

# Community responsive literacies: the development of the Ethnic Studies Praxis Story Plot

Community  
responsive  
literacies

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Momentum around the institutionalization of Ethnic Studies in US K-12 classrooms is increasing. Opponents have argued that Ethnic Studies does not challenge students academically and prepare them for high stakes testing (Planas, 2012; Sanchez, 2007). Conversely, research continues to show ways Ethnic Studies contribute to students' academic achievement, especially for students from marginalized and vulnerable communities (Cabrerá *et al.*, 2014; Halagao, 2010; Tintiangco-Cubales *et al.*, 2015). This study aims to demonstrate the possibilities and potential of Ethnic Studies-framed tools for English and Language arts teachers. This moment concerning Ethnic Studies in schools illuminates an important opportunity to demonstrate how Ethnic Studies-framed tools positively affect learning mainstream school content, namely, English and Language Arts. The authors consider the following point: To what extent can Ethnic Studies-framed tools affect approaches for learning English, writing and reading while simultaneously being responsive to a community's needs? The authors maintain the importance of such tools that exist in how they support the development of community responsive literacies (CRLs).

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper examines CRLs through the Ethnic Studies Praxis Story Plot (ESPSP). The authors begin by exploring the development of the ESPSP, first used in Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP), an innovative K-college Ethnic Studies teaching pipeline. Next, the authors examine each coordinate of the ESPSP, examining their purpose, theoretical underpinnings and ways the ESPSP offers nuanced approaches for learning literacies.

**Findings** – The authors then discuss how CRLs emerged to support PEP teachers and students' reading and writing skills using the ESPSP.

**Originality/value** – Finally, the authors learn from students' experiences with the ESPSP and offer implications for English and Language Arts teachers in the pursuit of teaching and serving students in more socially just and community responsive ways.

**Keywords** Identity, Critical literacy, Social justice, Writing, Teaching literature, Ethnic Studies

**Paper type** Research paper



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## Introduction

Momentum around the institutionalization of Ethnic Studies in US K-12 classrooms is gaining widespread attention. Opponents such as Arizona's Attorney General Tom Thorne and former state superintendent of public instruction John Hupenthal have

argued that Ethnic Studies does not academically challenge students and prepare them for high stakes testing (Planas, 2012; Sanchez, 2007). Conversely, research continues to show that Ethnic Studies contributes to the improvement of students' academic abilities, especially for students from marginalized and vulnerable communities (Cabrera *et al.*, 2014; Dee and Penner, 2016; Halagao, 2010; Tintiango-Cubales *et al.*, 2015). As Ethnic Studies in public schools is becoming increasingly common, several studies connecting Ethnic Studies and Education have emerged (Cabrera *et al.*, 2014; Cammarota, 2007; Daus-Magbual, 2010; Ríos *et al.*, 2015). A recent study out of Stanford University found that Ethnic Studies classes were significant sources of support for students designated "at-risk". Of the ninth graders in their sample, 21 per cent increased their attendance, GPA was raised by 1.4 grade points overall and credits earned were raised by 23 points (Dee and Penner, 2016). Indeed, the important work on Ethnic Studies' impact on students continues to be documented. Considering the dearth of research focused on Ethnic Studies' contributions to student learning and competencies, this paper offers an examination of how Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP) developed critical literacy pedagogies and curricula that teach youth how to read the word and the world (Freire, 1985).

In the San Francisco Bay Area, central to the institutionalization of Ethnic Studies is the collective action and leadership of PEP. PEP is an Ethnic Studies teaching pipeline that connects undergraduate and graduate students interested in the field of education to local San Francisco public schools. In February 2010, PEP along with several community-based organizations galvanized support of students, teachers, families and community members to demand San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) pilot Ethnic Studies in five high schools – the Board unanimously passed their resolution. Five years later, a coalition of community organizations, including PEP, successfully organized to solidify SFUSD's unanimous vote to institutionalize Ethnic Studies in all SFUSD schools.

Since 2001, PEP has created elementary to college Ethnic Studies curricula that are relevant and responsive to the local communities it serves. In addition to PEP's influence on educational policies and practices, much of PEP's curricula have been instrumental in the foundation of Ethnic Studies-framed curricula adopted in public schools throughout California. Therefore, this particular moment illuminates an important opportunity to demonstrate how Ethnic Studies-framed tools positively affect learning mainstream school content, namely, English and Language Arts (NCTE, 2016). The urgency with which Ethnic Studies becomes integrated into curricula moves us to consider:

- Q1. How does learning Ethnic Studies develop multiple forms of literacy, including reading and writing both the word and the world (Freire, 1985)? And
- Q2. To what extent can Ethnic Studies-framed tools affect approaches for learning language, writing and reading while simultaneously being responsive to a community's needs?

This collaborative paper presents PEP's development of the Ethnic Studies Praxis Story Plot (ESPSP), an innovative literacy tool that encourages students' learning, writing, reading and acting in their world. This piece begins by sharing the emergence of the ESPSP and offers its central theoretical orientations. Insights for community responsive literacies (CRLs) are connected to critical literacy frameworks followed by a detailed description of each of the ESPSP coordinates. Dee and Penner's study (2016) and the

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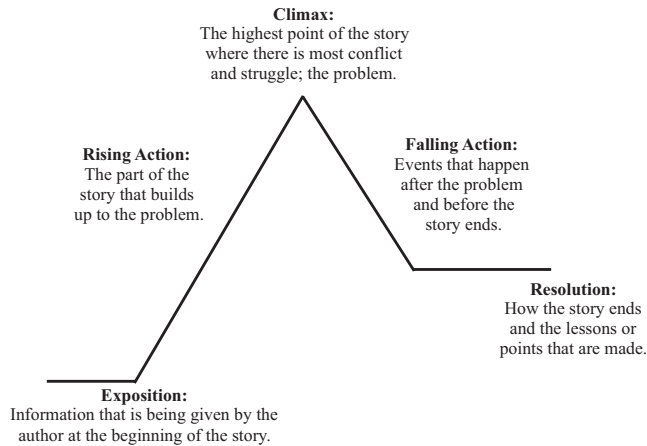
work of *Cabrera et al. (2014)* signal quantitative data in line with the body of research demonstrating how Ethnic Studies positively affects student learning, yet much of the focus has been on secondary classrooms and only a few scholars have examined Ethnic Studies for elementary students (*Valdez, 2015*). Drawing from the research and teaching practice of co-author Lopez, this paper presents ways the ESPSP was used to develop students' literacies in an elementary classroom. The conclusion provides implications for the utility of the ESPSP and how it has been piloted in diverse spaces by students and teachers.

### **Development of the Pin@y educational partnerships and the Ethnic Studies Praxis Story Plot**

Since its inception, PEP has transformed into a space dedicated to build Filipina/o American curriculum and research, connect services for students to self-actualize and reach their academic and personal goals and provide practical, creative and purposeful training for future social justice educators. Each year, PEP has 60 volunteer teacher apprentices teach Ethnic Studies in elementary, middle and high schools in SFUSD, including courses at City College of San Francisco, Skyline College and University of San Francisco. The context in which PEP was birthed include high numbers of Filipina/o and Filipina/o American students experiencing push-out, substance abuse, violence and mental health issues (*Buenavista, 2010; Halagao, 2010; Maramba, 2008; Teranishi, 2002; Wolf, 1997*). PEP's purpose became grounded in responding to the needs and challenges of the students, families and communities it serves. PEP has been successful in meeting these needs through its triadic partnerships linking the university, public schools and community in San Francisco. More specifically, PEP partners with the Asian American Studies Department and the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, SFUSD public schools and the Filipino Community Center, located in the Excelsior District of San Francisco, to provide access to numerous services in the PEP community. PEP has also fostered an intergenerational network of community responsive educators who are now serving youth locally and across the nation.

During a collaborative lesson planning session focused on Filipino folktales, authors Curammeng, Lopez and Tintiangco-Cubales were discussing ways to segment readings so that PEP students would understand the morals and lessons the folktales were trying to teach. For our students, these morals and lessons provided points through which the critical content of the day would be referenced. The idea came about to use the Conventional Story Plot (*Figure 1*) – popularized by German writer Gustav Freytag – to outline the folktales in hopes of students being able to better comprehend the story. After reading and discussing the folktales, the authors of this article realized that each of the folktales presented a problem that was essential for students to understand. Which is to say, the folktales offered insight toward understanding culture and a medium through which students could create a counter-narrative. After discussing ways to better engage students with the folktales in critical ways, the dialogue shifted to reflect upon the roots of the oppression in the stories. This then led into a discussion about tensions and trauma characters experience and what leads up to the trauma. In each of the stories, there was a need to consider the characters' acts of resistance and how it led to resolutions and in some cases revolutions at the end of each story. This process of examining closely the meaning of folktales led to considering possible applications in the lives of the students. In essence, creating a way to problem solve with

**Figure 1.**  
Conventional story  
plot



the stories could be transferred into a problem-solving process to address the students' real life problems (Camangian, 2010; Ríos, 2013; Halagao, 2013, 2004). After productive and thoughtful discussion on the folktales, there was a reevaluation of the lesson plan, and we decided that there was a need for the creation of a counter plot to the widely used conventional story plot. The counter plot, which we named the ESPSP, allowed for a better way to comprehend folktales and think critically about their possible impact and application in the lives of students. The creation of the ESPSP also marked the beginning of what we refer to as CRLs.

### Community responsive literacies

Illiteracy not only threatens the economic order of a society, it also constitutes a profound injustice [...] In our analysis, literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of practices that functions to either empower and disempower people. In the larger sense, literacy is analyzed according to whether it serves to reproduce existing social formation or serves as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and emancipatory change. (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 8)

What does literacy look like when influenced by Ethnic Studies? More specifically, how might we imagine an Ethnic Studies literacy? The central purpose of Ethnic Studies is rooted in the Third World Liberation Front movement, decolonization, self-determination and anti-racism (Ferguson, 2012; Maeda, 2009; Murase, 1976; Omatsu, 2003). Ethnic Studies emerged across higher education institutions, because of its investment in providing access to a quality education that was relevant to the experiences of students of color. Ethnic Studies made explicit the centrality of community as a site for learning, organizing and activism (Tintiango-Cubales *et al.*, 2015). Ethnic Studies provides an education that represents and serves the unique needs of marginalized communities, those that are often racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse. It is important to stress, however, that community contexts differ across geographic locations, vary because of diverse immigration patterns and are influenced by numerous sociopolitical forces. Which is to say, there is no single way to approach teaching youth of color from diverse communities. Although community cultural wealth

(Yosso, 2005) might look similar for young people attending urban schools, each school has its own context and culture that needs to be researched prior to prescribing any intervention, even an Ethnic Studies curriculum. This is where CRLs begin, by responding to the specific needs and contexts that communities possess and vigorously seeking out what Freire and Macedo (1987) describe in the epigraph above as literacy that is at once “democratic” and in service of “emancipatory change”.

Although Ethnic Studies is sometimes positioned in opposition to academic learning (Cabrera *et al.*, 2013; Delgado, 2013), we maintain that Ethnic Studies builds CRLs which strengthen conventional literacy (reading, writing and numeracy) of students (Gee, 2001; Hull *et al.*, 2003; Jocson, 2008) while also building students multiple literacies to read and transform their lives and their communities. CRLs then can be understood as learning to read and write while developing students’ abilities to identify and respond to a community’s needs as change agents and activists. CRLs are informed by what Gutiérrez (2008, p. 148) described as “sociocritical literacy” that “historicizes every day and institutional literacy practices and texts and reframes them as powerful tools oriented toward critical social thought”. These practices challenge “ideological literacy” as Camangian (2013) has described, therefore developing a “corrective lens to counteract myopia” (Francia and Gamalinda, 1996).

CRLs might also be considered to follow an “Othered critical tradition” as Morrell (2008, p. 63) proposed, that urges the creation of “learning spaces that would fundamentally alter the way that literacy education is conceived and practiced in urban classrooms across the country” and broadens the canon to include anti-colonial, marginalized and othered philosophical traditions. CRLs share resonance with “literacies of power” that develop academic literacies, self-efficacy and collective action, as Cati de los Rios *et al.* (2017) have described. CRLs encourage students’ critical consciousness by “connecting classroom learning with students’ home and community life, and helping students learn to analyze and act on community needs” (Tintiango-Cubales *et al.*, 2015, p. 115). Taken together, the ideas, research and theoretical underpinnings of CRLs gesture toward resolving the profound injustice of illiteracy by directly responding with a cadre of literacies tethered to principles of social justice, Ethnic Studies and community responsiveness.

Important to our understanding of youth literacies is the manner in which community responsiveness, social justice and Ethnic Studies are inextricably linked. This triad of interests framing our approach to youth literacies captures the significance of acknowledging “multiliteracies” of young people today (The New London Group, 1996). We define CRLs as literacies that:

- include an Ethnic Studies lens “grounded in critical consciousness, critical thinking” and are “authentic and responsive to local communities” (San Francisco Ethnic Studies Collective, 2015); and
- draw from community responsive pedagogies – pedagogies that include “developing critical consciousness, developing agency through direct community experience, and growing transformative leaders” (Tintiango-Cubales *et al.*, 2015).

CRLs go beyond teaching students to simply read and write, rather build students’ abilities and capacities to read and transform their worlds (Freire and Macedo, 1987). As Freire (1985, p. 18) describes in his interview with NCTE:

There is a permanent movement back and forth between “reading” reality and reading words [...] reading the word is not only preceded by reading the world, but also by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it.

In Ethnic Studies, CRLs are about reading and writing of the word, through the reading and writing of the world.

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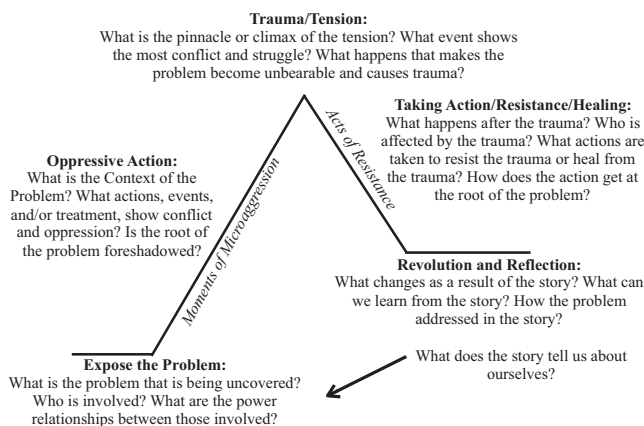
### The Ethnic Studies Praxis Story Plot

Continuing to build on Freire’s work, the concept of praxis is derived from his meditations around dialogic processes. Praxis or the embodiment of theory into action is based upon critical reflection and dialogue with the aim of social transformation. [Duncan-Andrade and Morrell’s \(2008\)](#) application of Freirean praxis is described as a process through which teachers and students commit to liberatory education, take action and reflect on the entire process. That is, action and reflection become the manifestation of what Freire has described as, “reading the word and the world” ([Freire and Macedo, 1987](#)). We connect praxis as exemplified through [Duncan-Andrade and Morrell’s \(2008\)](#) work in urban schools with the Ethnic Studies dimension of the ESPSP. More specifically, the ESPSP urges teachers to demonstrate how the stories students read can be applied to their lived realities, developing students’ abilities to write and identify the underlying assumptions and dominant narratives these stories proffer. Said differently, the ESPSP begins with where students are at, encourages them to make connections to power and interrogates relationships and narratives that maintain such power. The ESPSP is critical of dominant narratives, challenges majoritarian stories against what counter-stories and marginalized voices may be missing and encourages students to reflect on how stories connect to their lives. Following the lead of [Morrell \(2008, p. 238\)](#), the ESPSP taps into the “everyday experiences, the needs and desires of the students in particular classrooms, at particular moments, and within particular geographical, cultural and economic contexts”. In this way, students’ lives and communities become rich texts for making connections to content and skills. The ESPSP works to develop youth literacies, most salient through the CRLs described above, by remaining committed to the social justice values of Ethnic Studies.

The ESPSP ([Figure 2](#)) follows a praxis-oriented trajectory and comes full circle to engage in critical reflection. We refer to each point of the ESPSP as coordinates, electing this word to capture both the location along the ESPSP and metaphoric sense of capturing the resonances found within stories. There are five main coordinates that form the ESPSP.

#### *Expose the problem*

The ESPSP begins with developing students’ abilities to learn about and analyze power, structures and systems that frame the main problem(s) of a story. Although a traditional story plot encourages students to learn and identify single characters such as the antagonist and protagonist, the problem becomes individualized, obscuring larger causes for oppression and power. Ethnic Studies exposes the problem from a systemic and structural approach while also analyzing how histories affect material conditions that are oftentimes difficult to identify, thus the act of exposing. To facilitate students’ ability to understand this coordinate of the ESPSP, teachers must support students’ learning of systems such as white supremacy, imperialism and colonialism ([Tintiango-Cubales and Curammeng, 2016](#)). In this way, students and teachers engage



**Figure 2.**  
ESPSP

with the first stage of Freire's (1970) problem-posing methodology, identifying and naming the problem. Students become active agents engaged in naming, analyzing and exposing what they consider as the main problem(s). Exposing the problem asks:

- What is the problem that is being uncovered?
- Who is involved?
- What are the power relationships between those involved?

### *Oppressive action*

The next coordinate of the ESPSP incorporates students' abilities to identify oppressive actions within stories. The oppressive action coordinate advances the idea that with an exposed set of problems, stories are shaped by oppressive actions leading to significant trauma or tension. This coordinate is important, as it focuses on students' learning of the often non-explicit actions that produce or reproduce oppression and reinforce power. Students are able to critically assess and interrogate the author's utility of literary devices in developing the oppressive actions that are happening to or by the characters. This coordinate asks the reader or writer to think deeply about what causes the oppressive action and where it fits within a larger systemic hegemony. Oppressive action asks:

- What is the context of the problem?
- What actions, events and/or treatment show conflict and oppression?
- Is the root of the problem foreshadowed?

Central to understanding oppression is the idea that it is not a singular event and it is not separate from systems of power. The ESPSP supports moving students' thinking around oppression from being an individualized occurrence to again being part and parcel to systemic regimes of power. Present throughout the ESPSP and noticeable in this plane are what we call "Moments of Microaggression" – forms of systemic everyday oppression used to maintain power from those at the margins, most often people of color. Building off Solórzano's and Delgado's (2001) work on racial and gendered microaggressions, we maintain that "moments of microaggression" are subtle, layered

and cumulative assaults. These assaults arrive in stories by way of racial battle fatigue (Smith *et al.*, 2011) as soul wounds (Duran, 2006), as the effects from educational social toxins (Akorn, 2011) and through living historical trauma (Brave Heart, 2003). As a literacy tool, moments of microaggression and the ESPSP channels students' knowledge of oppression to better understand more fully how and where oppression occurs in both the reading and writing of stories and the lives of young readers.

#### *Trauma/tension*

The next coordinate of the ESPSP relates to trauma/tension. Within the frame of Ethnic Studies, marginalized histories have been impacted by trauma and, as a result, have had profound effects on the ways we live and learn. The duality of trauma/tension exists to suggest that not all trauma is tenuous and not all tensions are traumatic. What is important, however, is for students to be able to identify how this coordinate is instructive for detailing points through which trauma/tension "haunts" characters, contexts and collisions from the previous coordinates. In this way, the haunting characteristic of trauma/tension captures what Gordon (2008, p. 63) has discussed as "a special way of knowing what happened or is happening". Relatedly, trauma/tension can be understood through Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart's (2003, p. 7) definition as "the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations". We see the cumulation of trauma/tension in scholarship arguing for supporting young people to move "from coping to hoping" (Camangian, 2015) and as a source for radical healing (Ginwright, 2015). Trauma/tension asks:

- What is the pinnacle or climax of the tension?
- What event shows the most conflict and struggle?
- What happens that makes the problem become unbearable and causes trauma?

#### *Taking action/resistance/healing*

The ESPSP takes into account the ways trauma and students' experiences with and understandings of trauma affects their reading and writing practices. An essential component of CRLs acknowledges that too often, students' trauma are separated from their learning. This coordinate develops students' ability to identify the importance of taking action, resistance and healing as central and a multi-pronged approach to addressing trauma or what Strobel (2001) has referred to as "suturing separated selves". At the previous coordinate, students learn to identify trauma, this point of the ESPSP encourages students to think: what next? Although the stories we read may mirror tensions we have experienced, the agentive nature of the ESPSP stresses the importance of reading and writing stories for resistance. This coordinate allows students to think about productive ways to respond and take action on a path toward healing. Taking action/resistance/healing asks:

- What happens after the trauma?
- Who is affected by the trauma?
- How does the action get at the root of the problem?

Paths toward healing and taking action contain what we have named "Acts of Resistance" – the everyday, cumulative ways students of color enact resistance (Cammarota and Fine, 2010; Solórzano and Delgado, 2001). Acts of Resistance draw



from Waldram's (2014) work with Aboriginal communities. He offers: "healing is a process, not an event". Waldram continues, "the healing journey involves the reparation of damages caused by colonial processes in a way that accentuates both individual agency and collective responsibility" (Waldram, 2014, p. 377). As a literacy tool, this coordinate and the ESPSP as a whole embodies what Freire and Macedo (1987, p. 106) referred to as "a weapon of resistance to the dominance of standard language" and the dominance of majoritarian narratives and standardized storytelling. In so doing, students connect their lived realities to what is and is not present in the stories they are reading.

### *Revolution and reflection*

What makes the ESPSP especially unique is the last coordinate, which asks, "What does the story tell us about ourselves?" After taking time to realize the change and reflect on experiences in the story, the last coordinate allows the student to find deeper connections. Students are able to reflect on their world and their history by identifying instances where they have seen similar situations occur. Additionally, students can make connections to current events and where they continue to see these oppressive situations take place in their world. Students bring the situations closer by making connections to how the story affects their community and the people within them. It also urges them to exercise their position as agents of change. Last, students look deeper at themselves, how the situations have affected them, what they learned and how they can grow from it. The collective and communal aspect of this point of reflection is a central principle of Ethnic Studies education. Therefore, the collective "ourselves" empowers students to think more thoughtfully of themselves in relation to the world but, more importantly, in relation to those who are a part of their community.

Drawing from Cooper's (2006) work on the importance of reflection for students, the ESPSP suggests three levels of reflection. In the ESPSP, the three levels of reflection include:

- (1) *Reflecting the world*: The student looks back to events in their world that connect to the story, whether they be current events or historical events. This point of reflection asks, "Where have you seen similar situations of oppression, trauma, resistance, and revolution in your world?"
- (2) *Reflecting the community*: Being that the collective and communal aspect of reflection is a central principle in Ethnic Studies, reflecting on community is crucial to learning about ourselves. It is seeing parallels of injustice and oppression in the story connected to communities and creating ways to resist. During this reflection, students are asked, "How does the story connect to your community? What role do you play in your community? How can you be an agent of change?"
- (3) *Reflecting the self*: Through the ESPSP, students do not just learn about events in the story or practice a literacy strategy, rather, they learn about themselves by asking, "What have you learned about yourself from reading (or writing) the story?" and "What does the story tell you about yourself?"

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**Learning from elementary students' work with the Ethnic Studies Praxis Story Plot**

Students are regularly taught through a conventional story plot to analyze and comprehend stories. The ESPSP, however, is a counter method used to analyze a story that allows students to think more deeply about the characters and settings based off of the questions that are asked and learn about themselves. In what follows, we share the experiences of coauthor Lopez and her students on the ways the ESPSP affected their learning of CRLs. Data presented here draw from participatory action research methods (Cammarota, 2007; Morrell, 2006), coauthor Lopez's ethnographic work (Arias, 2008; Camangian, 2011; Reed-Danahay, 2009) and reflections in an elementary school classroom in San Francisco. Specifically, we take into account field notes, interviews with students and analyses of student work. We recognize the significance of Lopez's critical insights as a teacher-researcher and were both intentional and systematic with research design and site selection (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009; Simon and Campano, 2013). Lopez's class was made up of 32 fourth and fifth grade students. The school site, Al Robles Elementary School, serves primarily immigrant families of color in a predominantly working-class neighborhood. The school is made up of about 95 per cent students of color and 58 per cent teachers of color. Unique to the school site are the culturally relevant curricula offered throughout the school's programs. PEP is also housed at Al Robles Elementary School[1]. Several of the students in this study are also PEP students, which demonstrates the importance of Ethnic Studies throughout their daily learning. The study consisted of a year-long social studies block of coauthor Lopez's teaching; here, we focus on her unit introducing autoethnography, literacy and writing all through her adaptation of the ESPSP. Students included in this section were fourth graders and one fifth grader, all are Filipina/o and Filipina/o American.

***Lakas* and community responsive reading and writing**

In a six-week unit themed around oppression, students used the ESPSP as a literary strategy tool that guided them through a unit entitled "3 I's of Oppression -Institutional, Interpersonal, and Internalized Oppression". To the students, oppression was defined as cruel and unfair treatment over a long period of time. The teaching of the concept of oppression continued through a children's book written by Filipino American poet and activist, Anthony D. Robles, entitled *Lakas and the Makibaka Hotel* (Robles, 2006). *Lakas* is a story about a little boy named Lakas, Tagalog for strength, that explores his vibrant community and meets friends who are experiencing various forms of oppression. Students read *Lakas* multiple times, first mapping out with a partner major points along a conventional story plot outline. Students were then introduced to the ESPSP and learned main concepts for each of the coordinates. Students re-read *Lakas* through the lens of the ESPSP. To further historicize and make connections to their communities, students were given additional resources to build the context for *Lakas*. For example, students read about the history of Asian Americans who were evicted from the International Hotel (I-Hotel) in San Francisco and the movement that the community engaged to rebuild the I-Hotel. Students read a news article "The I-Hotel Rises Again" (Estrella, 2005 which described the establishment of a new I-Hotel offering affordable housing to low-income and senior occupants. Last, students ended the week by watching the documentary *The Fall of the I-Hotel* (1983), which contained footage of the violent eviction and intergenerational resistance of community members and I-Hotel

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tenants (Choy, 1983). These texts coupled with the ESPSP reading of *Lakas* brought Robles' story and characters to life and in many ways resonated with students because of shared experiences that *Lakas* and his friends experienced.

To support students in the writing process, the students were given an outline of the ESPSP where they outlined their autoethnography. Guided by principles of participatory action research (Camarota and Fine, 2010), our analyses were co-constructed and generated collectively. We were explicit with keeping in mind the importance of reflection and action throughout the data analysis process. Data analysis included identifying key points in the ESPSP and determining how, if at all, students' experiences touched upon the various coordinates in the ESPSP. Our analysis yielded three major themes that frame the findings of this study:

- (1) joy in reading and writing;
- (2) critical reflection through critical literacy; and
- (3) CRL as agency and action.

We arrived at these three themes, because of what author Lopez observed in her students, analysis of students' work that developed critical literacy and our own interpretations of students tapping into their agentive nature to move toward action.

*Joy in reading and writing:* Throughout the study, students shared they enjoyed reading and writing, especially when the students had a choice in selecting what to read. They also responded well when what they read and wrote about subjects that mattered to them or reminded them of themselves and people they know. This finding is in line with existing research that suggests that although some of the Filipino American students struggled with literacy, this approach produced positive experiences (Cabrera *et al.*, 2014; Dee and Penner, 2016). The authors' field notes detail observations that described how the ESPSP "taught students how to read the world better" because of the "twin-text strategy that takes a non-fiction text and fiction text and seeing that it [experiences] actually does happen". Because the students were able to make connections with fictional texts to their own lives and communities, the students were more engaged in both reading and writing. Co-author Lopez stated:

Students were able to name other instances like gentrification or when they had to leave their homes, evictions, them seeing evictions happening in their family or with others that they know. Which allowed for making personal connections to what they're reading and learning.

This reflection presents insights for how a CRL approach and the ESPSP encourage incredibly deep, analytical, critical thinking skills apparent in students' engagement with reading and writing. Moreover, all students in this study expressed that they had positive experiences with literacy. Although some of the students confidently quantified their positive experiences by their reading level or how fast they read, the following students were able to express and elaborate on the joy they had with reading and writing. For example, Justin shared that he "really enjoys reading" and he "reads when he has nothing else to do". Additionally, Justin explained that writing "is fun when [he] gets to write what's on his mind". Justin compared his experience with the ESPSP to a previous one where the teacher gave the students a specific opinion to write about. Justin struggled with this, because he "had something on [his] mind but [his] teacher says something else. It made it really hard". With ESPSP, Justin was able to integrate his real life experiences in his writing. Similarly, Roxanne shared how she likes reading

especially instances where she “really [gets] into a book and [starts] laughing out loud”. As for writing, Roxanne says that she enjoys “writing about [her] own perspectives and [own] experiences”. Just like Justin, challenges emerged for Roxanne when a topic was given to her and says that she had negative experiences. She struggles with literacy when she “doesn’t know the topic or doesn’t know what to write about”. For Justin, Roxanne and their classmates, being engaged in the readings was a result of the readings being relevant to their experiences. The ESPSP supported the critical analysis they needed to connect the text to their lives. Although some students may not have had the exact experiences displayed in the stories and articles, reading about Filipina/o Americans and people of color allowed them to find joy, because they were able to identify and make connections to the experiences they were reading. *Lakas* piqued students’ interests because the cover was a person of color. Students were excited because they saw that the book was written in English and translated in Tagalog. For the student participants, this excited them, because it was rare to see Filipina/o Americans in children’s books, let alone see their language in a classroom text.

*Critical reflection through literacy:* The “3 I’s of Oppression” unit utilized the ESPSP to scaffold students’ writing of their autoethnographies. This writing assignment was effective, because it moved “students toward a more personally reflective and culturally empowering education” (Camangian, 2011). In Theresa’s autoethnography, she described herself as a quiet and soft-spoken girl. Theresa, the only participant born in the Philippines, immigrated to the USA with her family at the age of seven. When immigrating here, she entered Sorro Elementary School as a second grader. Through her autoethnography, she describes experiencing interpersonal oppression from a boy, who she considered her best friend. Theresa’s then best friend began teasing her about her weight, which quickly turned into internalized oppression as she became “sad, depressed, and angry”. Theresa wrote, “it really hurt my heart because I’ve known him for two years. It makes me tear just thinking about it”. The teasing continued and even escalated to him physically hurting her as he “pushed me around, grabbed my arm and also kicked me”, she wrote. Theresa still valued the friendship and “just hoped that it would stop”. Theresa stated that “after the trauma, I told the teacher on him”. Seeking help was out of her character as she always just keeps to herself; however, she realized she needed to say something to help herself. Theresa’s example is an “Act of Resistance”, as described in the ESPSP. For Theresa, the teacher acted as a facilitator to help the problem stop. From this experience, Theresa reflected on what she learned and wrote:

Something that you can learn is that even though you are shorter, not stronger [...] you can stand up for yourself. Speak up. Be yourself. Love yourself no matter what people call you.

Theresa’s writing revealed how “Moments of Microaggression” affected her self-esteem, especially as a new immigrant. She knew that to intervene, she would need the support of a trusted adult to stop the bullying. Her reflection is especially poignant, as it demonstrates how she applied learning about the three I’s of oppression, connected it to her own experience and was motivated to act.

Theresa recalled an experience with trauma/tension through her writing by finding her own voice as an author. Which is to say, Theresa and other students in the study developed an ability to express themselves through critical reflection and writing.

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Theresa's teacher, co-author Lopez, recalls the impact the ESPSP approach to writing had. She writes:

Their writing of their personal narratives, allowed them to portray an author's voice in their writing. Stories about showing not telling; understanding about what really people said and adding quotations that are real. This was said, "I felt this way", "it broke my heart" - type thing. Most importantly, adding their own feelings into it [writing]. Telling what happened in the story and telling how they felt about those situations.

Ms Lopez also recalled the multiple levels of analysis and critique students developed using the ESPSP. On the topic of student writing, she added:

Students learned to write in a different way. Although students struggle academically, the students were at the benchmark for reading, it gave them more of a critical lens in finding deeper roots instead of just reciting a story. All but one of the students were [...] reading at their grade level, but with the work and the unit it showed, when you taught the regular [conventional] plot they were re-telling a story, sequencing a story. The ESPSP, however, allowed them to get to the deeper root of the problem and making inferences and connections to their world, which is a different type of comprehension.

Co-author Lopez's reflections on how students were able to develop an internal comprehension drawing connections to "Moments of Microaggression" and acknowledging ways to enact resistance were apparent in how students comprehended the stories they were reading and the way in which they acted in their world.

*CRL as agency and action:* The question of how literacy can be rearticulated as a source of power was a prominent theme that emerged from our analysis. It also showed how the ESPSP reflected CRLs that shape students' critical consciousness and identities and contributed to the development of their voice and sense of agency and action. Writing autoethnographies allowed students to critically write about themselves, their society and their world, gaining agency to overcome challenges they were confronted with. Camangian (2011, p. 183) states:

[...] autoethnographies also foster critically caring literacies [...] and in doing so, engage the students in learning that nurtures caring relationships toward themselves and their contexts while illuminating and disrupting existing power relationships.

The students' autoethnographies at the end of the "3 I's of Oppression" unit are strong examples of how youth can use CRLs to address problems in their lives, learn from their experiences and seek for change to improve their lives. Without much probing from co-author Lopez, students were also able to connect, what Bernal (2002, p. 107) describes as, "critical raced-gendered epistemologies that offer unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences of people of color".

Michael is a Filipino student who has unique hobbies from other boys at school. Michael enjoys dancing, particularly hip hop and Tahitian. Michael performed in the school talent show and other competitions outside of school with a dance group that he is a part of. Although some may consider dancing as widely accepted in the Filipina/o community, Michael became a target of ridicule in school, particularly by other boys. He presented a strong example that "(f)eeeling and/or being made to feel out of place in an institution can be viewed as a subtle form of race, class, and/or gender discrimination" (Solórzano, 1998, p. 128). Michael took a unique approach to

writing his autoethnography. While still using the ESPSP as a framework for his writing, Michael poetically exposed his problem and articulated his experiences with interpersonal oppression and expressed how boys made fun of him for the way that he looked:

People, mostly boys, make fun of me and how I look like. I'm skinny. I'm ugly. From the birthmark to the tail, it's in my face. It's a neverending war. Everyone called me a girl. Interpersonal oppression, I never knew. Words of hate that wasn't my fate, were everywhere. All that I felt inside the whole time was blank. Everything affected me.

Throughout his autoethnography, Michael narrates how he becomes stronger from dodging the words that he hears. He continues:

The words that were fired at me are now words that is used to light my fire. Nothing could stop me. No one could tell me who I am. I learned you have to fight with words.

Ultimately, Michael expresses how he wants to share his story with others who have experienced a similar situation. He takes a powerful stance and uses his voice to advise others to “fight with words in order to fight the bullies. It is the only way to stop it”.

Like Michael, Madelene, explained that she experienced interpersonal oppression, in her case, with sexism. Madelene used the ESPSP with a storytelling approach to depict a situation in her autoethnography. Madelene enjoys spending time with her older brother and engaging in activities with him such as playing sports and video games. She narrated an incident when a group of boys told her, “you're a girl, you can't play basketball”. Madelene took action by challenging the boys to a basketball game and said, “If you think that girls are bad at basketball then let's go!” In the end, Madelene and her friends won the basketball game. Concluding her autoethnography, Madelene wrote:

I want to share this story to other girls who feel like they are not strong enough. Anything boys can do, girls can do too. If boys bring you down, show them that you can do things that boys do.

When Ms Lopez transitioned from the “3 I's of Oppression” unit into identifying problems within their communities, she shared how most of the students chose to concentrate on writing and addressing interpersonal problems they experienced. “What they wanted to do after”, co-author Lopez recalls, “was share their story with others that experienced similar things as them”. This act of sharing, taking their word and re-naming the world were acts of transformation and responsiveness. So too was co-author Lopez's ability to nurture an environment where students were able to be vulnerable with themselves and their peers. What is more are the ways the communities the students are a part of became rich texts to both read and write about. Co-author Lopez recalled poignant statements from students' work after completing their autoethnography and ESPSP unit. Students wrote: “I want others to read this [autoethnography] especially women who are not treated fairly”; and “I want them to tell themselves to love themselves”. These declarations encompass the counter-story that the ESPSP strives to incite, a transformation of the individual, as that is the place where agency emerges. Thus, CRLs encourage students to read the word, re-name their worlds and move with agency and action in the spirit of creating liberatory communities.

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## Conclusion

Justin has finished seventh grade and will be moving out of SFUSD in the midst of his middle school education. In her interactions with him since, author Lopez acknowledged how he has been doing well academically and would have been enrolled in the eighth-grade PEP class if he were not moving school districts. We can only trust that the tools Justin gained from learning to read and write his world are applied in his new school. In the time between the authors' initial conversations about the need for a counter to the conventional story plot and our conception of what has become the ESPSP, several developments have emerged. First, within the PEP, teacher apprentices have completed teacher education programs and are in the first years of their own classrooms. These teachers now work in communities similar to those that PEP serves across San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles public schools and utilize the ESPSP with their students across K-12 classrooms. An important implication of the ESPSP is its application across disciplines and how such critical literacy tools are effective for student learning (Camangian, 2010; Morrell, 2008). Moreover, as was the case in author Lopez's class, the ESPSP is a tool that supports student writing by providing structure to build students' writing stamina guided by coordinates that are relevant to their experiences. Beyond the scope of this article, yet worth noting, the authors have also used the ESPSP in university classrooms focused on Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, educational leadership, teacher preparation, research methods and literature courses. The authors have also shared the ESPSP with critical educators from across the country in teacher professional development workshops designed to offer ways to connect Ethnic Studies to mainstream content and standards. How the ESPSP has proliferated to reflect the various communities and classrooms it is now used in is not only encouraging and creative but also demonstrates how Ethnic Studies-framed tools affect multiple modes of learning centered on the criticality of Ethnic Studies curricula (Dee and Penner, 2016; NCTE, 2016). The authors are encouraged by the novel ways teachers and students are applying the ESPSP. For example, a geography teacher working in Koreatown in Los Angeles uses the ESPSP framed around colonization and has her students create children's books around concepts related to colonialism. Another teacher, a ninth-grade Ethnic Studies teacher serving students in the Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland engages critical hip hop literacy and the ESPSP to have students write autoethnographies. These are but two of many examples of how the ESPSP is effective for not only developing students reading but also strengthening and supporting student writing.

The institutionalization of Ethnic Studies in US public schools is no longer a question of when. The activist energies of communities in solidarity with Ethnic Studies movements proliferates even against a fierce backdrop of attacks, most salient in Arizona with legislation to ban Mexican American Studies (Arizona House Bill – 2,281). This historical moment is especially significant and presents a critical juncture for education more broadly. The advocacy of students, teachers and families to make education more effective and culturally relevant requires educators to develop pedagogical practices that result in CRLs. The ESPSP is one way of developing critical literacies in young people who are relevant and responsive to the experiential knowledges youth bring with them to our classrooms. It is also an entry point into providing students with an education that builds their capacity to not simply read and write words, but read, write and rewrite the world.

**Note**

1. All names used in this article have been assigned pseudonyms.

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