



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2022 Volume III: Ethnic Studies: Theory, Practice & Pedagogy

---

## Introduction

by Daniel Martinez HoSang

When many people think about the civil rights movement and historic struggles for racial justice in the United States, their attention turns to a set of familiar issues including policing, fair housing, fighting discrimination in the workplace, and desegregating schools. To be sure, all of these were important issues. But another central legacy of this era were the social movements led by college and high school students demanding changes in both what they were taught (curriculum) and how they were taught it (pedagogy).

In many ways, these efforts were part of a longer legacy, stretching back to the early 20th century, in which African American, Indigenous, Asian American, and Latinx communities insisted that the transformation of curriculum, pedagogy, and knowledge production was essential to achieve a more just, humane and equitable world.

Our seminar, “Ethnic Studies: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy” sought to build on these traditions. Ethnic Studies today refers to both course content in an array of subjects, including social studies, humanities, creative arts, and science and math education. It also describes an approach to teaching and learning that is collaborative, seeking to build relationships with students, communities, and social movements.

The seminar explored examples of Ethnic Studies approaches used by teachers across the country both historically and in the present. It drew on diverse sources—the writing of James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, the art of Faith Ringgold and Titus Kaphar, Chicanx music from Los Angeles, indigenous knowledge production and cultural life, queer intimacies, Critical Race Theory, and legacies of Eugenics and scientific racism—to explore the ways teachers can use cultural texts and primary materials in their pedagogy and practice.

Four talented New Haven teachers completed curriculum units in the seminar, representing a range of grade levels and subject areas.

“Voices of Power, Voices of Change: Narrative Writing in the English Language Arts Classroom” by Madeline Craig, a middle school English language arts and writing teacher, introduces a writing workshop model centered on students’ own experiences to explore diverse social issues. The unit helps students build fluency in reading, composition, and creative expression, but not by simply memorizing the formal “rules” of composition and grammar alone. Instead, it invites students to draw on their own experiences, insights, and imaginations to investigate the power of the written word to develop an ethical vision rooted in shared community issues.

Annie Lerew, a high school math educator, developed a 10-part curriculum unit for her ninth-grade Algebra I

course titled "Revealing Truth." The unit supports students in reflecting on their own mathematical stories and heritages and introducing them to the many diverse traditions of mathematical thinking and problem solving. As a result, students develop competence in core concepts in algebra by connecting mathematical reasoning to the wider social historical world.

Larissa Giordano, an upper elementary science teacher, developed her unit, "Race, Racism and Genetics" to introduce her students to basic concepts in genomics and human biology by exploring the ways that race is constructed as a social concept. In doing so, the unit disrupts many of the common sense and often unstated assumptions students carry that the race concept represents a "natural" or scientific way to classify human variation and difference.

Finally, lower elementary teacher Alison Smith's unit "Building Unity in New Haven within Lower Elementary Education," draws on the rich histories of community formation in the city of New Haven to invite students to reflect on their own families, histories, and visions for the common good. It emphasizes the long traditions of multiracial and multicultural engagement in this diverse city through critical literacy projects and community and family-based assignments.

Ethnic Studies has always been a field in motion, shaped by the ongoing and continuous forces of social progress and change; a broad tapestry weaved by many hands. These curriculum units contribute to this tradition by activating new sites of knowledge, intellectual curiosity, and social consciousness.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2022 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>