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Never Too Young: The Existence, Impact, and Sustainability of Ethnic Studies in Elementary School

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NEVER TOO YOUNG: THE EXISTENCE, IMPACT, AND SUSTAINABILITY OF
ETHNIC STUDIES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Educational Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Angela R Guzmán

May 2023

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Dissertation Titled

NEVER TOO YOUNG: THE EXISTENCE, IMPACT, AND
SUSTAINABILITY OF ETHNIC STUDIES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

Angela R Guzmán

APPROVED FOR THE EDUCATIONAL DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

NEVER TOO YOUNG: THE EXISTENCE, IMPACT, AND SUSTAINABILITY OF ETHNIC STUDIES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by Angela R Guzmán

Ethnic Studies has existed in higher education for more than fifty years. In high school, critical education researchers have recognized Ethnic Studies as vital to improving attendance, lowering suspension rates, and boosting GPAs for BIPOC students. This has given rise to the recent K-12 Ethnic Studies model curriculum adoption by the State Board of Education, and the signing of Assembly Bill 101, making California the first state to require that all high school students complete a semester-long course in Ethnic Studies. Regrettably, Ethnic Studies continues to be mostly limited to higher education and grades 9-12 in public schools despite research documenting young children's ability to analyze a racialized society. Through an exploratory documentary-film study, this dissertation examines the possibilities and challenges of including Ethnic Studies in elementary schools as explained by teacher educators and Ethnic Studies faculty. As a result, the following themes emerged: (1) Ethnic Studies, curriculum and pedagogy, has a positive impact on all elementary aged students, particularly BIPOC students, (2) educators play a critical role in implementing authentic Ethnic Studies, and (3) children in elementary school are never too young to be exposed to Ethnic Studies. Recommendations are suggested for ways in which Ethnic Studies could be implemented by individual educators, schools, and school districts.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my maternal and paternal grandparents who in their own selfless ways ensured my journey would lead me here. To my parents, Juan Gutierrez Guzmán and Eulalia Rodríguez Guzmán whose words of encouragement and purpose shaped my moral compass. To my siblings, María de Jesus, Margarita, Guillermo, and Daniel who supported me in more ways than they will ever know. Last but not least, to my husband Antoine Watts and children, Mikaela, Anahya, and Antoine Jr.- it is because of you and for you that I make this dream come true. You gave me strength.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Significance of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study	5
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	8
Significance of the Study	10
Participant Selection	11
Scope and Limitations of the Study	12
Assumptions, Background, and Role of the Researcher.....	13
 Chapter II: Literature Review	 15
Eurocentric K–12 Curriculum.....	16
Educators’ Role.....	17
Importance of Early Experiences.....	22
Theoretical Framework.....	23
Critical Race Theory (CRT).....	23
LatCrit Theory and Critical Race Theory	24
Conceptual Framework.....	26
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	27
Community Cultural Wealth.....	28
Community Responsive Pedagogy	30
Ethnic Studies	32
Ethnic Studies Curricular and Pedagogical Misconceptions	38
Summary.....	40
 Chapter III: Research Design & Methodology	 43
Statement of Purpose and Research Questions.....	43
Exploratory Qualitative Methodology	44
Video Documentary Methodology	44
Sample Selection.....	46
Data Collection	47
Video Recordings.....	48
Memos.....	48
One-on-One Interviews.....	49
Documentary Production Process.....	51
Preproduction Phase.....	51
Production Phase.....	53
Postproduction Phase.....	55
Limitations	56

Positionality and Ethics.....	56
Chapter IV: Findings.....	58
Elementary Aged Students.....	58
Impact of Eurocentric Curriculum	58
Student Capacity	58
Ethnic Studies in Elementary School.....	59
Grassroots Existence.....	59
Belief in Ethnic Studies as the Solution.....	59
Consistent Interpretation of Ethnic Studies	60
Challenges With Implementing Elementary School Ethnic Studies.....	60
Curriculum	60
Teacher Training and Professional Development.....	61
Pre-Service Credentialing and Teacher Education Programs	61
Chapter V: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion.....	63
Summary of Findings.....	64
Research Question 1	64
Research Question 2	67
Research Question 3	70
Research Question 4	72
Relationship of Findings to Research	73
Challenges to Implementation	75
Overcoming Challenges.....	76
Recommendations for Improved Practice.....	76
Recommendations for Further Research.....	78
Reflection and Conclusion.....	81
References.....	83
Appendices	
A Documentary Participants.....	90
B Recruitment Flier	92
C Consent Form.....	93
D Interview Questions	96

Chapter I: Introduction

An ethnic demographic shift has swept K–12 public schools in the United States, and we should bring attention to the importance of diversifying K–12 curriculum to mirror this shift. de los Ríos et al. (2015) described this shift by looking at the percentage of White students in public schools; “While a generation ago, America’s schools could have been identified as predominantly white, this group now just comprises 52 percent of the national public-school population” (p. 85). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), in the fall of 2021, White students comprised 45.2% of the public-school population of the United States. When comparing the 2010 to 2021 school year, the White student population in public schools decreased by 7.2% (NCES, 2022). The percentage of White students in K–12 public schools is projected to continue decreasing; yet school curriculum maintains Euro-centric narratives at its core, regardless of the diversity in classrooms.

When taking a closer look, specifically at California’s public schools, it is seen that during the 2014–2015 school year, the California Department of Education (CDE, 2022b) reported White students as 24.6% of the public-school population. In the 2021–2022 academic school year, White students comprised 21.1% of California’s public-school demographic. While White student populations continue to decrease on a yearly basis nationally and statewide, the nation’s Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) student populations are continuously increasing. Not only should the increase in BIPOC student populations in public schools be a call for an interrogation of Eurocentric curriculum, but it should also be a call for the interrogation of the opportunities BIPOC students have overall to become academically successful. BIPOC students will become a major source of

the working-age population, voters, consumers, and contributors to the economy and government (Frey, 2018) in the future, making their success critical to the success of our nation. To fully realize the benefits and contributions of BIPOC student communities in the future, California schools need to acknowledge the diversity of the students it serves and consider how to best meet their needs at every level, including taking a critical look at the current curriculum, teacher pedagogies, and teacher preparation.

Statement of the Problem

Nationally, in 2021, BIPOC students made up 54.7% of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools (NCES, 2022). In 2021, California's BIPOC students made up 78% of students in K–12 public schools (CDE, 2022b). However, regardless of the increasing number of BIPOC students in our nation's K–12 population, the delivery of Eurocentric renditions of curriculum continues to devalue and erase the perspectives of Communities of Color (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Scholars agree this Eurocentric narrative found in K–12 public-school curriculum silences BIPOC narratives and alienates and oppresses BIPOC students in classrooms across the nation (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004; McInerney, 2009; Shear et al., 2015; Tejada & Espinoza, 2003).

Additionally, studies have found the lack of relevance of K–12 curriculum for BIPOC students and the absence of culturally relevant teaching pedagogy further marginalizes and increases BIPOC students' risk of being pushed out of school (de los Ríos et al., 2015; McInerney, 2009), which directly impacts BIPOC students' academic success, thus widening the opportunity gap. For that reason, scholars (Curammeng et al., 2016; Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) have argued that Ethnic Studies curriculum and

pedagogy in K–12 can counterbalance the negative effects that Eurocentric curriculum and Euro-dominant pedagogy have on BIPOC students and, ultimately, reverse school disengagement (Sleeter, 2011). An Ethnic Studies framework (curriculum, pedagogy, lessons, activities, and discussions) can help BIPOC students reclaim and center their history and narratives, giving BIPOC students the space to develop self-acceptance and acceptance of others, while also fostering critical examinations of identity, power, and race, which can challenge the status quo (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2020; Banks, 2012; Valdez, 2017). Therefore, it is important to examine how Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy can re-engage K–12 BIPOC students and increase their academic achievement, criticality, and civic engagement.

Significance of the Problem

The U.S. public education system started in the 19th century with the initial purpose of maintaining religious practices and beliefs in Protestant communities. In time, public education became available to only the wealthy, regardless of religion; eventually, it was reformed so all students could access its benefits. Reformers believed that common schooling could create good citizens, unite society, prevent crime and poverty, and prepare students to be literate enough to perform jobs in the newly industrialized workforce (Thattai, 2001).

However, since their inception, schools have been used to control and mold all inhabitants of this nation, with additional layers of control and coercion for BIPOC students through Eurocentric curriculum and institutionally racist practices. Beyond school curriculum, legislation has played an important role in using schooling to control BIPOC students and communities. An early example is the Dawes Act of 1868, which sanctioned genocide through the brutal theft of Indigenous children from their communities and

mandated that they attend boarding schools for the purpose of “civilizing” “the Native.” A more recent example of legislative control of BIPOC communities is the passing of California’s Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot initiative that would have established a state-run citizenship screening system to prohibit undocumented immigrants from using non-emergency health care and public education. Though the courts found Proposition 187 unconstitutional weeks after its passing, its impact on immigrant communities has been indelible. Today, legislation continues to manifest power and domination in BIPOC communities, a system “that can be traced to European conquest, colonization, and imperialist expansion throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries” (Tejeda & Espinoza, 2003, p. 2).

Despite educational reforms, “At worse, public schools reproduce the power relations of the larger society, and at best [hold] out the promise of viewing and experiencing schools as democratic public spheres” (Giroux, 2008, p. 9). According to Kohli et al. (2017), K–12 public schooling in the United States has historically subjected BIPOC students to “institutionalized conditions that contradict their interests and their humanity” (p. 184), deculturizing and Americanizing BIPOC communities to maintain dominant control over them (Tejeda & Espinoza, 2003). Shear et al. (2015) argued that K–12 public schools continue to oppress BIPOC students.

Those who have the power to shape public-school curriculum, such as state and federal agencies, curriculum developers, and school district leaders, are “supporters of a more conservative view of American history, work[ing] to silence minority experiences and historical narratives” (Shear et al., 2015, p. 68). This concealment and silencing of BIPOC

narratives in mainstream curriculum has negative impacts on students' cultural and scholarly identities. McInerney (2009) argued that when the relevance of students' learning in their lives is concealed—when students are kept marginalized—they are more likely to disconnect from schooling and are ultimately pushed out of school, feeding the school-to-prison pipeline. Similarly, Sleeter (2011) argued that the “overwhelming dominance of Euro-American perspectives in school curriculum leads to many students of color disengaging from academic learning” (p. vii). Banks (2012) argued that “to teach American history without the experiences and perspectives of ethnic groups ... is to teach a distorted version of the history of the United States” (p. 468). This distorted version of history, coupled with the lack of cultural relevance in K–12 curriculum, academically alienates and disengages BIPOC students, creating an educational disadvantage for already oppressed groups (McInerney, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

As BIPOC student populations in K–12 public schools continue to grow, the opportunity gap persists and expands. California's dropout report for the 2019–2020 academic school year for public schools indicated that 42,035 9th–12th-grade students who had a reported race were pushed out of school (CDE, 2021). Of the total number of students with a reported race, 34,107 students were BIPOC students or of two or more races. Of that same group, BIPOC students or mixed-race students constituted 81% of all students who were pushed out of public schools in the state of California alone during the 2019–2020 academic school year (CDE, 2021). These statistics call for an urgent interrogation of current educational practices; in particular, curriculum, critical pedagogies, and teacher preparation.

As important research exists about the presence of an opportunity gap and the persistence of contrasting educational attainment levels for BIPOC students, more research supporting the inclusion of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in elementary schooling to support student achievement is necessary. This research will build upon existing research that affirms the academic, personal, and social benefits of Ethnic Studies for BIPOC students.

Critical education researchers have recognized Ethnic Studies as vital to improving attendance, lowering suspension rates, and boosting grade point averages (GPAs) for high school students. Ethnic Studies acknowledges, analyzes, and centers BIPOC students' histories and contributions in this country and provides BIPOC students the space to develop self-determination and strong cultural identities; it also re-engages students and increases student achievement (Dee & Penner, 2017; Pawel, 2021; Sleeter, 2011; Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014).

Regrettably, Ethnic Studies continues to be mostly limited to higher education and the later grades of K–12 public schooling. Thus, it is important to examine how to embed Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in grades K–8 (Valdez, 2017). In particular, the inclusion of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in grades K–5, far before students enter high school, gives students the opportunity to develop the skills to think critically about themselves and the world around them (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2020). Though some may argue that elementary students are “too young” to understand critical concepts and that conversations about race and racism are inappropriate, this notion assumes that BIPOC students are not already navigating racism, oppression, and injustices within their own communities (Pour-Khorshid, 2020).

Therefore, since Ethnic Studies remains largely limited to higher education and secondary schooling, the aim of this research study is to explore the possibilities and challenges of including Ethnic Studies in elementary schools—whether it currently exists; what form it takes; whether it impacts the development of self-determination, critical consciousness, and the cultural and scholarly identities of elementary BIPOC students; and its sustainability.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework grounding this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and LatCrit Theory (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). CRT is a lens that recognizes the role of race as the primary focus of examination, while LatCrit Theory includes the necessary interrogation of language, gender, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, and immigration, thus granting education scholars the ability to critique the status quo (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). With the focus of this study on the exploration of the existence of Ethnic Studies in elementary school and its impact on BIPOC students, it is important to also include critical pedagogies in the field of education that contribute to the understanding of how Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy can be implemented in schools. The conceptual frameworks shaping this study are Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), and Community Responsive Pedagogy (Tintiango-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021).

Existing scholarship and research on Ethnic Studies are limited in exposing the current practical approaches and impact of addressing social-justice issues in education pertaining to BIPOC students at the elementary school level (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2020; Sleeter & Zavala,

2020). The theoretical and conceptual frameworks selected aim to center the work of social-justice educators that have implemented Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in K–12 schools. This study will explore the existence of Ethnic Studies in elementary school and its impact on BIPOC students in these schools through the application of theoretical and conceptual frameworks to explain the impact on students.

Research Questions

This research study will focus on how Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in traditional public elementary schools in California exists and how it has been implemented. It will particularly focus on teacher educators' and scholars' experiences with Ethnic Studies, and Ethnic Studies' effect on students' cultural and academic identities. The research study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the experiences of BIPOC K–5 students with traditional Eurocentric curriculum in California's public schools, according to adult participants?

RQ2: What is the difference between Ethnic Studies curriculum and Ethnic Studies pedagogy?

RQ3: In what ways does the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy impact elementary students, according to adult participants?

RQ4: What are the qualities or background experiences of successful elementary school teacher educators who teach using an Ethnic Studies framework?

Definition of Terms

In order to clarify and provide context for this study, I offer the following working definitions:

achievement gap: the unequal or inequitable distribution of educational results for students.

BIPOC students: students who self-identify as Black, Latina/o, Asian, Indigenous, and/or a mix of racial identities.

drop-out: the idea that students leave school of their own accord.

Ethnic Studies: The study of the history and current experiences of four historically marginalized racial groups in the United States; where critical analysis of race decenters Euro-dominant narratives and centers African American, Indigenous, Asian American/ Pacific Islander, and Latino/Chicano narratives.

Euro American: an American person of European ancestry; a person who is a descendant of the first European colonizers of the Americas.

Euro-dominant/Euro-centric: referring to the centering of European culture; emphasizing the imposed values, history, and perspective of European tradition, along with the marginalization of other racial/cultural groups.

opportunity gap: the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities for students created by the adults in the educational system.

push-out: the systemic exclusion and push-out of students from school through explicit and implicit discriminatory policies and actions.

social justice: refers to a commitment to interrogating social, cultural, and economic inequalities imposed on individuals based on power, resources, and privilege.

Significance of the Study

On September 13, 2016, California’s governor, Gavin Newsom, signed Assembly Bill (AB)-2016, written by Assemblymember Luis Alejo; this bill required the state to develop and adopt a model curriculum of Ethnic Studies for grades 7–12. On January 31, 2019, following AB-2016, AB-331 was introduced by assemblymembers Medina, Weber, and Bonta; this bill would make Ethnic Studies a requirement for high school graduation in California. Governor Newsom vetoed AB-331 on September 30, 2020, asking for revisions to the model curriculum to ensure the inclusion of all communities. On March 18, 2021, the model curriculum was adopted by the State Board of Education. And on October 8, 2021, Governor Newsom signed AB-101, authored by Assemblymember Medina, making California the first state to require all high school students to complete a semester-long course in Ethnic Studies to earn a high school diploma. The bill, in part, reads:

This bill would add the completion of a one-semester course in ethnic studies, meeting specified requirements, to the graduation requirements commencing with pupils graduating in the 2029–30 school year, including for pupils enrolled in a charter school. The bill would expressly authorize local educational agencies, including charter schools, to require a full-year course in ethnic studies at their discretion. The bill would require local educational agencies, including charter schools, to offer an ethnic studies course commencing with the 2025–26 school year, as specified. (Medina, 2021)

With the adoption of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and the approval of AB-101, which mandates the completion of a semester-long Ethnic Studies course for students in grades 9–12, BIPOC students in California are closer to “see[ing] themselves and each other as part of the narrative of the United States” (Pawel, 2021).

However, as important as this adoption and approval may be, they do not address how to implement Ethnic Studies authentically or what the benefits of Ethnic Studies are at the

elementary school level. Therefore, this exploratory qualitative research study explores the existence and impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in K–5 classrooms, as explained by teacher educators and scholars. In a study, Hickman and Wright (2011) found that “the path of dropping out of school started as early as kindergarten as dropouts were significantly behind in all academic subjects compared to their peers who eventually graduated high school” (p. 26). Moreover, this lack of mastery of academic subjects leads a student to feel like they do not belong in school (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011). Therefore, when corrective actions by educators to engage and develop strong academic skills in BIPOC students are not taken before the third grade, these students are more likely to struggle academically throughout their academic career. This research study is significant because it examines the effects of Ethnic Studies on the development of self-determination and the cultural and academic identity of BIPOC students in elementary school—an age when students develop their identity and an understanding of others and the world around them (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2020). Why should BIPOC students have to reclaim their identities in high school or college when we can make sure they don’t forfeit it to begin with?

Participant Selection

This research study utilized an exploratory, qualitative, documentary research methodology. The purpose of the exploratory qualitative documentary film was to explore the existence and impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy implementation in K–5 public elementary schools in California. Additionally, it centers the experiences, challenges, and successes current Ethnic Studies educators face in traditional public schools. Moreover, it includes the perspective of Ethnic Studies scholars who continue to advocate for Ethnic

Studies in K–12 public schools throughout the state of California. Essentially, the exploratory qualitative documentary film has two elements, (1) the teaching and learning experiences elementary school educators encounter when implementing Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy, and (2) a platform to center the experiences, knowledge, and expertise of seasoned teacher educators and scholars in California.

Teacher educators and Ethnic Studies faculty who participated in this documentary research study were drawn from schools and universities across California. I conducted one-on-one interviews, virtually and in person. Interviews with elementary teacher educators who use Ethnic Studies were intended to obtain various perspectives on traditional curriculum currently implemented at their school, as well as to provide opportunities for educators to share their pioneering experiences with the teaching and learning of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy.

Recruitment of participants for the study began with individual emails sent directly to participants. Participants were chosen based on their interest in Ethnic Studies and their experience with teaching Ethnic Studies. They were also chosen through word of mouth. All interviews were recorded using a virtual platform or video camera. The final, edited, exploratory qualitative documentary film focused on the key research questions by weaving together footage of interviews with Ethnic Studies educators and experts working throughout the state of California.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study aimed to explore the existence of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in elementary schools, and its impact on BIPOC students, at a time when California is stepping

towards rectifying the omission of BIPOC narratives in school curriculum, specifically in grades 9–12. This study is expected to contribute greatly to the literature on the implementation and impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy at the elementary school level. It provides insight into whether the guiding values, principles, and outcomes of Ethnic Studies—cultivate, celebrate, center, critique, challenge, connect, and conceptualize (Tintiango-Cubales & Curammeng, 2018)—could be developed in young children who many believe are not old enough to develop an understanding of these concepts. As an exploratory documentary, its results should not be generalized to other communities; however, the research study will hopefully lead to more discourse on the importance of requiring Ethnic Studies in California’s K–5 public schools and the inclusion of Ethnic Studies certification and credentialing in pre-service and administrator-preparation programs.

Assumptions, Background, and Role of the Researcher

The background of this study stems from my personal experience as a BIPOC child who attended traditional K–12 public schools in the heart of Silicon Valley, California, where I was only exposed to Euro-dominant curriculum and ideologies. Throughout my schooling I yearned to see myself in the curriculum and feel like I belonged. Instead, in elementary school, I was met with students telling me to “speak English, this is America!” and teachers who told my parents, “Don’t speak to her in Spanish; it will confuse her;” and later, in high school, teachers who encouraged me to take a cooking class and not the Advanced Placement history class. It was not until I was introduced to Ethnic Studies by an older sister that I realized my worth in Euro-dominant spaces and the significance of attending college instead of dropping out, like others in my community had.

As I advanced in my educational and professional career, I continued to witness how BIPOC students were kept in the margins in school curriculum and were kept at the center of deficit views and disciplinary statistics. This is why I am deeply passionate about Ethnic Studies in elementary education and why I am committed to improving educational outcomes for BIPOC students. As a Title I elementary school principal, I now have the opportunity and the responsibility to center BIPOC students in the curriculum and pedagogy educators use in their classrooms with historically marginalized students.

As a researcher, I explored K–5 teacher educators’ and scholars’ experiences with mainstream curriculum and Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy. My childhood experience with mainstream curriculum, along with my experience as a social-justice educator for more than 20 years, has directly impacted how I navigate my role as a school leader and how I operate as a researcher. I understand that this research study and documentary will be a tool to center historically marginalized narratives, as well as a method to share the stories of BIPOC educators and students with a larger population.

Chapter II: Literature Review

When looking at California's K–12 public schools, BIPOC students made up 76.7% of students in the 2019–2020 school year (CDE, 2022a); a visible demographic shift making BIPOC student populations larger in K–12 public schools, which de los Ríos et al. (2015) say should bring attention to the importance of diversifying school curriculum. Yet even though there have been changes in the K–12 student population, curriculum in K–12 schools has continued to be Eurocentric; silencing narratives and alienating and oppressing BIPOC students in K–12 classrooms (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004; McInerney, 2009; Shear et al., 2015; Tejada & Espinoza, 2003).

According to Chomsky (2000), “institutions [are] for indoctrination and for imposing obedience. Far from creating independent thinkers, schools have always, throughout history, played an institutional role in a system of control and coercion” (p. 16). Therefore, since their inception, schools have been used to control and mold all inhabitants. Over and above this, BIPOC students have had to deal with an additional layer of control and coercion as a consequence of the current, traditional Eurocentric curriculum and Euro-dominant pedagogy in K–12 public schools.

Not long ago, Arizona's House Bill-2281 of 2011 banned Ethnic Studies courses throughout the state. Presently, and since January 2021, 36 states have introduced bills or have taken steps to restrict CRT; this restriction limits how educators can discuss race and racism in their classes (Schwartz, 2021). Legislation continues to manifest power and domination in schools, retaining a dominant, Eurocentric narrative in K–12 curriculum to

hide the reality of the forced indoctrination and oppression of BIPOC students in schools (Cabrera et al., 2013).

When legislation continuously challenges and counters the demand to implement culturally relevant curriculum in schools, it is due to what Banks (2012) refers to as *identity politics*, wherein educational reform critics believe that “Educators should develop students’ identity as Americans and not their ethnic identities” (p. 469). Claims that school diversity will weaken national identity, and that BIPOC students should develop U.S. identities, is the reason schools “operate under the assumption that the process of becoming educated is a race-neutral or color-blind experience” (de los Ríos et al., 2015, p. 87). This forced acculturation of BIPOC students is clearly seen in the lack of culturally relevant standards and representation in K–12 curriculum.

Eurocentric K–12 Curriculum

In 2011, Sleeter researched the social and academic value of Ethnic Studies in K–12 schools. In her research of mainstream curriculum, she confirmed that the textbook publishers of the 1970s and 1980s made efforts to take BIPOC stereotypes out of K–12 curriculum, but the shift to focusing on standards accountability in the 1990s made “efforts to make texts and other curricula multicultural subside” (p. 2). Sleeter (2011) further acknowledged in her findings that publishers have added some content about Black individuals, Latinx individuals, and Indigenous individuals. However, Eurocentric narratives continue to dominate in the curriculum, with Black individuals as the next most represented group, but with their appearances in curriculum still limited; even less represented are Asian Americans and Latinx individuals.

Brown and Brown's (2010) study of contemporary elementary and middle school textbooks found that:

In spite of the changes in the narratives found in the textbooks about racial violence and African Americans, particularly those found in discussions about slavery, these representations fall short of adequately illustrating how racial violence operated systematically to oppress and curtail African Americans' opportunities and social mobility in the United States. (p. 150)

In a similar study, when Texas standards were reviewed, only 33% of them related to BIPOC experiences—mostly Black and Latinx experiences, with only 4% of the standards related to Indigenous people (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). Additionally, a study by Shear et al. (2015) on the representation of Indigenous peoples in K–12 history standards “found that only 13.34% of the 2,230 coded standards related to Indigenous history, culture, or issues occurring post-1900” (p. 81). Scholars agree that these studies show a steady effort to conceal BIPOC's histories, perspectives, contributions to this nation, and current experiences with racial and social injustices.

Educators' Role

Nationally, in 2017, BIPOC students made up 52.4% of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools (NCES, 2022). During the 2019–2020 academic school year, California's BIPOC students made up 76.7% of the student population in K–12 schools (CDE, 2022a). Although BIPOC students largely represent enrollment in K–12 public schools, “the teaching force is overwhelmingly White, middle-class, and monolingual English speaking” (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014, p. 11). These disparate groups in classrooms—BIPOC students from the non-dominant culture and White, middle-class teachers from the dominant culture—will continue to create environments in which BIPOC

students are denied academic opportunities unless their teacher rids themselves of a deficit mindset and instead works in solidarity with their students (Goldenberg, 2014).

Grant and Agosto (2008) draw on literature from the field of teacher education from the past three decades to examine and identify practices associated with social-justice efforts in education. They concluded that social justice is a well-intended idea in teacher-education literature and popular among teacher educators, but it is rarely included in teacher-education statements, practices, and expectations. However, the recent rise of social-justice education journals and books, articles, teacher-education programs, and professional development is indicative of its importance. Yet, they underscore Nieto's (2000 as cited in Grant & Agosto, 2008) lamentation: a recognition that teacher-education programs are addressing social justice and equity at a slow pace.

Due to the lack of developing social-justice educators in teacher-education programs, Bree Picower (2012) stated that many educators enter teaching “with a desire to teach from a social justice or multicultural perspective. Having been exposed to a variety of theories about social justice education...they may have an understanding of the need for such approaches...[and] the purposes behind them” (p. 1). However, while teacher-education programs lay the foundation, they often leave educators with a concept of social justice that is theoretical. Having taught pre-service elementary school educators, and based on her own experiences and observations, Picower (2012) provided a framework consisting of six elements of social-justice curriculum design for classrooms—particularly elementary classrooms.

For educators who want to provide opportunities to elementary students for with opportunities to critically engage with the world, Picower (2012) defined six elements that can help educators lead students toward valuing themselves, respecting diversity, understanding injustices, and empowering social action. Element One, self-love and knowledge, provides students with a historical exploration that recognizes their and their community's strengths and resilience. In Element Two, respect for others, students gain respect for history and characteristics of those who are different from themselves. Element Three, issues of social injustice, offers students the opportunity to take a critical examination of how identities impact people's conditions. Element Four, social movements and social change, teaches students about how people have historically fought against oppression. Element Five, awareness raising, engages students in activities and lessons that increase awareness and provide students with the opportunity to teach others. Element Six, social action, engages students in social action within their communities. Together, these elements support educators beyond the theoretical, into praxis, while also providing students the mindsets and skills needed to stand up for social justice at an early age (Picower, 2012).

Picower (2012) also referenced Banks' (1999) approaches to note that the six elements she proposes do not move from a lower level to a higher level of social-justice implementation. Though all lessons do not need to include all of these elements, all elements are equally important and should be addressed throughout the year. Moreover, Picower (2012) stated that even though educators are more comfortable with Element One and Element Two, "by addressing only these two elements, teachers leave students with the

curricular equivalent of ‘can’t we just all get along,’ ignoring structural and historical causes of how and why people haven’t ‘gotten along’” (p. 3).

However, the implementation of these six elements is not sufficient to transform the classroom from a traditional one into one that implements Ethnic Studies. Additionally, it is important for educators to self-reflect and define their values and beliefs, while also examining their own assumptions and actions when teaching BIPOC students. Educators’ inability to self-reflect and examine their authoritative role in schools, consciously or unconsciously, further marginalizes BIPOC students.

Given the social class, racial, cultural, and language differences between teachers and students, and our society’s historical predisposition to view culturally and linguistically diverse students through a deficit lens that positions them as less intelligent, talented, qualified, and deserving, it is especially urgent that educators critically understand their ideological orientations with respect to the differences, and begin to comprehend that teaching is not a politically or ideologically neutral undertaking. (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 99)

To implement Ethnic Studies and truly give students the space to become critically conscious, educators need to have more than content knowledge. They need to question and challenge inequalities, especially racism and its social and political implications in the BIPOC communities they serve. Scholars assert that when educators become “enlightened,” they will then have the ability to challenge the status quo and provide more equitable access to an education that fosters BIPOC student empowerment and liberation. Teaching is a political act, and educators “must ask themselves for whom and on whose behalf, they are working” (Freire, 1985 as cited in McNerney, 2009, p. 27).

Educators must support BIPOC students’ interrogation of systems that have historically oppressed and marginalized them and kept them from strengthening their cultural awareness,

identities, and self-advocacy. Educators, regardless of ethnic background, must be challenged because they, too, are products of this historically institutionalized indoctrination. In response, the literature provides suggestions to begin the process. Bartolomé (2004) suggested teachers could start as cultural brokers or advocates, where they help their students navigate school culture in order to succeed. Pitts (2016) suggested to teachers, “immerse yourself in literature that matters and that sharpens your zeal for human rights, social justice and teaching” (p. 49). Both scholars affirmed the need for sustained practice in order to make a difference.

In a study, Edwards and Kuhlman (2007), as teacher-preparation professors, provided a semester of opportunities for their educator candidates to develop as culturally responsive educators. The service-learning approach gave educators the opportunity to plan culturally relevant lessons, deliver the lessons, and reflect on their experiences. The goal was to develop educators who utilize culturally responsive teaching at all times. Through responses to specific journal entry questions, Edwards and Kuhlman (2007) found educator candidates’ descriptions of culturally relevant teaching practices to be superficial and broad. Although educator candidates had focused more on students by the end of the semester, it was also clear to the researchers that educator candidates did not automatically think about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy when planning or when teaching. Moreover, this study confirmed that the process of becoming a social-justice educator is a never-ending commitment and that educators must deliberately acknowledge students’ realities at all times.

Importance of Early Experiences

In a study, Hickman and Wright (2011) found “the path of dropping out of school started as early as kindergarten as dropouts were significantly behind in all academic subjects compared to their peers who eventually graduated high school” (p. 26). When corrective actions to develop strong academic skills are not taken before the third grade with BIPOC students, these students are more likely to struggle, which may lead to dropping out of high school. Moreover,

the lack of academic mastery and success leads a child to feel as if he or she does not belong in school. The more a student feels he or she does not belong in school, the more school may become uninviting and unrewarding. Researchers have found that the earlier a child experiences academic failure and finds school uninviting and unrewarding, the less likely he/she will be to become successful and engaged later in school. (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011, p. 3)

Across three pre-registered studies, Sullivan et al. (2021) examined the “relation between adults’ beliefs about children’s ability to process race, and adults’ willingness to talk with children about race” (p. 396). When participants completed several measures, using an age-in-months sliding scale to respond, the data suggested that adults believe children process the world around them, particularly race, later than suggested by scientific literature. Participants also believed that children should be closer to five years of age when having their first conversation about race. The researchers found an extreme gap between the age when most educators and adults believe children can begin to understand race and the age when science suggests they can. According to research from “racially and culturally diverse contexts” (Sullivan et al., 2021, p. 395), humans as young as 3 months old begin to prefer faces from specific racial groups and by 9 months old are using race to categorize.

Children recognize race as they collect information from the world around them to construct their own meanings; and, in turn, they develop racial biases and racial understandings at a very early age (Cole & Verwayne, 2018; Griffiths & Sullivan, 2022; Winkler, 2009). Young children connect meaning to what they witness around them, with or without adult instruction or intervention; “in other words, children pick up on the ways in which whiteness is normalized and privileged in U.S. society” (Winkler, 2009, p. 3). Consequently, when adults delay conversations about race or take a colorblind approach to race, children are more likely to reproduce inequities instead of diminishing them (Boutte et al., 2011; Griffiths & Sullivan, 2022).

Sullivan et al. (2021) state that “while the optimal time or way that adults should talk to children about race remains unclear, fully mitigating racial bias will require talking about it” (p. 399). Therefore, if educators truly want to improve BIPOC students’ success and overall sense of belonging in K–5 public schools, they must center race, help all students understand their identity, and avoid practices that reproduce social inequities through the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy starting in elementary school.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

With its origins in legal studies, CRT evolved in the 1970s when intellectuals in the field noticed that advances from the civil rights era had slowed down and, in some cases, even regressed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This movement led scholars and activists to critically examine policies and laws regarding issues of race, racism, and racial justice, with a focus on

“transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3).

Although CRT began in law, it has spread to other disciplines, such as education. This CRT lens recognizes the role of race as the primary focus of examination, thus granting education scholars the ability to critique the status quo (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In the field of education, educators who critically examine the status quo “use CRT’s ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, affirmative action, high-stakes testing, controversies over curriculum and history” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 6). Within Pre-K–12, this means centering and challenging race and racism in discourse, operationalizing structures, teacher praxis, and curriculum (Yosso, 2002). Moreover, CRT is used “as an epistemological and methodological tool, to help analyze the experiences of historically underrepresented populations across the k-20 educational pipeline” (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015, p. 1).

LatCrit Theory and Critical Race Theory

LatCrit Theory is complementary to CRT but includes a necessary interrogation of issues that are often ignored through CRT, such as language, gender, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, and immigration (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). For first-generation BIPOC students, this lens adds important dimensions that interrogate an intersectionality that has kept them marginalized on different fronts (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) posit at least five themes that form a basic lens for a LatCrit and CRT framework in education:

- *the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination*: multiple layers of oppression at play for first-generation BIPOC students, such as Latinx/Chicano students.
- *the challenge to dominant ideology*: the importance of challenging our educational system to rethink the traditional way of knowing. In reference to a public school's curriculum, Yosso (2002) stated, "A critical race curriculum exposes the white privilege supported by traditional curriculum structures and challenges schools to dismantle them" (p. 93).
- *the commitment to social justice*: It is important to recognize the role that power and oppression have had in BIPOC communities, both historically and currently. A commitment to social justice must include the seeking of political and social change to offer liberation and an "agenda that leads toward (a) the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty and (b) the empowering of underrepresented minority groups" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 313).
- *the centrality of experiential knowledge*: BIPOC students' experiential knowledge is seen as deficit in formal educational environments. LatCrit and CRT recognize their knowledge as a strength that educators need to accept and uplift.
- *the interdisciplinary perspective*: In education, it's about, "analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 314).

As theoretical frameworks, both CRT and LatCrit have yet to be centered lenses in K–12 public-school systems (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Consequently, the lack of CRT

and LatCrit lenses has maintained and perpetuated the Eurocentric, hegemonic, traditional practices that have kept BIPOC students marginalized and seen in a deficit view.

Conceptual Framework

There are a number of critical pedagogies in the field of education that challenge hegemonic ideologies and deficit images concerning BIPOC students. These pedagogies address BIPOC students' needs, interrogate current white-supremist epistemologies, and attempt to liberate BIPOC students. The following critical pedagogies have contributed to our understanding of how Ethnic Studies exists in schools: culturally relevant pedagogy, Community Cultural Wealth, and community responsive pedagogy.

Through critical pedagogical praxis, the purpose of schooling is to develop students who are expanding and deepening their knowledge of their realities. As an educational process, critical pedagogies engage students of historically marginalized and underserved communities in dialogue to name and transform oppressive social and structural conditions inside and outside of schools (Freire, 1970 as cited in de los Ríos et al., 2015). They seek to build authentic learning experiences that stem from the local experiences of all members, students, family, and the community. They are an approach in which educators and students pose questions about the world around them and engage in an inquiry-and-action process (de los Ríos et al., 2015). Through critical pedagogies, educators create spaces where students develop a sense of the world, their potential in the world, and their role as an impetus for change.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the classroom is more than “good teaching.” Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) engaged in research alongside excellent teachers of Black students for three years. From this experience, she termed the excellent pedagogy that she found *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* and argued for its centrality in the academic success of BIPOC students. So, it is not about how to insert culture into education, but rather how to insert education in the culture of BIPOC students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Previous scholars have attempted to link schooling and culture, which has resulted in a variety of labels, including “culturally appropriate” and “culturally responsive” pedagogy. These attempts fail to “deal adequately with the macro social content in which students’ failure takes place” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). Contributions to her conception of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is the recognition of previous attempts to bring culture into education, such as Shulman’s (1987 as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1995) pedagogical conceptualization, consisting of knowledge: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. She also referenced Bartolome’s (1994) humanizing pedagogy, which respects the history, perspectives, and realities of students in educational practices.

The aforementioned attempts at and contributions to the improvement of pedagogy, coupled with her own research, helped Ladson-Billings (1995) define Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a commitment to collective empowerment resting on three criteria, or propositions:

- *Students must experience academic success:* “The way [these] skills are developed may vary, but all [students] need literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills in order to be active participants in a democracy” (p. 160).
- *Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence:* This requires that students maintain cultural integrity as well as academic excellence through the use of students’ culture as a vehicle for learning. Additionally, the involvement of students, families, and the community affirms and increases cultural competence (p. 161).
- *Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order:* Beyond individual academic excellence and cultural competence, students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique cultural norms and values of institutions that produce and maintain inequities (p. 162).

Thus, as BIPOC students achieve greater levels of academic success with access to culturally relevant pedagogical schooling, they are able to reengage with the curriculum and connect it to themselves. Culturally relevant pedagogy helps students build a strong sense of belonging.

Community Cultural Wealth

Whiteness is normalized and privileged in the United States, which most often means that White ways of knowing and being are most valuable, and, therefore, have cultural wealth (Bourdieu, 1977 as cited by Yosso, 2005). This often results in the assumption that BIPOC communities “‘lack’ the social and cultural capital required for social mobility” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). It is from this assumption that schools and educators presume BIPOC students are unable to attain academic achievement because they lack the necessary knowledge, skills,

and abilities to succeed. This deficit thinking gives educators the ground to justify their stereotypical and racist beliefs about BIPOC students' behavior, performance, and motivation as inherently inferior. Additionally, deficit thinking is extremely problematic because it places the responsibility for a student's lack of achievement on the student and not on the educator, both making the student the problem and removing all of the responsibility from the educator (Valencia, 1997).

Yosso (2005) used CRT to shift the focus away from the idea that White, middle-class culture is the only culture that has cultural capital. Using the CRT lens, she identified *Community Cultural Wealth* as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, 77). She, consequently, named six forms of capital that BIPOC communities hold:

1. *aspirational capital*: the ability to retain hopes and dreams in the face of challenges and obstacles
2. *linguistic capital*: the intellectual and social skills acquired through the use of more than one language or varying styles of language
3. *familial capital*: the cultural knowledge nurtured among families; a kinship that carries a sense of community and connection
4. *social capital*: the networks of individuals and community resources that provide the support necessary to maneuver through society's institutions
5. *navigational capital*: the skills of navigating social institutions not created with BIPOC communities in mind

6. *resistance capital*: the knowledge and skills developed through opposing and challenging oppression and inequality

Educators must be able to recognize and affirm these various forms of capital in their BIPOC students' communities, thus shifting the perspectives educators hold of BIPOC students from deficit perspectives to one in which wealth and richness are centered and normalized.

Community Responsive Pedagogy

Community responsive pedagogy centers the community in students' education; the cultural, economic, political, and social spaces that form students' realities (Tintiango-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021). When Community Responsive Pedagogy is used by educators within Ethnic Studies, students become more critically conscious of their surroundings, which leads them to racial and social-justice action. According to Tintiango-Cubales and Duncan-Andrade (2021), educators transform classroom climates and curriculum using three domains: relationships, relevance, and responsibility. They described the domains of Community Responsive Pedagogy the following way:

1. *relationships*: This is when educators provide a space where students can build relationships with others based on humanization, empathy, and love, promoting connectedness, validation, and belonging in a greater purpose.
2. *relevance*: the commitment to developing curriculum and pedagogy that centers students, their families, their community, and their histories, beyond multiculturalism. It "focuses on ensuring that the education students receive is 'culturally rooted'" (p. 12).

3. *responsibility*: the ability an educator has to understand and respond to students' needs and remember that individual achievement cannot be separated from community achievement.

It is through the practice of building relationships, committing to relevance, and taking responsibility for all students and their communities that educators create spaces for students to reach high expectations, increase their self-esteem, and build solidarity.

One example of Community Responsive Pedagogy in action is the youth participatory action research (YPAR) method that Julio Cammarota (2007) guided his students through. He participated in and studied Tucson's Mexican American Studies Social Justice Education Project (SJEP), focusing on Chicano intellectual knowledge. With the growing population of Latinx individuals in the United States, he studied the reason why, regardless of an increase in population, the population of Latinx people in higher education was not increasing. With most of the responsibility to prepare students for higher education lying on K–12 education, he turned to experimenting with social-justice pedagogy at the high school level; specifically, during a history and U.S. government class containing Latinx students identified as “at-risk.”

In Cammarota's (2007) study, he and two high school educators provided high school students with four semesters of critically conscious social studies curriculum to teach racial and economic issues. The 17 students who participated in this project were all Latinx students from working-class families who were at risk for dropping out of school. He provided weekly social-justice lessons for students while simultaneously teaching them research methods they could use to develop their own YPAR project focused on social problems important to them and their community. Fixed on the idea that learning can happen

beyond the four walls of the classroom, YPAR accounts for learning spaces that include students' lived experiences and community cultural knowledge, driving social action. YPAR transforms learning and the curriculum into student-led and problem-based investigations, which give students the power to make change in their communities (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

Cammarota (2007) measured growth over two years by administering evaluation surveys after each course and conducting individual exit interviews with students. As a result of their participation in these social-justice lessons and an action research project, students' confidence increased, and they realized how education can transform their lives. In the end, 15 of the 17 students graduated high school, and 10 enrolled in college. Students shared that the SJEP made them think more about their other classes, going to college, and their future. Overall, the advanced-level concepts and research methods that students were engaged in, coupled with the experience of presenting to their school board, granted students the opportunity to see themselves as capable and empowered. Ultimately, Cammarota (2011) believed young people must embrace a social-justice perspective to overcome marginalization and that a social-justice approach in education is far more effective than high-stakes testing and remedial approaches.

Ethnic Studies

While important research exists about the presence of an achievement gap and the persistence of unequal educational attainment levels of BIPOC students, more research supporting the utilization of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy to support BIPOC K–

12 student achievement is necessary to build upon existing research affirming the academic, personal, and social benefits of Ethnic Studies.

At the core of Ethnic Studies is its curriculum; the “history and literature about the struggles and triumphs of people whose voices have been omitted from traditional texts and classroom readings” (Pawel, 2021, p. 24). Moreover, Ethnic Studies develops critical consciousness in students: the broadening of critical academic language and knowledge of social, political, and racial realities that continue to manifest social, political, and racial inequities in BIPOC communities (Chapman et al., 2020). The development of critical consciousness in students through “Ethnic Studies is both about the critique of unequal power and the reclamation of power by marginalized and oppressed communities” (Cuauhtin et al., 2019, p. 2). In addition to the curriculum, the development of critical consciousness is required to truly embody Ethnic Studies. Agarwal-Rangnath (2020) defines Ethnic Studies as

a movement for curricular and pedagogical projects that reclaim marginalized voices and histories, work to humanize the curriculum, create spaces of healing, critique structures of racism, and challenge the oppressive conditions which impact us personally and socially. Ethnic studies reveals the blindfold of oppression, an internalized way of being that can only be uncovered through a deep and powerful analysis of oneself and the world. (p. 4)

Critical education researchers have recognized Ethnic Studies as having the potential to improve attendance; lower suspension rates; boost high school GPAs; acknowledge, analyze, and center BIPOC students’ histories and contributions in this country; provide BIPOC students the space to develop self-determination and strong cultural identities; and reengage and increase student achievement (Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter, 2011; Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014).

The focus on mainstream curriculum's lack of cultural relevance emerged from the social movements of the 1960s (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014). The civil rights movements and the Third World Liberation movement opened a conversation about changing to curriculum that is anti-racist and multicultural. This push for change stemmed from the need for BIPOC students to decolonize themselves and exercise self-determination. In 1968, The World Liberation Front coalition at San Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley "demand[ed] inclusion, access, democracy, and autonomy for students and faculty of color as a step towards a decolonization of education. This movement demanded and birthed Ethnic Studies" (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 107).

What followed the emergence of Ethnic Studies in 1968 was a continued call for a decolonized curriculum, wherein BIPOC students would be exposed to their histories and narratives. The Chicano Blowouts of 1968 in East Los Angeles demanded a culturally relevant curriculum, specifically Chicano Studies classes in local high schools. They understood that "knowledge of our past and the placing of students and our communities at the center of learning could produce dramatic results" (Serna, 2016, p. 135). More recently, in 2010, the San Francisco Unified School District's Board of Education voted to support Ethnic Studies in their schools. The school board's decision to institutionalize Ethnic Studies in San Francisco's public school system "was the result of K–12 educators, university faculty, community organizations, students, and families coming together to fight for an education that could potentially address gaps in education achievement, opportunity, equity, and justice" (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 105).

Ethnic Studies, at any level in K–12, will disrupt Eurocentric curriculum and Euro-dominant pedagogy and give BIPOC students the space to interrogate race relations, examine systems of oppression, and analyze their role in and the importance of civic engagement. Through the unveiling of BIPOC colonization, oppression, and injustices through the Ethnic Studies praxis, BIPOC students will be truly liberated. It is through Ethnic Studies that an examination of race:

Deconstructs structural forms of domination and subordination, going beyond simplistic additives of multicultural content to the curriculum. Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and comparative study of the social, cultural, political and economic expression and experience of ethnic groups. Ethnic Studies recovers and reconstructs the counternarratives, perspectives, epistemologies, and cultures of those who have been historically neglected and denied citizenship or full participation within traditional discourse and institutions, particularly highlighting the contributions people of color have made in shaping the US culture and society. (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 107)

Simply put, the purpose of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy is to eliminate racism and build agents of change by fostering critical examinations of systems, power, colonialism, and white supremacy.

Sleeter and Zavala (2020) have identified seven hallmarks of Ethnic Studies that all together are a blueprint for praxis. When they are embodied, they help differentiate between the actualization of a weak and strong Ethnic Studies pedagogy.

- *curriculum as counter-narrative*. curriculum from the perspective of People of Color (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 7)
- *criticality*. structural analysis of racism and colonialism that works toward dismantling multiple forms of oppression (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 10)

- *reclaiming cultural identities*. a deep knowledge of where students come from that challenges deculturizing processes; learning about the historical contributions of their communities (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 11)
- *intersectionality and multiplicity*. attending to students' multiple social identities and their positions within intersecting relations of power (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 12)
- *community engagement*. community-based pedagogies and experiences that bridge classrooms to community and social movements (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 13)
- *pedagogy that is culturally responsive and mediated*. drawing upon students' lived experiences and sociocultural environments; intentional design of learning spaces (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 14)
- *students as intellectuals*. respecting and fostering students' curiosity, thinking, and intellectualism (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020, p. 16)

Sleeter and Zavala (2020) also highlight Banks' (1999) analytical framework, used to differentiate the levels of BIPOC inclusion in the curriculum. With the following approaches proposed by Banks—a contributions approach, an additive approach, a transformative approach, and a social-action approach—educators can also determine the level of inclusion of marginalized students' epistemologies.

A study by Halagao (2010) clearly showed the positive impact that Ethnic Studies has on BIPOC students. She examined the impact of the implementation of Pinoy Teach, a curriculum she developed for Filipino American college students who mentored and taught younger students. Through interviews, Halagao found that the college students who mentored younger students described the curriculum as finally being provided with a complete picture

of their identity. In the results of a follow-up survey, she found that Pinoy Teach did in fact, have a positive impact on students. Of the 35 students who responded to the survey and participated in the curriculum about 10 years earlier 30 were Filipino American and 5 were White. Of those students, all completed college and were working in various educational professions—all in positions that could impact student achievement. Students reported that what remained with them was a deeper love of and appreciation for their ethnic history, culture, identity, and community and a greater courage to use their voices. The curriculum, through its process of decolonization, helped them develop a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy. Participation in Pinoy Teach also developed activism and civic engagement in them that lasted beyond their college years. The two White respondents to the survey learned to work as allies: one in particular influenced textbook content in a positive way as an editor.

In a separate study, Dee and Penner (2017) evaluated the impact of an Ethnic Studies program in the San Francisco Unified School District with ninth-grade at-risk students. Using data from 1,405 students, from five cohorts, who participated in Ethnic Studies ninth-grade courses, they examined the impact of students' outcomes, such as attendance, GPA, and credits earned. They estimated the effects of the students' Ethnic Studies participation “through a ‘regression discontinuity’ design that effectively compared outcomes among students whose eighth-grade GPA placed them just below versus just above the threshold condition” (Dee & Penner, 2017, p. 129). The course units focused on themes of social justice and social movements, incorporating historical and political components representative of multiple racial groups who are not traditionally represented in history courses. The results from the study indicated that “[Ethnic Studies] participation increased

student attendance (i.e., reduced unexcused absences) by 21 percentage points, cumulative ninth-grade GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23 credits” (Dee & Penner, 2017, p. 129). Research indicated Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy can be effective in supporting the academic advancement of at-risk students.

Regrettably, Ethnic Studies continues to be mostly limited to, and within the secondary environment of, public schooling. Thus, it is important to examine how to embed Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in grades K–8 by using practical approaches (Valdez, 2017). For example, practices in grades K–8 could include the use of Ethnic Studies literature, community responsive literacies, or twin-text strategies during language arts lessons; the incorporation of the contributions of BIPOC scientists during science lessons; and the supplementation of social studies textbooks with literature beyond Martin Luther King Jr and Rosa Parks (Pitts, 2016; Valdez, 2017). Whether BIPOC students are exposed to Ethnic Studies courses in grades 9–12 or by practical approaches embedded in mainstream curriculum in grades K–8, at the core, “it should be rigorous, culturally relevant and community responsive, and reflective to be effective in living its promise of decolonization and challenging racism” (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2019, p. 25).

Ethnic Studies Curricular and Pedagogical Misconceptions

Zavala et al. (2019) engaged with teachers, scholars, school officials, and other groups to capture the essence of what individuals believe Ethnic Studies and its pedagogy to be. They list and counter 10 common misconceptions; five of the most commonly heard statements are listed:

- *We already do Ethnic Studies; we have culturally responsive teaching* (Zavala et al., 2019, p. 17). Ethnic Studies and CRT are not synonymous. Though CRT is a powerful pedagogical framework, it is informed by very different knowledge traditions. Ethnic Studies is broadly defined as curricular and pedagogical design that create healing spaces and a reclaiming of voices.
- *Ethnic Studies teaches students to hate White people. Worse, it teaches them to hate other groups of people* (Zavala et al., 2019, p. 18). People are led to think that an analysis of race only leads to resentment and hatred toward a dominant group. Therefore, it is important to understand that an analysis of white supremacy as a process to identify pain and reality is a part of BIPOC students' development and understanding of self.
- *Ethnic Studies Courses are successful because of teacher efficacy rather than the curriculum* (Zavala et al., 2019, p. 18). This statement undermines the value and significance of Ethnic Studies curriculum. Aside from having pedagogically versed teachers, when students see themselves in the curriculum, it impacts their engagement and learning.
- *Ethnic Studies is most effective at the high school and college level* (Zavala et al., 2019, p. 18). Though many of those (educators, families, and community members) who do not understand Ethnic Studies do not know if this is true or false, the statement presumes that young children may struggle with understanding complex topics or concepts dealing with race.

- *Ethnic Studies classes might engage students, but I don't see how they address real learning* (Zavala et al., 2019, p. 19). Those who are not familiar with Ethnic Studies believe it lacks rigor. However, classes observed and curriculum analyzed have demonstrated high levels of engagement, rigorous learning related to reading and writing, and academically demanding action research projects.

Zavala et al. believed naming and challenging these misconceptions, along with entering dialogue about these misconceptions, is essential to the development, expansion, and continued implementation of Ethnic Studies.

Summary

The lack of relevance of elementary curriculum for BIPOC students further marginalizes, further oppresses, and directly impacts students' academic success, thus widening the opportunity gap and increasing push-out rates. Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in elementary schools can counterbalance the negative effects that Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy have on BIPOC students, reverse school disengagement, and catapult students into a better future for themselves and those around them. It empowers students to interrogate history and their realities through a critical lens, transforming them into politically and socially aware advocates of themselves and their communities (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2020). For White students, it provides an opportunity to train themselves as allies for BIPOC communities. Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy imparts upon students an education that connects their learning to the importance of being global citizens striving for a common good.

Educators must take individual and collective action toward social justice (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2019). Culturally relevant curriculum based on multiculturalism and diversity is not enough to re-engage, increase the academic success of, nor develop critical consciousness in BIPOC students; “simply infusing representation of racially and ethnically diverse people into curriculum only marginally affects students’ attitudes” (Sleeter, 2011, p. viii). Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy must be implemented deliberately and consistently in K–12 schools because scholars agree that curriculum and pedagogy that conceals experiences and conversations about race and race relations should be disrupted (Sleeter, 2011; Tejada & Espinoza, 2003; Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2014).

Equally important is the role of the teacher educator; they are a critically political component of the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in K–12 public schools and in the development of critically conscious BIPOC students. Thus, the teacher educator who implements Ethnic Studies must either (1) unlearn and heal from their own experiences first, or (2) unpack the impact of benefiting from privilege and racism (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2019). The socially just teacher educator, who has examined their own biases and assumptions and has aligned their beliefs and values with advocacy for and the empowerment of BIPOC students, must talk about race, privilege, and white supremacy; no matter how difficult it may be. When teacher educators understand teaching as a political act and how silence perpetuates injustices, they will begin to authentically disrupt Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy for BIPOC students (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2020).

Through Ethnic Studies—which is culturally relevant, focused on Community Cultural Wealth, and community responsive—BIPOC students will have access to the entire story of

this nation and their role in it; and this will inspire them to claim their ethnic identity, connect it to their academic identity, and expand their intellectual engagement, enabling them to become something greater for themselves and their communities.

Accordingly, I plan to investigate the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the experiences of BIPOC K–5 students with traditional Eurocentric curriculum in California’s public schools, according to adult participants?

RQ2: What is the difference between Ethnic Studies curriculum and Ethnic Studies pedagogy?

RQ3: In what ways does the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy impact elementary students, according to adult participants?

RQ4: What are the qualities or background experiences of successful elementary school teacher educators who teach using an Ethnic Studies framework?

In particular, through an exploratory qualitative documentary film, I studied the existence, implementation, and impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in public elementary schools as explained by teacher educators and Ethnic Studies faculty. Specifically, I center the experiences of current Ethnic Studies educators in traditional K–5 public schools.

Moreover, I included the perspective of Ethnic Studies scholars, who continue to advocate for Ethnic Studies in K–12 public schools throughout the state of California.

Chapter III: Research Design & Methodology

This chapter summarizes the research methods and procedures used in this study to answer the research questions, which sought to explore and examine the existence, impact, and sustainability of Ethnic Studies in public elementary schools. The following is included in this chapter: research questions, methodology, sample selection, data collection, data-collection procedures, the documentary production process, and positionality and ethics.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

This dissertation involved the creation of an exploratory qualitative documentary film. The purpose of the exploratory qualitative documentary film was to examine the existence, impact, and sustainability of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in elementary schools across the state of California. Additionally, the film explored the experiences, challenges, and successes current teacher educators face in planning and teaching Ethnic Studies lessons in settings that may or may not support Ethnic Studies at an elementary level. Moreover, it included the perspective of Ethnic Studies scholars, who have continued to advocate for Ethnic Studies in K–12 public schools throughout the state of California. Ultimately, the qualitative documentary film was created with the aim to educate and persuade school districts in California to create, implement, and support Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in elementary schools now.

The following research questions guided the investigation:

RQ1: What are the experiences of BIPOC K–5 students with traditional Eurocentric curriculum in California’s public schools, according to adult participants?

RQ2: What is the difference between Ethnic Studies curriculum and Ethnic Studies pedagogy?

RQ3: In what ways does the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy impact elementary students, according to adult participants?

RQ4: What are the qualities or background experiences of successful elementary school teacher educators who teach using an Ethnic Studies framework?

Exploratory Qualitative Methodology

The study applied exploratory qualitative research methodology to understand the impact and overall experiences educators and scholars have with Ethnic Studies in K–5 public schools. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring and understanding the meaning behind a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2014)—in this case, the phenomenon perceived as the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in public K–5 elementary schools. Qualitative research “relies primarily on human perception and understanding” (Stake, 2010, p. 11) of personal experiences, relationships, events, or any other situation where I can observe interactions, preferably at a micro level, allowing me to pay close attention to what people are saying and doing. Stake (2010) notes that there is no one way for qualitative research and thinking to be done.

Video Documentary Methodology

This exploratory qualitative research project used video as a tool, specifically to create a documentary film. Through a combination of “ethnography, documentary filmmaking, and storytelling” (Walker & Boyer, 2018), I was not only able to use video as a tool for collecting and analyzing data, but also as a means for publicizing results.

The decision to move forward with documentary film as a research method was based on the opportunity it gave me to “see an event through the camera lens either actively or passively and later share what [I] have seen, or more specifically, the way [the interviewee] saw it” (Walker & Boyer, 2018). Most importantly, the documentary film, combined with a Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Theory lens, gave educators and scholars the opportunity to speak for themselves and—more specifically—to amplify marginalized BIPOC student experiences to challenge the status quo and erase deficit narratives, which can ultimately contribute to equity in K–12 public-school curriculum and pedagogy (Friend & Caruthers, 2016).

Additionally, according to Walker and Boyer (2018), using video as a tool captures events in various modes: responsive, interactive, and constructive. In the responsive mode, I am able to show the viewer a captured event without directly interfering with participants, thereby allowing the viewer to experience the event for themselves. In the interactive mode, the viewer is able to see the interaction “between [myself] and [the] participant” (Walker & Boyer, 2018, p. 3) during interviews in which participants responded to specific questions designed by me. In the constructive mode, I reflect upon and interpret video-recorded events to drive the narrative and create a final product—a documentary film. Using these three modes, a documentary film serves as a research tool filled with a compendium of rich, descriptive data; as a vehicle for viewer visualization; and as an opportunity “for research results to reach a broader audience outside of the traditional research audience” (Walker & Boyer, 2018). This will ultimately provide viewers the opportunity to engage in their own

conceptualization of the film, relating it to their respective realities (Friend & Caruthers, 2016).

Sample Selection

Purposive and expert sampling was used to select educator and scholar participants using non-random criteria. Purposive sampling was selected because the intentional selection of participants was more likely to generate useful data and insights that would aid in understanding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012)—in this case, data and insight into Ethnic Studies in elementary school. Expert sampling was used to select participants who were especially knowledgeable about the phenomenon and were able to provide valuable insight (Patton, 2018). Each participant was selected from a different city in the state of California; these include, but are not limited to, San Lorenzo, Union City, San José, Los Angeles, and Upland. The participants were all personally recruited and invited via email to participate in the study. A total of 12 participants were interviewed in this exploratory documentary research (see Appendix A). Footage for the documentary film was either A-roll or B-roll footage. A-roll footage consisted of main footage gathered during the scheduled interviews. B-roll footage was secondary and supplemental footage gathered to provide supporting imagery. B-roll footage was taken in elementary, middle, and high schools located across the Bay Area, in cities such as: Union City, Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, and San José.

Participants were selected based on their involvement in the field of Ethnic Studies as educators and scholars. All educator and scholar participants currently teach in a K–12 public school, community college, or university and have advocated for Ethnic Studies in their

respective educational spheres. Interviewing current K–12 educators gave me insight into specific themes, including—but not limited to—the pain, power, purpose, and progress of Ethnic Studies in current public-school institutions, which are traditionally heavily focused on standards-aligned lessons and high-stakes testing environments. Each educator interviewed has experience developing their own Ethnic Studies lessons and units for their classes while meeting the standards-based lesson requirements expected by school districts.

Interviewing scholars in higher education gave me insight into how teacher-education programs should develop Ethnic Studies educators, as well as the overall impact of Ethnic Studies on students and educators alike. Several of the scholars interviewed have researched and published work on the impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy and have been referenced widely by many. Additionally, several of the participants—both educators and scholars—develop curriculum, offer trainings, host seminars, and are members of an Ethnic Studies curriculum consortium.

All selected participants—educators and scholars—design and facilitate meetings and trainings to teach and guide other educators in the field, as well as non-educators, in how to implement Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in their respective communities.

Data Collection

Participants were categorized into two groups: educators and scholars. Educators included TK–12 classroom teachers, district-level personnel, and community college instructors. Scholars included professors who are instructors or lecturers at the university level. Each participant was invited to participate in the study through direct contact via email. Emails included a brief introduction, information about the research study, the purpose of

reaching out to them directly, and a request that they participate in this voluntary study. The email also included a flier (see Appendix B) containing detailed information about the study, participant criteria, and time commitments.

Video Recordings

The principal data-collection tool was video recordings, which captured reflections provided by participants during the interviews. Interviews were conducted in one of two modes: (1) an online interview, recorded via Zoom, or (2) an in-person interview, filmed using a Panasonic high definition (HD) video camera. The scripted audiovisual narrative (video) provided by the video tool in interviews “document[ed] consistency and changes in thoughts and observations” (Walker & Boyer, 2018, p. 7) of the participants, while also providing me with non-static data, such as verbal, nonverbal, and participant-researcher interactions (Wang & Lien, 2013). Participant interviews—based on questions formulated to elicit an understanding of the existence, impact, and sustainability of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy—were conducted at a time and day of the participant’s choosing and were voluntary, with agreed-upon, signed consent (see Appendix C).

Memos

Additionally, to develop a shared understanding of the impact of the phenomenon, memo writing—creation of a written record (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)—took place after video-recorded interviews. Beyond the use of memos as a method of analysis, they enabled

[me] to engage with the data to a depth that would otherwise be difficult to achieve. Through the use of memos, [I was] able to immerse [myself] in the data, explore the meanings that this data holds, maintain continuity and sustain momentum in the conduct of research. (Birks et al., 2008, p. 69)

Moreover, memos used during the research study ensured the retention of my ideas, which may later be significant (Birks et al., 2008), while also potentially exposing my assumptions and biases, thus keeping the research study as objective as possible.

One-on-One Interviews

This research study used semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with educators and scholars. Interviews served multiple purposes: they were used to gather unique interpretations and information from individuals participating in the study, they were used to tally the types of responses to see if it was necessary to gather additional data, and they provided findings that may not be otherwise available or explicit in observations (Stake, 2010). Asking open-ended questions during the interviews allowed participants to include as much information as they would like in their responses, including feelings, attitudes, and understandings of the phenomenon. The proposed duration of each interview was 60 minutes.

All participant interviews were voluntary, and all participants required written consent to participate in the interviews. The interviews consisted of at least one one-on-one interview. The interview started with general, open-ended questions aligned to the participants' role as educator or scholar, designed to get a deeper understanding regarding their perceptions of several aspects of education.

Included is an overview of the questions asked in the interview, which were intended to guide and, as much as possible, create a natural discussion with participants. Additionally, the synopsis also includes the reason for the questions. Questions were categorized into the following groups:

1. Self: These questions were developed to explore participants' own K–5 educational experiences with traditional schooling curriculum, messages they received from their teachers, identity development, and navigation of racialized spaces. A specific question about how they came to know about, learn, and advocate for Ethnic Studies was also included. It was through these questions that I would be able to illicit from the participants how Ethnic Studies impacted them, if at all.
2. Elementary School: These questions were developed to included opportunities for participants to share their thoughts about young students' overall ability to participate in Ethnic Studies lessons and how they believe students would respond to Ethnic Studies pedagogy. Ultimately, this gave participants the opportunity to share whether they believe students in elementary school are too young to talk about race.
3. Challenges: These questions explored any barriers educators face when trying to implement Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in traditional public schools that prefer teaching from boxed curriculum and that are focused on high-stakes testing. These questions were also developed to give scholars the opportunity to share what they consider to be the challenges involved in preparing Ethnic Studies teachers in teacher-education programs and how current legislative measures do or do not support Ethnic Studies at the elementary level.
4. Solutions/Recommendations: These questions were developed to explore participants' ideas about how they implement Ethnic Studies in challenging spaces, such as how they respond to questions about alignment to common core standards and how they explain Ethnic Studies to other educators who may not believe in it.

These questions also sought participants' ideas about how to best advocate for the implementation of Ethnic Studies. Moreover, inquiries were also made about participants recommendations regarding support from other educational leaders, needed legislation, and any thoughts they might have about the future of educator training and the pre-service certification needed to move Ethnic Studies into elementary school.

The open-ended questions (see Appendix D) asked provided valuable insight into the phenomenon, giving the participants the opportunity to share the potential roots of problems and challenges, the successes, and the future trends in the phenomenon to watch for (Patton, 2018).

Documentary Production Process

The production of this exploratory documentary film consisted of three different phases: (1) preproduction, (2) production, and (3) postproduction.

Preproduction Phase

During phase I, with advisor guidance, chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the dissertation were drafted. The drafted chapters included the identification of, and an in-depth look at, the problem, including a literature review and resulting research questions for this study. Once the literature review was performed and subsequent research questions were determined, I moved to the second phase of the preproduction process: identifying filming locations and potential expert interviewees, developing interview protocols and questions, and creating recruitment fliers and consent forms for participants.

As a novice documentary filmmaker, numerous meetings with my dissertation chair provided me with insight into the filming process for both in-person and online interviews. For in-person interviews, I was coached on how to set up a tripod and video camera, frame the scene and interviewee, position the Lavalier microphone for best audio quality, and determine the lighting necessary to ensure the best picture image. For online interviews, I was coached on how to direct others to get the best footage; especially because I was going to be unable to position the camera, lighting, framing, and microphone on behalf of the participant. My dissertation chair also guided me on how to creatively video-record B-roll (visual footage) in elementary schools without capturing students' faces and explained the process of uploading and editing footage using the editing program offered through the university. Additionally, substantial online research was required for me to learn and apply the countless tools available in the video editing program that would be used to create the video documentary film.

The preproduction phase also included the outreach needed to gather participants for the study. It was during this time that I began reaching out, via email, to potential educator and scholar participants who I knew were involved with Ethnic Studies. In order to facilitate this process, I attended several statewide in-person and virtual Ethnic Studies conferences, where I was able to gain access to potential participants. Some recipients of my request to participate in the study responded immediately, with excitement and eagerness to be a part of the study, while others responded with hesitation, and others never responded. There were several participants who responded to my initial request for participation and, after a couple of email exchanges, either stopped responding or recommended someone else for me to reach

out to. Though many constraining COVID-19 restrictions were already lifted in schools and public spaces at this time, I concluded, based on email responses, that those who decided not to participate or who did not respond to my request at all did so for reasons related to the impacts of COVID-19 on the teaching profession, their mental health, and their ability to do “one more thing” (Will, 2022), rather than a disinterest in or lack of passion for Ethnic Studies.

Production Phase

During this phase, I confirmed interview dates and times with the participants who showed interest in the study. Determining a mode was just as important. The steps to prepare for the interview depended on how the participant wanted to be interviewed—either in person or over Zoom.

To set up for in-person interviews, it was necessary to arrive at the agreed-upon location before the scheduled time to simultaneously (1) determine where the participant should sit, based on the lighting and background and (2) set up the camera, to film the participant. Before any interview questions were asked, there was also a need for the participant to clip the Lavalier microphone to themselves, at least five inches down from their chin, and test the sound. Filming locations were selected by the participant to maintain convenience, their level of comfort, and familiarity. The primary locations of interviews were in participants’ offices on school campuses or in district central offices; all were conducted indoors. Before and during the interviews, the lighting, background noise, and overall participant aesthetics were taken into consideration and monitored. In-person interviews were filmed using a Panasonic

3MOS AVCCAM full HD camcorder. I connected headphones to the camcorder to test and monitor participant's voice level and clarity.

To set up online Zoom interviews, the first step was to create a Zoom link based on the day and time the participant confirmed their availability. Zoom links were sent directly to participants' email addresses at least 48 hours in advance. On the day of the interview, Zoom meetings were opened at least five minutes before the scheduled start time to ensure stable Wi-Fi connectivity was available. Once the participant joined the Zoom meeting, they were welcomed and thanked for joining and a brief review of the study was shared. Before starting the interview questioning, it was necessary to direct the participant in how to adjust their camera, adjust their lighting, and determine a background, to get the best frame. Participants were reminded that recording would start with the first interview question. For editing purposes, it was important for the participant to wait a couple of seconds after the question to begin answering. I turned my microphone off during participants' responses and did not interact with them until several seconds after they finished their response. The practice of having silence before and after participants' responses guaranteed a collection of uninterrupted responses. Additionally, participants were asked to use the subject of the question in their answer to provide cues that would be used during the editing process.

All interviews were conducted with open-ended questions, along with follow-up questions based on participants' responses and needed clarification. The duration of both in-person and online interviews was approximately 30–60 minutes.

Postproduction Phase

The postproduction phase included an in-depth analysis of participant video recordings, organization of clips, and editing to complete the final exploratory documentary film. The coding process and the organization of the gathered video material by theme, ones aligned with the research questions, aided in the content analysis of the collected data, performed to determine exploratory research conclusions. Additionally, I organized and edited the footage following the themes that emerged to create an exploratory documentary film.

Once all interview footage was uploaded to the editing program, the initial step in the process consisted of watching and rewatching each interview. During each interview, portions of participant responses were made into sub-clips and titled based on content. Once all interviews were reviewed and sub-clips were created, thematic bins (folders) were created. Bins—such as, but not limited to, problem, pain, proclamation, power, program, and purpose—were created to begin categorizing sub-clips from each interview. Sub-clips categorized by theme into bins allowed for the creation of the documentary's final script and storyline. In the editing process, these sub-clips became the basis of a timeline organized around answers to the research questions. Sub-clips were dropped into the timeline based on their appropriate relationship to the research questions. Once the timeline, or sequence, was established, it was possible to edit footage to correct sound, color, and any framing issues. The timeline workspace also enabled the use of dissolves between video sub-clips and the addition of music, stills, and B-roll. After this process, narration, subtitles, and credits were added. The final step was to render the film to complete the production process and upload it to a private YouTube link.

Limitations

The initial intent of the research study was to center students and the experiences of these students with traditional curriculum, as well as what the impact of Ethnic Studies would be on young children. However, COVID-19 created significant limitations to exploring the experiences of current BIPOC elementary students in the classroom. While strict restrictions were lifted for all public spaces during the time of this research study, many individual districts and schools still maintained clear and strict protocols for visitors. Gaining access to classrooms where students could be interviewed and observed was difficult. Additionally, though there might have been opportunities to visit some schools, several educators were still hesitant to have visitors in their classroom and preferred online interviews. Who ultimately participated in the exploratory documentary study often depended on availability and receiving reassurance that they would not have to participate in in-person interviews.

Positionality and Ethics

I am an educator, a first-generation college graduate, a bilingual and biliterate Chicana, a mother of bi-racial children, and an advocate for Ethnic Studies in K–12 public schools. As the lead researcher, I recognize that my positionality could present limitations to the research study due to my identity, as well as my own experiences as a student of color who attended traditional K–12 public schools in Silicon Valley and as an educator who has worked in K–5 public schools for more than 20 years across the state of California. My experiences may cause me to have biases towards curriculum, teaching, and Ethnic Studies as a curriculum and pedagogy. For these reasons, data triangulation was used to support emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The multiple sources of data included participants in the research

study—educators and scholars—who all have experience with Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy, but at varying levels.

None of the participants—neither educators nor scholars—were employees of my current school district, and I do not hold any position of power that would allow me to assess their performance, assign a grade, evaluate their teaching practice, give input on their hiring or firing, or influence their employment status in any way. Participation in the research study was entirely voluntary and based on participants' own interest in being interviewed.

I believe my positionality, being a Chicana with aspirations of obtaining a doctorate, and my outside participation in Ethnic Studies webinars and conferences, where I networked to build relationships with Ethnic Studies educators and scholars, aided in establishing genuine and reliable rapport with participants, thereby enabling me to have access to their detailed and authentic viewpoints and opinions during the research study.

Chapter IV: Findings

The documentary film I created, *Never Too Young: Ethnic Studies in Elementary School* (available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/KjgaNebx1M4>), provides detailed results from the interviews I conducted. Following is a brief summary of some of the several themes that emerged from this exploratory documentary study; additional themes found in the study are located in the documentary film.

Elementary Aged Students

Impact of Eurocentric Curriculum

Educators and scholars in the field of Ethnic Studies who participated in this study recognized and acknowledged the oppressive impact Eurocentric curriculum has on BIPOC students. Educators not only noticed that students as young as preschool showing signs of racism, sexism, and xenophobia, but also how the current, traditional curriculum in schools does nothing to combat it. The educators and scholars themselves were also impacted by Eurocentric curriculum in their own K–12 experience, which at a young age, led them to develop feelings of invisibility, unworthiness, and self-hate. All educators and scholars believed it is crucial, for the future of BIPOC students, to eliminate Eurocentric curriculum in schools.

Student Capacity

All participants know that young students come to school with many questions about how the world works; questions about differences and how or why certain things happen in their communities. They also know that students as young as four begin to form their own identities based on the messages they receive from those around them. Therefore, all

participants believed young students are capable of handling Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy, which would support them in analyzing the world around them with a wider lens. Since many students are already experiencing a racialized identity in their lives, providing a space in schools for them to discuss their experiences would only expand their understanding of the world around them.

Ethnic Studies in Elementary School

Grassroots Existence

Educators and scholars alike believe that we are far from having Ethnic Studies mandated at the elementary school level. While the state is still trying to determine who currently gets to teach Ethnic Studies at the high school level and what the pathway for pre-service teachers to receive an Ethnic Studies credential will be, Ethnic Studies will only continue to exist in elementary schools due to the grassroots efforts elementary educators are putting forward. Currently, individual in-service educators are deciding if they want to become Ethnic Studies educators by independently learning more, reaching out to others who believe in the power of Ethnic Studies, and creating collectives to improve their Ethnic Studies lessons and practices.

Belief in Ethnic Studies as the Solution

Though both educators and scholars believe young students have the capacity to analyze, learn, and transform their realities, it is the educators who work with young students who have been witness to the transformation Ethnic Studies can have on young BIPOC students. When young students are provided with Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy, aside from finding increased academic performance, educators found students more willing to help others around them, having more confidence and pride in themselves, and ultimately having

the desire to teach the truth they had learned with those around them. Instead of creating a divide among young students, Ethnic Studies helped students build love and understanding for themselves and others.

Consistent Interpretation of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies is more than what is taught in lessons. Ethnic Studies is also about how it is taught. All participants agreed on and shared about the importance of having both the curriculum and pedagogy required to truly provide students with an Ethnic Studies framework. It was very clear *what* curriculum should be focused on: centering the voices, histories, and current realities of BIPOC communities in the United States; specifically, from the four historically racialized and marginalized communities (Black, Chicano/Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American). The pedagogy explained *how* a teacher can center BIPOC students using Community Cultural Wealth, community responsive practices, and critical pedagogy, with the end goal of encouraging students to examine the systems and structures in the world around them. Additionally, it was affirmed by participants that Ethnic Studies should be integrated into the current subjects taught throughout the instructional day, starting with social studies because it is the easiest subject to integrate Ethnic Studies into.

Challenges With Implementing Elementary School Ethnic Studies

Curriculum

Since Ethnic Studies has historically been a higher education field and just recently become a graduation requirement in California high schools, fully developed elementary Ethnic Studies curriculum is not available. Elementary educators who want to teach Ethnic Studies lessons must put a lot of time and effort into researching historical events and their

impacts and then creating age-appropriate lessons to teach their students. However, it is also important to note that Ethnic Studies educators expressed that they are not looking for a boxed curriculum either, because Ethnic Studies lessons must be responsive to the community it serves, which is different from school to school and from city to city.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Educators who are currently teaching their elementary lessons within an Ethnic Studies framework are finding a need for support. Since the State of California is currently focused on the high school requirement, elementary educators are not being offered training and professional opportunities to refine their Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy. They are either creating lessons on their own or taking it upon themselves to search for and reach out to other Ethnic Studies educators in the area. Collaborative Ethnic Studies planning time that educators can use to adequately create high-quality, impactful lessons for students is nonexistent for elementary educators in traditional public schools. Consequently, educators who teach with an Ethnic Studies framework, and current educators who wish to teach with an Ethnic Studies framework, need to advocate for themselves.

Pre-Service Credentialing and Teacher Education Programs

Ethnic Studies teaching credentials for those who wish to become elementary educators are currently not available in teacher-education programs. Ethnic Studies certifications are also mostly nonexistent. For that reason, current elementary educators who teach with an Ethnic Studies framework can only do so because of their prior experience with Ethnic Studies, received in courses they took as undergraduates, or their own desire to independently become an anti-racist educator. Participants who work in teacher-education

programs shared that even though a certificate or credential might become available in the future, the challenge will be in determining how many courses would be needed to become a proficient Ethnic Studies educator.

Chapter V: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This exploratory documentary research summarizes the implementation and challenges of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in elementary schools. It explores the Ethnic Studies framework and defines its curriculum and pedagogy, while also highlighting what K–12 educators and scholars believe young students are capable of. Additionally, challenges, as well as successes, experienced by educators were explored. This chapter provides an answer to the proposed research questions, which sought to identify the impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy on elementary aged BIPOC students and teacher preparation. It also discusses if conclusions reached in the documentary support or contradict existing literature in the field, as well as implications for future research.

The questions that guided this research were:

RQ1: What are the experiences of BIPOC K–5 students with traditional Eurocentric curriculum in California’s public schools, according to adult participants?

RQ2: What is the difference between Ethnic Studies curriculum and Ethnic Studies pedagogy?

RQ3: In what ways does the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy impact elementary students, according to adult participants?

RQ4: What are the qualities or background experiences of successful elementary school teacher educators who teach using an Ethnic Studies framework?

This study used documentary-film methodology to explore the existence and impact of Ethnic Studies in elementary school. Participants’ perspectives regarding their experiences and expertise as K–12 teacher educators and scholars are highlighted in the film. The film

method was used to collect and analyze qualitative data gathered through filmed interviews. This method was selected to ensure participants' voices and stories would be heard by a large audience and elevated into arenas beyond higher education. As a researcher, I was able to engross myself in the data as I reviewed and categorized film footage, determined sub-clips, and finalized the film. Consequently, the film provides insight into the benefits of Ethnic Studies in elementary school, the implications for teacher practitioners and teacher-preparation programs, challenges, and recommendations for successful implementation of Ethnic Studies in elementary schools.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study are presented in the documentary film entitled *Never Too Young: Ethnic Studies in Elementary School*. Film footage includes participant interviews, B-roll, pictures, and narration. The findings presented in this summary are based on interviews with five K–12 public-school teachers, one public-school assistant superintendent, one community college instructor, and five university scholars. In this section, I present the findings in alignment with each research question.

Research Question 1

What are the experiences of BIPOC K–5 students with traditional Eurocentric curriculum in California's public schools, according to adult participants?

Student Experiences. Though K–5 public-school students were not interviewed for this study, the teachers who teach them shared their experiences with teaching students via traditional Eurocentric curriculum and their experiences navigating race and racism in the classroom.

The public-school teachers interviewed shared that many students come to school with some ideas already formed about their own identity. It was also shared that it is in elementary school that young students continue to fully develop their own identity and begin to concretely form ideas about others; many times, biased ideas that are explicitly and implicitly taught in schools with Euro-dominant practices and curriculum. As expressed by one elementary teacher,

Students don't live in a bubble, and elementary students as young as kindergarten are already exhibiting signs of the different isms. Racism, sexism, and even xenophobia... I've seen students as young as kinder tell other students, like they're both Latino students, and one student will be lighter skinned and will tell the other student, 'You are ugly because you're dark.', and this is happening in kinder.

Therefore, unless teachers are prepared to counter Eurocentric curriculum and students' biased beliefs, students will continue to learn and perpetuate oppressive, white-supremacist ideologies as early as elementary school.

A different participant brought attention to how traditional schooling continues to perpetuate white-supremacist culture, noting,

Students learn about White-dominant culture through everything that we've been teaching them. Through the history books that currently exist, and the textbooks and what's highlighted. The ways that we have structured our classrooms. I mean, the whole idea of raising our hands, you know bells, and non-cooperative learning... those are all strategies that continue to perpetuate White-supremacy culture.

Moreover, another participant directly spoke about the violence inflicted on BIPOC students by traditional Euro-dominant schooling and the teacher educators who are not critical of the curriculum they use or the pedagogy they implement, saying,

If you are a teacher teaching Eurocentric curriculum, you kinda have these built in assumptions that the BIPOC students in front of you come from traditions that are not intellectually rich traditions, therefore those kids are also not intellectually rich and

not strongly intellectually capable. And that you see a lot, and that is a huge form of violence on students.

These findings align to what the literature indicates regarding the marginalization and oppression of BIPOC students through Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogy.

Participants' Experiences in Public School. Several of the BIPOC participants in this study shared their own experiences as students in K–12 public schools with traditional Eurocentric curriculum. Their first memories of being racialized happened at early ages, and this negatively impacted their overall identity and experience in school. Through Euro-dominant ways and Eurocentric curriculum in traditional public schools, they were made to believe that the Whiter you are, the better, smarter, and more special you are. These messages have been historically imposed on BIPOC communities, increasing many BIPOC parents' desire to assimilate themselves and their families. One participant shared their overall sense of self, based on their experience in school: “There was no messages that came to me that I was as good. So, I didn't want to be the Brown girl anymore, I wanted to be the White girl.” The lack of BIPOC representation in all participants' educational experiences, both with Eurocentric curriculum and lack of BIPOC teacher staffing, created in some of them a sense of self-hate and desire to become White or invisible.

However, this was not the experience of all BIPOC participants. Three K–12 teachers shared how they were able to combat, and in essence lessen, the impact of Euro-dominant ideologies on their lives due to their ability to navigate their schooling experiences with ease, an ability they developed because of the messages they received at home. Though they were exposed to Euro-dominant schooling in elementary school, they were students who

performed at high academic levels and had parents who constantly reminded them of the importance of having cultural pride outside of the home. One participant shared,

I was always a really good reader and a really good writer. So, I think that I just enjoyed the ability and the encouragement that I would get from teachers when they would give assignments... I was raised to love books... and by a Chicana mom. So, I was being exposed to very unique books that most of my classmates were not being exposed to.

Another participant shared,

I knew very young that I wasn't White, but it didn't affect me in a negative way because luckily my parents taught me from day one when I went to school like "This is your country too. And you have every right like every other kid in your classroom." So, I went into my school with already a mindset that "I belong here."

These participants also shared how their early experiences with social-justice activism helped them build pride in themselves and their community.

Research Question 2

What is the difference between Ethnic Studies curriculum and Ethnic Studies pedagogy?

The Ethnic Studies framework includes curriculum and pedagogy in which voices, narratives, and histories of historically racialized and marginalized communities are centered. Ethnic Studies must include perspectives of U.S. experiences from the Latinx/Chicano community, Black community, Indigenous community, and Asian American community, with a greater emphasis on the community that is representative of the students in an educator's classroom.

Ethnic Studies curriculum. Ethnic Studies curriculum is *what* you teach. One participant shared that Ethnic Studies curriculum

has to be framed in the context of People of Color, which is a framework that we use in the United States... it has to connect to the American experience... Students have to be analyzing real-world scenarios and comparing history with the present. If the

teacher is only teaching them about histories of the past, then that's not fully Ethnic Studies.

They brought attention to the importance of focusing Ethnic Studies lessons on first-person narratives from the four racialized groups: Chicano/Latinx, Black, Asian American, and Indigenous communities.

Another participant indicated that Ethnic Studies curriculum must include narratives that build pride in students, not just expose them to their community's story of struggle. They brought attention to how we should

also focus on the beautiful culture and the stories that are connected to BIPOC people. Because our stories don't just start with the culture of White supremacy. We have to go back to the truth about people's communities, and to tell their history through their eyes, not through the eyes of colonization.

Based on responses from participants, I concluded that Ethnic Studies curriculum at the elementary level needs to be integrated into the basic subjects taught in school and not be a stand-alone course, like it is in high school. Ethnic Studies lessons, regardless of content, must be aligned to and meet the Common Core State Standards and ELD standards and include scaffolds for multilingual students. Additionally, units and lessons must include the guiding values and principles of Ethnic Studies. According to Tintiangco-Cubales and Curammeng (2018), there are seven guiding values and principles:

- 1) **Cultivate** empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and People of Color;
- 2) **Celebrate** and honor Indigenous People/s of the land and Communities of Color by providing a space to share their stories of struggle and resistance, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth;
- 3) **Center** and place high value on pre-colonial, ancestral, Indigenous, diasporic, familial, and marginalized knowledge;

- 4) **Critique** empire, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, racism, xenophobia, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, anthropocentrism, and other forms of power and oppression at the intersections of our society;
- 5) **Challenge** imperialist/colonial hegemonic beliefs and practices on ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized levels;
- 6) **Connect** ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on global and local levels to ensure a truer democracy; and
- 7) **Conceptualize**, imagine, and build new possibilities for post-imperial life that promote collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing. (pp. 228-251)

Based on this criteria and participants' responses, specific examples of *what* educators teach in elementary include, but are not limited to, the need to provide students with first-person literature and narratives; opportunities for students to use their persuasive writing skills to advocate for Indigenous rights; and, through science units, opportunities for students to learn and analyze ecosystems, based on Indigenous epistemologies. More importantly, Ethnic Studies curriculum must include lessons that promote and develop students' self-identity.

Ethnic Studies Pedagogy. Ethnic Studies pedagogy is *how* you teach. It is the methods with which educators facilitate learning and create safe spaces for students. One participant stated Ethnic Studies pedagogy is based on love and that an educator is not practicing Ethnic Studies pedagogy if they “don't know how to translate their own humanity into an experience of love and rigor for the students.” Another participant shared that Ethnic Studies pedagogy is also about recognizing Community Cultural Wealth and that

at the elementary level it is super important to make connections with those families, to invite them to the classroom... even as guest speakers... cultural wealth is being encouraged and brought into the classroom.. see their parents as educators, see their

parents as having something to offer. That knowledge isn't just coming from the teacher.

In this case, it is important to position educators as facilitators who encourage students to think critically, construct knowledge, and ask questions about what they are learning based on the knowledge they already hold and bring from home. Beyond creating culturally relevant spaces where students' Community Cultural Wealth is included in the classroom so they can become stewards of their own learning, the final characteristic of Ethnic Studies pedagogy is its community-responsive existence. Units and lessons taught in the classroom should purposefully have activities through which students develop civic engagement and participate in forms of activism to improve their communities. One participant stated that teachers should

think about how [they are] creating a space for students to kinda drive the learning, to use their own inquiry to create projects, to go out into the community, to look around at their surroundings and actually tackle those issues that matter to them.

They stated that, ultimately,

if you are doing your job as an Ethnic Studies teacher, Ethnic Studies is going to leave the classroom. It's going to lead to civic engagement, it's going to lead towards student-led inquiry with their own family, with their own community, that starts to take action.

Research Question 3

In what ways does the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy impact elementary students, according to adult participants?

Impact on Students. Based on participants' responses, I concluded that Ethnic Studies's impact on BIPOC students is immediately visible when observational data is gathered. Participants shared how students begin to show pride in themselves and their families,

increasing in cultural and scholarly confidence as soon as their narratives are centered in lessons. One participant stated, “The best impact for Ethnic Studies is when I start seeing my kids wanting to help other people. When I start seeing my kids feeling good about themselves and celebrating who they are.”

Additionally, some students showed a desire to help others in their community, while others became more motivated to complete classroom assignments, such as writing, because the assignments related to the content. One participant shared, “I see students really step it up after Ethnic Studies lessons because they have so much to say...and I have seen students continue teaching after they learn Ethnic Studies lessons.” Participants noticed their students’ academic identities flourish with Ethnic Studies lessons, and they witnessed an increased inclination towards teaching others outside of the classroom. This participant encouraged their students to “Each one, teach one...Go teach someone something you learned so more people know this truth.” Though Ethnic Studies centers and empowers BIPOC students, it also serves as a bridge between all communities. One participant shared Ethnic Studies’ impact on White students, saying,

When race and racism is explicitly explored and discussed in school... you have a huge impact not just on students of color at the elementary level, but White students as well. And actually, the impact is even more positive for racial attitudes for White students at the elementary level, probably because they have farther to go.

All students want to be kind and fair, and through Ethnic Studies young students learn about oppressive realities and many take on the responsibility of being anti-racist.

Impact on Participants. Several participants expressed that they had yearned for Ethnic Studies when they were younger. Some are grateful they came across Ethnic Studies courses in college; however, they often wonder what their lives could have been like and what hopes

and dreams they could have reached had they been exposed to Ethnic Studies earlier in their academic lives. They wondered how differently they would have navigated their educational spaces with a curriculum that centered their histories and experiences and had the ultimate goal of increasing their scholarly achievement. However, regardless of when participants were exposed to Ethnic Studies, they shared the overall common feeling of being “saved” by it; it not only filled them with pride, purpose, and a desire to help others in their community, but also made them finally feel understood and visible.

Research Question 4

What are the qualities or background experiences of successful elementary school teacher educators who teach using an Ethnic Studies framework? A participant in the study shared that Ethnic Studies educators are not born; they are made. Some Ethnic Studies educators become Ethnic Studies pedagogues by taking their own journey through Ethnic Studies courses. Other participants became Ethnic Studies pedagogues through their community activism and their desire to teach others about harsh realities and the connection of these realities to history, colonialism, and white supremacy. Other participants had Ethnic Studies in their homes, where they had parents and family members who taught them about having cultural pride and a collectivist approach to building community and where they were given the necessary tools to navigate Euro-dominant spaces.

Regardless of how each educator came to be an Ethnic Studies pedagogue, a common thread is the undertaking of inner work; a practice that must occur prior to and throughout a teaching career. To be an Ethnic Studies pedagogue, an educator must reflect on their positionality, which includes an examination of their power as the classroom teacher; how

they travel through the spaces they are present in; and how they use their own racialized identity, biases, and internalized oppression or oppressor behavior when working with students. Becoming critically conscious is crucial to teaching using an Ethnic Studies framework. It is through this consciousness that teacher educators begin to see themselves as truth tellers, constantly seeking and sharing the whole story.

Teachers also need to undertake the role of a facilitator of knowledge. They must decenter themselves and know that there are other educators in students' lives, too. Along with being a facilitator, they understand that they must create spaces for healing—spaces that are humanizing, trauma informed, and anti-racist.

It is also critical for educators to be courageous and be willing to teach the truth about this nation and always challenge white supremacy. They advocate and speak up to defend and move Ethnic Studies forward. It is the grassroots efforts that sustain Ethnic Studies at the elementary school level.

Relationship of Findings to Research

Several of this study's findings are supported by the review of literature, summarized in Chapter 2. My findings indicate (1) Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy have a positive impact on elementary aged BIPOC students' cultural and scholarly identities, (2) educators play a critical role in implementing Ethnic Studies, and (3) children in elementary school are never too young to be exposed to Ethnic Studies and talk about race.

According to the literature, Ethnic Studies curriculum centers BIPOC history and narratives and helps students analyze systems, while also providing students with a space to reclaim their own power, increase school engagement, develop stronger cultural identities in

Euro-dominant spaces, and realize the importance of civic engagement (Cuauhtin et al., 2019; Dee & Penner, 2017; Pawel, 2021; Sleeter, 2011; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). It was while centering BIPOC narratives and realities that educators noticed the impact of Ethnic Studies on their students. Some noticed the impact when they saw and heard their students “wanting to help other people” and “when [they] start[ed] seeing [their] kids feeling good about themselves and wanting to celebrate who they are.” All K–12 teacher educators who were interviewed shared how they have been witness to the power of Ethnic Studies.

However, the level of Ethnic Studies’s impact on students is dependent on the teacher educator. Researchers (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2020; Bartolomé, 2004; Goldenberg, 2014; Picower, 2012; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2019) affirm the importance of the teacher-educator role; they are a critically political component in the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in K–12 public schools and in the development of critically conscious BIPOC students. Before beginning to teach, each participant had either engaged in the process of unlearning to heal from their own racialized experiences or unpacked how benefiting from privilege and racism had impacted them; this process enabled them to teach using authentic Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogical practices. By examining their own biases and assumptions—a difficult process—they have been able to talk about race, privilege, and white supremacy, all in the interest of supporting BIPOC students.

Most importantly, the literature review revealed how critical students’ early experiences are in ensuring their academic success and the overall development of their anti-racist perspectives and behaviors (Boutte et al., 2011; Cole & Verwayne, 2018; Griffiths & Sullivan, 2022; Hickman & Heinrich, 2011; Hickman & Wright, 2011; Winkler, 2009).

Sullivan et al. (2021) confirm that children’s capacity to process race, understand the world around them, and build beliefs around what they see begins at a very young age—even before they enter kindergarten. This confirms participants' experiences developing critical consciousness in children being able to engage children in conversations about race. Participants shared that young students “understand what’s fair [and] what’s not fair. They understand difference, they understand similarity” and that “they’re also honest, and they’re also willing to understand truth.” They never underestimated what young students are capable of.

Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy, when used by critically conscious educators to teach young students—an age group capable of understanding, processing, and developing as critical anti-racist thinkers—will help all students, especially BIPOC students, attain higher rates of academic success in school; it will also increase their sense of belonging and motivate them to engage civically for themselves and their communities.

Challenges to Implementation

As revealed by this exploratory documentary study, there are many challenges in implementing Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy at the elementary school level. Educators spoke about the lack of curriculum, the lack of time available to develop such a curriculum, and the common resistance of school boards, superintendents, and other actors to developing and allocating resources for authentic curriculum-development and implementation. Elementary teacher educators motivated to put Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy into practice can also often find themselves isolated in solo classrooms,

without connection to or support from others motivated to carry out similar educational change.

Additionally, though the State of California has adopted the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for K–12 education and has approved AB-101, which mandates the completion of a semester-long Ethnic Studies course for students in grades 9–12 to graduate high school, this does not address current systemic challenges school districts and teacher-education programs are confronted with. Beyond their experiences in the classroom, participants spoke about the politicization of Ethnic Studies, highlighting the important interrogation of who should teach mandated Ethnic Studies courses, how to best prepare in-service and pre-service educators as Ethnic Studies practitioners, and what the implications for teacher-education programs are or should be. Participants also shared how important it is to implement Ethnic Studies authentically at the elementary school level using educators who understand that Ethnic Studies is not a curriculum that can be simply picked up and taught without proper curriculum training and critical ontological understanding in Euro-dominant spaces.

Overcoming Challenges

Recommendations for Improved Practice

Based on findings of the exploratory documentary research study, in-service elementary school educators who teach using an Ethnic Studies framework or who have an interest in and desire to become an educator who teaches using Ethnic Studies should consider the following recommendations to increase the presence of Ethnic Studies in elementary schools. I recognize the recommendations made will not apply to every in-service educator; nor will they be relevant to every context. The results of this study indicate deserved attention.

Participants shared how being, or becoming, an Ethnic Studies educator can be a lonely and difficult journey at the elementary school level due to the subject's limited implementation and their own lack of connection with, and support from, other Ethnic Studies educators and community members. Implementing Ethnic Studies in elementary school has been, and will continue to be, confronted with resistance from those who do not understand the curriculum or the pedagogy. However, this should not prevent an in-service elementary school educator from becoming an Ethnic Studies practitioner.

Find Co-Conspirators and Support. For those elementary school educators who are already embedding Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy throughout their instructional day, a way to begin is by expanding beyond their four walls to influence those in their spheres. Having courageous conversations with colleagues who they lesson-plan or spend time with at their school site is an excellent way to advocate for the inclusion of Ethnic Studies and spark interest in others. It is also important to share and dialogue with students' families about the noticeable impact Ethnic Studies has had on their child inside and outside of the classroom. Conversations with families and community members can promote Ethnic Studies as a critical instructional framework and garner the needed support to extend Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy across a school or school district. For schools and school districts interested in a broader implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy, it is critical to seek expert support. Commit to partnering with Ethnic Studies consulting organizations comprised of BIPOC educators and experts who have authentic experiences with the development and implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in public schools.

Engage in Inner Work. To become an Ethnic Studies practitioner, educators must engage in inner work. They must confront their own identities and biases and how they either perpetuate or abolish colonial, white-supremacist practices in their classrooms. Both BIPOC and White educators need to explore their own identity before implementing Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy with students. Educators who wish to become Ethnic Studies practitioners in schools or school districts that are unwilling to support the implementation of Ethnic Studies can begin their own inner work by taking collegiate Ethnic Studies courses, reading books about race and racism, and immersing themselves in their students' communities; this will enable them to reflect on their own assumptions and gain cultural competence. Educators' inner work is necessary to examine initial beliefs and positionality; it is also a required ongoing practice throughout one's teaching career.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations for future research are based on findings of the exploratory documentary research study. I recognize the recommendations may not apply to every school and school district, nor will they be relevant in every context. However, the results of this study deserve attention.

The exploratory documentary film yielded by this dissertation confirmed what scholars have found regarding the positive impact Ethnic Studies can have on BIPOC students. However, the extensive research that exists is mostly representative of Ethnic Studies's impact in high school and higher education. Going forward, it is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted with elementary school aged participants to test the impact of authentic Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in elementary school. To do this, it is

recommended that an Ethnic Studies curriculum be implemented using a test sample of diverse elementary schools throughout California. This would also require teacher-educator participants to engage in the development of curriculum and related pedagogy through their school district, in partnership with teacher-preparation programs at nearby colleges and universities that focus on Ethnic Studies or Ethnic Studies consulting organizations guided by leading Ethnic Studies experts. Given the challenges in such implementation noted in the previous section, motivation in districts among their teachers, students, parents, and larger community exists. Based on such a test sample, future research would then be needed to examine the implementation of integrated Ethnic Studies curriculum and critical pedagogy, as well as its effect on BIPOC students' proficiency on benchmark assessments, used to determine student success and achievement in elementary school. This would include, but not limited to, district- and state-mandated assessments, attendance rates, and student discipline data.

Before any Ethnic Studies lessons are taught, educators, regardless of race, must confront and dissect their own identities. Ethnic Studies pedagogy relies on the educators' ability to humanize themselves and those around them and create spaces of healing and resistance, while also building solidarity within communities. Without reflective inner work, educators will not be prepared to teach authentic Ethnic Studies. Future research must include an analysis of the time and content required for professional development and training for current in-service educators who wish to authentically teach using an Ethnic Studies framework.

Additionally, future research should include an analysis of how teacher-education programs create pathways to prepare, certify, and credential pre-service elementary teachers to teach using an Ethnic Studies framework. Furthermore, future research must include a study on how educational-leadership programs prepare administrators as critically conscious educators who transform systems in schools to support the development of BIPOC students' ethnic and scholarly identities. Since Ethnic Studies acknowledges Community Cultural Wealth and is community responsive, educational leaders must know how to create and establish systems in their schools that support teacher educators through the creation of Ethnic Studies lessons and spaces; thereby meeting the needs of the community they serve. Resistance to Ethnic Studies from administrators and district leaders must cease in order to truly see the academic and social advancement of BIPOC students.

In higher education, it is also recommended that a systems-design study be administered. Higher-education-faculty participants from Ethnic Studies departments and a teacher-education department interviewed for this study shared about a lack of the interdepartmental collaboration needed to prepare critically conscious teacher educators. Partnerships among departments are not typically established, nor do faculty from different departments work closely together, other than on an individual basis. It is critical to understand how to design, build, and establish partnerships between Ethnic Studies departments and education departments for teacher and administrator programs to collaborate and better prepare public-school educators. One of the scholar participants stated,

We cannot move forward without, you know, teacher ed [departments] partnering with Ethnic Studies [departments] because Ethnic Studies folks have been doing this for lifetimes. So that is something that we need to bring to our university on how do we sort of collaborate... I think there are so many things that can happen... foundation

courses [in teacher ed] could be taught by Ethnic Studies professors... another way to do it is to have working time with Ethnic Studies professors... to sit down with folks that are deep in Ethnic Studies and have them look at my syllabi and say, you know, like what readings should I include, not include, is there something that I'm missing... Maybe it's redeveloping programs, rethinking course sequencing... there's so much there that I mean it would just be so powerful to have that collaboration.

Regardless of field or department, scholars should reach out to the Ethnic Studies department at their respective colleges and universities to collaborate on developing critically conscious mathematicians, scientists, and more. Overall, there is a need to redevelop programs and course sequencing, within and among departments, to collectively develop human beings who are critically conscious and, ultimately, to minimize resistance to Ethnic Studies in K–12 schools, and instead build solidarity.

Reflection and Conclusion

Currently, Ethnic Studies is not a focus at most elementary schools across the state of California, except where individual educators are taking it upon themselves to include Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in their lessons. Those who are teaching using an Ethnic Studies framework at the elementary school level are finding a positive impact on students; Ethnic Studies is increasing student engagement and their overall sense of belonging. It is giving students the knowledge and preparation for civic engagement, as well as the ability to participate in civil discourse.

In conclusion, this exploratory documentary-film study sought to explore the existence, impact, and sustainability of Ethnic Studies at the elementary school level. This study found that Ethnic Studies does exist in public elementary schools across the state of California. This study also found that young students, starting in preschool, can explore and discuss race, racism, history, identity, advocacy, and beyond to ultimately become anti-racist community

members through Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy. However, its current sustainability is due to educators, whose unceasing grassroots efforts advance the development and implementation of Ethnic Studies at the elementary school level. It is through these continued efforts that elementary school Ethnic Studies exists in school districts across California, a state that is mainly focused on including Ethnic Studies courses at the high school level.

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Appendix A

Documentary Participants

Name	Role in Education	Location	Filming Method
Christine Sleeter Ph.D.	Professor Emerita California State University Monterey Bay Member, National Academy of Education	Monterey Bay, CA	Zoom
Jorge Pacheco, Jr.	K-8 Native Studies Teacher	Menlo Park, CA	Zoom
Larry Salomon Ph.D.	Senior Lecturer San Francisco State University	San Francisco, CA	In Person
Marisa Villegas	K-12 Ethnic Studies Teacher	Union City, CA	Zoom
Mary Levi	Elementary Teacher	Upland, CA	Zoom
Miguel Zavala Ph.D.	Interim Associate Dean College of Ethnic Studies California State University, Los Angeles	Los Angeles, CA	Zoom
Ruchi Agarwal- Rangnath Ed.D.	Assistant Professor and Faculty Coordinator University of San Francisco, School of Education	San José, CA	Zoom
Taunya Jaco Ed.D.	Middle School Teacher	San José, CA	Zoom
Tracie Noriega	Assistant Superintendent, San Lorenzo Unified School District	San Lorenzo, CA	In Person
Tricia Gallagher- Geurtsen Ed.D.	Lecturer University of California, San Diego University of California, Santa Cruz	San Diego, CA	Zoom

Ulysses Acevedo	Community College Instructor	Los Altos Hills, CA	In Person
Wendy Lozano	Elementary Teacher	Los Angeles, CA	Zoom

Appendix B
Recruitment Flier

SJSU | CONNIE L. LURIE
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

**Participate in an
Ethnic Studies
Documentary
Research Study**



What is this study about?

The purpose of this research study is to explore the existence, impact and sustainability of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy in Elementary school and in the process more accurately and widely share the results.

Who can participate?

To participate in this research you must:

- Be an Ethnic Studies educator or scholar in CA
 - Higher-Education Scholar with an expertise in Ethnic Studies
 - K-12th grade Educator who has taught more than 5 years in public schools in California

Commitments

Participation in this study involves:

- One 1-hour interview

No compensation for your time

To join the study or to find out more, please contact:

Student Investigator:
Angela Guzmán
408-641-0627
angela.guzman@sjsu.edu

**VOLUNTEER
TO HELP ADVANCE
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
IN ELEMENTARY
ETHNIC STUDIES**

Appendix C

Consent Form

TITLE OF THE STUDY

Never Too Young: The Existence, Impact, and Sustainability of Ethnic Studies in Elementary School

NAME OF RESEARCHERS

Angela Guzmán, San Jose State University graduate student
Dr. Robert Gliner, Faculty Advisor

PURPOSE

The aim of this exploratory documentary study is to explore how Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy exists, impacts, and is sustained in California's K-5 public schools. There is important research about Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy to support student achievement, however it is mostly limited to the secondary level. Therefore, this study will only explore Ethnic Studies at the elementary school level. The educator and scholar interview are an integral part of an exploratory documentary study on how Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy exists in elementary school, its implementation, its impact on students' cultural and academic identities, and its sustainability.

PROCEDURES

This study is rooted in documentary research which will focus on how Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy exists, is implemented, and how it is sustained in public elementary schools. Perspectives of educators and scholars about the impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy on students' cultural and academic identities, and overall student achievement is critical. It will help the researcher better understand how Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy helps improve the quality of learning in classrooms for culturally diverse students. Additionally, interviews will help the researcher construct authentic and relevant discourse which can potentially improve educational outcomes for students of color. Edited film from the interview will be used to create a documentary and its final version will be made available to the public.

Educator and scholar participants are asked to do the following:

- Participate in one 1-hour interview at a time of your choice.

Questions the researcher will be asking participants in the interview will be shared at least two days before the interview.

There are minimal risks involved in the participation of this study.

COMPENSATION

No compensation for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Identity information of participants used in the research findings and documentary will only be what was consented to. Pseudonyms will be used for all adult participants, except for adult participants who give consent on this form. Due to the documentary nature of the study, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Faces and voices will be video recorded during the interviews. Data gathered in this study will only be accessible to the researcher.

YOUR RIGHTS

As educator or scholar, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

You are encouraged to ask questions:

- For further information about the study, please contact Angela Guzmán at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email at angela.guzman@sjsu.edu.
- Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Ferdinand Rivera at ferdinand.rivera@sjsu.edu EdD Program Director.
- For questions about participants’ rights or if you feel you have been harmed by participating in this study, please contact Dr. Mohamed Abousalem, Vice President for Research & Innovation, San Jose State University, at 408-924-2479 or irb@sjsu.edu

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

___Yes.No As educator/scholar, I am allowing the use of my full name

___Yes.No As educator/scholar, I am allowing the use of my first name

___Yes.No As educator/scholar, I am allowing the use of my last name

_____Yes.No As educator/scholar, I am allowing the researcher to choose a
pseudonym for myself.

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study and voluntarily agree to have your face and voice video recorded during the interview. That the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant's Name (printed)	Participant's Signature	Date
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RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I certify that the expert participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix D

Interview Questions

	Question	<i>Follow-Up Question</i>
1	Full name and title?	
2	What was your personal k-12 experience like?	
3	What was your first experience with race/racism?	<i>How old were you?</i>
4	What brought you to Ethnic Studies?	<i>How did you come into the position you are in now?</i>
5	What impact does the current public school system/curriculum have on children of color?	
6	How do you define Ethnic Studies?	<i>What does Ethnic Studies mean to you?</i>
7	What is the difference between Ethnic Studies curriculum and Ethnic Studies Pedagogy?	<i>Is there a difference? If so, what is the difference?</i>
8	Please share an Ethnic Studies lesson you have taught.	<i>What makes the lesson an Ethnic Studies lesson?</i>
9	Is Ethnic Studies important?	<i>Why or why not?</i>
10	Do you believe Ethnic Studies is important in elementary school?	<i>Why or why not?</i>
11	What would you say to those who say elementary school aged children are too young to talk about race?	
12	Why is there limited implementation of Ethnic Studies in elementary schools in California?	
13	What challenges are there regarding the implementation of Ethnic Studies in elementary schools?	<i>How have you overcome those challenges? How do you think those challenges can be overcome?</i>

14	What successes are there regarding the implementation of Ethnic Studies in elementary schools?	<i>How have students who participate in Ethnic Studies changed?</i>
15	What recommendations do you have regarding the implementation of Ethnic Studies in elementary schools?	<i>What recommendations do you have to moving Ethnic Studies forward?</i>
16	What do those who are interested in becoming an ES educator need to do to prepare?	<i>How do you become an Ethnic Studies educator?</i>
17	What would you say to those leaders in public school institutions who are scared/hesitant to move forward with the implementation of Ethnic Studies?	