

Understanding Social Justice Approaches in Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary field that aims to increase student knowledge and awareness of ethnically minoritized histories, cultures, struggles, and contributions. Ethnic studies programs are advancing in K-12 and higher education systems throughout America. In many instances, local rules and state laws have been instituted that make completing an ethnic studies class a requirement for public high school graduation and/or for matriculation into public colleges or universities. This means that all students, irrespective of their academic interests or goals, may soon be required to engage with ethnic studies curricula.

It is important that educators, legislators, community advocates, and students alike are aware of the ways that learning experiences may vary depending on the social justice approach that is used to teach an ethnic studies class. This document outlines key educational components that may impact student learning experiences when a critical social justice or classical social justice approach is used to teach ethnic studies.

Educational Components	Critical Social Justice Approaches	Classical Social Justice Approaches
Example Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Liberated/Critical Ethnic Studies Framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Empowered Ethnic Studies Framework (Download)
Key Instructional Tools and Methodologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on decentering whiteness, raising critical consciousness, the liberation struggles of BIPOC people, and intersectionality Sample Themes Utilized: (1) Identity, (2) History and Movement, (3) Systems of Power, (4) Social Movements and Equity Encourages students to become activists and co-conspirators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on centering American pluralism and the contributions of diverse minoritized people to E Pluribus Unum and a More Perfect Union Sample Themes Utilized: (1) Pluralism, (2) Agency, (3) Resilience, (4) Changemaking, (5) Equality Encourages students to become informed and engaged citizens
Foundational Assertions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> America was founded on and is irretrievably rooted in white supremacy; systemic racism is baked into American society and is the cause of every disparity The histories, cultures, struggles, and contributions of four groups of historically marginalized peoples in American history deserve to be known 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> America was founded on and is rooted in the aspirational goals of fairness and equality for all; racism is not the cause of every disparity The histories, cultures, struggles, and contributions of multiple groups of historically marginalized peoples in American history deserve to be known
Recommends and Promotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Colonial, Anti-Imperialist, Anti-Capitalist, and Anti-Racist informed ideas and practices (e.g., prioritizes present and future discrimination as a remedy for past discrimination) Critical Consciousness Resistance movements (i.e., violent and non-violent) for disrupting the social order Manifesting equality of outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liberal Democratic Values, Inquiry-Based, Bias-Free, Objective Pluralism, and Empowered Pathways informed ideas and practices (e.g., prioritizes human dignity and equal treatment of all under the law) Social Consciousness Multiple mechanisms for social change through peaceful and non-violent means Manifesting equality of opportunity

Educational Components	Critical Social Justice Approaches	Classical Social Justice Approaches
Expressions of Race and Gender Identity Ideologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes neo-reconstructionist race ideologies; teaches that race is a real and that race is socially constructed; claims that racism is present in all interactions and social dynamics Supports understanding privilege-oppression and victim-oppressor dynamics between racial and gender identity checkboxes; explores the historical and contemporary effects of heterosexism, cisheteropatriarchy, and more Embraces race essentialism and gender identity stereotypes; views gender as a synonym for sex; teaches students that sex/gender is a spectrum and that true liberation involves the ability to change one's sex/gender and acceptance of sex/gender "fluidity" as a norm in society Proposes there are only four minoritized ethnicities worthy of study: African American, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x, Native American, and Asian American and Pacific Islander 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes learning about a variety of race ideologies; teaches that race is not real and that racism is socially constructed; claims that American understandings of race, ethnicity, and racism continue to evolve Supports developing a value-centered identity, cultivating a dignity lens, and fostering mindsets of inquiry and compassion; explores the historical and contemporary effects of human agency, resilience, and more Rejects race essentialism and gender identity stereotypes; views gender and sex as distinct and recognizes that sex is binary; appreciates that explorations of sex and sexuality are unrelated to better understanding the experiences of ethnically minoritized groups and/or Ethnic Studies Proposes there are numerous minoritized ethnicities worthy of study; rejects the renaming of racial/ethnic groups without their consent in order to conform to gender identity ideology linguistic maneuvers

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