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A Praxis of Relational Thick Solidarity: Building Emancipatory and Mutually-Sustaining Ethnic Studies Communities in Texas

Ethnic Studies Network of Texas Core Team

Abstract

Parents, students, educators, and community members around the country have advocated tirelessly over several generations to expand access to Ethnic Studies courses for K-12 learners. Educational organizers draw strength and strategies from decades of movement work embedded in the liberatory theories of the Ethnic Studies disciplines. In this chapter, we write to honor this history, and to document a specific period of time, during the 2020 COVID pandemic, when the global emotional atmosphere was of fear and grief, compounded by the ruthless murder of George Floyd. Community shutdowns demanded new approaches to education and community organizing, and many were left wondering "but what can we do?" As a team of parents, teachers, and concerned community members, we write to reflect on how we collectively and intuitively came to answer the question. We theorize from our practices in developing the 2020 ESNTX Web Series as an act of mutual nurturance and co-learning and offer testimonios to define our praxis as a relational thick solidarity, examining how the Web Series contributed to the larger ethnic studies movement in Texas and in the country.

Introduction

In 2010, conservative lawmakers in Arizona enacted laws to ban Ethnic Studies, and particularly, a very successful Mexican American Studies program in a Tucson high school. Ethnic Studies (ES) content and courses have always been present in creative and insurgent ways, but a powerful movement to bring ES to public schools nationwide emerged in response to Arizona's racist legislation (Buenavista, 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Gallagher-Geurtsen, 2016). While the formalities and institutionalization process differs from state to state, a critical mass of diverse community members have continued to demand inclusive and nuanced approaches to ES for K-16 learners. In this chapter, we bear witness to the critical work bringing Ethnic Studies to Texas.

Within this movement, teachers and school personnel evolved curriculum to reflect contemporary social issues, fostering far-reaching implications. This engaged world-reading mode of study (Meyerhoff, 2019) shifts away from notions of assimilation, turning instead toward inclusive perspectives that create an open-ended space for "the enactment of critical pedagogy and praxis [so] that social transformation might occur" (Freire, 1970). While it is one thing to deeply

understand the concepts of critical pedagogy and justice-oriented transformation, it is an involved undertaking to internalize and enact such a praxis within a diverse and engaged collective, especially within regions that have traditionally been hostile or at least suspicious of efforts to create an equitable multi-racial society. Moreover, it is a nearly impossible endeavor to enact this praxis within the current context of state-based censorship and economic abandonment targeting anti-hegemonic epistemes.

In 2020, a racial justice movement arose in the midst of a mass public health crisis. In 2025, multiple communities face deep anxiety over the survival of a neoliberal version of multi-racial democracy on which many of us had grown to depend. Despite these differences, both periods push us to answer again and again: "what can we do?" In this article, we document our work as members of the Core Team of the Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX) in the development of the 2020 Summer Web Series in which we worked through a moment of great uncertainty and anxiety to maximize its liberatory and connective potential.

We created ESNTX to "foster… a holistic, culturally sustaining, and socially relevant mode of learning…grounded in ES pedagogy within Pre-K-12, higher ed, and community education spaces in Texas. ESNTX achieves this mission through collective planning and care, grassroots advocacy, research justice, and information-sharing" (ESNTX, 2024). The formation that came to be ESNTX initially emerged in the months that followed the adoption of Mexican American Studies as a Social Studies elective course in Texas in the early fall of 2018. Earlier that year, the Texas State Board of Education passed a motion to consider three additional ES courses for inclusion in the Social Studies TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) elective course catalog. These courses were Native American Studies, African American Studies, and Asian Pacific/Islander Studies (TEA, 2018). Formally named in the fall of 2019, ESNTX moved from being facilitated by a single member to being facilitated by a Core Organizing Team by the end of Fall 2020.

As members of the ESNTX Core Organizing Team, we serve as a planning and coordinating hub, regularly engaging with partners, educators, and community members to create spaces for information sharing and agenda-setting within the larger ES social movement ecosystem in Texas, as well as hosting annual events since the summer of 2020 to provide purposeful anticolonial and anti-racist professional development opportunities for teachers. The Core Team operates under collectively developed Points of Unity that include a commitment to relational collaboration and consensus-based conversation and decision-making. We work to develop intergenerational relationships with those who came before, those who are currently doing ES work in Texas, as well as those who will come after. As a network, ESNTX is composed of differently-identifying and differently-positioned students, teachers, parents, and advocates who are moved to create emancipatory ES in Texas, but we engage with ES communities beyond Texas as well. Within Texas, we work alongside both established and emerging ES communities to share information and stand in solidarity as each community develops according to their own needs, approaches, and timelines.

Initially, we began writing to document the specific moments in time, during the COVID pandemic and worldwide George Floyd protests, when communities shutdown and mass community mobilization created the need and opportunity for new modes of study (Meyerhoff, 2019) and of relating to one another. We continue writing to reflect on how our ESNTX 2020 Web Series not only contributed to the larger ES movement in Texas and across the country, but also on how it became central to creating a framework of what we call relational thick solidarity through which

we can understand our different positionalities while generating a collective purpose as we continue to face attacks against DEI in education and work toward the educational models that we wish to see for our communities.

Praxis as Collective Authorship and Learning[1]

Our project did not originate from academic literature or formal institutions but instead emerged from a history of anti-racist community organizing, responding to a specific set of circumstances and educational needs. In 2020, we were preoccupied with the verbs of praxis, including being, doing, building, knowing, learning, teaching, and co-existing together in purposeful, mutually supportive ways as a praxis of solidarity. Today, we are able to theorize our practices (Stepney & Thompson, 2020). Core Member Deyadira Arrellano reflected on the dire need for solidarity during the COVID pandemic.

> *Early one morning my cousin who worked for Google at the time told me something bad was coming and recommended I should stockpile. I didn't want to believe it. I told him we were fine, and I was just at the grocery store and everything seemed fine, but little did I know that would be the last time being inside a grocery store for the next two years. In CA, we kept in touch with our ESNTX family, and this was an emotional lifeline I needed especially as a mother and caregiver. The first year putting the web series together seemed overwhelming but we would come to know all the right people to make this idea a reality. Every person who contributed to the first web series had a gift and the ideas were more than plentiful. Planning this series with people who are so passionate they are willing to do this labor for free was liberating. We were conscious of the different types of labor involved and this helped us stay grounded in working in a manner that does not add a culture of pressure or shame into the group.*

The work was powerful in building community and responding to the needs of not only each other, but also to those educators in our community who were struggling to serve our children. In simple terms, we found a way to answer the question "what can we do?" with community-building meetings and a clear educational purpose. We could organize. We could listen to and support our teachers. We could move collectively with gentleness and compassion in fraught, scary times. Since 2020, we've continued to organize in support of Ethnic Studies (ES) in Texas, and made time to think, reflect, and grow. Writing together has allowed us to think collectively and document our work in the area of ES as a practice of critical and anti-colonizing pedagogies and articulate our praxis as a framework of relational thick solidarity. By including best practices and lessons learned, we hope to contribute our approach of non-proprietary community and social-movement building to the greater educational community. Embedded in our testimonies are detailed examples of how our work pushes education toward anti-racism, decolonization, and solidarity, as a collective praxis of emancipation.

Settler Colonialism and Historical Erasure

We foreground our contribution within and against a settler colonial framework. Settler colonialism is the historical and ongoing erasure of Native and Indigenous peoples, culture, and knowledges

[1] We are glad to answer the call, published as we completed our copy edits, to publish in community (Rivera Prince et al., 2025).

from the land, reified through structures (Wolfe, 1999). Formal educational paths established within settler colonial societies uphold the values and priorities of a Eurocentric colonial knowledge system (Calderón, 2014; Dei, 2000; Howard, 2006; Patel, 2014), shaping governance, policy, curriculum, pedagogical practices, perspective, omissions, expected outcomes, assessments, the physical schooling facilities (Muñoz & Proffitt, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012) and eventually, the identities of the learners themselves (Calderon, 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). As a part of the greater public schooling community, we recognize the myriad ways that "formal schooling has had far more to do with the project of coloniality than it has with learning, teaching, or co-existence" (Patel, 2015, p. 4). We know to examine patterns of racial disparity– disproportionate disciplinary actions based on race (Bal et al., 2018), disparities in extractive high-stakes testing outcomes and the larger assessment industrial complex (Conn & Tenam-Zemach, 2019), underrepresentation among faculty, staff, administration, and policy makers in racialized communities (Kohli, 2018; Picower, 2009), as well as curriculum that glorifies colonial narratives and erases non-White peoples, perspectives, and (his)tories (Calderon, 2014; Sleeter, 2011; Utt, 2018). Which is also to say, we are intentionally building upon the work of many generations of community-responsive activist scholars who have left a map for us with the gentle reminder that education does not have to look this way.

Core Member Cecilia Sanchez-Hill reflected on how the epistemic violence her students experienced led her to participate more fully within the movement to reclaim knowledge.

> *In the middle of a US history lesson, an eighth grade Latina student in an urban Texas school district raised her hand and asked me, "Mrs. Hill, did any Mexicans sign the Declaration of Independence?" In the brief moment that I paused and realized that I had already taught more than a century's worth of US history and had not once mentioned Mexicans, a white male student laughingly responded, "Nope." I did my best as a first-year teacher with limited content knowledge beyond the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards to provide a little bit of Mexican American history. It was clear that such content would be relevant to both students, one who was clearly longing to see herself reflected back in the history, and the other, who at thirteen years old had already formed an opinion of Mexicans as another, undeserving of respect. It was also clear that by the eighth grade, my students had not received a full account of US history and instead they learned an Anglocentric narrative that celebrates a linear progress of white Americans without acknowledging the structures of white supremacy that ensured the subjugation of people of color. These lived experiences as both a Latina student and educator in Texas have led me to dedicate time and energy to ESNTX and our efforts to advance the teaching of Ethnic Studies in K-12 classrooms.*

As exemplified by Cecilia's testimony, we acknowledge and understand the historical erasure and are intentionally building upon the work of many generations of community-responsive activist scholars to build a more inclusive conceptualization of education.

Decolonizing Projects in Education

Decolonial projects in education are not a monolith. These projects spring from multiple geographic and temporal localities, demanding different processes, but universally rejecting the notion that the dominant, Eurocentric way of being and knowing, bolstered by capitalism and rooted in racist violence, is, or should be, the accepted standard or norm (De Lissovoy, 2015). For example, through

his explication of the *coloniality of power*, Quijano (2000), describes how the colonial encounter made capitalism possible. He argued that the colonization of the Americas is foundational to the concept of modernity. The project of colonialism and its use of race in the division of labor is critical in understanding today. Before coloniality there was never a unified global system or economy; through colonialism, racism and the division of labor are "structurally linked and mutually reinforcing," but designed to look like "natural outcomes" (p. 536). Critical to this project, colonizers appropriated resources, erased epistemological heritage, inculcated the colonized into western culture, and affixed themselves as the heroes of the historical narrative, victims of their historical context but ultimately justified in their actions.

While Quijano writes from the *peripheral* lens as a scholar of South America, decolonial theorists each provide a different perspective from which they challenge Western knowledges and the current neoliberal moment (see Harney & Moten, 2013; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000; Tuck & Yang, 2012, Wynter, 2006). These scholars call for a decentering of Eurocentrism, and a resituating of it amongst other onto-epistemological orientations. Within these projects, "the point is not to find permission to be admitted into the circle of humanity by colonial reasons but rather to transform the meaning of the human in accordance with a nondominative ethical stance" (De Lissovoy, 2015). For this project, a decolonial lens is appropriate as the epistemologies of Ethnic Studies (ES) work to de-center the individualistic, meritocratic logics of white, western, Eurocentric education (Valenzuela, 2019). In the midst of a struggle to undo a neo-colonial re-naming of the Mexican American Studies course, core member Orlando Lara, reflected on how he used his position within the university to assist in the creation of a decolonial and intersectional ES community that cut across university and community institutions.

> *At the time, I had just completed my first semester as the Associate Director of Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES) at Texas Christian University, which just a few months before had become the first ES department in the state of Texas. The program, now a department, had emerged through student calls for a Black Studies program and the early energy of social transformation was still palpable on campus. I was encouraged, in other words, to help fulfill the activist and community legacies of ES in my role as Associate Director. As such, I was also finely attuned to how ES could be used to de-mobilize or "water-down" more ethnic-specific ES fields and courses. To some conservatives and moderates, the idea of a multi-racial ES where students are ultimately taught to "get along" is slightly less threatening than ES fields that are organized around existing ethnic identities. The fear, if one takes the Tucson backlash against MAS as an example, is that students might develop too much ethnic solidarity and pride in these courses.*
> *In my role as Associate Director of an ES department, I lent my support to the argument that Mexican American Studies was a legitimate academic field that deserved to be respected in its own right. Later that June, the [Texas SBOE] voted in favor of reverting the course back to its original name of Mexican American Studies. By September of 2018, MAS was adopted as the first TEKS-approved ES elective course in the state of Texas and a new ES motion called for new courses. The priority at this point was to develop a much-needed mass implementation strategy for Mexican American Studies. During this time, however, Trinidad Gonzales, a South Texas College history professor, began emailing academic ES departments, asking them if they had any plans to develop the courses named in the new 2018 SBOE motion. Traditionally there has been a separation between K-12 ES and higher ed ES, so when I got his email, I was not surprised to hear that no other academic departments had responded to his query. I was, however, happy to receive the message. It was one of those rare moments when you are called to do something that*

> *you actually want to do and fits your capacities. Working with Dr. Gonzales and Dr. Max Krochmal, then Founding Chair of CRES at Texas Chrisitan University (TCU), that December in 2018, I convened a group of academics and educators who had previously been involved in the MAS advocacy work and similar efforts. We met via Zoom, an online video conferencing service that would, only a year later, come to play a central role in most academic and professional lives.*

The rise of ES courses in Texas and the continued legacy of interracial and interdisciplinary coalition building can be attributed to the community leaders that first began to decolonize education from the escuelitas of the early 20th century and to the current movements fighting for inclusive education across institutional and community spaces (Barragán Goetz, 2022).

Emergence and Solidarity in Social Movements

As demonstrated by our predecessors and elders, social movements are emergent and fluid. They draw their strength, at times, from being fast and temporary or from having no or very little centralized organization. Sometimes the goals of these social movements are not to modify the existing social system or even to overthrow it, but to create sustainable alternatives that can help make older systems obsolete (Graeber, 2004; den Hond, et al., 2015). Organizations, by contrast, see themselves as effective precisely because they are long-term and sustainable, and to get there, they presume that certain organizational forms and hierarchical structures need to be in place for the organization to reproduce itself and gain social and political legitimacy. Nonetheless, even deeply participatory activist networks hell-bent on bringing social systems to the brink of chaos as their primary "theory of social change" have organizational elements, such as spokes-councils or task-based committees where consensus-based decisions are made (Fithian, 2019). Some anti-hierarchical organizations go further to argue that the social relations one hopes to create should be present in the organizational forms that are used to get there; in other words, that the means *should* prefigure the ends (Graeber, 2004).

If social movements can be both decentralized, loosely connected social networks and interconnected, collective action fields, it is also important to recognize that social movement networks are not free-flowing, ever-expanding borderless worlds (Diani & Mische, 2015). They are composed of social ties that form, stretch, grow, and at times "sever." In the thick of social emergence, it can be difficult to determine when a social tie is one of "friendship or enmity, of alliance or opposition, or of entailing varying degrees of shared goals, resources, tactics or ideas" (Diani & Mische, 2015, p. 12). This represents both the risk and possibility of solidarity and if one is not going to replicate the surveillance strategies of the state, some risk in association is always at stake.

However, this does not mean that solidarity must be entirely open-ended or presumed: Shange and Lui argue for a "thick solidarity" that is built not on superficial assumptions of unity (we are all in this together), but on a deep and committed effort to understand each other's histories, as well as the legacies of alliance and of betrayal that cut within and across communities. In U.S. racial politics, this often means acknowledging a long-standing commitment to anti-Blackness even among communities of color (Shange & Lui, 2018). However, this does not mean that we should resort to new narratives of racial singularity that ignore how various forms of racial violence have interacted and shaped each other. In this essay, we argue for remaining attentive to the "infrastructures of feeling" that allow people to "select and reselect" new "liberatory lineages"

across vast geographies of difference (Gilmore, 2017). This is the wisdom that tells us that "not all skin folk are kinfolk" and that sometimes we find our greatest allies beyond our own racial communities. In the past several years, ESNTX has set out to re-generate and build upon these infrastructures of resistance, while creating new relational thick solidarities along the way.

In addition to interrogating the unique histories of racialization that communities experience, this view of relational thick solidarity requires us to be mindful of how racial violence is meted out through both state and non-state institutions and how differently racialized communities have created different strategies of resistance. This means staying attentive to how racialized communities and individuals occupy specific matrices of power and privilege that do not remain fixed and unchanging. In other words, working toward relational thick solidarity means recognizing and reckoning with the racial singularity that white supremacy has forced upon us while working through those deeply embedded barriers to forge new racial solidarities. This is simultaneously intergenerational work and also work that each generation must engage in anew.

Part I: A Brief History of K-12 Ethnic Studies in Texas

While the Ethnic Studies (ES) movement at the K-12 level in the U.S. has been growing for the last two decades, ES has longer and often unwritten histories within grassroots, localized efforts. In Texas, Tejano and Chicano advocates developed and sustained escuelitas, community-based schools grounded in Mexican American language, culture, and history for over 100 years beginning as early as the 1860s (Barragán Goetz, 2022). In the early 1970s, the Texas State Board of Education approved a series of courses called American Cultural Studies, including American Indian Studies, Mexican American Studies, and Negro American Studies (later titled Black American Studies) developed by the Texas Council of the Social Studies, which were later allowed to dissolve (Sánchez Hill, 2024). We also hear from elders that MAS courses were taught in the Houston area as early as the late 1990s (Loredo, 2025).

While some states have adopted "Ethnic Studies" courses or even requirements (e.g., California) Texas advocates have focused on creating and advocating for discipline-specific ES elective courses. Spurred by cross-state collaboration with MAS teachers in Arizona in 2010, advocates in Texas led by the Librotraficante movement and the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Tejas Foco Pre-K-12 Committee pushed for an elective course in Mexican American Studies in the years that followed.

By 2014, MAS was taught as a special topics course in multiple districts and by the mid-2010s, there was a fully operating MAS Teachers' Academy hosted at the University of Texas in San Antonio. By 2018, a Social Studies MAS course began moving through the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). In April of that year, the Texas SBOE voted to change the course title to "Ethnic Studies: An Overview of Americans of Mexican Descent." A coalition of advocacy groups and individuals across the state including the Texas Freedom Network, the NACCS Tejas Foco PreK-12 Committee, the Intercultural Development Research Association, parents, teachers, educators, community members, students, and most Democrat SBOE members challenged this action. At the

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same time (and possibly as a result of) a negotiation with conservative SBOE members, the SBOE considered and voted for a motion that created a pipeline for considering additional ES courses.[2]

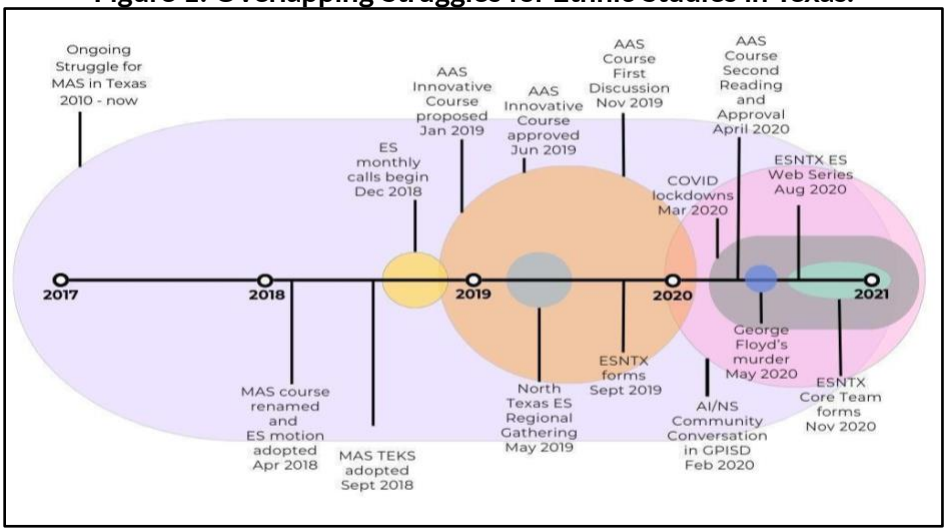
As part of the deliberations, board members acknowledged that an open-ended motion could open the possibility for an endless amount of course adoptions. As a result, the SBOE motion named four specific "comprehensive ethnic studies courses": Latino studies, African American Studies, Native American Studies, and Asian American Studies, putting Texas on a track to integrate these ES course electives into the state-wide TEKS course catalog.

Through the emergent alliances and ruptures that accompanied advocacy for Mexican American Studies in Texas, an unexpected opportunity arose, one that was almost ignored by ES advocates. While many MAS advocates argue that they had long championed the creation of additional ES courses, in the months that followed the approval of the MAS course, there was no public-facing plan to further develop these remaining ES courses. Nonetheless, whether intentional or coincidental, the advocacy that surrounded the adoption of the MAS social studies elective created a clear opening for future ES courses.

Building an Ethnic Studies Community in Texas

By the late fall of 2018, there were two primary opportunities and challenges in the Texas Ethnic Studies (ES) community. The first was the gargantuan effort of preparing a growing number of educators to teach the newly approved Mexican American Studies course, championed by the annual MAS Teacher's Academy and the call for local school districts to adopt the course, which was promoted by an annual MAS Summit. The second was the creation of additional high school level ES courses. While no highly publicized effort had yet arisen to address this need, some course creators had already begun to develop a course in African American Studies in Dallas ISD.

Figure 1. Overlapping Struggles for Ethnic Studies in Texas.



Source: ESNTX.

[2] Advocates would later find out that the motion in April 2018 did not require the SBOE to take the full step of adoption. It merely committed the Texas SBOE to consider these courses for adoption. This opened future courses to the possibility of ongoing delay.

In December 2018, a small group of ES educators and advocates also began holding monthly Zoom calls, largely facilitated by Orlando Lara who was then at TCU in Fort Worth, to discuss the creation of additional ES courses. In January 2019, Prof. W. Marvin Delaney from UT Arlington joined the discussion and informed the participants that a course on African American Studies was being piloted in Dallas ISD and was in the process of being submitted for approval as an Innovative course.[3] Later that week, Deyadira Arellano and Orlando Lara attended a Dallas ISD school board meeting where the board voted to approve the Innovative Course application that would be submitted to the Texas SBOE later that month. Orlando and Deyadira also met one of the course creators, the then director of the Dallas ISD Racial Equity office. Later that year, Prof. Dulaney and Robert Edison began working with Dallas ISD to develop teacher workshops in preparation for the African American Studies courses' second pilot year.

Orlando and Dee continued to convene the monthly ES Zoom conversations and by May of 2019 worked with Cecilia Hill and CRES staff and volunteers to host an in-person, multi-day North Texas Ethnic Studies Regional gathering that included K-12, community college, higher ed faculty, and community members. The gathering opened with a panel of Social Studies coordinators and TCU CRES faculty who described their ongoing Ethnic Studies projects, including a new lead for the African American Studies innovative course project in Dallas ISD and a Fort Worth ISD curriculum overlay for Latina/o Studies. The gathering then broke into four field specific strategy sessions, where participants discussed the current needs and future visions for each K-16 Ethnic Studies field in North Texas. In the session on Native and Indigenous Studies, participants planted the seeds for a future conversation on Native American Studies.

The African American Studies innovative course was approved in June 2019 and by the fall of 2019, the small planning committee named itself the Ethnic Studies Network of Texas. Later that year, they began meeting with District #13 Board Member Aicha Davis and Dallas ISD reps to support the review and adoption of African American Studies as a TEKs-based course. In November 2019, together with Dallas ISD educators ESNTX mobilized community testimony on behalf of the course's "first discussion" before the SBOE. More than 30 testifiers traveled from throughout Texas in what one testifier described as "a class in African American Studies… here and now."

In February of 2020, Grand Prairie ISD, American Indian Heritage Day, and TCU faculty hosted an event called "Conversation for Native American Studies," which was attended by over 70 participants from 24 different tribal communities. Since this 2020 conversation, a community committee of Native people and engaged allies have continued to diligently refine the proposed course of American Indian/Native Studies as an Ethnic Studies course for all Texas learners, centering the voices of Native and Indigenous peoples.

In April of 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the African American Studies course moved toward full adoption, becoming the second Ethnic Studies course in Texas. In May, the American and global public was shocked to witness the brutal murder of George Floyd via camera phone. In addition to mass protests in the streets, this sparked a mass call for educating oneself on the realities of structural racism, a move that was championed temporarily even by corporations. This put Texas advocates in an unusual position: African American Studies had just been approved

[3] This process had begun several months before.

in their conservative state, but there was no infrastructure to offer K-12 training and professional development for the course adoption. This is a common predicament for education organizers who have often had to advocate for ES courses even before there is a critical support structure for broad course adoption or to prepare educators for the racial backlash that can often accompany efforts to transform racial norms. In spite of these logistical challenges, interest amongst teachers, students, and communities was poised to grow by the summer of 2020 when both Mexican American Studies and African American Studies had become state-wide course electives.

Part II: 2020 ESNTX Web Series

At the K-12 level, Ethnic Studies is most commonly taught as a social studies course, and teachers are eligible to teach the class as long as they have a social studies teaching certification. Scholars who study ES classrooms cite the importance of educators who are fluent both in the *content* and the *pedagogy* of ES (Sacramento, 2019; Saldaña, 2022; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Some hold degrees in ES fields, while others bring lived experience to their work, engaging with the content, pedagogy, and embodied epistemologies, or what Moraga and Anzaldua (1981) call the *theories of the flesh*, that are associated with critical ES forms of critical thinking and analysis that arise from lived experience. For a majority of white teachers without specific training, personal experience, or connection to ES content, the work demands intensive self-guided racial awareness and a commitment to constantly upend dominant whitestream content and pedagogies (Sacramento, 2019; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Utt, 2018). For some, the work is not entirely self-guided, as they may find an opportunity to study ES in community or higher education as a student, taking Mexican American Studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies and American Indian/Native American Studies courses to prepare. However, to date, there are no state-level accredited teacher education programs for educators who intend to teach ES at the K-12 level.

By the spring of 2020, in the midst of a Covid pandemic and the mass street protests of the brutal murder of George Floyd, and as African American Studies was approved by the Texas SBOE, many community conversations revolved around the question of "but what can we do?" ESNTX decided to shift its focus to address the critical problem of educator preparation. The Dallas ISD Social Studies department had indicated that they wanted to offer African American Studies and MAS in every one of their 39 high schools and shared their need to support educators. Bolstered by the critical energy of the George Floyd protests, new members joined the Network as it began to conceive of using (for us) novel web-based technologies to create a new pedagogical opportunity for Texas educators. Indeed, Core Team member Maria de los Angeles De Santos-Quezada recalled the significance of that moment.

> *…The pandemic began during the spring semester of 2020, disrupting in-person advocacy and limiting my ability to deepen my involvement as an early advocate for education policy. Then, on May 25, 2020, the murder of George Floyd profoundly impacted society. I wanted to do more than share calls for social justice on social media or attend protests. Advocating at the state level felt crucial in addressing the intersecting pandemics of racial injustice and systemic inequity.*

Looking to support the launch of a new course in African American Studies and continue the growth of MAS, ESNTX organized and launched a Summer Web Series in 2020. Nearly 200 people registered and 120 people attended the week-long online event.

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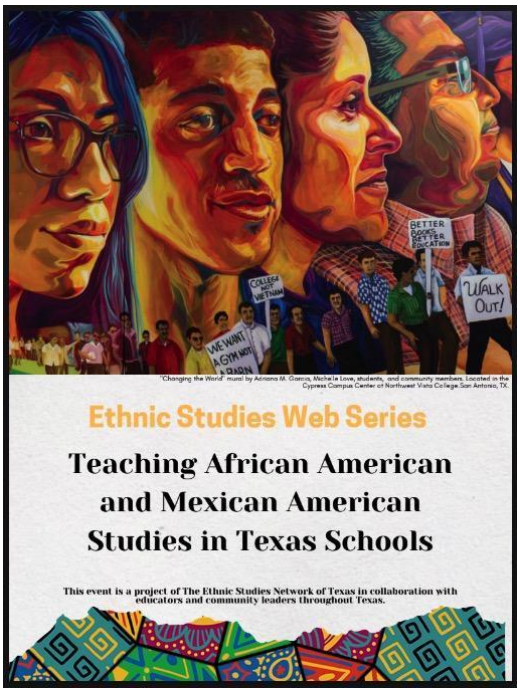
Figure 2: 2020 Ethnic Studies Web Series Program.



Source: https://bit.ly/ESNTXWebSeries2020

The series combined workshops for Mexican American Studies, African American Studies, and Afro-Latinx Studies. This was one of the first ES professional development workshops and one of the first intersectional K-12 ES workshops to be held in the state of Texas. Rather than follow the somewhat formulaic approach of connecting teachers to content experts, our team purposefully created open-ended spaces for our respective communities to engage the critical pedagogies of ES in multiple ways, from the epistemological to the logistical. Angeles reflected on learning about the efforts of the Summer Convergence by saying that her inclusion, "introduced me to a new kind of activism—one grounded in collectivism and mutual care."

Core Member Eliza Epstein also reflected on the conditions that led to organizing the ES web series and how participation shaped her view of collaboration and solidarity:

> *So much has been written about the impacts of the pandemic, and yet so little trauma has been processed, healed. Watching schools close, businesses shutter, and capitalism (sort of) slow down in a collectivist effort towards public health was inspiring. I had been studying education reform for years and seeing, in an instant, how everything could be changed. The pandemic was a cloud, a curtain, a closing. The realness of illness, death, and loss cannot be forgotten. And, the pandemic was also a space for germination, for growth, for change.*
>
> *In an unintentional way, the district-driven approach to PD faded away as the nascent organizing collective of the ESNTX Core Team brought their efforts to the project. Throughout this work, we were always asking questions about the locations of knowledge and how the combinations of*

> *who and what we centered would enliven, enrich, and trouble/unsettle high school classrooms. For example, we invited a number of university professors to present their work, but also invited school board members, museum curators, parents, graduate students, educators, high school students, community college teachers, artists, and community organizers. What we sought was not just a diversity of perspectives, but a diversity of epistemic locations, of ontological orientations—people who thought and lived methods and stories of freedom.*

As scholars building from work for education and liberation that has spanned decades, we approach this project of building a web series, as stewards of a movement. We reach back to the work of those who built the movement, center the goal of being in-relation with those currently in the struggle, who engage in praxis—bringing the theory to life in the work—and remain focused on the future generations.

Patel (2015) calls on educational researchers to examine to whom they are accountable. Building on the work of scholars before her, she frames the importance of reversing the gaze (DuBois, 1898) on educational research to reveal the way that it is "symptomatic, emblematic, and beholden to coloniality" (Patel, 2015, p. 15). Educational partnerships are often theorized as ways to bring together "diverse stakeholders to support "21st century learning." However, our conceptualization challenges the neoliberal concern for producing employable citizens (i.e., citizen subjects that won't make excessive demands on the state) and instead centers the potential of grassroots, place-based collaborations that level hierarchies and take an authentically democratic and humanizing approach to learning, honoring and being accountable to our community and youth.

Significance

The ESNTX 2020 Web Series allowed us as a community of educators to envision and enact an emancipatory model of co-learning focused on Ethnic Studies free from the hyper-surveillance of institutions. We moved intuitively to share ancestral ways of knowing and being in relation to each other, examining what it means to be good relations across our many differences. While the eternal struggle in academia is to find ways to enact theory or find patterns of theory in real world practices, our intentional disruption of the direction of the production of knowledge set us free to be and do and know and write and laugh and think collectively. We embodied critical pedagogies and we made justice-centered transformations in our learning circles, moving as a nurturing collective of co-creators of the knowledge. Marissa reflects on her work as an ESNTX Core Team member, and the parallels to the current educational crisis:

> *In the last five years, as we have looked back on our work, we recognize that in a moment of great social upheaval, in a climate of fear and isolation, we did something of lasting significance. We answered the question of "what can we do?" with a week-long event that brought educators, parents, students, and concerned community members into a circle of learning based in nurturance and mutual respect, honoring the lived experiences of our Elders, and the critical questions of our youth. We engaged in responsive discussion strategies, used small breakout rooms to encourage personal conversations, and wrote collective notes about what and how we were learning from each other. We acknowledged the ancestral peoples and places from across the state and offered words of appreciation and connection across our many areas of interest and expertise. We enacted and embodied all the best parts of what it is to be a reflective, engaged, educator and co-learner in a nurturing educational moment. It felt good to hold space*

> *for our work, and we were surprised how easily it came together. As K-12 teachers, we are bound by the confines of standards and test-driven, content-heavy approaches to teaching. The Web Series reminded me of what it feels like to be included in a learning community led by curiosity, connection, thinking thoroughly, reminding me of what education could be.*

Although the specific contexts of racial violence and anti-DEI legislation have shifted over the last five years, ESNTX continues to organize with a unified purpose toward collective liberatory education for all learners. In 2020, we may not have had the precise language to describe the thing we did, but given time to think, to draw, to share time, to organize with each other, today, we call it a praxis of solidarity that rehumanizes education, honoring relational, thick solidarities as the conceptual framework for our collective Core Team and our organizing in support of Ethnic Studies for Texas.

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