Studies pedagogy to support effective teaching in high school settings, and the positive impacts of Ethnic Studies curriculum on student achievement and identity. As dismal educational attainment levels for African American students continue to persist, researchers have studied, analyzed, and affirmed that African American students experience racism at all levels of education—including practices, policies, and curriculum. To consider how student-experienced racism is contributing to the phenomena; critical race theory provides a scholarly lens to view and analyze these experiences. As education scholars have analyzed the causes and effects of racism on the African American student experience, culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy continues to emerge as a mitigant to the effects of racist curriculum and teaching practices. In the following literature review, I explore factors that contributes to historically low educational attainment levels and achievement gaps for African American students, and investigate specific reform efforts aimed at bolstering African American student success. In particular, I examine racism in public school policies and curricula through the lens of critical race theory, the purpose of

culturally relevant pedagogy, and the value of Ethnic Studies pedagogy and curriculum, which has been reflected to have positive impacts on student academic achievement and engagement (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014), including higher GPAs and improved attendance (Dee & Penner, 2016).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as scholars of color in the field of legal studies started examining the persistence of racism in America after the Civil Rights Movement. These scholars focused on how the law continued to support disparate race relations despite the Civil Rights Movement's promise of equal opportunity in critical aspects of American life, including employment and education (Banks, 2012). In particular, this small group of primarily African American legal scholars, most notably Derrick Bell, along with Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Kimberle Crenshaw, and others, questioned why the gains of the Civil Rights Movement had stalled, began examining race as a fundamental form of oppression, and critically analyzed how the law was used to perpetuate racism and undermine the racial justice, despite laws and legal remedies that had been specifically created to mitigate racial injustice (Banks, 2012).

These critical race theorists asserted that racism not only exists, but is both an ingrained part of our social fabric and central to Whites' disproportionate and unfettered access to capital, wealth, job, health, and educational opportunities. Critical race theory seeks to expose hidden systemic racism and the fundamental ways that racism is normalized in American society, largely to the benefit of Whites and the detriment of African Americans. In the early 1990s, notable scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) introduced CRT into the education arena (Banks, 2012). Yosso (2002) notes that Daniel Solorzano (1997) suggested that CRT might be applied in education as "a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of

racism in U.S. education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in education” (p. 7). In the application of CRT to education, Hiraldo (2010) analyzed how the five tenets of CRT can be utilized to examine how various forms of social injustices are fortified in the education system. Each of the five tenets--counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Hiraldo, 2010)--can be used as an analytical frame to critique how education has continued to fail African Americans. tenets of CRT in this study. The first, counter-storytelling, provides narratives that counter those perpetuated by the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In educational studies, such as the one proposed here, counter-storytelling can give voice to the experiences of African American students, who are often designated as the “lowest performing subgroup,” and expected to perform as such. These counterstories, in turn, help decision-makers create stronger policies to support them.

The second tenet of CRT, the permanence of racism, holds that racism exists inherently in American culture, and controls all aspects of American society, including economics, education, and politics, and thus progress is undermined when matters of race and racism are ignored (Hiraldo, 2010). In a perceived post-racial society, the permanence of racism is a crucial concept to apply in the critical analysis of educational attainment levels for African Americans. Decades of repetitive achievement data for the same group indicates a systemic failure, rather than a failure of an entire community, decade after decade. Applying this tenet to a critical analysis of educational attainment levels for African Americans over the past few decades, helps develop an understanding of the existence of racism and its correlation with educational outcomes. The vast majority of public school teachers, administrators, and policymakers are still White. This tenet of CRT offers a lens to understand and challenge White predominance in education policies, practices, and curriculum.

The third tenet of CRT, interest convergence, maintains that significant progress for African Americans is only achieved when the goals of that progress consistently align with the needs of White people (Bell, 2004). Interest convergence influences the development of short-sighted initiatives like No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds, where White people are called to “save face” by quickly developing resolutions to systemic problems that have developed over decades. Even programs like AAMA and AAFE emerge from interest convergence, as White administrators scramble to meet the needs of African American students with programmatic solutions that seem effective at first glance, but ultimately continue to hold students and families accountable for systemic failures in education resonating from sustained racism in public education. This tenet leads to the fourth, Whiteness as property (Capper, 2015). The laws and policies of the United States have always benefitted White people and as such, the very notion of Whiteness has value, or property interest, in American society. The old adage, “If you’re White you’re alright, if you’re Black, step back” was born out of the idea of Whiteness as property. Jim Crow laws that kept African Americans separated from Whites for decades created an environment of racial hierarchy, with Whites at the top and African Americans on the bottom, that still haunts today’s institutions. Across America, the majority of teachers are still White. Oakland Unified School District’s teachers are 50.6% White, although only 11.4% of the student population is White, while 41.8% is Latino and 25.4% is African American (OUSD, 2019e). Whiteness as property emerges as a lens for the analysis of racial disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes, in both teaching and learning paradigms.

The fifth tenet, critique of liberalism, challenges the notion that we live in a colorblind society where all one has to do, regardless of racial background, is “work hard and follow the rules” to achieve their goals. These liberal ideologies create false narratives about African Americans’ social, political, and economic positioning. The

critique of liberalism tenet challenges those ideologies by illuminating racism against African American in school policies and curriculum, discriminatory employment practices, and unfair sentencing practices for African Americans. No matter how hard African Americans work to assimilate to social norms, concepts of colorblindness, meritocracy, and the neutrality of the law (Capper, 2015) simply have not applied to African Americans—there is no escaping “Blackness” through hard work or colorblindness.

Critical Race Theory in educational research. Over the past 20 years, CRT-based research in education has been used by scholars to document strategies to navigate and disrupt racism and analyze school policies and practices. For example, CRT can be used as a theoretical lens to critically examine school climate, curriculum, and pedagogy, and scholars also have looked to CRT to help analyze the experiences of people of color in school, from kindergarten through college (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). In one such study, DeCuir and Dixon (2004) utilized CRT to analyze race and racism in education at a suburban high school. Through counter-storytelling, the African American students in the study were able to express feeling uncelebrated and othered at a school that claimed to celebrate diversity. Further, they were able to critically reflect on being student of colors at an affluent, predominately White school (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). Through their counter-narratives, elements of CRT were exposed and explored. For instance, the permanence of racism was analyzed through one student’s observation of the unfair disciplinary policies, racist behaviors, and school governance in the way school officials handled an alleged hate crime committed by a White student, threatening toward. Essentially, the African American student in the study described how the White student engaged in threatening, racist behavior with limited consequences, despite recommendations from the student council to expel the student. Instead “he was suspended for a month and made to watch the series *Eyes on the Prize* and read *Black*

Like Me, written by a White man” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27). The study revealed, through counter-storytelling, that the school environment bolstered notions of Whiteness as property in many ways, such as demanding that expressions of African cultural pride conform to acceptable standards, categorizing African dress as offensive, and deeming discussions about Marcus Garvey as controversial (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

Interest convergence was also explored, making note that the private school regularly recruited African American athletes to maintain its championship status, however, those same athletes were rarely enrolled in honors or advanced placement courses. Essentially, the school benefited from African American athletes, but whether those athletes benefited from the rigorous academic program provided at the school remained in question. In fact, the African American male in the study student reported that on the first day of his freshman year, before anyone even greeted him, he was asked if he played football and what his 40 time was (a reference to how fast he can run the 40-yard dash; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). In sum, using a CRT framework, DeCuir and Dixon (2004) were able to illuminate the insidious nature of racism in education policy and curriculum and capture the subtleties of how African Americans students are affected by it.

As a second example, Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) used CRT to analyze the experiences of African American college students regarding the racial climate and microaggressions on their campus. Using focus group data from African American students at three universities, the researchers found that microaggressions (subtle verbal, nonverbal, and visual insults) were directed toward people of color often in the collegiate environment. The study revealed that racial microaggressions exist in academic and social spaces on college campuses, and have a negative impact on students and the overall campus racial climate (Solorzano et al., 2000).

Qualitative studies like the two previously discussed examples demonstrate that African American students, at all levels of education, are experiencing racism in various forms: overt, covert, subtle, and obvious. Analyzing these experiences through a CRT framework brings truth to life experiences and frames them within an ongoing narrative about how Africans Americans experience racism in schooling, from pre-K through graduate school.

In their research on the convergence of critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy, Brown, Brown, and Ward (2017) note that CRT paired with CRT provided a useful framework for teaching about race and Black History, calling for teachers to help students engage in the deconstruction of traditional historical narratives. Using a lesson about President Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation as an example, interest convergence was used to critically assess the decisions leading up to Lincoln's decision to abolish the institution of slavery.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), as a conceptual framework, focuses on effective teaching practices, strategies, and pedagogies in culturally diverse classrooms, and is informed by the beliefs, behaviors, and values of teachers *and* students. Ladson-Billings (1994) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as one that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 16–17). Essentially, CRP suggests that engaging students of color, who have historically experienced more barriers to achievement than their White counterparts, requires teachers to deliver diverse content through a lens that reflects the cultural identities and experiences of the students, and build up students' confidence while holding them to high academic expectations. Ladson-Billings (1995) sets forth three criteria required to meet the standard of culturally relevant pedagogy:

students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; students must develop a critical consciousness through which to challenge the status quo; and students must experience academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These elements require both teacher and student to learn from one another. Culturally relevant teaching requires teachers to draw from students' culture to inform teaching and learning, and requires students to critically engage with the world to disrupt sociopolitically oppressive norms, stereotypes, and injustices. In addition, educators committed to working within a culturally relevant framework are careful to consider the long-term academic achievement of their students versus testing outcomes. Culturally relevant educators focus on cultural competence, seek to develop sociopolitical consciousness, recognize oppressive behaviors in themselves, and seek to understand the origins of oppression before integrating these topics into their instruction (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Effective CRP engages both students and teachers in developing critical consciousness, gaining cultural competence, and experiencing academic success.

African American students are likely to thrive when teachers deliver content that engages them in critical thought and narrative inquiry (Gay, 2010). More than acknowledging cultural holidays, infusing pop culture into lessons, or adopting colloquialisms, culturally relevant content for African Americans encompasses concepts of equity, systemic oppression, and social justice. Teaching African American students about systemic oppression empowers them to recognize and critique the social and cultural obstacles that have created the deep disparities in education, like consistently low graduation rates and high suspension rates among them. It helps them understand that their failure is not entirely their fault—systemic forces are at play that impact their chances of succeeding. Perhaps, most importantly, it teaches them that racism is real... and still has the power to cause great hurt and harm, when especially when harnessed covertly in a system.

Research affirms that a culturally responsive pedagogy can positively impact African American student achievement and academic identity (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Gay, for example, noted that ethnically diverse students respond positively to teachers that express value in their humanity, have high expectations, and hold them accountable for performing academically. When teachers express this level of care for students' academic and personal achievement, students often respond by performing at higher levels in the classroom, socially, and culturally (Gay, 2010). Researchers have also used culturally relevant pedagogy as a theoretical framework to study the impact between curriculum and academic outcomes. For example, Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010), in a mixed methods study of a large urban high school in Colorado, found that African American students relate better to more culturally relevant lessons—that is, when content is aligned to their own life experiences. The qualitative and quantitative data presented in the Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010) study affirms the benefits of culturally relevant curriculum, reveals important perceptions about African American academic achievement, and addresses the challenges of being an African American student (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010).

Sustaining a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Since the release of Gloria-Ladson-Billings' (1995) landmark article, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," many education researchers have used the terms "culturally relevant" and "culturally responsive" to describe the types of teaching, learning, and curriculum planning that are foster positive academic outcomes for African American, Latinx, Asian American, Native American, and other indigenous backgrounds. Paris (2012) argues that while a relevant and responsive pedagogy is essential, educators must transform their practice, terminology, and stance from relevance and responsiveness to that of a culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy requires educators to develop engage in teaching and learning that is *more* than relevant or

responsive. It requires the supporting and valuing of young people's multiethnic, multilingual existence and experiences (Paris, 2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy requires more exploration, as social justice educators continue to resist racist school curriculum and policies through culturally relevant and responsive practices.

Racism in school policies and curricula. Since the establishment of the public schooling system in the U.S., curricula and educational policy have been used to perpetuate White supremacist ideals and racist beliefs (de los Rios et al., 2015). For example, up until the late 1950s, schools taught that African Americans were genetically inferior and not fully human, and scholarly arguments contradicting this view often failed to reach the mainstream literature (Ladson-Billings, 2000). For many decades after the Civil War, the separate and unequal education policies that plagued the U.S. embedded racist ideals into public school policies and curriculum. Although the landmark decision in the 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education* called for the end of segregated schools, decades of discriminatory practices and inequitable policies remained intact in schools across the nation. For instance, in 1978, twenty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, African American and Hispanic students in Tucson, Arizona filed and won a class action lawsuit against the Tucson Unified School District, demanding an end to *de jure* segregation, a legal form of racial discrimination imposed by the law (Dotts, 2015).

Despite changes to the ethnic makeup of the U.S. over the past few decades, school curricula continues to rest on a traditional Eurocentric foundation that implicitly assumes that all relevant theories, knowledge, and capacities are European (Duncan, 2015). Blanchett (2006) posited that despite the research acknowledging the role of White supremacy and racism in school curriculum, inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy persists, fueled by an undertone White privilege in public education.

In many cases, historically racist principles are still reflected in school policies (Jost, Whitfield, & Jost, 2005). In their findings and insights from a graduate level

diversity course for teachers in North Carolina, Jost et al. (2005) found that not only did the majority of White teachers tend to maintain ethnocentric world views, but a good portion of African American teachers maintained Eurocentric views of education as well. Their study also revealed instances of modern day segregation and not just inequitable, but egregious, treatment of African American children at magnet schools located in African American neighborhoods. Parts of the buildings were separated for White children in the magnet program, and African American children were required to collect the garbage of White children in the magnet program. These researchers also noted classrooms were noticeably segregated—gifted and talented classes were filled with mostly White students, whereas those more focused on learning, behavior, and emotional issues were overwhelmingly filled with African Americans.

Today, although 60 of the nation's largest districts are 80% non-White, school curricula has seen little change, though school systems in California and New York are beginning to make intentional efforts to move away from Eurocentric dominant curricula (de los Rios et al., 2015) by implementing Ethnic Studies.

Ethnic Studies Background

Ethnic Studies emerged in the 1960s from the Civil Rights Movement, as students, educators, and scholars of color rejected long-embraced ideologies of Eurocentrism and White supremacy taught in many schools; schools, districts, and textbook publishers were pressured to create and make more readily available curricula reflective of the population's increasing ethnic diversity (Sleeter, 2011). The institutionalization of Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline evolved from the 1968 demands of African American students at San Francisco State University for an immediate institutional response to the relentless systematic discrimination they were facing at that time (Rojas, 2007). African American students presented SFSU President

Robert Smith with a list of ten demands, the first of which was the immediate creation of a Black Studies Department. A few days later, an ethnically diverse coalition of students, the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), issued similar demands of SFSU, calling for a School of Ethnic Studies (Rojas, 2007). When President Smith announced that while the administration was in support of Black Studies and Ethnic Studies, it would not meet *all* of the demands presented by African American students and then TWLF, the longest and most violent student strike in history began - the Third World Strike. From November 1968 to March 1969, students, faculty, community activists, and administrators battled until the next President of the college negotiated an agreement to end the conflict, giving birth to the establishment of four departments within the College of Ethnic Studies: Black Studies, La Raza Studies, Asian American Studies, and American Indian Studies (Rojas, 2007). Once colleges and universities recognized Ethnic Studies as legitimate academic field of study, Ethnic Studies programs, specifically Black Studies, changed the landscape of race, gender, and class constructs in academia (Rojas, 2007).

Since its inception, the Ethnic Studies curriculum has been embraced in some areas of the nation and met with great resistance and rejection in others. Political leaders in conservative states like Arizona have long advocated for the total elimination of Ethnic Studies curriculum, while progressive school districts in California, like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland Unified School Districts have embraced the curriculum. In 2011, the Arizona legislature passed HB 2281, which effectively eliminated Tucson Unified School District's Mexican American Studies program, arguing that the curriculum was too political, although significant research and data existed contradicting that argument (Delgado, 2013). Conversely, political leadership in California and Oregon, continue to move forward with aggressive measures to encourage and, in some cases, mandate Ethnic Studies curriculum in public schools. In 2015, for example, California Assemblymember Luis Alejo drafted, introduced, and facilitated the passage of Assembly Bill, AB 2016,

an act of legislation that adds a section to the California Education Code relating to pupil instruction. AB 2016 requires the adoption of a model curriculum on Ethnic Studies for California schools serving grades 9 through 12 by 2020 (California Assembly Bill 2015, 2016). Similarly, in 2017 the state of Oregon passed legislation requiring an Ethnic Studies curriculum for all K-12 students (June, 2017).

Ethnic Studies and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy has three aspects essential to Ethnic Studies pedagogy: building upon students' experiences and perspectives, developing students' critical consciousness, and creating caring academic environments (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). Culturally responsive pedagogy, which centers curriculum and lessons around students' lived experiences, has been shown to be beneficial for students of color. For example, Hefflin (2002) found that student engagement and verbal and written performance among African American students was increased when lessons about literature were approached from a culturally responsive framework. Not only did the teacher utilize literature by African American authors, but also encouraged classroom dialogue by drawing upon a "call and response" style of communication, which is rooted in African American church culture, which improved outcomes for both the teacher and students. An ethnographic study by Jocson (2008) presented similar results in a study of a high school Filipino Heritage Studies class, where the Filipino approach to storytelling known as *kuwento*, which is rooted in the cultural tradition of passing down history, values, and lived experiences was revealed as a culturally responsive pedagogical tool to support student success. Students were able to affirm their knowledge and cultural identity, learn about themselves and their peers, and make critical cultural connections to family and community by hearing from and sharing with their teacher and peers as part of the learning process. Both illustrate how

intentionally engaging the critical consciousness of students of color, in both a historical and current context, liberates their learning in an Ethnic Studies course.

As Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014) noted, Ethnic Studies curriculum linked with culturally responsive teaching that reflects the experiences of students of color increases academic engagement, achievement, and empowerment, yet lessons about the significant cultural contributions of people of color in America are often relegated to cultural month assemblies (e.g., Black History Month). As the data continues to reflect poor educational attainment levels and wide achievement gaps for African American students and reforms aimed at standardization and testing to measure achievement continue to negatively impact African American students, supporting African American students will require a more intentional embrace of culturally responsive ways to approach pedagogy, develop course content, and deliver a curriculum that supports African American student success.

Suppression of Ethnic Studies curriculum and Culturally Responsive pedagogy. More progressive districts in California, including San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles, school districts are moving toward requiring ethnic studies (Tintiangco-Cubales & Monteiro, 2016). Recently, California State Assemblymember Luis Alejo drafted, introduced, and facilitated the passage of California Assembly Bill AB 2016, which requires the adoption of a model curriculum of Ethnic Studies for all California schools serving grades 9 through 12 by 2020 (AB 2016). However, although America's student population continues to diversify and despite some successes, the political fight to maintain a Eurocentric focused curriculum in public schools rages on. For instance, political leadership in more conservative states like Arizona and Texas continue to press for the total elimination of Ethnic Studies curriculum, as evidenced by highly publicized and well documented accounts of the banning of Mexican American, Chicano/Latino, and other cultural texts in conservative states like Arizona (Delgado, 2013). As an illustration, in Arizona in 2011, the state legislature passed HB 2281, eliminating Tucson Unified

School District's Mexican American Studies (MAS) program. Lawmakers argued that MAS curriculum was too political to be allowed in public schools, despite significant research and data to the contrary (Delgado, 2013).

Ethnic Studies curriculum in K-12 education. Despite persistently Eurocentric focused curriculum in K-12 education, many education researchers have reported on the value of Ethnic Studies curriculum. Delgado (2013) found that although Ethnic Studies curriculum is actually good for students, Eurocentric focused schooling still persists in many school districts across America. Recent studies have noted that Ethnic Studies curriculum, combined with culturally responsive teaching practices, has demonstrated positive impacts on student achievement and identity (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014), and improves GPAs and attendance (Dee & Penner, 2016). In particular, culturally relevant content positively impacts student learning, engagement, and empowerment (Dotts, 2015). Conversely, when African American students experience school devoid of cultural diversity, their academic achievement is at risk. In this section, I discuss support for ethnic studies curriculum, studies demonstrating the impact of ethnic studies curriculum on students, and the powerful combination of culturally responsive pedagogy and ethnic studies.

Support for Ethnic Studies curriculum. Although the criminalization of the curriculum continues in conservative states like Arizona, more progressive school districts like San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) are moving in the opposite direction. In fact, the SFUSD Board of Education took action to support Ethnic Studies, unanimously adopting a resolution committing to providing every high school student in SFUSD the opportunity to enroll in an Ethnic Studies course by the 2015–2016 academic year. According to a press release posted on the SFUSD website, the Board further encouraged district middle schools to “infuse multiethnic and multiculturalism throughout the 6-8 grade curriculum and to commit to exploring institutionalizing Ethnic

Studies classes as required coursework for graduation in the future” (Janofsky, 2016, para. 11).

Similarly, in an attempt to build cultural understanding and narrow the achievement gap between underrepresented students and their White and Asian counterparts, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) implemented a policy requiring all high school students to take an Ethnic Studies class before graduating. According to the Los Angeles Board of Education, underrepresented students will be more likely to achieve if they have the opportunity to explore diverse frames of reference on history, literature, and social justice. In addition, LAUSD’s Ethnic Studies courses fulfill California State University college admission requirements; by 2019, Ethnic Studies classes will be mandated as a graduation requirement throughout LAUSD (Szymanski, 2016).

SFUSD’s Ethnic Studies program, a partnership with San Francisco State University’s Department of Ethnic Studies, offers courses in grades 9 through 12 that focus on teaching American history through the lenses of race, ethnicity, nationality and cultural identity, and the curriculum is designed to help students understand and contextualize the course material in relationship to their shared experiences, prepare them to excel academically, and empower them to embrace their ethnic identities (Dee & Penner, 2016). Preliminary results of the implementation of SFUSD’s ethnic studies program show great promise. For instance, a research study conducted by the Stanford Graduate School of Education (Dee & Penner, 2016) demonstrated that SFUSD students who have taken high school Ethnic Studies classes have improved their attendance and increased their academic performance, as compared to the attendance academic outcomes of students who did not take those classes (Tintiango-Cubales & Monteiro, 2016). Data gathered from three high school classes in the SFUSD participating in Ethnic Studies from 2010 to 2014 revealed a 21% increase in attendance, a 1.4 grade point increase in

GPA, and an increase of 23 credits earned for those enrolled in Ethnic Studies classes. In addition, the data revealed that significant effects on GPAs in math and science achievement for students enrolled in Ethnic Studies, suggesting that exposure to Ethnic Studies curriculum could increase performance in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Dee & Penner, 2016). The data presented in the Stanford study illuminates the promise in planning, developing, and executing an impactful Ethnic Studies curriculum for public schools, modeled after the SFUSD/SFSU partnership.

In 2015, the Ethnic Studies Leadership Team (ESLT) was established at Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) to increase access to and improve the quality of Ethnic Studies courses for all students in OUSD, with a goal of having all high schools offer a course by the start of 2018–19, per OUSD Board Policy (OUSD Ethnic Studies Framework, 2017). Oakland School Board Policy expects all OUSD high schools to offer an Ethnic Studies course by 2018–19. They based their policy on research that reveals its positive benefits for youth, noting the previously cited study by Stanford researchers Dee and Penner (2016) regarding the SFUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum that found several positive impacts for ninth graders, including higher GPA and attendance and lower suspension rates (OUSD Ethnic Studies Curriculum Overview, 2017).

Impacts of an Ethnic Studies curriculum in K-12. As noted previously, Ethnic Studies pedagogy and curriculum creates space for teachers and students to look critically at matters of racial oppression at systemic, institutional, and personal levels and how each level impacts the other (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Research by Delgado (2013) found that young students of color particularly benefit from Ethnic Studies curriculum, as it helped them improve their performance in traditional subjects like math and English,

and helped improve their academic performance overall. Moreover, Delgado (2013) asserted that Ethnic Studies programs strengthen, not weaken, America's unity.

A study by Sleeter (2011) documents research supporting the impacts of Ethnic Studies curricula, identifying the positive relationship between Ethnic Studies, ethnic/racial identity, and academic achievement. More than a course or series of courses detailing the historical contributions of members of different racial groups, Ethnic Studies demands and challenges students to raise their consciousness, think about how race and ethnicity intertwine with power, and consider how the misuse and abuse of power causes racialized oppression, legalized discrimination, and social fear (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). The curriculum informs the root causes of stereotyping and prejudice and validates the covert racism that many people of color experience as early as elementary school, but often do not understand. Consider Lorenzo Lopez, an Ethnic Studies teacher in the Tucson School District, who credits the Chicano Literature course that he took in college with spurring his interest in higher education. The class "changed everything," he said (Dotts, 2015). Lopez's inability to connect or relate to traditional mainstream curriculum prior to taking an Ethnic Studies course resonates as common phenomena among many people of color, as early as elementary school.

Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, and Marx (2014) examined the relationship between Ethnic Studies and academic achievement by analyzing the GPAs, state achievement test results (AIMS), and graduation rates of ninth- and tenth-grade students enrolled in a high school Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in Tucson, Arizona to those of their non-MAS peers. Their quantitative examination revealed that MAS students had significantly higher graduation rates and better AIMS passing rates, despite having lower performance rates than that of their peers in 9th and 10th grade, demonstrating that students enrolled in the MAS program outperformed their peers that were not enrolled in the program (Cabrera et al., 2014). The results of their examination establish that student

taking an Ethnic Studies course align with previous findings that Ethnic Studies supports students development, including studies cited by Sleeter (2011) that demonstrated increased student engagement when students read literature by authors of their racial/ethnic background (Bean, Valerio, Senior, & White, 1999; Brozo, Valerio, & Salazar, 1996). Ethnic Studies curriculum also led to higher achievement in math and science and more positive attitudes toward learning among Native American students (Sleeter, 2011). Sleeter's examination of Ethnic Studies in K-12 education also found that Ethnic Studies in social studies led to higher academic achievement and created a sense of agency among students.

Support for implementing Ethnic Studies curriculum in public schools to impact student success continues to gain momentum. In addition to recent moves by OUSD and SFUSD to support Ethnic Studies in their respective schools, a press release posted on the SFUSD website notes that the district is committed to exploring Ethnic Studies as required curriculum and eventually a graduation requirement, and further encouraged district middle schools to infuse multiculturalism throughout their curriculum (SFUSD, 2014). In the spring of 2015, funding was secured to launch the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) Ethnic Studies Leadership Team (ESLT), whose task was to develop a framework for Ethnic Studies in OUSD that would serve as the backbone for current curriculum development and instruction (Choi et al., 2016). ESLT, a group of teachers and administrators, was charged with increasing access to and improving the quality of Ethnic Studies courses for all students in OUSD. Per OUSD Board Policy, all high schools are expected to offer an Ethnic Studies course by 2018–19, noting Dee and Penner's (2016) study documenting the positive impacts of a ninth grade Ethnic Studies course in SFUSD as a driving factor behind the decision (OUSD Ethnic Studies Framework, 2017). Most recently, in 2017, Oregon became the only state to pass statewide legislation mandating an Ethnic Studies curriculum for all K-12 students

(June, 2017). In 2018, that state of Indiana declared that high schools must offer, at least once per year, an elective Ethnic Studies course (Mullis, 2018). In short, Ethnic Studies pedagogy is making gains in education reform. As such, narrative data on how practicing its pedagogy specifically impacts African American students is worthy of generating and exploring, to capture and bring forth their authentic voices and experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

This qualitative research study was designed to explore how Ethnic Studies curriculum impacts African American students' perceptions of their own academic and cultural identities. It further seeks to analyze whether the purpose, goals, and design of OUSD's Ethnic Studies initiative effectively align with students' experiences. Utilizing Ethnic Studies pedagogy as a conceptual framework, the study explored the following research questions: (a) What are African American students' perceptions of the ways the OUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum impacts their academic and cultural identities? (b) How do the goals, purpose, and design of the OUSD's Ethnic Studies program align with students' perspectives?

Methods

The following data sources informed this study: (a) OUSD Ethnic Studies program implementation, framework, and curriculum documents, (b) professional development meeting agendas from two pedagogy planning activities for Ethnic Studies practitioners, and (c) four semi-structured focus group interviews with 13 African American students at three OUSD high schools: Fremont, Skyline, and Madison Park Academy. One professional development meeting agenda is from an Ethnic Studies planning day for OUSD teachers; the other is from the inaugural Northern California Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering at Saint Mary's College of California.

Document Collection

The OUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum, Ethnic Studies Framework, and Implementation Guide and Timeline documents were retrieved from the OUSD website. These documents provide valuable data about the design, purpose, pedagogy, and implementation of the OUSD's Ethnic Studies initiative.

The first professional development meeting agenda was collected from participating in an 8-hour Ethnic Studies pedagogy development and lesson planning day for OUSD teachers. The purpose of the meeting was to support teachers as they continue to develop their practice in Ethnic Studies by connecting them, building trust among them, reviewing the Ethnic Studies framework together, and co-planning lessons in alignment with Ethnic Studies pedagogy. The OUSD professional development activity meeting agenda informs the study about the purpose, goals, and design of OUSD's program, to explore how students' perspectives aligned with them.

The second professional development meeting was collected from participating in a four-hour Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering at Saint Mary's College of California. The inaugural meeting was designed to nurture, support and engage Ethnic Studies practitioners at public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and K-12 institutions throughout Northern California around Ethnic Studies pedagogy and pipelines. The purpose of the gathering was to share pedagogical practices, strengthen networks of care, and explore the possibilities of institutionalizing a radical pipeline of student/teacher activism—and all of this was rooted in the Ethnic Studies tradition. The meeting agenda provides a lens into the professional development activities and pedagogical practices shared among Northern California Ethnic Studies educators committed to institutionalizing an intentional Ethnic Studies pedagogy and pipeline in K-12 institutions and beyond.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interview method (Leavy, 2017) was utilized to gather data from a series of four focus groups comprised of African American male and female students, enrolled at three different schools, who shared the experience of taking the 9th grade OUSD Ethnic Studies course at their respective schools. Through guided discussions, African American students had the opportunity to interpret their Ethnic Studies experience with stories and examples (Leavy, 2017) of how they think the course impacted their perceptions of their own academic achievement and cultural identity, describing how it related to their other academic courses; students also reflected on their their understanding of systemic oppression and the most impactful experiences in the course. Overall, the study is designed to generate qualitative data about how African American students, as members of a historically oppressed racial group in America, experience Ethnic Studies in relationship to their achievement and identity, with a particular focus on Ethnic Studies' inherently anti-racist and culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, the study will illustrate how critical professional development and pedagogical practices inform effective Ethnic Studies teaching and learning.

Narrative inquiry is used in this study to illuminate the experiences and perceptions of and give voice to African American students taking an Ethnic Studies course, as they describe the impact of Ethnic Studies on their perceptions about their cultural and academic identities. Researchers utilize narrative inquiry to intentionally bring forth people's stories and narratives to improve understanding of complex human experiences and social phenomena (Phillion & He, 2008). Related to the cultural traditions of oral history, storytelling has been valued for decades as a way to pass down knowledge and history (Linde, 1993). Narrative inquiry is also informed by the CRT principle of storytelling (Clandinin, 2006). Vasquez and Altshuler (2017) note that for

many students of color, storytelling remains as a tradition, and narrative inquiry is helpful for focusing on the data of people's stories, because their lives are shaped by the stories that they create, live, and tell (Vasquez & Altshuler, 2017). Given how the mainstream methods of inquiry privilege dominant perspectives, using stories to understand people's experiences is more likely to capture the nuances and complexities of those less privileged, more marginalized experiences, which can theoretically inform social justice studies in meaningful ways (Yosso, 2005). Through narrative inquiry, a method used by many education scholars to capture stories and counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), the study explores and illuminates how OUSD's Ethnic Studies framework impacts African Americans students' perceptions about how they view themselves as members of a historically socially oppressed group. Their stories also provide insight into whether the OUSD Ethnic Studies program design meets its intended purpose and goals, by assessing the students' perspectives about the curriculum.

Focus groups are often used by researchers to learn about the ways in which groups talk among themselves (Roulston, 2010). Focus groups are also useful if the researcher is of the belief that the group environment will encourage self-disclosure (Roulston, 2010). In this study, capturing the stories of African American students who have taken an Ethnic Studies course is critical to generating data about the student learning experience, specific to their own racial identity. The focus group feature allows for the students to engage in critical dialogue and narrate their own stories about their specific experiences as African Americans, a group primarily descending from American chattel slavery and the generational impact of being historically locked up and locked out of society. Narrative inquiry, as a pedagogical approach in education, brings validity to the stories and lived experiences of students in the classroom, allowing for them to tell, retell, live, and relive their stories (Huber et al., 2013) .

According to Leavy (2017), qualitative research methods are useful when the researcher is attempting to learn inductively about a social phenomenon from the perspective of individuals and small groups. The focus group interview method empowered participants to use their own language, narrate their own stories, and ascribe meaning to their experiences in the classroom (Leavy, 2017). Focus group interview questions guided conversations about how they respond and relate to culturally relevant pedagogy, and how the Ethnic Studies course impacted them.

Ethnic Studies pedagogy challenges both teacher and learner to resist Eurocentric curriculum and tap into more complex critical paradigms about race and racism. Education scholars like Delgado (2013) suggest that although an Ethnic Studies curriculum is good for students, Eurocentric schooling persists. Through the lens of critical race theory, the focus group interviews allowed for students to reflect on their own identity as African Americans and the effects of systemic oppression on African Americans throughout history. Participants explored how systemic oppression and inequality among African Americans in society might impact their achievement and identity in school. Students shared their narratives about how they see themselves as students and how Ethnic Studies curriculum has affected them and their perceptions about their own selves, families, and communities.

Setting

Oakland Unified School District's current enrollment is 36,900 students, with an ethnic breakdown of 25.4% African American, 11% White, 41.8% Latino, 13% Asian, 4% Multiethnic, and 0.2% Native American (OUSD, 2019e). California Dashboard data reflects that African Americans are underperforming at all OUSD high schools. Fremont, Madison Park Academy, and Skyline, the three high schools selected for the study, represent a cross section of Oakland's economic and ethnic diversity. All three schools

have high percentages of socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. All three schools report low graduation rates and high suspension rates for African American students, according to 2019 California School Dashboard data.

Skyline High School. Situated in the affluent Oakland Hills, Skyline High School has 1873 students enrolled, 78% of which are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Skyline's student population is 6% White, 39% Latino, 15% Asian, 2% Filipino, 1% Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American. African American students represent 32% of Skyline's population. The school's website notes its vision as follows:

The Skyline community will engage our students by embracing an education that values critical thinking, academic rigor, cultural responsiveness, and healthy relationships. We strive to create equitable and meaningful learning experiences in which students thrive in college, career and community with confidence, courage and joy. (OUSD, 2019d, para. 2)

Completion of A-G requirements and college level courses for African American students at Skyline, however, suggests that African Americans are in the peripheral of that vision, as they represent the lowest performing group in those areas, with no significant status change from year to year. The graduation rate for African Americans is low at 62.5% and the suspension rate high at 10%. African American students also reported the lowest percentage of positive responses to Skyline's school climate survey, according to OUSD's 2016–17 School Performance Framework (OUSD, 2019a).

Fremont High School. Established in 1905, Fremont High School is situated in socioeconomically depressed East Oakland. Fremont currently has 780 students enrolled, with 83% of the student population reported as low-income. Furthermore, 26% of Fremont's students are African American, 61% Latino, 5% Asian, and 1% Pacific Islander. African American students represent the lowest performing group in English

Language Arts, A–G course completion, and college-level courses. African American students are also the least on track to graduate for both 9-10 and 11-12 grade populations, have the highest suspension rates, and represent the lowest percentage of positive responses on the student climate survey at Fremont. Further, there has been no little to no growth for African American students, across any of the performance indicators at Fremont (OUSD, 2019a).

Madison Park Academy. A fairly new high school, the first senior class graduated from Madison Park Academy in 2017. Situated in a socioeconomically blighted area of East Oakland, Madison Park Academy’s 312 high school student is comprised of 78% Latino, 15% African American, 3% Asian, and 1% Pacific Islander students. Additionally, 97% of the school’s population is low-income. The school website notes the while their students are resilient, advocate for themselves and others, and have an immense amount of linguistic capital and cultural wealth, the challenges are immense:

100% of our students are students of color (80% Latino and 15% African American) who receive free and reduced lunch. Our students live in a part of East Oakland that experiences frequent trauma; as a result we are a community school that utilizes restorative practices to support the social emotional needs of our students. (OUSD, 2019f, para. 2)

Although an abundance of data does not yet exist for such a new school, the current data available about African American students at Madison Park Academy is telling. African Americans represent the lowest performing group in college and career readiness pathway participation and have the highest chronic absenteeism rate. African American students at Madison Park Academy are not attending school. Those that are attending are not being led to participate in any college or career pathways, such as

industry-themed courses of study, work-based learning, job shadowing, or internships with links to careers and college majors.

Ethnic Studies Planning Day, Oakland, California. The Ethnic Studies Planning Day occurred at non-district site in Oakland. The purpose of having the planning meeting offsite was to build trust and camaraderie amongst the OUSD teachers and administrators called to embrace the Ethnic Studies pedagogy and teach the course at their respective high schools. Breakfast and lunch were provided, and several opportunities to break out, connect, and reflect were offered throughout the day. The agenda was intentionally focused on reviewing and reflecting on the pedagogy, lesson planning, and professional development.

Intercultural Center, Saint Mary's College of California. The inaugural Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering was held the Intercultural Center at Saint Mary's College of California (SMC) in Moraga, CA. Invited participants included Ethnic Studies teachers, activists, and scholars from Northern California secondary and postsecondary institutions including Oakland Unified School District, Salinas Unified School District, Cal State East Bay, and the Peralta Community College District. The purpose of the gathering was to engage Ethnic studies editors and scholars in critical discussions about developing curricular pipelines for Ethnic Studies, from elementary school to college. Breakfast and lunch were provided, and several opportunities to break out, connect, and reflect were offered throughout the day.

Sampling and Participants

Participants in the focus group were identified with the support of the Ethnic Studies teachers at Fremont, Madison Park Academy, and Skyline High Schools. Thirteen African American students—7 male and 6 females—were identified to participate in one of four focus groups held at the three school sites. 12 of the students were in the ninth

grade and currently enrolled in Ethnic Studies, and one student was a sophomore who had successfully completed the course as a freshman. The first focus group, conducted at Fremont High School, consisted of one tenth grade male student and one ninth grade female student. The second focus group, conducted at Skyline High School, consisted of two female and one male student, both in ninth grade. The third focus group was conducted at Madison Park Academy, consisting of one male and one female student, both in ninth grade. The fourth and final focus group, conducted at Skyline, consisted of six students total, five male and one female, all of whom were in the ninth grade.

Focus Group	School Site	Count	Male	Female
1	Fremont	2	1	1
2	Skyline	3	1	2
3	Madison Park Academy	2	1	1
4	Skyline	6	5	1
Total	3	13	8	4

Table 1: Focus Group Demographics

Data Collection Procedures

To collect data about the impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum on African American student achievement and identity and to explore whether the goals, purpose and design of OUSD’s Ethnic Studies initiative align with students’ perspectives, I collected the Ethnic Studies curriculum, Ethnic Studies framework, and Ethnic Studies Implementation Timeline documents from the OUSD website. I also collected the meeting agendas from participating in two professional development activities focused on Ethnic Studies pedagogy.

In addition to collecting documents and agendas related to Ethnic Studies pedagogy, I conducted a series of four focus group interviews with a total of 13 African American students—12 were currently enrolled in Ethnic Studies courses at Fremont,

Madison Park Academy, and Skyline High Schools, and one sophomore student at Fremont had completed the course in his previous year, as a freshman. The Ethnic Studies teacher at each school site helped me identify students from current or previous Ethnic Studies classes to participate in the focus groups. Once potential student participants were identified, each teacher assisted with contacting parents to obtain written permission for students to participate. Once participants acquired parental permission at each school site, the focus groups were scheduled. Each participant signed a consent form before participating in the focus group interview.

The focus group interviews facilitated critical dialogue about the nature and impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum, from their perspective as African American students, utilizing dialogic interaction to discuss concepts related to culturally relevant pedagogy, academic identity, and academic achievement. Semi-structured questions prompted participants to share their thoughts about the meaning of Ethnic Studies and describe how the course impacted their perception of themselves, their families, and their culture. Participants reflected on the most impactful experiences in their Ethnic Studies courses and whether the course influenced their understanding of systemic oppression. Participants were probed about whether the course should be mandatory for African American students and why, and whether they perceived the Ethnic Studies course as influencing their learning experiences in other courses. Students also expressed if, how, and why they were motivated or empowered by the course. Examples of the questions that I used to guide the discussion include:

1. Reflecting on the Ethnic Studies class that you took, what was the overall takeaway for you?
2. How was the content in your Ethnic Studies class relevant to other school subjects, if at all?

3. How did Ethnic Studies impact your performance in your other classes, if at all?
4. How did Ethnic Studies impact your perception of yourself, your family, and your culture, if at all?
5. How did the Ethnic Studies curriculum impact your understanding of systemic oppression?
6. How did the Ethnic Studies curriculum impact your understanding of racism and African Americans?
7. How did the Ethnic Studies curriculum make you think about your own identity as an African American person?
8. How did the Ethnic Studies class make you think about how you see yourself as a student?
9. What was the most impactful or memorable experience in your Ethnic Studies class?

Each focus group was audio-recorded on an iPad, with the Recorder app. The same process was repeated at each school site, at each focus group, although I made slight improvements to the protocol with each session, as I gained more experience conducting focus group interviews. Sitting in a circle setting in an empty classroom, we introduced ourselves and collectively set the ground rules to create a more relaxed environment for everyone. Before we began recording, I shared my personal background and the purpose of my research and dissertation study. Next, together we reviewed and briefly discussed the 2016 article, “Stanford GSE Study Suggests Academic Benefits to Ethnic Studies Courses,” by Brooke Donald, as an opening activity to get the students to start thinking critically about Ethnic Studies. After reviewing the article, participants were asked to reflect on an Ethnic Studies-inspired meme, write down their thoughts, and share

their interpretations of its meaning. After collectively debriefing the activity worksheet, I restated the purpose of my research study, tested the recording device, and delved into the focus group questions.

Each focus group lasted from 40–70 minutes, from opening to closing, depending on the number of participants. During the process, clarifying questions were asked and transition statements were used to move the discussion along. As each focus group came to an end, I summarized some of what I had gathered for member checking, and offered the opportunity to respond to this summary (Leavy, 2017). I then indicated that the focus group was ending, and offered participants an opportunity to add any final comments. The focus group participants engaged in thoughtful discussions about their Ethnic Studies class. The two smaller groups with two participants allowed for more individual interactions and direct discussions, while the two groups with three and six students generated energetic cross discussions and reactions to others' comments. Although there were a few times that I was asked to repeat questions for clarity, students answered the questions thoughtfully and candidly, and remained focused on the purpose of the discussion. At the conclusion of the focus group, each participant was given \$20 in appreciation for their participation in this voluntary study.

The first planning meeting agenda, OUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum, and pedagogical framework documents were collected at the OUSD Ethnic Studies Planning Meeting. The second planning meeting agenda was collected at the inaugural Ethnic Studies Pedagogy gathering. Reflections from both meetings were also included as part of my data collection procedure, to be analyzed as a source of information regarding the ways Ethnic Studies practitioners develop and practice pedagogy.

Analysis

The qualitative data from the four focus group interviews were collected, transcribed, coded, sorted, and analyzed for deeper themes, categories, and subcategories through the lens of Ethnic Studies pedagogy. Social science researchers note multiple benefits that can derive from using focus groups (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009), including obtaining data from multiple participants simultaneously and capturing face-to-face, real time responses in a socially oriented environment. In addition, the sense of belonging to a group can provide a cohesive, safe space to share information. Further, important data can be yielded from the spontaneous interactions of the participants, providing a setting for the discussion of both personal problems and possible solutions (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

I began the analysis process by conducting analytic memoing on the printed transcripts to explore initial possible themes that might emerge from the data. Saldaña (2013) notes that the purpose of analytic memo writing is to document and reflect on the researcher's process of coding and choice of codes, how the inquiry process is unfolding, and what themes, categories, subcategories, and concepts are emerging that possibly lead toward theory. Analytic memoing allows for researchers to think critically about what they are doing and why, confront and challenge their own assumptions, and recognize the extent to which their own thoughts and actions influence how they research and what they see (Saldaña, 2013). According to Saldaña, analytic memoing writing and coding are concurrent qualitative data analytic activities, given the relationship between the development of a coding system and the evolution of understanding a phenomena.

Next, utilizing a qualitative framework presented by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) for collecting and analyzing focus group data in social science research, I utilized constant comparison analysis and strategies from discourse analysis as methods to

analyze the focus group responses. Constant comparison analysis is a three step process, which is useful when there are multiple focus groups in the study, allowing the researcher to assess saturation in general, and particularly across-group saturation. The first step is open coding, where the data are grouped into smaller units and given a descriptor or code; during step two, the codes are grouped into categories; and during step three, the researcher develops one or more themes related to the content of groups (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Four overarching themes emerged and were color coded to capture students' responses for each: Empowerment (red), African American Identity (orange), Learning Experiences (green), and Teacher Impacts (blue). Next, I charted the responses to each answer in a visual data set, and color coded the students' responses by overarching theme. I reviewed the focus group response several times, to ensure that all responses were properly and color-coded. Many responses overlapped several themes and colors, providing insight into the ways that the pedagogical concepts overlap, as well as the ways that focus group data can be messy and fluid.

Discourse analysis is a methodology developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) that involves selecting representative or unique components of language use or segments - several lines in a focus group transcript for example - and conducting a detailed analysis to examine how various elements of life, such as society, community, institutions, events, and experiences, emerge in the discourse (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), the discourse analyst examines words and phrases to determine how people hold accountable their versions of events, locations, activities, and life experiences. I utilized this strategy to analyze the discourse among the students for similar words, expressions, and experiences among students related to the themes and subthemes, generating rich narrative data from student experiences in their Ethnic Studies courses.

The Ethnic Studies curriculum, framework, and implementation documents and meeting agendas from the Ethnic Studies Planning Day and the Northern California Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering were utilized to analyze the critical professional development activities of OUSD and Northern California Ethnic Studies practitioners. By analyzing the critical professional development activities of Ethnic Studies practitioners, and giving voice to African American students' experiences in the classroom, we can discern whether the purpose, goals, and design of OUSD's Ethnic Studies initiative aligns with the students' perspectives and experiences.

After a thorough analysis of the data and documents collected, the following four themes emerged as significant to the study: (a) Critical Professional Development for Teachers; (b) Affirming and Informing Identity; (c) Student Agency and Praxis; and (d) Student Empowerment and Motivation. The findings and theme that emerged from them illuminated the impacts of the effective operationalization of Ethnic Studies pedagogy, including the students' understanding of the purpose of Ethnic Studies, whether the curriculum allowed them to see themselves in it, whether they learned about systemic oppression in specific relationship to being African American descendants of chattel slavery, and how the ethnicity of the teacher mattered in relationship to their learning.

Limitations

As with all studies, this proposed project has limitations. While the focus group method provides rich data and allows for narrative inquiry, there is also the possibility of "groupthink" among high school students in a focus group setting. The in-depth interview phase of the study seeks to mitigate the potential groupthink by drawing out rich qualitative data, from several individual narratives. Further, the sample size, though it covers three of the eight high schools required to teach Ethnic Studies, does not represent

the entirety of the African American students taking Ethnic Studies at all eight OUSD high schools offering the course. However, the outcome of this study offer the promise to inform and enhance the body of research that currently exists about effective K-12 Ethnic Studies pedagogy as a conduit for improving educational attainment levels for African American students.

Positionality

As an undergraduate student at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, I was profoundly impacted by an Ethnic Studies course that I took during my sophomore year. I distinctly remember having several “aha” moments, as I learned about the systemic oppression, racism, and the devastating effects White supremacy. I began to understand that a series of historic events led to laws and policies that developed a social and economic environment ripe for the massive failure of African Americans that I observed happening around me as a child in my hometown of San Francisco. Growing up, it seemed that most African Americans families were battling poor living conditions, living in housing projects, and suffering from alcoholism, drug addiction, and mental health issues; even in my own multigenerational household. It was enlightening and empowering to understand how to connect the dots by gaining an understanding of systemic oppression, racism, and social justice and connecting them back to the socioeconomic conditions of my community and family.

As an African American, female, first-generation college graduate and the first in my family to acquire an advanced degree, I often reflect on what it means to have access to knowledge to which others may not have equitable access. The Ethnic Studies course that I took in college had a life altering impact on me. It changed my life at a time that I needed understand the world differently. It was empowering, invigorating, and affirming,

yet disappointing, leaving me to wonder why all of this valuable information seemed to have been “hidden” throughout my public school experience, seemingly only available in college. Considering not everyone enjoys the privilege of attaining a higher education, I wondered why Ethnic Studies curriculum was not available in high school. Based on my experience taking an Ethnic Studies course and having served in higher education administration for over twenty years, where I have encountered countless African American students with a lack of cultural identity and knowledge of African American history, I am convinced that Ethnic Studies can stem the tide of racism and vastly improve African American achievement and identity.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, participants were encouraged to be open and honest about their experiences throughout the process, because no right or wrong answers exist in this study. All participants were informed that the focus group interviews will be recorded. During the focus groups, open-ended questions about the impact of and experience in their current Ethnic Studies course were presented from general to more specific, without leading the participants to any desired answers. “Member checking” was embedded (Leavy, 2017) by reflecting back answers and summarizing key points to the students during the focus groups interviews. All participants were informed that the anonymized data and findings from the study will be shared with the CSUEB community and beyond.

Summary

African Americans continue to represent the least successful group in K-12 education. While many factors contribute to the systemic failure of African American students to attain equitable educational levels to that of their peers, education researchers continue to affirm that African American students have a better chance at success when culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies are in play. Research has also affirmed that students that take an Ethnic Studies course experience better GPAS and attendance rates, as well as lower suspension rates. While a great deal of research has been published about achievement gaps and low educational attainment levels for African American students, more research is needed regarding the specific impacts that Ethnic Studies has to empower African American student identity and achievement. The purpose of this study is to illuminate their experience and explore impactful pedagogical practices. A narrative approach was used to bring the voices and experiences of African American students to life through the focus group interviews. The current practices of OUSD educators and other Ethnic Studies practitioners in the field are also presented to bring attention to the social justice-oriented professional development activities of both. Education practitioners can use the data that emerges from this study to develop pedagogy, education policies, and learning environments that support African American student success. It is no secret that African American students have been failing at alarming levels, for decades. It is time to take a serious look at what African American students are—and are not—learning, and how that impacts their overall school experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

“We can’t change the past, but we should work to erase its harmful consequences.”

~Political Activist Yvette Carnell

Education researchers continue to find that African Americans are the lowest performing ethnic group in the nation, the state of California, and the Oakland Unified School District, with the highest suspension rates and poorest rates of graduation. As described in the literature review, Ethnic Studies has been shown to benefit students of color, at-risk, and otherwise marginalized student populations. In 2017, the OUSD Board unanimously voted to implement a mandatory ninth-grade Ethnic Studies course at eight high schools, in response to what has become consistently discouraging educational attainment data about African Americans and other low performing subgroups of students.

The findings of this study emerged from (a) OUSD Ethnic Studies program implementation, framework, and curriculum documents, (b) meeting agendas from two professional development activities for Ethnic Studies practitioners, and (c) four semi-structured focus group interviews. I spent four hours in focus groups with 13 African American students—8 male and 5 female—that were currently enrolled in, or had successfully completed, the ninth grade Ethnic Studies course at one of three high schools: Fremont, Skyline, or Madison Park Academy. Twelve of the participants were ninth grade students currently enrolled in Ethnic Studies and one was a sophomore that

had completed the course during the previous year. Utilizing semi-structured questions in a focus group setting, I documented and analyzed the students' narrative voices and experiences with the intention of capturing their perceptions regarding the ways the Ethnic Studies course has impacted their academic and cultural identities. During the focus groups, many common themes emerged among the students. Although some conversations veered off onto a tangent, the majority of the discussions maintained focus around the topic, and it is clear that the Ethnic Studies course was impactful in a variety of positive ways for the African American students in this study.

In addition to interviewing students, I spent a total of seven hours engaged in the professional development activities of Ethnic Studies teachers from OUSD and an additional four hours engaged in the professional development activities of Ethnic Studies practitioners representing K-12 and post-secondary institutions throughout Northern California. I collected the agendas from each of the professional development planning meetings, as well as OUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum, framework, and implementation guideline documents from the OUSD website. The professional development meeting agendas, OUSD Ethnic Studies program framework, and curriculum documents illuminate the design, pedagogy, goals, and critical professional development activities of Ethnic Studies initiative.

The questions that guide this study are, "What are African American students' perceptions of the ways the OUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum impacts their academic and cultural identities?" and "How do the goals, purpose and design of OUSD's Ethnic Studies program align with their perspectives?" Through an analysis of the documents and focus group data, the following themes emerged: (a) Critical Professional Development for Teachers, (b) Affirming and Informing Identity, (c) Student Agency and Praxis, and (d) Student Empowerment and Motivation. Those findings are presented next.

Critical Professional Development for Teachers

Ethnic Studies teachers are social justice educators. They are called upon to teach students how to critically assess how racism, politics, and systemic inequities intersect, and operate within a pedagogical framework that challenges the same unjust system from which they may be currently benefiting, depending on their social positioning. The operating principles of Ethnic Studies pedagogy guide the development of effective teachers, which includes effective professional development practices.

According to OUSD data, 46.8% of OUSD's teachers are White, 21.4% are African American, 14.7% are Latino, 12.4% Asian, and 4.7% are noted as Other. OUSD has an African American student population of 24.3%. The likelihood of a non-African American teacher teaching Ethnic Studies to African American students is present. If Ethnic Studies is to develop students' critical understanding of the world and their place in it, and ultimately prepare them to transform their world for the better by using academic tools, its purpose needs to be embedded in its pedagogy, implementation, and practice. The implementation of the OUSD Ethnic Studies initiative, which began in 2016, includes a three year implementation plan that clearly notes expectations for teachers to participate in professional development and curriculum planning activities. These kinds of professional development opportunities for teachers are critical, to ensure that the program design and pedagogy serve the larger purpose of Ethnic Studies, in relationship to students in the classroom.

As an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy needs to "to develop students' critical understanding of the world and their place in it, and ultimately prepare them to transform their world for the better by using academic tools" (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 111), such intentionality must be designed. As such, before examining students' perceptions about impacts of the OUSD Ethnic Studies course on their cultural and

academic identities, an analysis of documents will draw insight to the purpose, goals, and design of the OUSD Ethnic Studies initiative. Doing so will help to provide an analysis of the ways that the goals, purpose, and design of the program align with students' perspectives.

The critical professional development efforts of the district began with the assemblage of a passionate, knowledgeable team committed to the research, rationale, and goals for implementing the mandatory Ethnic Studies course. Next, the district pedagogy was developed based on established Ethnic Studies research, and a framework was developed to drive the curriculum. Finally, the curriculum was developed and ongoing professional development opportunities have been offered to immerse teachers in the pedagogy and curriculum planning.

OUSD Ethnic Studies Implementation Guide. Though recognized primarily as a college or university level course, it is important to note that Ethnic Studies as critical pedagogy has a long and rich tradition in the postsecondary context, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area, where Berkeley High School students were demanding an African American Studies Department as early as 1968 (de los Rios et al., 2015). From “that rich tradition of pedagogy and praxis” (p. 88), educational researchers have documented several cases of successfully implemented critical pedagogies of race in high school, giving OUSD a broad range of exemplars from which to develop and implement a mandatory ninth grade Ethnic Studies course.

During the 2016–17 academic year, the OUSD Ethnic Studies Leadership Team initiated an implementation plan to fulfill the School Board's policy expectation that a mandatory elective would be offered in all district high schools by academic year 2018–19. The Board policy, which was primarily driven by Dee and Penner's (2015) study affirming the academic benefits of Ethnic Studies, informs the project goal, which is to increase access to and improve the quality of all Ethnic Studies courses in OUSD,

and offer the course to all high schools by academic year 2018–19. The OUSD Ethnic Studies Implementation Guide (Appendix D), a three-year plan that includes an annual self-assessment, focused on the following goals: identifying teachers with the requisite background, programming the course into the master schedule, and developing leadership knowledge during year one; offering some 9th graders the course and continuing with summer and school year professional development during year two; and making the course a mandatory elective for 9th graders, aligning the course with dual enrollment offerings, and continuing summer and school year professional development during year three.

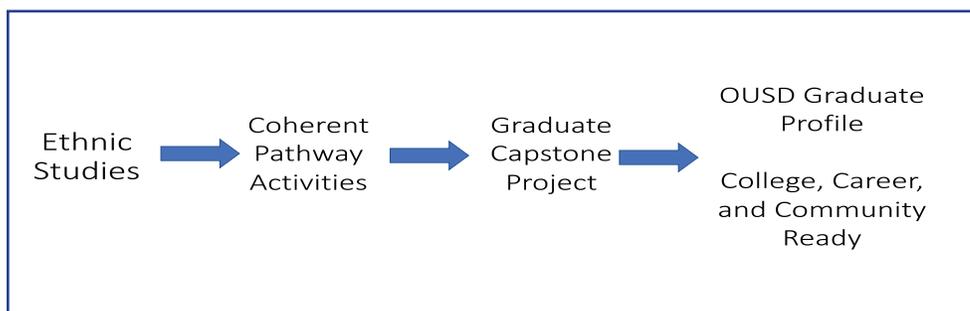


Figure 1: OUSD Ethnic Studies Logic Model (adapted from OUSD, 2019b, para. 1).

The educational purpose of Ethnic Studies centers around three major concepts - Access, Relevance, and Community, also known as the “ARC” of Ethnic Studies (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). The ARC of Ethnic Studies provides students with a “critical hope” (Tintiango-Cubales, 2014, p. 107), shaping students’ engagement in their own education and leveraging it toward the betterment of their communities (Gonzalez et al., 2009; Tintiango-Cubales, 2012). The ARC of Ethnic Studies contends that through *access* to a quality education and content that is *relevant* and connected to the student experience, Ethnic Studies serves as a bridge from school to *community* activism, organizing, and involvement. The OUSD Ethnic Studies Logic Model in Figure 1, which is included in the Implementation Guide, notes that the goal of the program is

“to increase access to and improve the quality of Ethnic Studies courses for all students in OUSD with a goal of having all high schools offer a course by the start of 2018–19 (Board Policy)” (OUSD, 2019b, para. 1). Here in the OUSD Logic Model, we see that there is potential misalignment with the broader aims for Ethnic Studies as a liberatory project in the United States. While the goal reflects elements of the ARC - aiming to create *access* by making the course available at all high schools, in the broader discourse of Ethnic Studies, the goal might be better suited if it embodied the entire ARC, by aiming to offer *access* to a quality Ethnic Studies curriculum that is *relevant* to the experiences of Oakland students and grounded in *community* involvement, organizing, and activism.

At the same time, the Logic Model notes in the first input labeled, “Ethnic Studies (builds positive identity),” drawing a relationship between positive identity, performance, learning key competencies, and becoming ready for college, career, and community. The logic is in alignment with Stanford researchers Dee and Penner’s (2016) study of the effects of a ninth grade SFUSD Ethnic Studies course that found several positive benefits for youth. The “Teacher Supports” input acts as the foundation of the Logic Model, with professional learning communities that inform and support effective pedagogy by engaging in cycles of inquiry and providing one-on-one coaching for teachers, classroom observation cycles, and curriculum resources. Professional learning communities support the effective preparation of Ethnic Studies teachers, who are called on to engage in critical discussions about institutional racism, systemic oppression, culture, and identity, but must also go through a process of continuous self-reflection.

Tintiango-Cubales et al. (2014), in their review of Ethnic Studies teachers, found that the most successful teachers strengthened their knowledge base and pedagogy through ongoing professional development and support, including coursework, conferences, workshops, and learning groups to ensure that the pedagogy aligns with the

larger purpose of Ethnic Studies, while contextualized to the students in their classrooms. New initiatives like OUSD Ethnic Studies require the proper investment of time, money, and resources to maximize success for teachers and students. In alignment with Tintiango-Cubales et al.'s (2014) recommendation to districts to allot financial resources to support the success of Ethnic Studies teachers, the implementation timeline includes a budgeting for Ethnic Studies professional development: \$2,000 per teacher, for summer and districtwide professional development, \$480 per teacher to cover the cost of three teacher release days per year, and \$300 per 100 students for materials and art supplies for creating student projects.

During year one (2016–17), the Ethnic Studies Leadership Team identified teachers with requisite background to teach Ethnic Studies. In California, Ethnic Studies teachers must obtain a Social Studies teaching credential and successfully complete the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET). For Social Studies teachers, state standards require proficiency in five domains: World History, United States History, California History, Economics, and Geography. Ethnic Studies is currently not a domain; further an analysis of the testing standards revealed very few references to the history of the United States-based ethnic groups (CCTC, 2002). These baseline standards do not require Ethnic Studies teachers to have content knowledge or a perspective aligned with Ethnic Studies pedagogy. As such, professional development becomes necessary to effectively prepare Ethnic Studies teachers to critically reflect on their own identities and positionalities, so that they can deliver culturally relevant, community responsive pedagogy and teach confidently, from a social justice lens—without fear, guilt, shame, or doubt.

Summer and school year professional development was offered to teachers, including the Ethnic Studies Curriculum Planning Day that I attended, where I collected the meeting agenda. During year two (2017–18), Ethnic Studies was programmed into the master schedule and offered to some ninth graders. During the final phase of

implementation, year three (2018–19), the Ethnic Studies was made a required ninth-grade elective and aligned with dual enrollment offerings. Teachers also participated in summer and school year professional development, including the Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering, where I also collected a meeting agenda. The district has met most of the goals noted on the timeline, though not all. Eight of the 14 OUSD high schools offered an Ethnic Studies course in 2018–19. Progress toward the goal of offering that course at all high schools is noted in the table below:

School/Pathway	Offers Ethnic Studies Course	Participated in OUSD Professional Development
Bunche	No	No
Castlemont	Yes	Yes
CCPA	Yes	Yes
Dewey	No	No
Fremont	Yes	Yes
Life Academy	Yes	Yes
Madison Park Academy	Yes	Yes
McClymonds	Yes	Yes
MetWest	No	No
Oakland High	No	No
OIHS	No	No
Oakland Tech	Yes (Cal Studies)	Partial
Rudsdale	No	No
Skyline	Yes	Yes

Table 2: OUSD Progress Toward Offering Ethnic Studies At All High Schools

There are barriers associated with institutionalizing Ethnic Studies, such as the CSET examination, which many Ethnic Studies college majors, best positioned to teach Ethnic Studies, find difficult to pass due to testing bias (Kohli, 2013). The lack of Ethnic Studies as an available teaching credential is also a barrier. However, despite these barriers, OUSD has made significant progress toward the goal in the area of implementation, with 8 of 14 schools having access to an Ethnic Studies course within a two year period.

OUSD Ethnic Studies Framework, pedagogy, and curriculum planning.

The pedagogy of OUSD Ethnic Studies operates on six pedagogical principles: (a) critique the dominant individuals/institutions/ideologies, (b) divert needed resources to the community, ensure needs of the community are being met, (c) incorporate multidisciplinary/holistic methods, series, models, perspectives, approaches, (d) foster reflexivity and negotiate outsider/insiderness, (e) celebrate communal and individual assets, and (f) build community and promote healing. OUSD's approach to Ethnic Studies reflects Tintiangco-Cubales's (2010) definition of pedagogy by taking into account the critical relationships between the purpose, context, content, and methods of teaching, as well as the identity of the teachers, students, their relationships to each other, and their relationships to the power structure. Further, the pedagogy aligns with operating principles of effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy: Principle 1 supports understanding of the purpose of Ethnic Studies, to disrupt racism and critically reflect on its impact on self and others; Principles 2 and 5 support the utilization of a community responsive pedagogy to support the needs of the community and celebrate community and individual assets; Principle 3 orients teachers toward a culturally responsive pedagogy by incorporating multidisciplinary and holistic approaches and perspectives to teaching; and Principle 4 allows for the continuous reflection of teachers own identities and the impacts of a Eurocentric system on them and their relationship to focal ethnic communities by

fostering reflexivity and negotiating insider/outsiderness. Principle 6 embodies the role of Ethnic Studies as liberating praxis, by building up the community and working to heal the wounds of economic, political, and historical social injustices.

The OUSD Ethnic Studies Framework 2017–18 (see Appendix B) defines Ethnic Studies as “a content and pedagogy that humanizes and empowers all people by honoring histories and cultures of historically marginalized groups, by employing multiple disciplines and perspectives to critically analyze systems of oppression, and by promoting action in solidarity with others to transform students’ lives and communities” (Alderete & De La Cruz, 2017, para. 21). OUSD notes that the Ethnic Studies framework is based on the paradigm of Dr. Jose Cuellar, who served as the chair of La Raza Studies at San Francisco State University from 1990–1998. Four key themes drive the OUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum: (a) Origins, Identity, Culture; (b) Power, Privilege, Oppression; (c) Resistance and Liberation; and (d) Action (See Appendix B). The key themes of the curriculum reflect the purpose of Ethnic Studies, ARC of Ethnic Studies by creating access to a curriculum rooted in cultural relevance and community action. Next, we explore the agendas of two critical professional development opportunities presented to OUSD Ethnic Studies teachers, and how those opportunities supported the pedagogical development of teachers and informed the goals of the Ethnic Studies initiative.

Ethnic Studies Curriculum Planning meeting agenda. The Ethnic Studies Curriculum Planning day for teachers was a comprehensive, all-day professional development activity. The meeting agenda had three objectives, tied to three of the six OUSD Ethnic Studies pedagogical principles noted above:

1. To practice with the final performance task in order to support student success and critique the dominant through our teaching practice (Pedagogy #1 - Critique the dominant individuals/institutions/ideologies)

2. To build community with colleagues and promote healing as we develop OUSD's Ethnic Studies initiative (Pedagogy #6 - Build community and promote healing)
3. To foster reflexivity through sharing of student work and through collaboration (Pedagogy #4 - Foster reflexivity and negotiate outsider/insiderness)

In line with the goals of the logic model, the planning meeting agenda included a link to a curriculum resource for teachers, to be discussed at the meeting.

Ethnic studies pedagogy requires that effective Ethnic Studies teachers understand and embrace the purpose of Ethnic Studies, which is to critique dominant narratives and challenge racism, grounding themselves in culturally and community responsive teaching practices. The agenda's focus on Pedagogy #1 allowed for discussions about how lessons can center on the students' voices, experiences, and ideas. The agenda called for participants to expect to share a piece of student work, as well as be prepared to discuss how students give feedback on their learning experiences, where the students have a choice on what and how they are learning, how the physical space of the classroom facilitates student discussion, and how much time students are expected to talk to the teacher, to one another, or listen to them as the teacher. The agenda called for critical discussions and reflections on teaching, learning, and knowledge construction. The meeting agenda set clear expectations for critical dialogue and full participation, as opposed to a more traditional top-down style which is, as noted by Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz (2015), aligned with the critical professional development processes necessary to support social justice teachers and practitioners.

Setting a foundation for success: clear goals and expectations for CPD. The meeting agenda clearly stated what participants would do and why they would be doing

it, at each time slot. The agenda also noted that the design of the meeting agenda was informed by the OUSD Ethnic Studies framework (See Appendix B), because their work as teachers needs to mirror what they expect of their students. For example, the purpose of the Introductory Activity, which called for teachers to bring a piece of student work to the meeting to share, was “to get to know one another and develop trust within the network by sharing student work and reflecting on that work.” The agenda further noted that the sharing activity was grounded in student work because that pushes the teachers to be reflective about what they were sharing. This was an example of what Tintiango-Cubales et al. (2014) refer to as a process of engaging in deep critical self-reflection that is necessary for both Whites and people of color who are present or potential Ethnic Studies teachers, due to their occupation of various positions on the complex racial hierarchy and the very different issues they face, depending on their position in relation to Whiteness or the dominant narrative.

After the Introductory Activity, the agenda called for a review of OUSD Ethnic Studies framework, and then the group was paired for cross-school planning opportunities to put themselves in the shoes of students who asked to complete the final task for Unit 3 of the curriculum. The purpose of this activity was “to get the teachers to reflect on successful instructional choices that support student success.” Teachers were to select from two options - take a resource from a Unit 3 lesson and apply the popular education model in a workshop structure, or create a student example of a workshop using the popular education model addressing the question “What do we want to learn that is relevant to our lives and our community?” Each pair would then share out their planning template, framing the discussion in reflections about what they are taking away from the experience, implications for their own teaching, and what support students will need to be successful with final performance task for the Unit, “Becoming An Agent of Your Own Education.”

The Ethnic Studies Curriculum Planning meeting and the agenda that I collected from it demonstrated the ways OUSD supports social justice teachers tasked with operationalizing Ethnic Studies pedagogy, with a focus on socioemotional learning, as noted on the agenda. The majority of the afternoon breakout session, nearly two and a half hours, was noted on the agenda as planning time focused on socioemotional learning, exploring what content from Unit 1: Origins, Identity, and Culture will be challenging for both teacher and student, and what supports teachers can draw on. The purpose of the activity was to illuminate the challenging emotional nature of Ethnic Studies work and how the teachers create and maintain this delicate space for students. The intentional encouragement of cross-school planning was noted on the agenda, as well as the differentiated work space provided, just as teachers were expected to provide in the classroom. How to develop assignments, learning experiences, and projects from a community responsive framework emerged as a theme, as teachers shared student work and ideas for how to best reach the goals of the Social and Emotional Learning unit, while honoring the pedagogical principles of the Ethnic Studies framework in their assignments. The teachers discussed the importance of connecting with their students, who were often a different race than them, an important step in the process of teacher racial identity development, regardless of the teachers' race. Effective Ethnic Studies teachers need to engage in a process of continuous critical self-reflection and work out their own issues related to their social position in the racial hierarchy (Tatum, 1992). Tintiango-Cubales et al. (2014) found that teachers that did this were able to “come to grips with the impacts of racism and colonialism on their own sense of self, and learn to take action individually and collectively toward social justice and self-decolonization” (p. 117). Research affirms that teaching race, racism, and racialized realities requires more than being a person of color to be effective (Berta-Avila, 2004); further, teachers of color do not always necessitate a cultural match for students. Left unexplored, teachers who

are considered outsiders to the communities that they teach, whether they share the same ethnicity or not, may bring privileges and prejudices to the classroom that may negatively impact their ability to connect with the students and the curriculum, and connect the students to the curriculum (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Au & Blake, 2003; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011a).

In addition to engaging in critical self-reflection about their racial identities, positionalities, and privileges, effective Ethnic Studies pedagogical practices require teachers to develop curriculum that allows students to see themselves in the assignments. Analyzing the curriculum framework provided to OUSD teachers, including the units and sample resources provided, we see an alignment of the learning goals with the performance task, with the appropriate curriculum resources, support, planning time dedicated to developing expectations for teaching and student learning. If the goal of the OUSD Ethnic Studies course is to build positive identity and develop students into college, career, and community-ready, while remaining true to the operating principles of effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy, the curriculum should reflect an appropriate alignment of pedagogy with the learning goals, performance tasks, and curricular resources provided to teachers, as exemplified in the example units from OUSD's 2017 Ethnic Studies Curriculum, in the table below:

Unit	Sample Learning Goals	Unit Performance Task	Sample Resources
1. Origins, Identity, and Culture	<p>Students will reflect on their experiences and memories.</p> <p>Students will analyze their identities, including race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.</p> <p>Students will cultivate courage, empathy, and respect for one another by sharing their stories and listening to others’.</p>	<p>Students create an auto-ethnographic shadow box and narrative essay that illustrates the ways in which the intersections and relationships of identities can be used to construct a counter narrative.</p>	<p>Danger of a Single Story (TED talk – Chimamanda Adichie)</p> <p>Little Things are Big (short story by Jesus Colon)</p> <p>Borderlands/La Frontera: opening poem (Gloria Anzaldua)</p>
2. Power, Privilege, and Oppression	<p>Students will identify how different systems of oppression (classism, ableism, White supremacy, etc.) are operating in our society.</p> <p>Students will apply systems of oppression theory to better understand their lives.</p> <p>Students will work collaboratively to educate their peers about systems of oppression and what they can do to address it.</p>	<p>Students will illustrate a different system of oppression, define it, explain how it impacts people, and suggest ways their peers can stand in solidarity with the oppressed group. Final projects can take the form of poster, audio recording, or digital animation.</p>	<p>An Open Letter to the Woman Who Told My Family to Go Back to China (NYT)</p> <p>Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack (Peggy McIntosh)</p> <p>Why the Myth of Meritocracy Hurts Kids of Color (Atlantic)</p>

Unit	Sample Learning Goals	Unit Performance Task	Sample Resources
3. Resistance And Liberation	<p>Students will have a clear and empowering concept of how they learn and who they are as learners.</p> <p>Students will understand the impact of implicit bias & stereotype threat on learning.</p> <p>Students will articulate an understanding of school as a system and how it impacts their lives.</p>	<p>Students will work in teams to create their own mini-lesson that teaches their class about a topic based on the popular education spiral model, which starts with student experience, adds new knowledge, and give students the chance to act.</p>	<p>And Then I Went to School (Joe Suina)</p> <p>Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Paolo Freire)</p>

Table 3: OUSD Sample Ethnic Studies Curriculum Units

Teacher racial identity and reflection. After the lunch break, time was built into the agenda to discuss the challenging emotional nature of teaching Ethnic Studies and how the teachers hold those spaces for students, before breaking out into a two-hour collaborative planning session, with the purpose “to encourage connections across racial groups and school sites.” The agenda noted that it would close the professional development day with a share out of one thing that they were excited about based on their planning activities that day and share appreciation for the ways colleagues supported the learning of the day. Effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy calls for teachers to continuously

reflect on their own identities, as well as the impacts of a Eurocentric system on them and their relationships with the students in the focal ethnic communities that they teach.

The OUSD professional development day agenda specifically noted the expectation to, and intentionally provided time and space for, opportunities to reflect on identity, pedagogy, and community. For example, the professional development agenda allotted time for framing the meeting, noting the clear the objective: “we want to intentionally use the ES framework to inform how we designed the agenda. Our work needs to mirror what we expect of our students.” During the paired curriculum planning session, the agenda noted the purpose of the activity: “we want to give you a chance to work in cross-school pairs and to put yourself in the shoes of students who are asked to complete the final task for Unit 3. The purpose of this activity is to reflect on what instructional choices you can make to support students to be successful.”

Creating space for effective social justice teaching. Lastly, the agenda noted that the purpose of the breakout planning session was “to provide a differentiated space for working either individually or collaboratively based on teachers’ needs. We want to be intentional about building community across racial groups and school sites.” In studies of exemplar Ethnic Studies teachers (Baptiste, 2010; Lipka et al., 2005; Pollard & Ajitrotutu, 2001), the type of professional development opportunities offered to teachers has been demonstrated to impact the teachers ability to effectively reach and teach students. Content-based, top-down approaches are emerging are far less useful for creating strong teachers; the most successful Ethnic Studies teachers were engaged in professional development activities that required critical self-reflection, enabled them to get to know their students and communities, and created a high degree of student agency by presenting curriculum rooted in both culturally relevant content and responsive to

the needs of the community. Kohli et al. (2015) note that a balance of love, support, and challenge must be present to support teachers engaged in social justice work.

An analysis of the district teacher planning meeting agenda provides clear examples of how the OUSD Ethnic Studies Leadership Team is working toward intentionally operationalizing Ethnic Studies pedagogy as part of the critical professional development of Ethnic Studies teachers, as opposed to less effective top-down, content-based teacher training models, while attempting to provide a balance of love, support, and challenge. The purpose of Ethnic Studies is embedded within the framework of the training; teachers were provided with tools for delivering culturally and community responsive pedagogy; curriculum examples and resources were provided to help teachers plan; and time and space was built in to the schedule for appreciating students and colleagues, racial identity exploration, and self-reflection.

Next, I explore how the pedagogy and planning emerged as impactful across school sites, with an identity exploration assignment called the Shadow Box.

The shadow box. During the curriculum planning meeting, the breakout sessions for collaborative lesson planning were intentionally focused on Unit 1: Origins, Identity, and Culture. The focused performance task that teachers spent significant collaborative planning time on was a student project called the Shadow Box, described on the example curriculum as, “students create an ethnographic shadow box and narrative essay that illustrates the ways in which the intersections and relationships of identities can be used to construct a counternarrative.” The sample learning goals for the Shadow Box provided were: students will reflect on their experiences and memories; students will analyze their identities, including race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.; and students will cultivate courage, empathy, and respect for one another by sharing their stories and listening to others. Essentially, the Shadow Box assignment engages students in a process of identity exploration and reflection by asking them to present their identities in a shoebox. To

complete the assignment, students are provided with art supplies and instructed to utilize a shoebox-type box for this project. Encouraged to be creative, students are asked to think about, create, and present the interior and exterior of a box as a counter narrative to their perceived identity, describing how they believe they are seen from the outside looking in (the outside of the box), and how they see themselves (the inside of the box). Through this assignment, students engage in a process of deep self-reflection, creative expression, and writing a narrative essay about how the intersection of race, culture, social class, gender and more impact their identity, as well as how they believe the world perceives their existence. The assignment requires students to present their Shadow Boxes in class.

During the focus group discussions about the most impactful experiences in their Ethnic Studies course, indications of the effectiveness of the critical professional development and collaborative planning activities of the teachers around Unit 1: Origins, Identity, and Culture emerged in the students' responses about their experience with the Shadow Box assignment. This assignment helped teachers orient themselves toward a more culturally responsive pedagogy by centering the curriculum around students' experiences and perspectives, student culture, and funds of knowledge (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014), which the literature has revealed as essential to strong Ethnic Studies teaching. When participants were asked about the most impactful assignment, a student named Jamal responded, "One of those projects was a shadow box. We had a box, and we brought things that represent us and put it in there, in the box." "That was a good experience for you?" I inquired. "Um hmm," he said. Jamal, who was a bit reserved in his responses overall, did not provide great detail about his experience. However, other students provided more descriptive insights into the shadow box project, with responses similar to the one below describing the experience in relationship to how it made them feel about being to expressing themselves, how they see themselves, and how others see them:

Summer: We have this shoebox, or a small box that opens up. And we put all of our memories, and all of the things that represents us—whether it’s little things, like what color we like or what sport? A big thing is what is our religion. And how do we feel about certain events that goes on in our lives. And then you could also open it, if you want [points to shadow boxes in the front of the room]. We had to present them.

Marguerite: This is great. I’m opening a “counternarrative” box.

Summer: And we had the pictures of our family, and most of the things that we liked in it. I felt like that really just expressed myself; we expressed our whole lives in one tiny box. It felt really nice to me.

Summer’s comments reflect a framework of culturally responsive teaching highlighted by Hefflin (2002), where students’ lived experiences were utilized as a guide to shape the content and approach the curriculum, which engaged students in a process of learning about their peers and sharing their own experiences, within a larger socioeconomic context. This learning and sharing affirmed students’ cultural identities and knowledge, enabling them to make critical connections between themselves, history, familial relationships, and community (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014), which is a cornerstone of effectively delivered culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, Amari described the shadow box as an impactful experience because he had the opportunity to express many sides of his identity, such as his interest in activism and sports, and relationships with his father and close friends. At the same time, Amari expressed what he felt was society’s low expectations for African Americans to have a voice or valuable opinion, stating:

Amari: The shadow box. Yeah. They wanted you to reflect upon yourself, and put things into the box that represented you. I remember I had two sides of it; how I see myself, and how people see me. You know, how America sees me. And in the center of it, it had a picture of me and my father working on a project in the backyard. Because we were building a deck. And then on the right side, which is how I saw myself—I love playing football. You know, that activism stuff. And um, yeah . . . me and my friends kicking it, having a good time. Stuff like that. And then on the other side, pretty much there was a . . . I had a sticker that said, “Shut up.” Because not that many people want to hear your opinion, because some people are closed-minded—like your opinion doesn’t matter.

Marguerite: Because you’re African American?

Amari: Because I’m African American. Some people are mostly close-minded, like that. That’s just an example of what I had in my box.

Ethnic Studies pedagogy, in the culturally responsive context, draws upon on students’ past and present experiences within their own families and communities; however, more effective Ethnic Studies teaching and learning goes further in terms of developing students’ critical consciousness; the teacher leads students’ through the process of racial identity exploration and transformation in relationship to Ethnic Studies. This approach created space for Amari to express the stark difference in how he sees himself—a dutiful son, loving friend, and potential community activist, as opposed to how he believes America sees him, because of his African American identity—as someone who should simply “shut up.”

Many students that are newly exposed to Ethnic Studies often find themselves unlearning the predominantly Eurocentric anecdotes, histories, and cultures that “they

have been taught throughout their whole academic and social lives” (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 114), which makes it important for oppressed and marginalized students of color to go through a process of recovering themselves and their identities (Camangian, 2010). Zola described having gone through this kind of identity recovery process, discussing how her initial apprehension about the Shadow Box project evolved into a deeper appreciation for the exploration of her racial and cultural identity, with her eventually adding an important element of her identity to her box, on her way out the door, on the day it was due:

Zola: When she first showed us, and she was like—our teacher—she was like, “Okay, we’re going to do this shadow box.” And I was like--oh, I don’t want to do this. I was like—no, that’s too much work. Then, when I started to do it, I was like—oh, this is kind of fun; I get to express who I am and where I come from, and how my personality is. And I was like—I don’t even have to use words; I’m expressing it with images, or objects. I put a whole bunch of stuff in there. I had like, a house, and I had like, food in there that my family would have. [Laughter] It was really just everywhere. It was lit; it was literally lit! I remember right before I was about to leave, to go take it to the cafeteria, I was like--wait; I am missing one thing. So, I ran to my mom’s dresser with a whole bunch of earrings, and I grabbed one of her earrings. And it was an earring of Africa. I put it on the top of my box. It has the colors, too, on it.

Marguerite: Red, Black, and green?

Zola: Yeah. This is where I come from, so this is going to be in the center of my box—so you know that’s where I come from, and I’m proud of who I am.

Across all four focus groups, there was agreement that the shadow box was an impactful assignment, with 7 of the 13 participants overall, and at least one student at each focus group noting the Shadow Box as most impactful. The positive responses to the assignment suggest that the pedagogical, curriculum planning, and professional development activities of the teachers around Unit 1: Origin, Identity, and Culture are translating into impactful academic experiences for students. Zola, Amari, and Summer's comments about how the project helped them explore their identities aligns with the culturally responsive aspect of Ethnic Studies pedagogy in that the students are developing a critical lens through which to understand and even question their realities, learning how to value cultural knowledge (Camangian, 2010). Students are then able to recover themselves and their identities, in the way that Zola did, when she grabbed the earring that represented Africa and added it to her box, at the last minute. She recovered her identity, in a way, making it the centerpiece of her box.

Creating caring environments. As a culturally responsive approach, Ethnic Studies lends itself to teachers' investment in students' academic success, especially when teachers create an environment that is caring and supportive, so students can safely and openly question reality, challenge racism, and process their newfound understandings of social justice, in relationship to their identities. Summer, for example, described how she loved that her Ethnic Studies teacher made it fun to learn about difficult subjects like oppression, marginalization, and power and privilege:

I loved how my Ethnic Studies teacher would make it fun to learn Ethnic Studies. They would do little games. You could see that chart over there [points to the wall in the classroom], and you would play games—and it would be about—you can see up there—oppression or exploitation, or marginalization, or—Power and privilege. About three topics, and it would be under, “Society, economy,

and politics.” And you would roll the dice. It would be such a fun game, and we would learn at the same time. And how our teacher would explain it to us in a way we understand; like, how you would talk to any normal person on the street rather than a professor speaking to you blandly and you get bored. But in this classroom, it’s more soul free. (Summer, personal communication, March 2019)

Teacher caring is crucial to students, as documented in a study by Howard (2001) of African American elementary students in an urban school setting. These students expressed that the teachers that bonded with them, expressed caring, and exhibited nurturing behavior and respect for them created an optimal learning environment for them. Similarly, a 5-year ethnographic study by Franquiz and del Carmen Salazar (2004) in Colorado, investigating how school structures and teachers’ confidence in students influence academic success, found that Chicano/a students in the study identified respect, mutual trust, verbal teachings, and exemplary models as the keys to their success. This kind of caring in the classroom is important for Ethnic Studies students, who may experience challenges as they learn to reframe their identities, examine issues from a social justice lens, unlearn Eurocentric focused narratives, and retool their thinking to begin the process of decolonizing their minds. Summer’s teacher created an environment that she felt was more “soul free,” although the discussion topics involved some challenging discourse. As Summer noted, the teacher “talked to them in a way that they could understand” about difficult social justice topics, such as oppression, exploitation, and marginalization.

Effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy maintains that while being a person of color is an asset, both non-White and White teachers can be effective, as long as they continuously reflect on their own identities in relationship to the students they are teaching, and their positioning in relationship to Eurocentric values, norms, experiences,

and power (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). Many studies of effective Ethnic Studies teaching highlight the practices of teachers of color, however the effectiveness of White Ethnic Studies teachers have also been documented. For example, Laughter (2011) found that the most effective White teachers avoided trying to be race-neutral or color-blind, and took the time to analyze how their lived experiences influenced how they perceived race and racism, and engaged in processes of critical reflection. In the critical professional development space, activities such as critical storytelling, critical autobiography, and critical life history help White teachers examine and reflect on their own beliefs about race and systemic inequities and how that might impact how and what they teach (Johnson, 2002).

Of the three teachers that taught the course in this study, two are Latino/a and one is White. Referring back to the OUSD Ethnic Studies Curriculum Planning Day agenda, the first objective of the day was to “foster reflexivity through sharing of student work and through collaboration,” referencing Pedagogy #4—“foster reflexivity and negotiate outsider/insiderness.” Critical professional development (CPD) is key for Ethnic Studies teachers of all racial identities, allowing space for racial identity exploration, learning and engaging in the prescribed pedagogy, collaborative curriculum planning, and cross-site connections among colleagues. The kinds of activities that OUSD teachers participated in during the Curriculum Planning Day orient teachers toward a more culturally responsive pedagogy, helping and establish stronger connections with students (Tintiango-Cubales, 2010).

Effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy operates on the principle that being a person of color is an asset for Ethnic Studies teachers; however White and non-White teachers alike can effectively teach Ethnic Studies, if they can continuously reflect on their identity, positionality, privilege, and their relationship to ethnic communities that they teach. During one of the focus groups, as an example, Dante made a statement about his Ethnic

Studies teacher that sparked notable agreement from the group of six. “It was surprising when I walked in, because I thought it would be like a Black dude, or a Mexican dude. I didn’t think it would be White. That was interesting, that a White dude was teaching Ethnic Studies. But he actually is teaching it well, so it don’t even matter that he’s White.” The critical professional development activity supported by the district created an opportunity for Ethnic Studies teachers from various ethnic backgrounds to explore their identities amongst a caring group, in a safe and supportive space.

Inaugural Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering meeting agenda. A

collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary Ethnic Studies practitioners throughout Northern California, the goal of the inaugural meeting was to convene radical Ethnic Studies educators to interested in nurturing Ethnic Studies pipelines, sharing pedagogical practices, strengthening networks of care, and exploring the institutionalization of Ethnic Studies, in the tradition of radical teacher/student activism. One OUSD Ethnic Studies teacher, whose students also participated in this study, was present at this unique, voluntary professional development opportunity. As noted in Kohli et al.’s (2015) study on CPD as an emerging form of social justice professional development, often emerges as a grassroots response to the traditional banking methods models of teacher training, and is more focused on community building, shared power, and transformative teaching to build stronger communities steeped in social justice action. As such, the agenda for the Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Planning Meeting was presented to attendees in advance of the meeting:

Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Planning Meeting Agenda	
9:30 am	Breakfast/Informal Introductions
10:00	Welcome & Ice Breaker/Community Building/ Formal Introductions
10:40	Community / Interaction Agreements

Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Planning Meeting Agenda	
10:50	Building the Foundation Together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified Goals from Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>ES Pipelines and Partnerships</i> ◦ <i>Ethnic Studies curriculums</i> ◦ <i>Pedagogical strategies</i> ◦ <i>Political Education in Action: Popular Education and Activism</i>
12:00	<i>Group picture</i> Community Building Lunch
12:30	Discussion of Next Steps
12:50	Reflection and Closing Activity
1:00	Meeting Concludes

Table 4: Inaugural Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering Agenda

The meeting itself was rooted in Ethnic Studies pedagogy, with an opening activity that encouraged attendees to build community in the room by reflecting on their identities as a matter of entering and assuming the space to do the work of social justice educators. Everyone was given a piece of paper to fold into four squares. Participants were asked to write down and share out the following, one per square; first in small groups, and then to the larger group:

My name is . . .

They call me . . .

Where I'm from . . .

Where I belong . . .

After the icebreaker activity, the group read aloud a set of Agreements for Supportive Interactions, adopted from the East Bay Meditation Center, and then broke

off into groups based on goals previously identified by participants (refer to Table 4). The foundational building session and community building lunch led to the following ideas generated for strengthening K-12 to college Ethnic Studies pedagogical pipelines in Northern California:

- Support OUSD Ethnic Studies Leadership Team with curriculum planning
- Educational opportunities Create an Ethnic Studies credential; create an Ethnic Studies option for doctoral programs in Educational Leadership
- Align curriculum with data to make a critical connection and develop community agency
- Researchers need to document experiences and publish more journal articles; the need for more articles published from our community was expressed.
- Develop an Ethnic Studies textbook from the authentic voices around the circle and within the community of care.

The meeting plan reflected a careful attention to pedagogy embedded in the meeting agenda, as well as into the meeting purpose and process. The agenda also allowed for community building, agency development, and praxis among a wide variety of Ethnic Studies practitioners, which resulted in a discussion around the need for developing effective teacher and student Ethnic Studies pipelines, and a call to action to support OUSD Ethnic Studies, which was specifically vocalized at the inaugural gathering.

The critical professional development of Ethnic Studies teachers appears to strengthen their ability to effectively impact students. Through coming together to dialogue and participate in reflection and action, the teachers operationalized Freire's (1970) praxis of dialogical action, which "allows for liberatory transformation" (Kohli et al., 2015, p. 11) by analyzing their shared critical practices of Ethnic Studies through

cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis. Through authentic conversations, dialogue, and cooperation among participants, a sense of unity was established, by creating a caring and safe environment, both spatially and psychologically. Shared meals and icebreakers, and activities encouraged community building. The opposite of top-down, information-banked, anti-dialogical professional development experiences, in both meetings a cultural synthesis, where the needs of students, teachers, and communities were positioned “over the interest of leaders” (p. 14) created an anti-banking environment where teachers constructed knowledge together about how to best implement a mandatory Ethnic Studies course, operationalize the pedagogy, and create stronger current and future K-college pipelines.

The critical professional development activities of Ethnic Studies teachers in this study were designed to prepare them to implement social justice pedagogy in the Ethnic Studies classroom, which requires identity exploration, honesty, open communication, shared power, political analysis, and a desire for social change, which are all elements of teaching and learning in an academically rigorous Ethnic Studies classroom. Teachers must in some ways be open to transforming themselves, so that they can transform their students, who will transform society’s future. Next, I explore the ways in which the OUSD Ethnic Studies course and pedagogy impacted African American students’ perspectives about their cultural and academic identities, encouraged and developed student agency and praxis, and impacted African American student empowerment and motivation to be successful in school.

Ethnic Studies: Affirming and Informing Identity

As noted in the literature review, Sleeter (2011) found that for students of color, a culturally relevant curriculum, with lessons, literature, and assignments that reflect the students’ experiences, impacts them more positively than Eurocentric curriculum.

More than just content-based teaching, a more culturally relevant pedagogy supports the identity development of both teacher and student (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). There are three aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy that are essential to Ethnic Studies pedagogy in supporting students through the process of identity and exploration and transformation—developing critical consciousness, building upon students’ perspectives and experiences, and creating caring environments (Kohli et al., 2015).

The OUSD Ethnic Studies Logic Model highlights that Ethnic Studies “builds positive identity.” For the African American students in this study, the theme of Ethnic Studies as affirming and informing their identities emerged from deep discussions about their identities, histories, families, communities, and experiences in relationship to what they learned from the course about past and present social justice conditions for African Americans. An Ethnic Studies curriculum is also a decolonizing curriculum (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014); this process of decolonization aims to move students “toward self-determination, claiming of an intellectual identity, and active participation in the transformation of material conditions” (p. 112). Zola expressed this kind of movement toward self-determination as a main takeaway from Ethnic Studies for her, reflecting on intersections of her identity in relationship to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement:

My takeaway would most likely be that no matter how hard it can be, being an African American and being a girl—I have to keep going. Because if you look in the past you see the slaves, and Martin Luther King, Jr. And you can see all the African American people that continued to go, and they kept going over and over again, and they never gave up. never gave up. So, my takeaway would be just to never give up. And to keep going.

Halagao (2010) argued that a decolonizing curriculum requires “deep and critical thinking of one’s history and culture focusing on concepts of diversity, multiculturalism,

imperialism, oppression, revolution, and racism” (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 112) yet it is to be “feeling-based that allows mourning, dreaming, confusion, excitement, struggle, passion, and empathy to be sources of knowledge” (p. 112) in such a way that allows for the combination of reflection and determination that Zola is expressing. Zola is encouraged to continue on, because African Americans have been resilient, kept going, and never gave up, despite the oppression of slavery and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, Amari discussed how learning the history of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which was founded in Oakland, helped him explore his identity and empowered him to think more about community organizing and activism:

Amari: ...I mean, obviously knowing yourself a little bit more. And where you come from, obviously. But also, a sense of empowerment, I guess you could say. Because just a week ago we were learning about the Black Panthers, and how they fought for food for the kids, free lunch, stuff like that.

Marguerite: The free breakfast program?

Amari: Yeah. It’s a lot of eye-openers that comes along with it [Ethnic Studies]. Like, Black people had a tough upbringing for the last few years. I mean, not the last few—but you know, all the years, mostly. It’s nice to see Black people walk around with power [referencing the Black Panther Movement]. At the time, they could walk around with guns. You look at that as a Black child, you’re like—wow, I want to do that.

Learning about the Black Panther Movement introduced Amari to a counternarrative about African American identity that he may not have otherwise known

or considered—a brief moment in American history when the existence of social and political power among African Americans was visible, which both affirmed and informed his identity. Amari saw himself as a future scholar activist, stating, “I want to get pretty much active within the community and upon the subject [Ethnic Studies]. That activism stuff. I just want to grow upon that, and stuff like that.”

Education scholars have built upon and borrowed from Ethnic Studies to analyze racial inequities in school through the lens of critical race theory (Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, & Lynn, 2004), which offers concrete tools like counterstorytelling and testimonio (Yosso, 2005) to place students from historically marginalized and oppressed backgrounds at the center of the learning experience, analyzing the impacts of racism, reframing Eurocentric narratives, challenging systemic inequities, and legitimizing them as members of society with an equally important counter narrative. In many ways, Ethnic Studies helps African American students understand and navigate stereotypes about their identity, as expressed by Javon:

What I would carry with me, probably, out of the Ethnic Studies group—I just feel like growing up as a Black kid, to learn about our history and what’s happening throughout the world and just social justice in general—I just want to carry that around. Just knowing that I’m just a Black kid that is coming from a place—like comes from Oakland. You know? With what’s going on with my culture; what’s happening with my culture throughout the world. Just knowing my history. And nobody can say I don’t know.

Javon’s references to “growing up as a Black kid” and “coming from a place like Oakland” are not positive; however Ethnic Studies gave him critical knowledge about African American history and matters of social justice, which helped inform and affirm his identity. Empowered by and confident about what he learned, Javon wants to carry

that around with him. Javon’s statement reflects the decolonizing nature of the Ethnic Studies curriculum in two ways—in his orientation toward self-determination, as a Black kid coming from a place like Oakland that can make it, which he presented in a negative connotation, and in the claiming of his intellectual identity. As Javon put it, “nobody can say I don’t know.”

Keyshawn, who identified as half African American and half Nigerian, provided the most nuanced response in relationship to his identity exploration and affirmation, in relationship to the specificity of the African American experience:

Well I feel like it’s really good to have this class. Because my mom, she’s from back home; she’s from Nigeria. She really is from like the back home; she grew up in a place not like here. And then you come out here. And it’s like . . . she gets the pro-Black part. She don’t really get it-get it, because she’s from back home.

[Marguerite: She has an identity there?]

Yeah. An identity. So, it’s like we’re African American, but I have a double side to it—because I’m Nigerian and I’m African American, too, because I grew up here. So, I feel like this class is really understanding, like, helping me with my understanding—because I already know Nigerian culture but didn’t really understand the “Black-Black” culture. So, it’s like it’s cool to learn, because my mom, she’s like from back home, so it’s cool. (Keyshawn, personal communication, March 2019)

The “Black Black” experience that Keyshawn is referring to is rooted in his distinctly proud ability to distinguish his mother’s identity and experience as a Nigerian from “home” from the challenges of navigating the African American identity and experience, which is rooted in the systemic oppression of chattel slavery and a consistent

onslaught of negative stereotypes in the media. His reference to his mother being from “home,” meaning Africa, marks his understanding of the existence of a distinguishing factor between African immigrants and African Americans that made their way to the United States via the Transatlantic Slave Trade, although most simply see him as “Black.” Keyshawn and Javon elaborated later in the discussion:

Keyshawn: It mainly impacted me because almost every day I see racism come up for myself or from others. I feel like I know more about how the African American would feel in the 1990s, where . . . or, like the 1980s, where racism was big. All those old times. Because I see it in modern day, and some days I even have to live with it. Yeah . . . like go through . . . it’s like it’s so easy now; police can shoot a Black person and just say he was fearing for his life.

Javon: And just get away with it.

Keyshawn: Yea, you know. I don’t want no problems . . . that’s why I said in my rap. That’s what I said in my rap. There was a line, I said, “Donald Trump is a troublemaker; he’s snatching lives off the street like an undertaker.” What that line meant is that calling Black people murderers, Donald Trump is a murderer; he’s killing innocent people. Just because you’re not shooting—not pulling the trigger—don’t mean that you’re not a murderer. Donald Trump is a murderer, whether you like it or not. He’s killing innocent people. Or like, people are getting killed and he’s just letting that stuff slide. I feel like that’s murder. Like, he’s snatching lives.

The cultural relevance of Ethnic Studies content tuned Keyshawn’s social justice antenna toward a richer understanding of his shared identity as Nigerian, with a

home, land, and identity, and African American, with a persistent barrage of negative information and imagery forced upon him by the social and political structure of the United States. Keyshawn and others were able to make critical connections between history, family, and community, which lends itself to CRP by enabling students to engage in sharing their lived experiences and learning about their peers. Marcus, the only tenth grade student in the study, reflected on the impact of the course in relationship to his identity, White privilege, and how African Americans can take what they learn in Ethnic Studies back to the community:

It [Ethnic Studies] impacted me because White people, they already got more power. We know that. And then they try to belittle Black people, and make Black people not feel as powerful—so they tell you things, and put things into your ears. And you start believing it. A lot of Black people don't get a lot of education, but when you do get the education—certain Black people do get the education—and you learn things, you can take it to other Black people and spread it.

Zola also aligned what she was learning in Ethnic Studies with her own identity, access to education, and responsibility to the community:

I would say that it makes me believe that I can continue to try. And it makes me think about all of the people that ... they gave up their lives for us to come to school, and for us to sit in a class all day and to get our work done. Because I know that people in the past, they didn't have the privilege to sit in the classroom—only White people had the privilege to--and they had to be in the fields, and they had to pick cotton and stuff. I know that I need to continue to try, and I need to get As; like, Cs and Bs is not acceptable, because I'm privileged to come to school every day. I still know some people that can't come to school. They can't be here every day.

Ethnic Studies as culturally relevant pedagogy nurtures caring environments, where students can tackle tough political and social issues without punishment or judgement. In the process of identity exploration and transformation, African American students must navigate subjects that are extremely painful and some even perceived as embarrassing like chattel slavery, the Jim Crow era, systemic oppression, poor educational attainment levels and low test scores, mass incarceration, extreme generational poverty, broken families, and lives painfully disrupted. During discussions about how Ethnic Studies impacted their identity, and how it made them think about themselves as African American, Jamal noted that it made him “feel like a joke, maybe?” When I asked why, he responded, “because of the way that we have been treated.” “How have we been treated?” I asked. Jamal paused and responded, “Poorly.”

While many students described the negative aspects of navigating their African American identity, others expressed an affirming transformation in “learning about other cultures than White history” (Derrick, focus group, March 2019). Alaya had a similar reflection on Ethnic Studies: “When I think of Ethnic Studies, I think of not just like the history of all the old White people and all that. I think about all the races, like everybody. The history of everybody, and not just one specific race. Keyshawn also stated, “In Ethnic Studies we’re learning about our culture, and just racial culture, all just in general. In World History we learn about what Whites had to go through.” Culturally relevant pedagogy supports and informs the racial exploration of African American students, which can positively impact their identity. Dante, for example, expressed how the course gave him more confidence in himself and his identity: “It makes me feel more like . . . I want to be an African American other than something else, you know? It makes being African American like, more . . . as I would say, confident.”

Disrupting stereotypes and negative media portrayals. In this study, the Ethnic Studies assignments and lessons that students perceived as disrupting racial stereotypes

and negative media portrayals of African Americans, as well as those provided historic counternarratives to what students had been traditionally taught, had profound impacts on the African American students in this study, in relationship to their identities. African Americans are often portrayed negatively in the media, which can have profound impacts on the way that African Americans are perceived in real life, even if it is contrary to reality. When students were asked about the most meaningful assignments or takeaways from the course, many provided examples, such as Jamal, who appreciated learning “the way they brought different kind of races into movies.” “The media’s portrayal?” I asked. Jamal continued, “Yeah. They would try to make . . . say, the Black person looked bad and looked like he was going to do something wrong, or something. Instead of making him actually look like a good person.”

These lessons raised the critical consciousness of students who previously lacked tools to fully interpret negative media portrayals without the critical lens provided by Ethnic Studies. For example, Romello said, “Now I see . . . I can understand it more on TV and stuff like that. When we watched that ‘This is America’ video [by musical artist Childish Gambino], I thought it was just he was dancing retarded or doing some stupid stuff. But then I saw the meaning of it all.” Romello was able to critically analyze the content of the video, to arrive at a different conclusion about its deeper meaning, in relationship to African American identity and social justice. The teacher brought current and relevant content into the classroom, allowing students to critically assess the content and challenge its meaning.

In many ways, the decolonizing nature of Ethnic Studies serves as a bridge between perception and reality for African Americans in they interrogate the media’s insistently negative portrayal of them. Tanisha discussed how the media’s portrayal of African Americans influences her family’s identity and their perceptions of reality, whereas Ethnic Studies gave her a more critical eye:

I mean, with me personally, regarding my family—my family looks a lot into the media, and what the media portrays as things. So, usually when the media puts things out, they're just like—oh, that's what's happening. And they don't really look in [to themselves]. Because I don't think they have that . . . like, in Ethnic Studies class, that was in-depth. Like, a critical thinking of what's actually going on. So, yeah; I feel like I notice more and more things going on and a lot of the incorrect information that was going around in my household, because of my family listening to the media more than . . . Because they didn't really have that [Ethnic Studies]; my parents didn't really have that. And my sister, I'm not sure if she had it or not. But it wasn't really as good as it is now. And it could still be better.

Alaya learned that negative stereotypes extend beyond her own identity and community, stating, “Well, my take away would be like stereotypes and stuff. Because I didn't really know about all the stereotypes and all that. I only really knew some stuff about the Black stereotypes and all that--not all the other ones.” Tanisha passionately described how Ethnic Studies helped her navigate the impacts of stereotypes, when discussing experiences with her identity in the Ethnic Studies classroom and at school in general:

. . . in Ethnic Studies class—we hear about the bad things that happened to Black people, and we also hear about the good things. Like, the progress in the Black community. But if we're talking about not in class; informal, outside of class—I hear a lot of shit about Black people. “Oh, well; my Black boyfriend does this.” “All Black people are so fucking loud.” “They're always doing this and this.” It seems like it's always a Black person in the office. It seems like it's always this and it's always that. The thing is, Ethnic Studies kind of opens my ears to these

things; it makes my ears sensitive to these words. I hate hearing it and it bothers me. Like I was saying before, it conflicts the ignorance in an ethnic group, and it conflicts the people who actually buy into the stereotypes. They're just like—oh. It's conflicting them. It's conflicting their whole reality. "I was born around this stereotype, I was raised around this stereotype—and I'm being told that it's not true. That's my childhood. That's what I was raised around. I was raised around guns. I was raised around gangs." It's just irritating, because—it opens our eyes, and I see more. And I want to do more research, because it may piss me off—but at the same time, I like the conflict. Not for the actual conflict, but for the discussion.

Marguerite: For the discourse.

Tanisha: For learning and for the discussion. I don't just argue to argue. I don't even tend to argue. Most of the time when I snap on people, I listen to their opinion and how they feel. I do. I listen to what other people have to say, and I'm just like—okay, part of what you said was right, but this part was wrong. And I'm going to tell you why you were wrong. The only time it turns into an argument is when I'm being cut off and I'm being disrespected in the middle of the argument. That's not something you want to do with me, because I'm a very . . . like, my defense mode is hard, when it comes to my identity. It's rock-hard. Like a jail cell.

Tanisha's passionate discourse places Ethnic Studies at the center of some difficult conversations about navigating racism, anti-Blackness, stereotypes, and what she perceived as blatant disrespect to her intellect. Strobel (2001) distinguished three elements of the decolonization process—naming, reflecting, and acting—much

like what Tanisha experienced above, as her African American identity continues to develop. She identifies stereotypes, reflects on their validity, and challenges herself and others to learn more. Tanisha references the Ethnic Studies course as “opening her ears” to racist and stereotypical comments about African Americans, empowering her to speak up, challenge misinformation, and do more research. It can be emotionally exhausting for African Americans to navigate constant stereotypical comments and negative media portrayals, as expressed by Alaya: “They’re always saying the wrong things, sometimes. They’re not saying the right things, and it’s just—Like, “All Black people—” As Alaya struggled to find words to articulate her deeper thoughts, Tanisha passionately interrupted with clear examples:

Like, “All Black people this!” And I’m just like, god forbid me saying, “All White people this!” All of a sudden, I’m being racist. I understand if I was to do that, I would acknowledge that I’m in the wrong. I would acknowledge that. But there are a lot of people who do that to Black people and be like, “But it’s true; but it’s true, from what I’ve seen.” So, from what I’ve seen and from what I’ve seen from Black people—that is true. But you know life is not about what you see. Because we could see things on TV and on social media. So, you have to really rely on data.

Tanisha explained that the constant barrage of negativity, false narratives, and stereotypes about African Americans makes her defensive about her identity, creating a heightened sensitivity to oppressive language and occasional conflicts with her school mates. Alaya agreed, “Because when she said it makes her go into defense mode, I see her do that in class. And I’m like—yeah, I agree with her sometimes.” Alaya and Jamal shared the same frustration. Tanisha explained how Ethnic Studies created internal conflict for her

regarding her identity, why students like her and Jamal are defensive about their African American identities, and described how she despises the internalized oppression that can result from embracing the negative stereotypes:

What I mean by “go into defense mode,” I mean go into defense mode. Because I’m pretty sure almost every student in my Ethnic Studies class has seen me go off on somebody, because I felt conflicted about my identity. Because I don’t like discrimination against my identity. I don’t like somebody saying Black people this or Black people that. And I especially don’t like when I see my Black peers, and my African American peers basically kind of proving these stereotypes. Buying into it. I hate seeing that. Buying into it. I hate seeing that. And I hate seeing that ignorance. So, the thing is, it’s kind of like Ethnic Studies divides and brings people together. It’s kind of conflicting the ignorance in someone’s ethnicity and in that ethnic group. Because it’s being piled on that group so much that some people actually believe it. They’re saying—“Oh, all Black people do is steal, rap, have guns, shoot up, drive-bys.” There are some who are buying into that.

In Ethnic Studies, Tanisha and her classmates learned how to identify, recognize, and challenge stereotypes about their African American identity. Tanisha articulated a shift in her consciousness that reflects “the move toward self-determination, claiming of an intellectual identity, and active participation in the transformation of the material conditions” (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 112) indicative of a decolonizing pedagogy. As Mohanty (2003) asserts, the decolonizing nature of Ethnic Studies as allows for resistance to and critiques of transnational perspectives for the purposes of transforming local communities, institutions, and individuals from liberate them from socially and psychologically dominant and damaging structures. Ethnic Studies helped Tanisha articulate her feelings about constantly defending her African American

identity against stereotypes and the frustration that she experiences when she perceives African Americans as buying into the negative stereotypes cast upon them. Ethnic Studies pedagogy, in addition to being an anti-racist project, encourages students and teachers alike to critique racial oppression at various levels, including institutional, interpersonal, and internalized, while showing how each level influences each other. In the case of African Americans and stereotypes, Tanisha described how Ethnic Studies created internal and external conflicts for her, as she challenged the oppressive nature of stereotypes, acknowledging that some African Americans internalize, believe, or buy-in to the very stereotypes that portray them negatively.

Decolonizing the mind: Ethnic Studies and African American student

identity. The purpose of Ethnic Studies is to challenge racism and disrupt oppression and the decolonizing nature of the curriculum is designed to help students think deeply and critically about their own histories and cultures, which in the case of African Americans, often includes lessons about unimaginable racism during the times of legalized slavery, sustained oppression after the emancipation of slavery in the form of segregationist Black Codes and racist Jim Crow laws, the deadly decades-long fight for the establishment of civil and human rights for African Americans, and the ongoing quest for liberation from current levels of mass incarceration, abject poverty, and well noted education disparities. Many of these lessons and discussions, as academic exercises, only happen for African American students in an Ethnic Studies classroom. All of the participants in the study affirmed that they believed that Ethnic Studies course should be mandatory, in relationship to African American identity and critical consciousness development in relationship to challenging historically inaccurate narratives. Some students reflected with specificity about why African Americans should take the course, like Amari, who talked

about how Ethnic Studies disrupts the predominance of White history lessons and helps African Americans learn about their culture and background:

. . . if they [African Americans] want to learn about their background, then they should definitely take it. But they should also . . . it should also be mandatory, because you want to—When you grow up, you probably won't know nothing about yourself because all they've been talking about in history is old White people.

Zola expressed that she felt that African American students should take Ethnic Studies in elementary school, to help remedy the low self-esteem and shame that can accumulate from the constant negative stereotypes, racism, and prejudice that African Americans experience:

I feel like they should take it even when they're younger. I feel like they should take it when they're in elementary school, so they don't have to grow up being ashamed of who they are or not being proud of being Black. I feel like they should take it when they're first-graders, so they can be like—yeah, I'm Black and I'm proud!

Similarly, Dante expressed that he thought African Americans should take the course because it is important, and fun, to learn about your own culture. He also explained that African American students can learn and thrive from the lessons of the struggles of oppressed groups like his own and others:

I believe they [African Americans] should [take Ethnic Studies]. Because it's a great curriculum. It's always fun to hear about your own culture, you know? And it is important to learn about your own culture—then you know what you and others, as African Americans or any race has been through. So, then you

can always use that as a goal. Not much so as a goal, but like [to] thrive. (Dante, personal communication, March 2019)

Along the same lines, Dante expressed the curriculum as a “great tool” for learning more about African American culture and racial identity, providing a lens for how to rebound from adversity—how to thrive based on the struggles of African Americans and other marginalized groups. Romello provided specificity about how African American students need to recognize and understand and navigate systemic oppression, which may go unnoticed otherwise:

Maybe to know—like really know—how . . . what they’re going to see in the world. Like, they need to understand it, because systemic oppression happens all the time, and we don’t even notice it. So, they need to know that it exists. And also knowing their history and knowing actually where they come from—it would be really nice. I feel like all African Americans really need to do Ethnic Studies, to know their background and to know what’s happening in the world now. And to know that the government is kind of against us, but you have to find a way to fight it. (Romello, personal communication, March 2019)

The notion that African American students themselves expressed that they have been deprived of a culturally relevant education speaks to the urgency for Ethnic Studies as an academic tool for identity development, knowledge construction, and support the academic success of African American students and other marginalized students. To that end, Tanisha provided the most detailed and critical response advocating for a mandatory general Ethnic Studies course, as well as elective cultural studies courses, based on the ethnic makeup at the school:

I think there should be a mandatory general Ethnic Studies class. And I feel like there should be a separate Ethnic Studies class. They evaluate the school, and the mixed ethnicities in the school, and be like—okay, so we have a Samoan Ethnic Studies class. We have a Samoan Studies class, a Black Studies class, an Asian History Studies class, and like a Mexican History studies class. And you can do that as maybe an elective. Either way, since Ethnic Studies would be mandatory—either way, you would be learning about it. And then you could drill down into your own culture. Or somebody else’s culture Because the thing is, if you already know these things about your own culture, you’d be like—“hmm, I want to know about Samoan culture. I want to know what’s going on over there. Because it wouldn’t hurt to learn any information.” Knowledge doesn’t hurt. (Tanisha, personal communication, March 2019)

Through Ethnic Studies, Tanisha developed a critical awareness of the need for more culturally relevant curriculum in schools, for the benefit of all students, an example of how Ethnic Studies pedagogy fosters students’ critical consciousness and develops their sense of value for cultural knowledge.

Zola was able to draw a critical connection between the value of Ethnic Studies and how the course may have impacted prior generations of her family, if they had taken the course, and how that might have impacted the trajectory of her family’s educational opportunities, discussing how different she thought her parents’ and grandparents’ lives might have been, had they been exposed to Ethnic Studies:

I wish that my parents and their parents got to have Ethnic Studies, because I think it would be a lot different if they did have it. I feel as though Ethnic Studies can help people a lot, if they all have it. If my parents had it, or their parents had it—a lot of them probably would have went to college, and probably would have

tried to do something with their lives, because they had a lot more empowerment and a lot more courage to go out there in the world and say, “No; I’m proud to be Black and I’m proud to do this. And I can do this. And I won’t let anybody say I can’t do this, because I know that I can.”

Effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy orients teachers toward a more culturally responsive pedagogy, in which they lead their students through a process of identity exploration and transformation. Teachers that find ways to center the students experiences in their content have been found to most effectively deliver CRP, finding ways to situate the student at the center of the teaching experience (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). Ethnic Studies thrusts African American students into the process of decolonizing their minds against embracing institutional racism, prejudice, and unjust conditions as the norm for “Black life.”

During the focus group sessions, we discussed the Ethnic Studies content, assignments, and experiences that students found most impactful, as well as how Ethnic Studies specifically influenced or challenged their ideas about their identities, knowledge bases, and cultural capital as African Americans. Most students described the course as informing and affirming in relationship to their racial identities. Marcus, a sophomore, completed the course during the prior academic year, allowing for a more retrospective outlook, having more time to process what he learned in Ethnic Studies and reflected on how it impacted him in relation to his identity, reflecting on how African American students are not exposed to information about the African American historical and cultural experience in America, which can complicate the dynamics of African American identity:

African Americans—they get knowledge, but they don’t get a lot of knowledge.

Like . . . you know what I’m trying to say? And with Ethnic Studies, it could teach

you about your background and how you want to identify. Or what you identify yourself as. You can learn more about yourself and your history. I feel like African American kids should take Ethnic Studies, because I feel like that's a memorable class. You will have all these classes, but you won't really remember everything. But I feel like in Ethnic Studies you will remember everything. (Marcus, personal communication, March 2019)

For African American students like Marcus, with the perspective that they “get knowledge, but don't get a lot of knowledge,” Ethnic Studies becomes the culturally and community responsive course that they need to stay engaged and explore their identities. It allows them to see themselves, their families, communities and histories in the curriculum and classroom practices, because their cultural identities are validated and celebrated (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). Tanisha expounded on this idea, explaining why she thinks that African American students should take Ethnic Studies even earlier than high school:

I feel like [African Americans] should take [Ethnic Studies] even when they're younger [than ninth grade]. I feel like they should take it when they're in elementary school, so they don't have to grow up being ashamed of who they are or not being proud of being Black. I feel like they should take it when they're first-graders, so they can be like—“Yeah, I'm Black and I'm proud!”

Jamal reflected similarly about how African Americans should “definitely” take Ethnic Studies if they want to learn more about their backgrounds, because often African Americans are taught from a Eurocentric perspective, or what Jamal refers to as “talking about old White people”:

If [African Americans] want to learn about their background, then they should definitely take [Ethnic Studies]. But they should also . . . it should also be mandatory, because you want to—When you grow up, you probably won't know nothing about yourself because all they've been talking about in history is old White people.

Students articulated their experiences and perspectives at length about how Ethnic Studies informed them about sensitive issues such as experiencing racism in life and at school, systemic oppression of African Americans, stereotypical media portrayals of African Americans, inaccurate historical narratives reducing African Americans' contributions to society, in relationship to their identities, and how they believed that the course can help other African American students as well. Romello elaborated on this concept, explaining why he thought all African American students should take Ethnic Studies:

Maybe to know—like really know—how . . . what they're going to see in the world. Like, they need to understand it, because systemic oppression happens all the time, and we don't even notice it. So, they need to know that it exists. And also knowing their history and knowing actually where they come from—it would be really nice. I feel like all African Americans really need to do Ethnic Studies, to know their background and to know what's happening in the world now. And to know that the government is kind of against us, but you have to find a way to fight it. (Romello, March 2019)

There is an old adage, “When you know better, you do better.” Ethnic Studies affirms and informs African American identity and that leads them to develop agency in their own learning and apply the knowledge they have learned. Next, I explore how student agency and praxis emerged as themes from the focus group discussions.

Student Agency and Praxis

Ethnic Studies pedagogy informs us that effective teachers must be culturally responsive in their pedagogy *and* utilize a community responsive framework to engage with students from various ethnic backgrounds. Teachers working within this framework prepare students to address issues in their neighborhoods and communities by building upon praxis—Freire’s (1970) notion that cyclical process guiding the relationship between theory, practice, and reflection can be used to interrogate social issues—applying what they’ve learned in Ethnic Studies to address issues in their community. The steps of Freire’s cyclical model of praxis are to identify the problem, analyze the problem, develop an action plan toward a resolution, implement the plan, and reflect on the plan of action (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). In this study, one teacher’s orientation toward community responsive pedagogy and Freire’s model of praxis emerged in one of the discussion groups, as student reflected on most impactful assignment in the course. Marcus explained the “SeeClickFix” Project:

Marcus: So, SeeClickFix is basically like you go around your neighborhood and you find something that needs to be fixed. You can send them a picture, and write like a brief description about it, and where is it.

Marguerite: I use that app all of the time.

Marcus: And I liked it because . . . I mean, I notice problems in my neighborhood—but I didn’t know a way to fix it, so I didn’t really trip off of it. But then, with that app, you notice even more when you’re looking for it. So, you find stuff. And it just makes you think, and it makes you want to help and better your community.

Marguerite: And you said you said you got what fixed, Marcus?

Marcus: A crack in the street. That I kept tripping over.

Summer described her experience with SeeClickFix, where she was able to see a blighted house in her community get properly addressed as a result of her efforts:

I seen this house. Full of junk; the yard was just full of trash, and old TVs. And the house looked like . . . I looked at it, and I was like—I would never want to live there. And then I wrote about it on SeeClickFix. Of course, anonymously. And then I want to say a few months later it was all cleared. And then as the months went by, there was grass growing. There was a new balcony. There was a new fence. I was like—that looks like somewhere I would want to live. (Summer, personal communication, March 2019)

The SeeClickFix project is an example of student praxis via community responsive pedagogy. The students were able to identify an issue in their community, utilize a mobile app to engage City of Oakland services in an attempt to address it, and monitor the progress via the app. The SeeClickFix app has social media sharing capabilities and commenting and voting features that allow users to share community issues and apply pressure to the city. The students were able to evaluate their engagement and involvement in the community based on real-time results. Led by their teacher, the students applied the knowledge that they learned in the classroom to real-life community concerns to initiate change and then had the opportunity to reflect on their community leadership.

The positive impacts of culturally and community responsive pedagogies also emerged as Keyshawn discussed an upcoming research project for which he was very

excited, because the teacher had given them the option to present their findings in a style most comfortable to and reflective of their identities.

It's like he's giving us the chance to really do this project in our own way, and express ourselves the way we like. But we're also talking about like, our topic, and how racism and stuff . . . so I just feel like this is the most important one—because he's letting us like, do the project, and talk about what we want to talk about; whether racism, or oppression, or anything. He's letting us do it in our own way.

Romello agreed, “Yeah. And we were given all these types of groups. A certain amount of people would search up and make a presentation about it.” Derrick added, “But you can do it in your own way. You could make a dish, or make a dress, or write a rap.” Christine elaborated, “you get to pick a topic, and you just have to research it. And it can be any topic that has to do with this class; so, it can be like the history of Black people, or it can be the history of something of your people. It's just like saying what your history is, and you're trying to research it.” Dante added, “And my group picked LGBTQ. But it was a group that I didn't know even existed, and I got to learn.” Tanisha also reflected on how the research project empowered her and developed praxis and a sense of agency in her own learning, giving her choice and voice in the research topic. “I mean, one of my most memorable things was when we were doing the isms; the systems of oppression. And we had to do a research project on a lot of isms. A lot of people chose racism. I chose specifically something that wasn't on the list—and I chose ageism. It's like the discrimination of young people,” she said.

Effective community responsive pedagogy helps students develop their critical consciousness by connecting classroom learning with students' home and community life (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014), much like the way Tanisha connected the research

project, and her decision to select the topic of ageism, to her own home and community life. She went on to discuss her family dynamic, why she chose ageism as a topic, and the implications of understanding how she was impacted by ageism within her family dynamic. Tanisha explained that she desperately wanted to attend Oakland Technical High School, as opposed to Skyline. Her parents preferred Skyline, simply because her brother attended there. They believed that Tanisha was too young to decide on her own fate regarding school, and Tanisha reluctantly attended Skyline. Researching ageism helped Tanisha understand that perhaps her parents' decision was flawed, as it was based primarily on the belief that she was not old enough to make her own decision about what school was best for her, but also helped her to empathize with her parents struggles to make sure that she has the best educational opportunity, given their socioeconomic status as African American and the limited access and opportunity associated with that status. Situated in the affluent Oakland hills, Skyline was perceived by her parents as the better school, in their opinion. Research projects such as these, in the Ethnic Studies classroom, engage students in becoming critically conscious thinkers and help them develop agency and praxis, particularly when students are centered at the focal point of the learning experience, connecting classroom learning with home and community life. These students experiences exemplify the implications of community and culturally responsive pedagogy for Ethnic Studies. Next, we explore how agency emerged as a theme in students' responses.

Developing student agency. Culturally responsive Ethnic Studies pedagogy allows students to see themselves, their families, histories, and communities in the practices of the classroom. Student agency is developed when teachers give students voice and choice about their learning. In the case of Ethnic Studies, research has shown that this concept of agency is undergirded by content that is culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of the community, and learning experiences that allow

for students to see them themselves in the curriculum and community (Cammarota & Romero, 2009, 2011; Romero et al., 2008; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). The SeeClickFix project was a good example of how the operationalization of strong Ethnic Studies pedagogy develops student agency and praxis.

When students were asked to reflect on their thoughts about Ethnic Studies, a sense of agency emerged among the students. Learning about their cultural history and identities through activities and assignments that were meaningful to them made them more invested in school. Agency development in students creates lasting impacts, inspiring students to take purposeful action, at school and in their own lives. For example, Marcus, the sole tenth grader in the study, discussed how he still uses what he learned in Ethnic Studies about race, social classes, and various forms of oppression, in his daily life:

What comes to my mind is everything I learned last year in Ethnic Studies. First thing I learned is like the definition of race. I knew what race was, but I didn't know the definition. I also learned about ethnicity and nationality; the definition of that. I learned about social classes. Oppression. Internalized oppression. All of that. And I just learned more about it. I still use it. Like, now I know what it means; I use it in my daily life. (Marcus, personal communication, March 2019)

As Marcus indicated, when exposed to Ethnic Studies, African Americans can become enlightened about social phenomena and social justice issues that impact them on a daily basis, such as racism and systemic oppression. To understand the things that they experience, but were not necessarily able to define before taking Ethnic Studies, has lasting impacts. Marcus, for example, expressed that he was to apply what he learned in Ethnic Studies in other courses and still uses what he learned in Ethnic Studies to help him in his learning as a current sophomore, stating, "I still use it in this year; the stuff

I learned last year, I can use it in my learning year now. When I was in English class I was talking about oppression. The definition of it. And it just helped me more in my work.” As exemplified by Marcus’s experience and noted by Ginwright and Cammarota (2007), students that develop a critical consciousness are empowered by the opportunity to see themselves as capable, knowledgeable, and intellectual. His sense of agency was developed from engaging in meaningful content that he could also apply to his other courses.

Similarly, Tanisha reflected on how critical discourse about social justice topics discussed in Ethnic Studies spilled into her other courses, and fueled her ability and willingness to engage in critical conversations with her peers:

Some of the discussions we have in Ethnic Studies class, there would be some people who would have a disagreement--and they’ll bring it up. It would be like, “Oh, I heard about this person saying this in Ethnic Studies class; it wasn’t very educated of them.” And they’re like, “Oh, well, this is my reasoning for this.” So, they’re having a whole debate in English class. That’s happened before, in my English class. Because we talked about a controversial topic in Ethnic Studies class. And the thing is, the person I was arguing with--we didn’t even have the same [class] period. One of my friends just told me that, “Oh, he said this--and I don’t think that was right, but I don’t want to say anything.” And I’m just like, “If he’s incorrect . . . if he has incorrect information, I don’t want him walking around with incorrect information.” So, we ended up having a whole debate in our English class. (Tanisha, personal communication, March 2019)

Passionate about engaging the classmate to ensure that they did not have “incorrect information,” Tanisha was highly invested in social justice topics, especially

related to African American identity, and articulated her willingness to stand up for others to prevent the perpetuation of false narratives.

Summer expressed that Ethnic Studies made her want to come to school more because she learned a lot and the content was interesting, impactful, and engaging: “It was like learning about so many things. It just interested me. It made me want to come to school more. It made me want to just sit there and watch all the little movies that they had, of documentaries and stuff. It was nice.” Marcus reflected on how the course made him think about himself as a more engaged student, saying, “it made me think about myself as a student because I enjoyed Ethnic Studies; it was fun. It was a fun topic. It was interesting, too. It just made me want to be more involved in coming to school, too.” Keyshawn and Romello made similar statements about how the course made them reflect on themselves as students. Keyshawn described how it felt navigating through a school day as a more informed and empowered student, learning his own culture:

The Ethnic Studies class made me think about myself as a student because just walking from class to class, knowing that what I’m learning in Ethnic Studies is that . . . I’m learning about my culture, and I’m learning that people the same skin color as me are successful—and I can also be successful. So, I carry that with me. And yeah. [nods affirmatively] (Keyshawn, personal communication, March 2019)

Like Keyshawn, Romello felt a sense of empowerment knowing the triumphs and challenges associated with his African American identity, and how that related to him and his family, and connected that to his desire to be a better person and excel more in his classes:

It helped me as a student, because knowing how much African Americans have been through and how much my family has been through—and me, personally—

it drives me to excel more in all of my classes. And it gives me a boost. And it makes me want to do better at everything I do. Be better than everybody.

(Romello, personal communication, March 2019)

Derrick described an assignment that was impactful for him because he believed that it made him and his classmates think more deeply about their identities, something some of them had not done before. “Well uhh . . . for like, one activity, or worksheet, we had to put down stuff that we identified as. Like, traits about us. Some we could choose, some we couldn’t. So, yeah.. That like, really had to make some of us think about our identities,” he said. Christine, who provided relatively short answers for most of the focus group session at her school, opened up about the anxiety that school can cause for due to her identity, and how Ethnic Studies made her feel more confident about herself as an African American person and as a student, which she perceived as being hard and sometimes scary:

Christine: I am sometimes scared that if I don’t have good grades, I may not make it. And I may not just . . . I may just end up on the streets and not end up somewhere I want to be. So, I feel that I have to try really, really hard. Maybe a lot harder than most people do. So, then I can get the grades that I need to succeed. It is really hard to be a student and do that. But it’s something that being Black, you just have to do—just to make it.

Marguerite: Work harder? Work harder than everybody else?

Christine: Yeah. And so, it’s something that you may have to go through but you’ll probably make it. (Christine, personal communication, March 2019)

Christine's statement is an example of how Ethnic Studies pedagogy allows for students to see themselves as academically capable, knowledgeable, and empowered. Ethnic Studies empowered Amari, for example, to get more involved in his own education and community through activism, as a result of learning about the activities of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and the Black Lives Matter movement:

Well, more so like I have to step up in my education. Because, along with all the history of Black people—me, myself, personally, I want to make a change. That made me want to be . . . I was talking about career paths earlier. I want to write a book about it. And also, I want to get pretty much active within the community and upon the subject [of social justice for African Americans]. That activism stuff. I just want to grow upon that, and stuff like that.

Ethnic Studies inspires students like Amari to act on the knowledge that they have acquired, applying what they have learned about racism, oppression, and stereotypes to critically assess daily interactions with people, and in some cases disrupt racist behavior. Tanisha, for example, explained how Ethnic Studies helped her recognize the nuanced nature of racism.

I mean, the thing is, it helped me a lot. Because I learned that . . . that class helped me learn that you can be racist without having the intent to be racist. Because it's like racism is so embedded in modern days. There are some things you could just say, and it may not come off as racist to you—because you're familiar; that's familiar to you. But that might come off as racist to someone else.

She went on to describe an experience that she had on the social media platform Instagram, where a French woman was using dark makeup to Blacken her skin (which

the woman considered a form of art intended to appreciate African American women). However, Tanisha found the woman's actions to be offensive and racist:

I saw something the other day, and [the Ethnic Studies] class kind of helped me notice it. Because before, I would have been like—oh, well . . . I mean, it kind of is this, but it's not this at the same time. She's just trying to make art. But I think she was speaking French. There was this French lady; there was this French White woman, and she showed a picture of herself. She was in makeup. She had her red lipstick on. And then on the side it was a picture of her in like, some dark-ass foundation, some dark-ass concealer—basically she was doing Blackface. And she was like, “This is art. I am appreciating Black people.” I'm just like—you can appreciate Black people using Black models.

Tanisha felt enough agency to respond to comments that this was *not* racist—or at the very least extremely offensive. In doing so, she posed a powerfully critical question in the comments, “Why couldn't you just use a Black model to appreciate Black people?” Tanisha felt angry and victimized by what she interpreted as blatant racism on public social media platforms, yet utilized the opportunity to offer a more critical perspective: “It may come as art for them. But when you're actually in the shoes of the person who is being depicted in the picture, it's just like—what the fuck?” she lamented. Tanisha ultimately viewed the social media interaction as an opportunity to educate, describing how she engaged in a public debate with another follower about how the use of Blackface was racist, and how they might not understand that if they have not walked in the shoes of an African American person. Tanisha explained:

I was like—whether it came off . . . It may have been art to you. Like, how ironic is it that you're White? Like, you don't really understand . . . you don't really know anything about Blackface because you're not in the shoes of a Black person.

It may have come off as art to the person; to the “artist” but it’s not art. Whether they think it or not, it’s still racist.

As Tanisha mentioned earlier in her statement, her ability to recognize Blackface and the problems associated with that kind of publicly offensive behavior derived from the understanding of systemic oppression, stereotypes, and racism that she gleaned from the Ethnic Studies course. Tanisha discussed that racism is embedded into the system and how incidents like these are quite common on the social media platform, “This happens a lot on Instagram,” she said, describing incidents like the Blackface post as “so normalized on social media” and “like they’re treating it [African American identity] like it’s some trend.”

Experiences like Tanisha’s exemplify how Ethnic Studies developed agency and encouraged praxis among her and other students in this study. Students expressed that the course made them want to come to school, take ownership of their own learning, and apply what they learned to real life circumstances, like Tanisha, who was empowered to critically assess and act upon the Blackface incident on social media. Zola, for example, spoke to the transformational nature of Ethnic Studies as she assessed her own agency in her identity and learning: “Before I took Ethnic Studies, I wasn’t really like all about that [social justice]. I didn’t care. And I was like--all right, whatever. I just got to take this class, get my credits, and I’m gone. And now I’m just like--oh, I want this class next year!” Marcus expressed a similar sentiment, stating, “I feel like African American kids should take Ethnic Studies, because I feel like that’s a memorable class. You will have all these classes, but you won’t really remember everything. But I feel like in Ethnic Studies you will remember everything.”

Student Empowerment and Motivation

The purpose of Ethnic Studies has been well established - to disrupt and eliminate racism, challenge systemic oppression, and critique the systemic inequities that create an unjust society. One of the operating principles of Ethnic Studies pedagogy calls for teachers to understand its purpose and teach students to recognize and challenge racism, prejudice, and social injustice. If students are to transform this world for the better through their academic experiences, the Ethnic Studies pedagogy they engage with must have the purpose of Ethnic Studies embedded within it, and be grounded in anti-racism and Third World Liberation roots, decolonization (Fanon, 1963), and self-determination. Titiangco et al. (2014) note that decolonization is a liberatory process central to Ethnic Studies pedagogy, because it creates room to critique the traumatic histories of oppressed people, and to heal from that trauma, including the trauma of learning to see to see oneself as academically inadequate, as many African American students do, given the decades of dismal educational attainment data used to inform and measure their academic success.

For the African American students in this study, these opportunities to unpack and address uncomfortable matters of race and racism were empowering and motivating, especially in relationship to being African American and being a student. Zola, for instance, expressed that her takeaway from Ethnic Studies “would be just to never give up. And to keep going.” Romello took his newfound understanding of himself and other cultures and backgrounds as an avenue to becoming a better person overall, “so then, I won’t feel as if . . . like, I can’t judge nobody. Or, like, I can better understand everybody’s past and where they come from—so then I, myself, can become a better person and be more understanding to people.” Romello also aligned his learning in Ethnic Studies with his ability to perform in other classes: “And in some classes you might find

something or hear something, and you could connect it back to Ethnic Studies—and that could help you understand it better.”

Alaya, who also aligned her learnings in Ethnic Studies about the African American experience with her motivation to press through her school days, even when she is tired, said, “Well, when I’m in Ethnic Studies and I’m learning about my people and all that, I’m more engaged. Because when I get to school I’m really tired, and it’s like waking me up. Because I’m more engaged, and I’m focused. And then I’m more focused throughout the day, for the rest of the day.” Similarly, Javon expressed how he felt more confident in his ability to rebound from adversity, as well as how Ethnic Studies gave him self-confidence, just knowing more about himself and his culture:

I just feel like I know more about myself and I’m more confident in myself—and just some people that doubt me can bring me down . . . like, if I just mess up with one grade, you know? The people that doubt me, I feel like I’m just more confident in myself. I can do it. I can make it, and I just take what I learn from Ethnic Studies from and my culture—I’ll just take that with me as I go. (Javon, personal communication, March 2019)

Derrick expressed that the course “makes you feel more confident with the stuff that you do, because you know where you come from and you know that your people were smart.” Likewise, Zola believed that the course was empowering and motivating, awakening her understanding of the struggles of African American life in relationship to her and her family:

It can really improve the way you feel about yourself. Because I think that . . . I’m going to speak for myself, and maybe for a couple of other people that I know—in how Ethnic Studies has changed the way that they see themselves and their families. Like, I know it’s a struggle for my mom all the time, because she’s got

to take care of all of us—and there’s four of us. And my dad, too; he’s got to take care of us, too. And I know that it’s a struggle, and . . . I didn’t even think any of that before I had Ethnic Studies. I was like—oh, my mom; whatever. And now I’m like--okay, I can see the struggle. And I can see that she’s doing really well, for an African American woman. (Zola, personal communication, March 2019)

Amari explained that Ethnic Studies instilled in him a sense of pride and empowerment as an African American, “Because US History and all that tends to be taught about other people—not yourself. White people, you know?” Jamal agreed, articulating in his own way the importance of African American students learning through the lens of Ethnic Studies, as opposed to Eurocentric focused narratives: “Now, if I hear about what actually happened [historically], maybe I can make myself feel like I can do more, do better. I can represent my Black culture.” Ethnic Studies gave Jamal the confidence to believe in himself. Similarly, Javon provided an assessment about the empowering nature of Ethnic Studies that also reflected praxis, stating, “It made me look at myself as I can do better; I can help my community. I could do all that.” Zola also reflected that Ethnic Studies empowered and motivated her to go forward:

[Ethnic Studies] makes me believe that I can continue to try. And it makes me think about all of the people that . . . they gave up their lives for us to come to school, and for us to sit in a class all day and to get our work done. Because I know that people in the past, they didn’t have the privilege to sit in the classroom—only White people had the privilege to—and they had to be in the fields, and they had to pick cotton and stuff. (Zola, personal communication, March 2019)

Although the participants acknowledged the challenges of being African American students, they agreed that Ethnic Studies still empowers. Alaya acknowledged,

“But like, I’m still going to have work harder, probably. I know I have to work hard to do the things that I want to do and all that.” “But you still feel empowered? I inquired. “Yeah. Like I still feel like I can do it. Like, no matter how hard . . . I can do it,” she said. Tanisha provided a passionately detailed explanation about why she felt empowered by Ethnic Studies, describing how she wants to achieve high test scores and show the school that African American students are smart. Recognizing that institutional racism exists and she still has to work harder than others simply because of her race, Tanisha was still empowered and motivated by the idea of improving her socioeconomic condition by improving on her academics, stating:

I feel empowered because I want to have high test scores, and it makes me want to do better. Because if they see that Black people have the potential, and they see that Black people are smart enough—they’re going to try and tear us down, but at the same time the schools are probably going to give us a chance. It’s about race, but it’s not about race. They just want the school to look good so they can make money. It’s like if I help depict Black people in a good way, and I help raise up the test scores of Black people—and I want to represent Black people—I feel like it’s going to give Black people a better chance. And I feel like I’m helping my community. Even though I have to work harder. Even though I have to wake up earlier. And even though I have to study more—I am willing to do all these things, because I don’t want to live like this.

The students in this study were acutely aware of the difficulties that African Americans face, navigating systemic issues like racial profiling. For example, Dante described how commonly African Americans are falsely accused of committing crimes, how difficult that can be, and how everyone needs to know about Ethnic Studies to

illuminate and eventually eliminate injustices placed on African Americans and other cultural groups:

You're going to come through some tough moments where you're going to be in a racist situation, to where someone is going to confront you on something you didn't do—just because of your skin color, or something. Like, you look like you could have done. Like, just say you're walking down the street. A White lady can accuse you of trying to rob someone, or just trying to do anything. Just suspect. I just feel like everyone needs to know about Ethnic Studies, because they're going to just . . . it's important to learn about just all types of discrimination and all that. And all types of culture, and what Blacks and Mexicans—all them, all that; all of our cultures, what we face today.

As the participants in this study showed, when African American students are given the opportunity to challenge systemic oppression, White privilege, and traditionally Eurocentric historical narratives, they are empowered and motivated to learn more, come to school, and engage in their school and community. Ethnic Studies pedagogy rooted in the true purpose of Ethnic Studies raises the critical consciousness of African American students by offering the opportunity to critique racism, challenge oppression, and positively inform their identities by challenging stereotypes, which empowers and motivates. Marcus expressed how he felt more confident in his embracing his African American identity and more empowered after learning the meaning of terms like “systemic oppression” and “racism:”

Ethnic Studies impacted me because before Ethnic Studies, like if somebody with power tell you what you are, you gone believe it—because you don't really know much about your history. So, you just gone believe it . . . the first thing somebody tells you. You just gone believe it. But I learned more about the definition of the

words, and more about myself, and more about the history. So, it like opened my mind. And now I can make what I am; you know? I decide what I am.

Ethnic Studies helped Marcus develop his critical consciousness around resisting oppressive tropes and rejecting stereotypes, and determined to define and decide his own identity, as opposed to being defined by society's racism toward African Americans.

Conclusion

I was fortunate enough to spend time with 13 engaged African American high school students who were willing to openly share their experiences navigating race, class, and social justice issues, which has emerged as both challenging and triumphant in relationship to their experience taking Ethnic Studies. The time that I spent connecting and communicating with students, Ethnic Studies teachers, and practitioners exposed me to various aspects of the pedagogical practices and potential pipelines for Ethnic Studies. This study was designed to capture African American students' narrative insights and perspectives on the impacts of taking the Ethnic Studies course on their academic and cultural identities. Alongside the analysis of OUSD's Ethnic Studies pedagogical framework, curriculum, implementation plan, and professional development agendas, the findings gleaned helpful insights into the effectiveness of strong Ethnic Studies pedagogy, the planning and implementation of OUSD's Ethnic Studies, and how the goals of the initiatives aligned with students' perspectives.

This study reflects the relationship between effectively operationalized Ethnic Studies pedagogy and its impacts on African American students' perceptions about their own academic and cultural identities. Essentially, Ethnic Studies helped African American students navigate racism, challenge systemic oppression, take ownership of

their learning, engage with their communities, and apply what they learned in Ethnic Studies to other academic courses, themselves, their families, and their communities. Teachers played a large role in this process. None of the teachers in this study were African American, yet the effectiveness of their pedagogical practices emerged in students' responses about their experiences engaging with the course content as well as their teachers.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As African Americans continue to emerge as the lowest performing ethnic group in the national (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011), state (California Dashboard Data, 2018), and local data (OUSD Data Dashboard, 2019), educators will be tasked with responding to this systemic failure in a variety of ways. While co-curricular and afterschool programs provide some measure of effectiveness and support, turning our attention to more pedagogical and curricular approaches is necessary to effectively bolster African American student success. Research affirms that Ethnic Studies courses in the high school setting has positive impacts on students of color. These impacts include higher GPAs, better attendance, and lower suspension rates (Dee & Penner, 2016). Ethnic Studies has also been shown to build positive identity in at-risk and marginalized students (Sleeter, 2011). These promising research findings have already prompted some schools and districts across the nation in places like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco to implement Ethnic Studies courses (de los Rios et al., 2014). Along those lines, the OUSD Board decision to mandate an Ethnic Studies course was in response to continuously poor performance data for the lowest performing subgroups in their district, nearly always African American students and students with disabilities (OUSD Dashboard Data, 2019). This qualitative study, which explored the impact of Ethnic Studies teaching and learning on African American students in OUSD, was guided by the following research questions: (a) What are African American students' perceptions of the ways the OUSD Ethnic Studies curriculum impacts their academic and cultural identities?

(b) How do the goals, purpose, and design of the OUSD's Ethnic Studies program align with students' perspectives?

Discussion of the Findings

The OUSD Ethnic Studies Leadership Team, building on the principles of Tintiango-Cubales's (2010) effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy and the paradigm of Dr. Jose Cuellar, professor of La Raza Studies at San Francisco State University, developed and implemented an effective pedagogy and culturally relevant curriculum for teachers and students, grounded in academic research noting the positive benefits of Ethnic Studies (Dee & Penner, 2016) as a driving factor behind their decision to mandate the course at all high schools. The three-year implementation plan allowed for planning time to engage in the professional development of teachers. Signals of the successful operationalization of these pedagogical principles emerged in the findings of this study, through the students' voices and experiences, as they reflected on what they learned, how they learned, and the most impactful learning experiences in the course.

Studies on K-12 Ethnic Studies teaching practices found that the most effective teachers are firmly grounded in Ethnic Studies pedagogy, which operates on four primary principles: (a) effective Ethnic Studies teachers understand the purpose of Ethnic Studies, which is to disrupt racism, critique oppression, and challenge systemic inequities and its impacts on self and society; (b) effective Ethnic Studies teachers oriented in culturally responsive pedagogy have a strong belief in their students academically, leading students through the process of identity exploration and transformation in relationship to Ethnic Studies; (c) effective Ethnic Studies teachers utilize a community responsive pedagogy framework to engage with focal ethnic communities and create a rigorous curriculum around relationship building with students, students' families, and communities;

and (d) while being a person of color is an asset, White and non-White teachers can effectively teach Ethnic Studies, if they can continuously reflect on their own identities and the impacts of a Eurocentric system on them and their relationship to the focal ethnic communities that they teach (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Ethnic Studies as culturally responsive pedagogy responds to the culture and needs of students, builds upon their perspectives, and “situates student culture and funds at the center of curriculum” (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 113) which had great value for the African American students in this study, especially when they were engaged in community responsive and culturally relevant assignments such as the SeeClickFix assignment and the Shadow Box project. With the SeeClickFix assignment, students were able to identify an issue in their own community, engage with city services on a social platform to address the issue, and initiate visible changes in their communities. The Shadow Box project situated student culture and funds at the center of the assignment by allowing for them to engage in identity exploration and express a counternarrative to stereotypical expectations. For most of these students, their Shadow Boxes were rooted in their African American identities, which strongly influenced their own perceptions about themselves and how they believed others saw them.

Each of the 13 African American students that I had the opportunity to interview were profoundly impacted by their Ethnic Studies courses in various ways, but most apparently in relationship to empowering their identity as African Americans and students. Carrying the heavy burden of systemic oppression and racial stereotypes, they navigate low expectations of teachers and peers on a daily basis, yet emerge as resilient, critical thinkers. Similarly, the teachers and practitioners that I spent time with were genuinely committed to advancing Ethnic Studies pedagogy as a matter of social justice and educational equity. The Ethnic Studies Curriculum Planning Day was a golden opportunity to engage with teachers and district leaders responsible for rolling out the

implementation plan and teach the course. Each Ethnic Studies teacher that I worked with to coordinate the focus groups was more than willing to help and fully supported the research study. Every Ethnic Studies practitioner at the Inaugural Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering was committed to creating access to and advancing Ethnic Studies K-12 pipelines, for both students and professionals.

African Americans are still victimized by systemic levels of oppression that result in disparities in education, health, employment, and wealth (Shapiro et al., 2013). Consistently poor levels of educational attainment levels, high rates of poverty, and the mass incarceration of African Americans is, in many ways, morally equivalent to the Jim Crow era (Alexander, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2013). In terms of the education and its impacts on African Americans, Howard (2001) argues that racial inequality is actually perpetuated when schooling and curriculum development is rooted in color-blind or race-neutral perspectives. If “race neutral,” color-blind, post-racial, informal, and hidden curricula continue to permeate the public school landscape to maintain the status quo (Apple, 1982, 1990; Wells, 2014), schools will continue to promote pedagogical practices that support and promote racial and cultural hegemony (Howard, 2001). As this relates to the research question, if Ethnic Studies, the opposite of race-neutral, color-blind curriculum, is designed to disrupt racism and challenge systemic inequities, the course should have positive effects on African American students’ cultural and academic identities, by motivating and empowering them to resist oppression, recognize stereotypes, and see themselves, their families, and their communities in the curriculum (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). In the case of this study, African American students experienced a sense of empowerment, more confidence as students, and more positively informed identities when engaged in OUSD’s Ethnic Studies curriculum.

Preparing Teachers to Teach Ethnic Studies

A large majority of the OUSD students labeled as “low performing” are African American (OUSD Dashboard Data, 2018). As such, transformational pedagogical and critical professional development practices for teachers are needed to support both teachers and students, since most teachers in California are White (CDE, 2012), including 46 percent of OUSD’s teachers (OUSD Fast Facts, 2018). Many White teachers enter the field with little to no multicultural connections, experiences, or background (Sleeter, 2008), and while being a teacher of color is an asset, it is not enough to be automatically considered an effective Ethnic Studies teacher (Berta-Avila, 2004). Toward more effective Ethnic Studies teaching and learning, teachers of all ethnic backgrounds must engage in critical dialogue and self-reflection about race and racism, and in the case of teachers of color, recognize and address any internalized racism that may impact the way that they teach students of color (Kohli, 2013). This study, for example, suggests that White and Latino teachers can effectively teach Ethnic Studies to African American students. The effectiveness of the pedagogy emerged in students’ answers about their most impactful experiences in their Ethnic Studies courses, which aligned with the operating principles of effective K-12 Ethnic Studies pedagogy. Along those lines, OUSD provides a solid pedagogy, curricular framework, implementation guide, and professional development practices to model.

The critical professional development of Ethnic Studies teachers is essential. Teachers, both non-White and White, should not be expected to automatically know how to teach an Ethnic Studies course. Research has affirmed that content-based professional development alone is not acceptable (Kohli et al., 2015). Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014) note that more successful Ethnic Studies teachers participate in professional development to strengthen their Ethnic Studies knowledge base, and districts must allot the financial

resources necessary to provide current teachers with ongoing support, including coursework, training, learning groups, workshops, and conferences. As classrooms become increasingly diverse, a new “demographic reality in American education” (de los Rios et al., 2015, p. 85) has emerged, where the majority of students in the classroom are now non-White. Rapidly changing school demographics demand a rethinking of teaching, curriculum, and pedagogy (de los Rios et al., 2015).

Social justice-oriented professional development opportunities support and engage teachers in the process of racial identity development and liberatory transformation (Kohli et al., 2015), which is necessary for effectively teaching Ethnic Studies. As noted by Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014), strong Ethnic Studies teachers are grounded in the purpose of Ethnic Studies, which is to critique the social and personal impacts of racism and challenge all forms of oppression. Teachers develop this strong sense of purpose through “professional development of Ethnic Studies content and intellectual frameworks” (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 111), which requires dedicated time and resources. However, there can be challenges with preparing effective Ethnic Studies teachers, since many teachers come with limited Ethnic Studies backgrounds (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Tatum (1992) noted that both White and non-White Ethnic Studies teachers need to engage in critical self-reflection about the impacts of racism and colonialism on their own lives and perspectives and how that might in turn impact their teaching. Careful attention to the purpose of Ethnic Studies, exemplified in the professional development agendas and activities noted in this study, strengthens pedagogical practices, and opportunities for collaborative lesson planning reinforce the effectively delivery of the framework and pedagogy. It has been noted in the research that White teachers often have lower expectations of African American students (Ahram, Fegus, & Noguera, 2011; Ferguson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Critical professional development for Ethnic Studies teachers allows for racial identity

exploration, community responsiveness, and cross-site collaborations for curriculum development, much like the professional development meeting agendas gathered for this study. As the participants in this study indicated, African American students benefit from intentional pedagogical practices that create caring and nurturing classroom and teaching environments.

Ethnic Studies supports racial identity transformation and exploration for African American students and teachers alike. Teachers must lead this effort, which requires self-exploration of their own identity, privilege, and social position. With Ethnic Studies, African American identity is explored in beyond slavery, stereotypes, and negative media portrayals, which is transformational and affirming for African American students, who are often taught a very succinct but inaccurate story about their identities - they were once enslaved, President Abraham Lincoln emancipated the slaves, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. fought and died for their civil rights. The end. That is far from the end of the story, but often times all that is taught in school. However, when African Americans do not learn about systemic oppression, mass incarceration, and institutional racism, the full story about the colonization of the United States, or get exposed to counternarratives to Eurocentric focused historical narratives about America's establishment, a cognitive dissonance develops among African Americans. Something is wrong, but we can't put our finger on it. Everyone is telling us that racism is dead and equal rights have been bestowed upon us, yet young African American men continue to get murdered by police officers without consequence. Educational attainment levels continue to lull, achievement gaps persist, and poverty pervades their neighborhoods and families, yet we are bombarded with images of athletes and entertainers as markers of success. Ethnic Studies may fill the knowledge gap for African American students.

Creating Caring Environments

Teaching historic counterstories in the curriculum awakens African American identity as positive versus negative, but teachers have to believe in their students. Effective Ethnic Studies teachers nurture caring academic environments and build assignments around student experiences, much like the research and shadow box projects described by the participants in this study. The shadow box allowed for a transformational experience with identity exploration, allowing African American challenging stereotypes and false assumptions about their identity by allowing them to present themselves and their own narrative. In an effective Ethnic Studies classroom environment, students are safe to explore the difficult topics that shape their existence, critique racism and challenge systemic oppression. The students in this study expressed how teachers oriented in culturally relevant and community responsive pedagogy can reach them, even if they are of a different ethnic background than them. Assignments created from a culturally relevant and community responsive framework matter to African American students, especially when their voice and choice are deemed important to the teaching and learning process.

Poor educational attainment data and performance outcomes for African American students may suggest, to the less critical eye, that African American students might not have an interest in what they learn or any intention to apply what they are learning to real life. This could not be further from the truth. I challenge that notion that African Americans are failing with the contention that the education system is failing African American students, and perhaps those that make up the entirety of the system have no interest in the teaching and learning of African American students, given the sustained consistency of the data. If educators are serious about changing the data and shifting the narrative about African American student success and failure, educators must work

through how the Eurocentric system has influenced their perceptions of themselves and African American students before embarking upon this work (Tintiangco-Cubales et al, 2014). Ethnic Studies calls on teachers to shift their internal and external narratives about race and racism, practice a revolutionary love (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), and humanize the learning environment by manifesting love, care, and support for the students and communities that they serve (Morrell, Duenas, Garcia, & Lopez, 2013). Strong Ethnic Studies pedagogy informs us that the most effective Ethnic Studies teachers utilize a community responsive pedagogy framework (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2010) to engage with the ethnic communities that they teach and create a rigorous curriculum around the relationships that they build with their students and their students' families/communities. In the case of teaching African American students in OUSD, this requires an understanding of the family and community dynamics that impact their daily lives, which requires talking with and listening to them. Effective Ethnic Studies teaching also encourages student praxis and develops agency (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), as demonstrated with the SeeClickFix project. Students were given a tool to have a voice in the community, and a choice about how to engage in their own community around an important issue, monitor the progress of their work, involve others in the community, and hold the city accountable for not responding to the needs of the community. The SeeClickFix project was a good way to develop agency by introducing meaningful and relevant content that encouraged student praxis, from a community responsive framework.

Similarly, students were given voice and choice with Shadow Box project, which allowed them to fully embrace the assignment—even those that expressed initial apprehension about it. The ability to express an identity narrative other than those placed upon them by society, the media, and their peers was important for the African American students in this study. The aspect that resonated most for students that enjoyed the

research project assignment, for example, was that they got to present their findings their way. When African American students have a voice and choice in the lesson planning, they are more invested in the lessons and the outcomes. The Ethnic Studies assignments and projects that teachers developed from a community responsive framework positively impacted student learning and served as critical learning experiences.

Supporting and Empowering African American Student Identity

Ethnic Studies content curriculum raises the critical consciousness of African American students, by exposing them to counternarratives that reject historical narratives and stereotypical tropes. Ethnic Studies teaches students about the significant contributions of African Americans to the American lexicon, which is affirming and encouraging. For example, several students in the study spoke openly about Ethnic Studies as “more than old, White history.” By assessing and unpacking the impacts of institutional slavery, mass incarceration, generational poverty, police shootings of unarmed African American men and women, Ethnic Studies provides an opportunity for African-American students, as one of the most oppressed groups in America, to critique racism, challenge oppression, and see themselves in the curriculum as they try to understand the world around them and their position in it. Learning that racism is real is powerful for African American students; it validates many of their daily experiences dealing with hostility and hate.

Ethnic Studies empowers and motivates African American students to come to school, learn more, and engage in their other academic courses, because it validates their identity as something other than “unable or unwilling to learn.” Many African American students carry the burden of being lumped into a barrage of stereotypes (Shelvin, Rivadeneyra, & Zimmerman, 2014; Strutchens, 2000; Wasserberg, 2014), much like the ones that Tanisha mentioned—“African Americans are too loud, always being sent to the

office, and the source of all of the trouble at school.” Ethnic Studies empowers African American students with the knowledge and confidence to challenge these notions by engaging in critical discussions about racism and stereotypes, versus internalizing them. Effective Ethnic Studies teachers understand and effectively convey to their students the purpose of Ethnic Studies—to challenge oppression, and critique racism, which raises critical consciousness, much like the student that was empowered to challenge the model in Blackface.

Implications

All teachers should have the opportunity, regardless of the subject that they teach, to be offered critical professional development in Ethnic Studies pedagogy, as part of the district’s mandatory teacher training program. Teachers’ critical, cultural, and liberatory sense of purpose can be developed through Ethnic Studies pedagogy, as it calls for identity exploration, awareness of one’s positionality, and the acknowledgment of racism, prejudice, and systemic inequities as real factors that impact African American students.

Toward an Ethnic Studies teaching credential and textbook. The Ethnic Studies initiative at OUSD has been successfully implemented at eight high schools. Offering the course at all fourteen OUSD high schools will increase access to the course to African American students and open more career pathway possibilities for African American students to be writers, teachers, and scholars of Ethnic Studies. OUSD’s African American students need more exposure to current high school to college Ethnic Studies pipelines to encourage more African American students to pursue Ethnic Studies as a college major and future career path.

Major school districts throughout California, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, and now Oakland Unified, have taken the lead in mandating an Ethnic Studies

course, as studies continue to reveal its positive benefits for youth (Dee & Penner, 2016). As K-12 Ethnic Studies continues to expand throughout California, more Ethnic Studies teachers will be needed to meet the mandate to teach Ethnic Studies at high schools in districts across the state. Ethnic Studies is an undergraduate major at local universities, including UC Berkeley, Cal State East Bay, and San Francisco State University among others. A career pipeline for Ethnic Studies college majors that includes a financial incentive for obtaining a teaching credential to teach Ethnic Studies courses in ninth through twelfth grade would support the implementation and long-term efficacy of the Ethnic Studies initiative. Further, the development of an Ethnic Studies teaching credential supports the growing number of districts across the nation that are implementing and mandating Ethnic Studies courses in their high schools.

In addition to the development of a teaching credential, current and future Ethnic Studies teachers and practitioners require more support in the area of curriculum development, specifically in the area of an Ethnic Studies textbook. De los Rios et al. (2014) argue that the sustainability of Ethnic Studies courses and programs relies heavily on creating a culture of collaboration, in which teachers across departments and disciplines work together to apply a critical pedagogy developing powerful units of curriculum that address social justice issues like racism, classism, and systemic oppression. Similar to the Ethnic Studies Curriculum Planning Day and the Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Gathering, Ethnic Studies practitioners have access to various opportunities to cross-collaborate and expand their curricular and pedagogical approaches. This has occurred locally, regionally, and nationally in many forms over the years, to varying degrees of success. The now defunct Institute for Transformative Education in Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), for example, amassed and engaged thousands of Ethnic Studies educators in the praxis of critical pedagogies, but no longer exists. Existing opportunities include a three-day summer institute developed

by former teachers from the dismantled TUSD Raza Studies Program, designed to engage in Ethnic Studies implementation methodologies in the K-12 context, and The Xican Institute for Teaching and Organizing (XITO) in Arizona, which provides an exemplary model for theory, praxis, and community responsive organizing (de los Rios et al., 2014). De los Rios et al. also note the need for more institutes, conferences, trainings, and meetings, similar to the aforementioned examples, dedicated to providing Ethnic Studies educators with the tools to develop curricula. I posit further that these kinds of conferences, meetings, and organizing spaces for professional and pedagogical development are optimal opportunities for the collaborative development of an Ethnic Studies textbook. Similar to OUSD's curriculum framework, Ethnic Studies curriculum represents a thoughtfully curated cadre of appropriately themed articles, readers, book chapters, poems, lessons, and assignments, based on collaboratively developed learning units. The field would be better served by engaging both new and seasoned Ethnic Studies practitioners in the development of an adaptive textbook, one that allows for the curricular needs of local communities in which they teach to be addressed, while maintaining the critical pedagogical principles that define Ethnic Studies.

Aligning Ethnic Studies curriculum with co-curricular programming efforts.

The Ethnic Studies course reaches, empowers, motivates, and raises expectations of African American students through a high level of academic engagement and discourse. While co-curricular efforts like the African American Male Achievement and African American Female Excellence programs are impactful, they do not go far enough in supporting the academic success of African American students. Aligning the goals of programs like AAMA and AAFE with the goals and pedagogy of the Ethnic Studies initiative may lead to better outcomes, overall. AAMA and AAFE coordinators and staff may benefit greatly from immersion into Ethnic Studies pedagogy and participation in the

critical professional development activities required of the teachers, to become even more effective social justice educators.

Recommendations for Future Research

While documented attempts to legally ban Ethnic Studies curriculum do exist, robust efforts by teacher unions in cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles continue to call for anti-racist curriculum and more teacher engagement in local organizations and community struggles, which are leading to calls for a mandatory college preparatory Ethnic Studies course in school districts (de los Rios et al., 2015). While mandates in districts like LAUSD, SFUSD, and OUSD are good starts, resolutions to mandate Ethnic Studies must move beyond offering the course as a social science elective to ensure that the course is a prerequisite to graduation and counts toward college admission requirements.

To support the continued growth of K-12 Ethnic Studies, future research on the development and implementation of an Ethnic Studies credential for teachers and an Ethnic Studies textbook for California high school courses is necessary to support current and future K-12 Social Studies and Ethnic Studies teachers. The textbook must be an authentic, localized, collaborative effort, developed by Ethnic Studies practitioners and scholars, as opposed to corporate education consultants, to support the growth and grounding of Ethnic Studies in K-12 education. The most authentic, informed, engaged, and prepared K-12 Ethnic Studies teachers are the best kinds of teachers to support African American student success in the classroom and beyond.

In addition to the necessity for more research on developing stronger Ethnic Studies professional development and K-12 academic pipelines, more qualitative research that captures and illuminates the voices and experiences of African American students

is necessary to further analyze and assess the impact of Ethnic Studies on empowering their academic and cultural identities. In addition to qualitative studies, more quantitative studies on the academic progression of African American students that take the Ethnic Studies course is necessary, to track their GPAs from ninth grade through graduation, to continue the exploration of the academic impact and social value of Ethnic Studies.

Conclusion

Throughout K-12 public education, African American students are failing at alarming rates. Poor graduation rates, low college attendance levels, high suspension rates, and chronic absenteeism continues to dominate the data, despite the narrative of “equality” permeating the American education lexicon, insisting that every student will succeed. As assessment data continues to emerge as the primary measure of student success, education researchers must continue to unearth new data, strategies, and ideas for addressing and resisting the persistent failure of African American students. In that pursuit of social justice in education, the recognition of racism, oppression, and marginalization is relevant, necessary, and impactful.

While Social Studies, U.S. History, and American Government courses cover important dates and factual information, they do not cover the evolution and maintenance of racism and systemic oppression toward African Americans and its devastating effects on American society today. On the contrary, Ethnic Studies pedagogy and curriculum creates opportunities for teachers and students to engage with culturally relevant curriculum. Teachers have the opportunity to lead African American students in the learning, sharing, transparency, identity development, and healing work necessary to combat systemic oppression, racism, and internalized racism, and help them move through the world empowered with understanding, compassion, and love. Ethnic Studies

creates space for teachers to connect with and support the success of African American students, and students to engage in social justice work necessary to change the pulse of the nation.

Research continues to affirm that Ethnic Studies positively benefits students. For African American students in this study, it demonstrated the potential to shift the trajectory of their overall school experience by empowering and motivating them to attend school, affirming and informing their identities in the school setting, and developing agency and praxis.

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APPENDIX A
ETHNIC STUDIES CURRICULUM PLANNING DAY AGENDA

Ethnic Studies Curriculum Planning Meeting Agenda

9:30am- 4:00pm

Objectives:

1. To foster reflexivity through sharing of student work and through collaboration (Pedagogy #4)
2. To practice with the final performance task in order to support student success and critique the dominant through our teaching practice (Pedagogy #1)
3. To build community with colleagues and promote healing as we develop OUSD's Ethnic Studies initiative (Pedagogy #6)

Curriculum Materials provided: "Act like a student"

Time	What are we doing?	Who	Why are we doing this?
9:30	Intros Opener - Share a piece of student work - Round #1: What's a connection? To yourself? To your students? To the ES framework? - Round #2: What's a question you have?	JD	To get to know one another and build trust in our network. We are grounding our sharing through student work because it pushes us to be reflective about what students are learning. It takes a risk to share student work, and we develop trust by honoring those risks.
9:45	Framing - Objectives Review the ES framework (see below)	JD	We want to intentionally use the ES framework to inform how we designed the agenda. Our work needs to mirror what we expect of our students.

Time	What are we doing?	Who	Why are we doing this?
9:50	<p>Paired Planning</p> <p>Option A: Take any of the resources from a Unit 3 lesson and apply the popular education model (workshop structure).</p> <p>Option B: Create a student example of a workshop using the popular education model addressing the question: What do we want to learn that's relevant to our lives and community, and how do we want to learn it?</p> <p>(Planning template provided)</p> <p>Share out (5 min)</p>	JD	<p>We want to give you a chance to work in cross-school pairs and to put yourself in the shoes of students who are asked to complete the final task for Unit 3. The purpose of this activity is to reflect on what instructional choices you can make to support students to be successful.</p>
10:35	<p>Discussion</p> <p>What are you taking away from the experience?</p> <p>What are the implications for your own teaching?</p> <p>What supports will students need to be able to be successful with the culminating performance task for the Unit "Becoming an Agent of Your Own Education"?</p>	AB	See above
10:45	Break		

Time	What are we doing?	Who	Why are we doing this?
10:55	Planning - Sharing of planning goals - Forming work teams (encouraging cross-site when possible)	AB	To provide a differentiated space for working either individually or collaboratively based on teachers' needs. We want to be intentional about building community across racial groups and school sites.
12:30	Lunch	All	
1:00	Focus on SEL What content in the unit is going to be emotionally challenging for you, for your students? What supports can you draw on?	JD	To shine a light on the challenging emotional nature of the Ethnic Studies work and how we hold this space for students.
1:15	Planning Time	All	See above
3:45	Closing - share one thing that you are excited about based on your planning today.	AB	This is a chance to hear from each person and to end on a hopeful and aspiring note.
3:55	Appreciations	AB	To recognize and honor the ways our colleagues supported our learning today.

OUSD Ethnic Studies Pedagogical Principles

1. Critique the dominant individuals/institutions/ideologies
 - a. Critique in positive/constructive ways that can build a foundation for change, but that is also honest and transparent, recognizes existing power structures and how to work around/change them
 - b. Provide opportunities for students to examine counter-narratives that challenge dominant paradigms

- c. Encourage students to come up with their own questions, ideas, and critiques
 - d. Provide students with choice
 - e. Critique power dynamics in the classroom/school
 - f. Counter the deficit-oriented, low expectation narrative of students of color by being a “warm demander”
2. Foster reflexivity and negotiate outsider/insiderness
- a. Question the value of remaining “objective”
 - b. Provide opportunities for student to practice “switching hats”
 - c. Include reflections from “insider’s” perspective when examining a topic
 - d. Start by providing opportunities for students to engage in self-reflection and story-telling about their own “insider” identities before they consider others
 - e. Provide frequent opportunities for metacognition and self-reflection should be a regular part of the learning process for students
 - f. Teachers engage in self-reflection alongside students
 - g. Reflexivity fosters humility
3. Build community and promote healing
- a. Examine the impact of historical, societal, and personal trauma
 - b. Create a safe/healthy/trusting classroom environment, building relationships
 - c. Provide opportunities for connections/solidarity across groups
 - d. Build classroom communities that reflect our hopes for the broader community
 - e. Build student self-determination/leadership
 - e. Encourage healing through listening, oral tradition, and storytelling

f. Engage in contemplative practice

Planning questions related to Pedagogy #1:

1. How can this lesson center students' voices, experiences, ideas?
2. How much time are students expected to talk to one another, to talk to the teacher, or listen to the teacher?
3. Where do students have choice to decide on what and how they are learning?
4. How do students give feedback on their learning experience?
5. How does the physical space of the classroom (chairs, tables, open spaces) facilitate student participation?

APPENDIX B
ETHNIC STUDIES FRAMEWORK

OUSD Ethnic Studies Framework 2017-18

Table of Contents:

1. Definition
2. Operating Principles/Pedagogy
3. Key Themes

Definition *What is Ethnic Studies?*

Ethnic Studies is a content and pedagogy that humanizes and empowers all people by honoring histories and cultures of historically marginalized groups, by employing multiple disciplines and perspectives to critically analyze systems of oppression, and by promoting action in solidarity with others to transform students' lives and communities.

Operating Principles/Pedagogy *How do we teach Ethnic Studies?*

(Based on Dr. Jose Cuellar's Xicano/Latino Ethnic Studies Paradigm)

1. Critique the dominant individuals/institutions/ideologies
 - a. Critique in positive/constructive ways that can build a foundation for change, but that is also honest and transparent, recognizes existing power structures and how to work around/change them
 - b. Provide opportunities for students to examine counter-narratives that challenge dominant paradigms

- c. Encourage students to come up with their own questions, ideas, and critiques
 - d. Provide students with choice
 - e. Critique power dynamics in the classroom/school
 - f. Counter the deficit-oriented, low expectation narrative of students of color by being a “warm demander”
2. Divert needed resources to the community, ensure needs of the community are being met
- a. Our curriculum should reflect our communities
 - b. Consider, “How can needs be identified and addressed sufficiently to move forward in a proactive manner without being usurped by the demands of outside stakeholders?”
 - c. Create opportunities for students to participate and take ownership in the identification process of needs and solutions within their own communities
 - d. Engage with members of the community to avoid assumptions and a deficit mentality
 - e. Empower students to take action
3. Incorporate multidisciplinary/holistic methods, series, models, perspectives, approaches
- a. Use a “triangulation” approach - examine a topic through at least 3 disciplinary lenses
 - b. Consider whose perspectives you will present to students, with the understanding that others’ perspectives will be left out
 - c. Encourage students to question whose perspectives are included and whose are missing

- d. Include inter-generational perspectives e. Include lenses of feminist, queer, and critical race studies
- 4. Foster reflexivity and negotiate outsider/insiderness
 - a. Question the value of remaining “objective”
 - b. Provide opportunities for students to practice “switching hats”
 - c. Include reflections from “insider’s” perspective when examining a topic
 - d. Start by providing opportunities for students to engage in self-reflection and story-telling about their own “insider” identities before they consider others
 - e. Provide frequent opportunities for metacognition and self-reflection should be a regular part of the learning process for students
 - f. Teachers engage in self-reflection alongside students g. Reflexivity fosters humility
- 5. Celebrate communal and individual assets
 - a. Have an asset-based approach to students, students as peer mentors and leaders, celebrating and building students’ resiliency
 - b. Bring joy, celebration, and connection to the classroom
- 6. Build community and promote healing
 - a. Examine the impact of historical, societal, and personal trauma
 - b. Create a safe/healthy/trusting classroom environment, building relationships
 - c. Provide opportunities for connections/solidarity across groups
 - d. Build classroom communities that reflect our hopes for the broader community
 - e. Build student self-determination/leadership
 - f. Encourage healing through listening, oral tradition, and storytelling

- g. Engage in contemplative practice

Key Themes *What key themes drive Ethnic Studies curriculum?*

Origins, Identity, Culture

1. Analyze the origins and migration patterns of people.
 - a. Interview family/community member's oral history in order to deepen understanding of one's own story and sense of self
 - b. Research, using Primary and Secondary sources, racial/ethnic migration patterns
2. Explore the unique cultures, languages, values, and symbols of historically marginalized groups
 - a. Examine family structures, music, art, literature, legends, and traditions
 - b. Examine how culture both changes and sustains over time and generations, influenced by the hostility of the society as a whole
 - c. Draw connections among shared histories in order to build alliances between racial/ethnic groups
 - d. Examine cultural diversity within specific ethnic and racial groups
3. Develop strength and a sense of empowerment from one's cultural wealth

Power, Privilege, Oppression

1. Examine the origins, perpetuation, impact, intersectionality, and levels (institutional, interpersonal, internalized) of oppression/structural violence
 - a. institutional violence
 - b. cultural dominance
 - c. White supremacy and privilege
 - d. classism, capitalism, and economic exploitation
 - e. sexism and gender exploitation
 - f. education exploitation
 - g. environmental racism and health inequities
 - h. homophobia and heterosexism

2. Analyze how race has been socially constructed and contested in the United States, in an ongoing struggle for power in society
 - a. Trace the historical development of racial/ethnic identity of various groups within the United States
 - b. Contrast dominant narratives and negative stereotypes with insider stories and counter narratives in order to develop a healthier acceptance of one's own racial/ethnic identity.
 - c. Examine intersectionality of gender, class, and sexuality
 - d. Analyze the inequality between ethnic/racial groups

Resistance and Liberation

Analyze the past and present to inform our approach to liberation:

- a. Study groups and movements that have come together in struggle and community in the face of oppression
- b. Evaluate these different strategies and practices of resistance and healing
- c. Apply these understandings to create our own roadmap to personal and communal liberation

Action

Research current events and data affecting different ethnic groups (and the intersections within them) in order to design, implement, and evaluate social action projects to address community needs.

APPENDIX C

ETHNIC STUDIES OUSD CURRICULUM



TEACHING & LEARNING AND LINKED LEARNING OFFICE

OUSD Ethnic Studies Curriculum

October 2, 2017

Goal and Rationale:

A recently passed Board Policy expects all high schools to offer an Ethnic Studies course by the start of 2018-19 because the research base reveals positive benefits for youth. Stanford researchers Dee and Penner studied the effects of a 9th grade Ethnic Studies course in SF Unified and found several positive impacts, including higher GPA and attendance and lower suspension rates (2016).

OUSD Ethnic Studies Framework (an excerpt):

Definition: Ethnic Studies is a content and pedagogy that humanizes and empowers all people by honoring histories and cultures of historically marginalized groups, by employing multiple disciplines and perspectives to critically analyze systems of oppression, and by promoting action in solidarity with others to transform students' lives and communities.

Example Units:

Unit	Sample Learning Goals	Unit Performance Task	Sample Resources
1: Origins, Identity, and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will reflect on their experiences and memories. Students will analyze their identities, including race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. Students will cultivate courage, empathy, and respect for one another by sharing their stories and listening to others'. 	Students create an auto-ethnographic shadow box and narrative essay that illustrates the ways in which the intersections and relationships of identities can be used to construct a counter narrative.	Danger of a Single Story (TED talk – Chimamanda Adichie) Little Things are Big (short story by Jesus Colon) Borderlands/La Frontera: opening poem (Gloria Anzaldua)
2: Power, Privilege, and Oppression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will identify how different systems of oppression (classism, ableism, white supremacy, etc.) are operating in our society. Students will apply systems of oppression theory to better understand their lives. Students will work collaboratively to educate their peers about systems of oppression and what they can do to address it. 	Students will illustrate a different system of oppression, define it, explain how it impacts people, and suggest ways their peers can stand in solidarity with the oppressed group. Final projects can take the form of poster, audio recording, or digital animation.	An Open Letter to the Woman Who Told My Family to Go Back to China (NYT) "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (Peggy McIntosh) Why the Myth of Meritocracy Hurts Kids of Color (Atlantic)
3: Resistance and Liberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will have a clear and empowering concept of how they learn and who they are as learners. Students will understand the impact of implicit bias & stereotype threat on learning. Students will articulate an understanding of school as a system and how it impacts their lives. 	Students will work in teams to create their own mini-lesson that teaches their class about a topic based on the popular education spiral model, which starts with student experience, adds new knowledge, and give students the chance to act.	And Then I Went to School" (Joe Suina) Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Paolo Freire)

Student Reflections:

- My Ethnic studies class was something I looked forward to everyday, future students should have the same opportunity to feel this way. (June 2017)*
- I appreciate the opportunity to have an ethnic studies class... I believe all school curriculum should represent the children it is teaching so it becomes more relevant and motivates students to learn. (June 2017)*

Contact: Young Whan Choi, Performance Assessment Manager, OUSD, youngwhan.choi@ousd.org

APPENDIX D

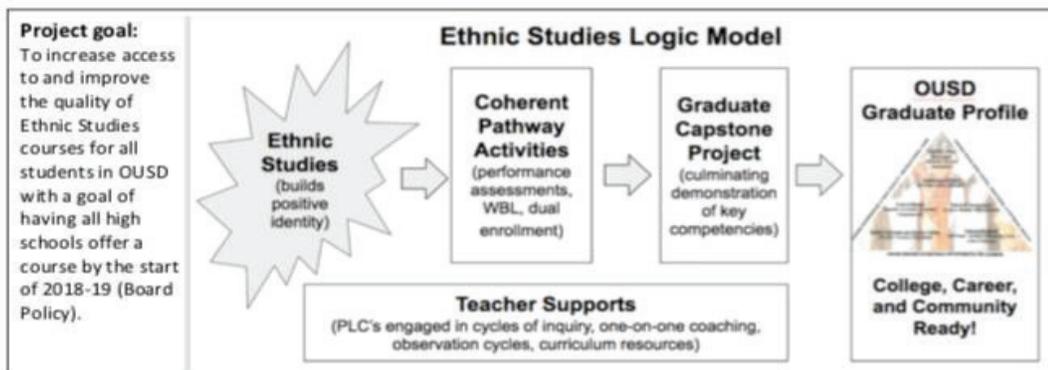
OUSD ETHNIC STUDIES IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE



LINKED LEARNING and TEACHING & LEARNING

OUSD Ethnic Studies

"I am impressed with the integrity and dedication of this group. Change is needed and is possible when we work together. I wish all of OUSD worked this way." (February, 2016)



Progress Data

School/Pathway	Offering course?	OUSD PD?
Oakland High	No	No
Skyline	Yes	Yes
Oakland Tech	Yes (Cal Studies)	Partial
Fremont	Yes	Yes
Castlemont	Yes	Yes
McClymonds	Yes	Yes
Life Academy	Yes	Yes
Madison	Yes	Yes
CCPA	Yes	Yes
MetWest	No	No
Dewey	No	No
Bunche	No	No
Rudsdale	No	No
OIHS	No	No

Implementation Timeline – Self-Assessment

Year One (2016-17)

- Identify teacher(s) with requisite background
- Program the course into master schedule
- Develop leadership knowledge

Year Two (2017-18)

- Offer course to some 9th graders
- Participate in summer and school year PD

Year Three (2018-19)

- Make course a required 9th grade elective
- Align with dual enrollment offerings
- Participate in summer and school year PD

What's your next step?

Budgeting for Ethnic Studies

Stipends: summer PD, district-wide PD; **Total: \$2000/teacher.**

Teacher release: 3 days/year; **Total: \$480/teacher.**

Materials/supplies: art supplies for projects; **Total: \$300/100 students.**

Contact: Young Whan Choi, Manager of Performance Assessments, OUSD, youngwhan.choi@ousd.org

APPENDIX E
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the term “Ethnic Studies”?
2. Reflecting on the Ethnic Studies class that you took, what was the overall takeaway for you?
3. How was the content in your Ethnic Studies class was relevant to other school subjects, if at all?
4. How did Ethnic Studies impact your performance in your other classes, if at all?
5. How did Ethnic Studies impact your perception of yourself, your family, and your culture, if at all?
6. How did the Ethnic Studies curriculum impact your understanding of systemic oppression?
7. How did the Ethnic Studies curriculum impact your understanding of racism and African Americans?
8. How did the Ethnic Studies curriculum make you think about your own identity as an African American person?
9. How did the Ethnic Studies class make you think about how you see yourself as a student (your academic identity)?
10. What was the most impactful or memorable experience in your Ethnic Studies class?

11. Would you recommend that all African American students take an Ethnic Studies course in high school? Why or why not?

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP ICEBREAKER ACTIVITY

Ethnic Studies Focus Group Icebreaker Activity

Facilitated by Marguerite Hinrichs, EdD Candidate

Task 1: Participants were asked to introduce themselves. Next, they were provided with the image below and asked to write down what it means to them. After a brief discussion about their answers, I collected the papers and moved on to Task 2.



Name: _____ **Grade:** _____

School: _____

What does this image mean to you? _____

Task 2: Participants were given the short article below to review. After reviewing the article, participants were asked to reflect and briefly share their thoughts.

Stanford GSE study suggests academic benefits to ethnic studies courses

January 12, 2016

Stanford Graduate School of Education

By Brooke Donald

New research shows gains in attendance and GPA of at-risk high school students from incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy.

A high school ethnic studies course examining the role of race, nationality and culture on identity and experience boosted attendance and academic performance of students at risk of dropping out, a new study by scholars at Stanford Graduate School of Education found.

The study looked at ethnic studies classes piloted in several San Francisco high schools and compared academic outcomes for students encouraged to enroll in the course with similar students who did not take it.

The researchers found that students not only made gains in attendance and grades, they also increased the number of course credits they earned to graduate.

“What’s so unique about this program is the degree to which it helped the students who took it,” said Emily Penner, co-author of the paper and a post-doctoral researcher at the GSE. “Schools have tried a number of approaches to support struggling students, and few have been this effective. It’s a novel approach that suggests that making school relevant and engaging to struggling students can really pay off.”

Thomas Dee, a professor at the Stanford GSE and director at the Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, was the other author of the report, which was posted Jan. 11 as a working paper on the website of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

Reference: <https://cepa.stanford.edu/news/stanford-gse-study-suggests-academic-benefits-ethnic-studies-courses>

...

Mentioned Publications

The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Thomas Dee, Emily Penner

Excerpt:

Our results indicate that assignment to this course increased ninth-grade student attendance by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23. These surprisingly large effects are consistent with the hypothesis that the course reduced dropout rates and suggest that culturally relevant teaching, when implemented in a supportive, high-fidelity context, can provide effective support to at-risk students.

Reference: <https://cepa.stanford.edu/news/stanford-gse-study-suggests-academic-benefits-ethnic-studies-courses>

After the two tasks, we discussed how the article and the image related to the research project to wrap up the icebreaker activity, and proceeded to the focus group questions.