

### Students Learn Activism And Advocacy In "Movement Makers" Class

Posted by Robyn Gee on February 6, 2013 at 11:00am



photo: Franco Folini (CC BY-NC-SA)

Reporting by Ashley Williams, Robyn Gee

Reporting by Ashley Williams, Robyn Gee

Hira Alam, 16, considers herself an activist, thanks to an extra course she's taking called Movement Makers.

Movement Makers is a high school curriculum focused on Latino activism, advocacy, and ethnic studies. "I never would have heard about the Chicano movement unless I'd taken Movement Makers," said Alam. "The current curriculum in our public schools, focuses on the civil war -- we don't focus on the movements that were taking place side by side to it."

Movement Makers was developed by Veronica Benavides, a Fulbright Education Fellow, in conjunction with *Mex and the City* -- a cultural collective. Benavides is piloting the course at Essex Street Academy in New York City, but she teaches part of the course from Mexico City online.

The class meets on Fridays after school. First, participants complete readings and questions online. Then, they do a seminar-style discussion and listen to guest speakers.

The first part of the course focuses on issues of identity. The second part of the course focuses on movements in history, such as the Farm Workers Movement with Cesar Chavez and the Mexican-American civil rights movement with Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. "We use these movements as a model for our students to think of how they can be advocates for issues they care about," said Benavides. The class will also travel to Los Angeles to learn about activism on the opposite coast.

There are 12 students in this first pilot class, but Benavides says she would like to expand the program to other schools. Ideally, Benavides would like to see Latin American historical figures and movements covered in every student's high school tenure, but she said she realizes that teachers and schools are restrained by standardized tests and Regency Exams.

The pilot participants are diverse in their academic histories and ethnic backgrounds, but all wanted to learn more about their identity.

"Having a sense of pride and the desire to fight for something increases a student's chances of staying in school," said Benavides. "Not only do we want to teach students to become advocates, we also want to academically support them and spark some interest that would keep them involved in school and help them graduate and go on to college," said Benavides.

Alam agreed. "Being so young, having such a small view of the world living here in New York City... [the class] made me want to be successful," she said.

[» comments](#) | [» permalink](#)

Share