

"...Reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it"

- Paulo Freire, 2002 (philosopher)



How Our Current News Landscape Reiterates the Importance of a Relevant Cultural Education

The January 2023 murder of Tyre Nichols and the collective societal reckoning we have all experienced, brings Rising Advocates back to why our social platform was created.

What are the victims of police brutality telling us? There is no one answer, but the general way forward is clear: we must restructure the criminal justice and education systems within this country. We must give our children and society the tools necessary to cultivate peace, understanding, and create effective ways to deal with differences...

Welcome to the February 2023 edition of our Rising Advocates newsletter, where we're focusing on Black History Month, and how to implement a culturally diverse curriculum for today.

This month in particular, is a time to reflect on the contributions and achievements of Black Americans throughout history and acknowledge the ongoing social struggles for equity and justice.

One of the most pressing issues facing our education system today, is the continued struggle to improve the caliber of the curriculum taught within public schools. There is a direct correlation between what we fail to teach our children and how the Black population is viewed.

Far more than just a racial issue, police brutality incidents serve as a harsh reminder of the continued structural problems which exist in the justice systems of this country, and the urgent and continued need for reforms.

But we must also talk about how early culturally relevant curriculums, are essential for helping younger generations under the realities of this country, and the role they play.

In many states and school districts across the United States, Black history and culturally relevant experiences are only highlighted through themed months like Black History Month, or through individual school days dedicated to workshops on diversity and equity. This limited dedicated time to explore the past struggles of minorities /black community and the current ban in some states of Ethnic studies open some imperative questions about the scoop and practice to address these issues within the educational system. As the nations' schoolchildren are concentrated by districts where more than (75%) of students are either white or nonwhite. And race, socio-economic disparities accentuate segregation of children's of color. The need for "the critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color in the United States." It's imperative.

But along with implementing a culturally relevant curriculum within the classroom, it's also important to develop critical consciousness in educator training. As Dr. Tandra Jackson (University of Indiana) addresses in her 2021 article, "Internalized racism and the pursuit of cultural relevancy", to address internal racism, we must diversify the K-12 educator pipeline. A 2021 Pew Research report citing the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES), states that "eight-in-ten U.S. public school teachers (79%) identified as non-Hispanic white", and "fewer than one-in-ten teachers were either Black (7%), Hispanic (9%) or Asian American (2%)." This has a direct effect on the ways students make sense of their race and ethnicity, particularly in the process of developing their identity.

Research has also identified a causal relationship between culturally relevant education (operationalized as Ethnic Studies) and improvements in outcomes for Black and Latino students. These improvements can include increased attendance, improved GPA, fewer disciplinary infractions, and higher standardized test scores (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017). Across the country, advocates are working to ensure K-12 students have the opportunity to take ethnic studies courses. While the benefits of ethnic studies are clear, the path forward remains murky—especially in hostile states. Recently, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, who oppose to multicultural education signed a bill banning "ethnic studies" in elementary and secondary schools, stating that ES teach students to see themselves as oppressed victims of racist structural forces.

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Incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) into a classroom curriculum in a meaningful and ongoing manner can help students foster a sense of identity and pride in their cultural heritage. This can not only lead to a more positive school environment, where students feel valued and respected, regardless of their cultural background but also promote inclusivity, bridge the achievement gap, and fosters a sense of identity cultural pride for students.

Ethnic studies helps students make sense of our history and validate Black and Indigenous struggles with empathy confirming that their cultures matter.

Rising Advocates join the continuing work of teachers, activists, and community coalitions who advocate for enhancing ethnic studies within mainstream education.

Meaningful integration helps promote inclusivity, bridge the achievement gap, and fosters a sense of identity cultural pride for students. Doing so can help promote a more inclusive and understanding school environment for all students.

Best regards,
Cintia Alfonso Fior

