

Ethnic Studies in the United States

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What is the current status of the ethnic studies introduced in school systems in recent years? This survey analyzes various aspects of these studies and draws conclusions as to their availability and significance.

WHAT do we know of one another, the peoples of the United States? Do we have a shared experience which binds us as a nation? In a sense we do, but in a larger sense we are many peoples with many experiences. If we are to come to know and appreciate one another, an effort must be made to share the experiences that are not common.

Many educators, aware of the fact of cultural pluralism in this country and, further, recognizing that it is within their classrooms that the mortar of citizenship which binds a nation together is laid, have begun programs of ethnic studies. By so doing they attempt to provide mechanisms for cross-cultural and, ultimately, general human understanding.

It is no secret that residential patterns

in this country are such that we are, by and large, a land that is segregated along lines of color and culture. This places a heavy burden upon the schools of a nation whose ideals are stated in democratic terms. Liberty, justice, and equality of opportunity are values which should encompass the total of a culturally diverse population. If imbalances exist in the broader society, a school committed to these values must endeavor, as best it can, to correct this by producing in its students a regard for the rights of others and a desire that these values be upheld.

Many schools are accepting this burden by, among other things, providing curricula aimed at understanding our nation through knowledge of its peoples. It is reasoned that without such programs, and in the absence of direct cross-cultural contact, it would be difficult for our young people to come to know and appreciate the qualities and contributions of each of the ethnic groups represented in our society.

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Number of Years	Number of Districts	%
Less than 1 year	9	3.1
1 Year	18	6.3
2 Years	46	16.0
3 Years ^a	57	19.8
4 Years ^{a, b}	52	18.1
5 Years	53	18.4
6 Years	15	5.2
7 Years	9	3.1
8 Years	9	3.1
9 Years	4	1.4
10 Years	12	4.2
No Response	4	1.4

^a Mean
^b Median
^c Mode

Table 1. Length of Operation of Programs of Districts Reporting Ethnic Studies Curricula (N = 288)

Most Programs Are New

In an effort to discover just what the school districts of the United States are doing in the area of ethnic studies, the 715 school districts in the nation which serve student populations of ten thousand or more were surveyed. This research was conducted during the spring and summer of 1974 with partial support provided by the Department of Educational Studies and Services at

Number of Students	Number of Districts	%
Fewer than 100	30	10.4
101 - 200	37	12.8
201 - 300	26	9.0
301 - 400	14	4.9
401 - 500	12	4.2
501 - 600	5	1.7
601 - 700	1	0.3
701 - 800	4	1.4
801 - 900	2	0.7
901 - 1000 ^b	14	4.9
1001 - 2000	20	6.9
2001 - 3000	11	3.8
3001 - 4000 ^a	8	2.8
4001 - 5000	7	2.4
5001 - 6000	7	2.4
6001 - 7000	7	2.4
7001 - 8000	3	1.0
8001 - 9000	5	1.7
9001 - 10,000	6	2.1
More than 10,000 ^c	56	19.4
No Response	13	4.5

^a Mean
^b Median
^c Mode

Table 2. Students Participating in Programs of Districts Reporting Ethnic Studies Curricula (N = 288)

Bloomsburg State College (Pennsylvania) and with the assistance of the Computer Services Center at that institution.

Of the 715 school districts surveyed, 288 or 40% reported having ethnic studies curricula. By and large, those districts having ethnic studies curricula have not had them long. 81.7% of the programs have been in

operation for five years or less, with the average at slightly under four years. This corresponds to the 4.2% which have been engaged in ethnic studies for ten years or more (see Table 1).

The number of students per district participating in the ethnic studies programs shows great variation. 10.4% of the districts have fewer than 100 students involved while 19.4% have more than 10,000 participating. The average number of students per district engaged in ethnic studies is 3,370, although the median figure of 950 is considerably lower (see Table 2).

A large proportion (80.9%) report community involvement of some type in their ethnic studies programs (see Table 3). The

Type of Community Involvement	Number of Districts	%
Use of Community Resources	215	74.7
Use of Human Resources in the Community	201	69.8
Interaction With Community Organizations	159	55.2
Community Involvement in Curriculum Planning	120	41.4
Study of the Community	116	40.3
Community Based Instructional Program	46	16.0

Table 3. Extent and Type of Community Involvement in Programs of Districts Reporting Ethnic Studies Curricula (N = 288)

types of community involvement include: the use of community resources (74.7%); the use of human resources in the community (69.8%); interaction with community organizations (55.2%); community involvement in curriculum planning (41.4%); study of the community (40.3%); and a community based instructional program (16%).

Group	Number of Districts	% Including Group in Program	Total U.S. Population (1970) Census
Black American	265	92.0	22,600,000
Mexican American	203	70.5	5,023,000
Native American	193	67.0	792,730
Japanese American	142	49.3	591,290
Chinese American	124	43.1	435,062
Puerto Rican	99	34.4	1,450,000
Central or South American	95	33.0	501,000
Italian American	90	31.3	5,733,000
German American	86	29.9	25,661,000
Irish American	85	29.5	16,325,000
English (including Scotch & Welsh) American	81	28.1	31,006,000
Other Hispanic American	78	27.1	1,356,000
French American	75	26.0	5,189,000
Polish American	72	25.0	4,941,000
Cuban American	63	21.9	626,000
Russian American	59	20.5	2,132,000
Filipino American	46	16.0	343,060

Table 4. Cultural Groups Studied by Districts Reporting Ethnic Studies Curricula (N = 288)

Black Americans are the most widely studied cultural group in school districts reporting ethnic studies programs. 92% of these districts include Blacks in their ethnic studies curricula (see Table 4). The next two most widely studied groups are Mexican Americans (70.5%) and Native Americans (67%).

Ethnic studies in the public school districts of the United States having student populations of 10,000 or more most often concern themselves with the history of the cultural group studied. While 94.8% include history in their ethnic studies curricula, 82.6% delve into social customs, and 71.5% examine the relationships between culture and personality (see Table 5).

The results of this survey reveal that the major growth in the adoption of ethnic studies curricula among schools serving student populations of 10,000 or more has occurred in the past five years. The bulk of these programs was begun between 1969 and 1972, with fewer programs being initiated in the past two years. With only 40% of the 715 school districts queried reporting ethnic studies curricula, it is important that these declining figures do not represent a trend.

Also, in only a small proportion of the districts queried are all or most of the student populations touched by ethnic studies. If we are to gain an understanding of the ways of living of the peoples who populate our land and come to appreciate the contributions made by each of these groups, a broader proportion of our students should come into contact with information and experiences pertaining to our diverse cultures.

Community Enrichment

A large proportion of the ethnic studies programs reach into their communities and the communities of others for enrichment. This, of course, is the logical extension of curricula which focus on people. Going to the people for involvement in curriculum building, utilizing the attributes of those in the community who wish to participate, bringing students into the community and

Element	Number of Districts	% Including Element in Program
History	273	94.8
Social Customs	238	82.6
Culture and Personality	206	71.5
Values	198	68.8
Attitudes	185	64.2
Material Culture	182	63.2
Social Organization	180	62.5
Social Structure	176	61.1
Beliefs	170	59.0
Religion	161	55.9
Language	145	50.3
Physical Characteristics	129	44.8
Kinship Structure	87	30.2
Dialect	76	26.4
Body Language	54	18.8

Table 5. Elements Included in Programs of Districts Reporting Ethnic Studies Curricula (N = 288)

the community into the school, breathes life and humanity into the programs.

The population data in Table 4 lend credence to the statement that we are a nation of minorities. It follows that ethnic studies, if they are to provide understanding which is national in scope, should, during a child's twelve years of schooling, deal with all ethnic groups whether represented in the local community or not.

Time is, of course, limited and the emphasis upon ethnic history by school districts offering ethnic studies curricula is defensible. Knowledge of how and why ethnic groups came or were brought to this land and resultant settlement patterns provides a foundation for understanding the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of today. Most schools engaged in ethnic studies appear to provide a broad sociocultural view as well. Although there is a growing body of data on the cultural foundations of kinesics and dialect, these data are fairly new.

It appears that among our largest school districts there is a core of concern for inter-ethnic understanding as exemplified by the inclusion of ethnic studies in their curricula. Some seem to be committed to the inclusion of a broad scope of the peoples of the United States in their programs. Many districts afford students the opportunity to deal with the historical and sociocultural issues involved. The tragedy is that the core of concern represents an apparent minority of the school districts serving student populations of ten thousand or more and that these programs have been so long in coming. □

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