"FINDING COMMON GROUND"

Experiences of Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Students in a Community Engaged Learning Course

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Abstract

Research on community engaged learning (CEL) courses predominantly focuses on the learning experiences of white students or quality of student–community partner relationship(s). Scholarship accounting for the learning experiences of minoritized students describes negative learning experiences wherein students' learning goals are subordinated to their role as peer educators. Given this literature, our case study of a CEL course yielding positive outcomes for immigrant students sought to identify promising pedagogical practices that support the diversity of CEL students. Through 13 student interviews, we identified distinct learning goals for immigrant versus nonimmigrant students. We also found distinct "hidden curricula" for both student groups, with immigrant students gaining empowerment and nonimmigrant students gaining deeper understanding of immigrant communities. Despite these differences, both groups described similar levels of commitment to their community partners. Many students also felt their service helped them find "common ground" across their diverse experiences, highlighting CEL's promise for teaching humility and understanding of difference.

Benefits of community engaged learning (CEL) for students in higher education are numerous and well supported, such as promoting civic engagement (Buch & Harden, 2011), increasing self-efficacy (Astin et al., 2000), and improving understanding of community partner population(s) (Greene, 1998). Scholarship has long decried CEL that prioritizes benefits for students over benefits for community partners, resulting in nonreciprocal relationships that more closely resemble volunteerism than true CEL (Eby, 1998; Furco, 1996). While this literature often assumes that these benefits accrue equally to all students, more recent work counters this assumption (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Novick et al., 2011). For example, Mitchell et al. (2012) critique service learning as a "pedagogy of whiteness," urging educators to take steps to ensure equally valuable learning experiences for minoritized students (e.g., immigrants)

and address CEL's "hidden curriculum" of white supremacy. Our study provides a contrasting case, showcasing how CEL can support all students equally. The study's objective was to better understand learning experiences of diverse students (i.e., immigrant and nonimmigrant students) in the CEL course EDUC197: Supporting the Well-being of Immigrant Youth. Research questions guiding our inquiry were the following: (1) What are students' learning goals? (2) How do these learning goals differ from one another along the axis of immigrant status? and (3) What elements of the curriculum and CEL support students' learning goals?

This article describes students in two ways: as "white" or "students of color (SOC)" or as "immigrant" or "nonimmigrant." We use the descriptors *white* and *SOC* when referring to the literature because race figures most prominently in the literature, whereas we use *immigrant* and *nonimmigrant* when referring to our study participants and findings because immigrant status is the identity most salient to EDUC197. Since all immigrant participants identified as SOC and all nonimmigrant participants identified as white, we can utilize this literature on SOC as a starting point to understand immigrant students' experiences while recognizing that their experiences in EDUC197 uniquely stem from their identities as immigrants or children of immigrants.

Our concept of learning goals also requires clarification, as it encompasses both students' motivations for taking EDUC197 as well as EDUC197's impact on students. Typically, learning goals refer to either instructors' pedagogical goals (Ramsden, 2003) or students' short-term goals (e.g., desire to master certain skills) (Seifert, 2004). Our adjustment to this concept is based on our interviews, through which we found that students were motivated to take EDUC197 not only by the desire to accomplish short-term goals characteristic of traditional learning goals but also by the course's long-term impacts.

We also refer to hidden curricula, both in the context of the literature's hidden curriculum of white supremacy and the hidden curriculum of empowerment and understanding that emerged from our interviews. A hidden curriculum means previously unconscious pedagogical practices that, once identified, should be redressed (in the case of the literature's curriculum) or intentionally amplified (in the case of the curriculum we found).

Background: Why This Course?

EDUC197 is a two-quarter course sequence consisting of weekly seminars coupled with weekly service at partner sites that support Northern California's immigrant communities. Course assignments include weekly discussion questions, four reflection papers, a policy brief, and a final deliverable for community partners (for assignment descriptions, see Table 1). Drawing on a critical service learning approach (Mitchell, 2008), this course is designed to build long-lasting, authentic relationships that form the foundation for students' continued advocacy for immigrant communities and against structural inequalities.

EDUC197 is a popular course that enrolls students from a diverse spectrum of disciplines and racial as well as ethnic identities. However, neither EDUC197's popularity nor interdisciplinarity is unique.

Experiential learning has become increasingly popular at U.S. universities (Kolb & Kolb, 2018). Additionally, many CEL courses adopt an interdisciplinary approach, recognizing that multifaceted community concerns require multifaceted responses (Laninga et al., 2011). Although EDUC197's high level of diversity is notable, particularly in light of the critique that CEL often caters to white students at the expense of SOC (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2012), this attribute alone does not warrant exploration of this course as an exceptional case.

Table 1
Course Assignments, Descriptions, and Curricular Goals

Assignment type	Description	Curricular goal
Reflection papers (throughout the course)		
Reflection paper #1	This short paper prompts students to reflect on their experiences with immigrant communities, whether lived experience as a 1st-, 2nd-, or 3rd-generation immigrant or exposure to members of immigrant communities.	The goal of this assignment is to jump-start students' continual process of reflection on their positionality in relation to that of our partner communities.
Reflection paper #2	This short paper prompts students to (1) research the history of their partner site and its broader community and (2) identify any questions they have for partner staff that would support students in their engagements.	The goal of this assignment is to ensure that students are well prepared for their on-site engagements. By researching the broader community context as well, students are pushed to recognize structural inequalities that marginalize immigrant communities.
Reflection paper #3	This short paper prompts students to use what they have learned from lectures, readings, their on-site engagements, and/or their lived experiences in a hypothetical discussion with a stranger on a topical immigration issue. For example, students could select to advocate for multilingual English language learning programs when talking to a hypothetical stranger who believed in "English only" education.	The goal of this assignment is to help students practice applying what they have learned in this course in the service of advocacy for immigrant communities as well as in the service of their partner.
Reflection paper #4	This short paper prompts students to (1) find an immigration narrative in nonfiction written or multimedia work and (2) identify the protective and risk factors for that individual.	The goal of this assignment is to expose students to another immigration experience beyond what they may observe at their partner site or in their home community, with the hope of helping students recognize that immigration experiences are multifaceted.
Policy brief (developed in pairs throughout the course, presented during final week)		
Policy brief	This policy brief prompts students to (1) identify a problem or issue confronting their partner or home community and (2) write a short brief that presents empirically supported recommendations for a policy change that supports immigrant communities. For example, in a recent brief, a group of students addressed food insecurity in the Bay Area and lower levels of uptake among immigrant communities in supplemental nutritional services, recommending steps to disseminate linguistically accessible resources and build trust with immigrant communities.	The goal of this assignment is to guide students through the process of transforming empirical findings into policy briefs that can be used to effect political change or for informed advocacy.

Table 1
Continued

Assignment type	Description	Curricular goal
Final deliverable (developed with partner staff throughout the course)		
Final paper and deliverable	This final, two-part assignment prompts students to write a paper reflecting on their on-site engagement, with a focus on (1) what went well in their engagement; (2) what could be improved; and (3) any recommendations or outstanding questions they have for partner staff. Additionally, students prepare a deliverable (e.g., a resource guide, curriculum) that will support the work of their partner staff. For example, a recent deliverable was a bilingual, Spanish-English resource on supporting students during remote learning that was shared with immigrant parents at a partner site.	The goal of this assignment is to help students reflect on their community engagement, which is important for ensuring continued growth in their work at that partner site or others. It also ensures that, in addition to on-site work, students' in-class learning directly serves community partners.

The exceptional nature of this course became evident to the instructors, both of whom are authors of this study, through continued contact with a large number of its students. First, unlike "traditional service learning," which tends to yield fleeting partnerships that may prove more harmful than helpful (Mitchell, 2008), EDUC197 has consistently yielded rich, multiyear partnerships that students nurture throughout their time at the university and sometimes beyond. For example, EDUC197 students helped establish an after-school homework club for low-income elementary school students living in a mobile home park. Four years later, the program still operates under student leadership. As corroborated through multiple interviews with partner staff, the quality of these student-partner relationships has contributed to EDUC197's strong course partnerships since its inception.

Second, while some scholars assert that traditional service learning courses fail to reach their potential in shaping students' social justice mindsets (Einfeld & Collins, 2008), many students leave EDUC197 as staunch community advocates or, in the language of critical service learning, "agents of social change" (Mitchell, 2008). Some students pursue scholar-activism, utilizing their research to highlight injustices facing immigrants, while others enter "caring" professions (e.g., education, healthcare) with an emphasis on supporting immigrant well-being.

Third, many former students cited the transformative impact EDUC197 had on their university and postgraduate lives. The course not only helped students find long-term, community-oriented academic interests or careers but also helped them find on-campus communities within and across racial and immigrant identities. The positive nature of both immigrant and nonimmigrant students' learning experiences stood in contrast to the tensions among diverse student groups cited in the literature. These observations prompted this study.

Literature Review

Over the last three decades, a large body of work has discussed the potential negative externalities of CEL courses. Seminal works from scholars such as Eby (1998) identify issues with "inauthentic" CEL, such as courses that favor student learning over partner needs or cause more harm than good due to insufficient preparation. Furco (1996) echoes Eby's concerns, arguing that true service learning equally values curricular and service goals.

However, this scholarship assumes that the learning experiences of all students are prioritized equally and/or lumps these students into a monolithic group.

Tensions between SOC and their white counterparts in CEL surfaced in the literature as early as the 1990s. Coles (1999), Miller and Scott (2002), and Green (2001) discussed the trepidation that SOC felt toward CEL courses based on their perception of these courses as "white charitable programs" (Coles, 1999). SOC were therefore less likely to enroll in CEL courses, even if they wanted to give back to their communities (Miller & Scott, 2002). In their 2009 qualitative study, Mitchell and Donahue began to explore the roots of these tensions. They found that white students in CEL courses were more likely to experience racial "dysconsciousness" (i.e., a lack of awareness of race/racism), whereas SOC were more likely to experience racial "double consciousness" (i.e., an understanding of their race through the eyes of a white supremacist society). This double consciousness resulted in SOC feeling a double responsibility to serve their communities and correct the dysconsciousness of their white peers. Importantly, many SOC felt that the classroom became the site of their service rather than a site of their learning.

Novick et al.'s 2011 case study of Beacon University's Social Action Program yielded similar results. They found that SOC expressed significantly less support for the notion that the program offered a "strong sense of community" than their white peers. SOC felt tokenized or dismissed by white peers, undercutting any nascent sense of community they might otherwise feel. Consequently, SOC withdrew from their program community, missing rich experiences they could have enjoyed in a more inclusive learning environment.

In their 2012 theoretical piece "Service Learning as a Pedagogy of Whiteness," Mitchell et al. built on their 2009 contribution by arguing that whiteness—specifically, white supremacy—is a hidden curriculum in many CEL courses. This hidden curriculum is reinforced through two main mechanisms: CEL's deficiencies-based language of serving "underprivileged" (nonwhite or low-income) communities and CEL's view that "white, middle-class students [are] automatically and necessarily capable of serving" these communities. These mechanisms contribute to the aforementioned double responsibility wherein SOC take issue with this deficiencies-based view and feel an additional burden of sharing their experiences with the class to ameliorate it. Mitchell et al. also pushed back against a CEL claim of helping students learn through "real-world" or "boundary-crossing" experiences; for some SOC, entering their partner site may feel like returning home rather than crossing a boundary. Mitchell et al. argue that CEL courses fail when they subordinate the learning of SOC to that of their white counterparts.

Thus, CEL is not immune to the oppressive forces of racism and classism in our society. Without avoiding these troubling realities, other scholars have portrayed CEL more positively, showcasing how CEL can push back against these forces through students' transformative experiences at their partner sites. Pak's (2016) mixed methods study of 16 heritage Spanish undergraduates describes their CEL experiences at an immigrant community center. Pak found that CEL helped students develop a sense of belonging and pride in their ethnolinguistic identity that was otherwise lacking at their "isolating," predominantly white institution. Relatedly, Shadduck-Hernández's (2006) qualitative study of 10 immigrant or refugee undergraduates' experiences developing a participatory photography project with immigrant youth shows how CEL gave undergraduates tools to critique structural inequalities in their community and at their university. Both studies examined courses of only immigrant students, which likely provide uniquely protective spaces dissimilar to more diverse CEL courses.

Furthermore, both studies focus on students' experiences outside the classroom at their partner sites, ignoring the potential for the in-class experience to continue reproducing structural inequalities.

Our article adds to this conversation by focusing on the in-class experience, highlighting the promise of inclusive CEL pedagogy in supporting high-quality learning experiences for all students. It also contributes a unique perspective by focusing on immigration status rather than the relatively better-studied identity of race, which adds nuance to our understanding of students' different learning goals and experiences. Our purpose was to examine curricular elements that engaged the diversity of students' learning goals. However, we also found evidence of our own hidden curriculum that empowered immigrant students and pushed nonimmigrant students beyond surface-level understanding of immigrant communities. Moreover, we sought to understand if and how students' experiences with relationship building at their partner sites helped them find "common ground" with students from different backgrounds over a shared commitment to service.

Methods

Case Selection

We identified EDUC197 as our single, exceptional case due to the contrast it presented with the literature. This case can be understood as an "instrumental" case (Stake, 1995) because it plays a "supportive role [in] facilitating our understanding of another issue" (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Specifically, by studying students' experiences with EDUC197's curriculum and pedagogical praxis, we hope to highlight specific approaches that CEL educators can use to yield positive learning outcomes across diverse student groups.

Participants

We conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with former EDUC197 students from the 2016–2020 academic years. We chose this 4-year range because the instructional team changed in 2015, which could have contributed to different experiences for students enrolled before 2016.

In line with the purposeful sampling methodology of qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994), we selected our interviewees from a pool of 136 former undergraduate students to ensure diversity in the following categories: (1) cultural identity, (2) immigration status, (3) field of study, and (4) school year. Of the 13 interviewees, six self-identified as nonimmigrant and white, and seven self-identified as immigrants and SOC. All interviewees were full-time undergraduates at Sunnyvale University, a private institution in Northern California. Although many students continued working with their community partners after the course's conclusion, we selected students who remained highly engaged (i.e., one or more years of engagement) as they could share deep perspectives yielding richer data.

As this course was deeply intertwined with the work of our community partners, it was important to understand how community partners perceived the role of students engaging at their sites. Accordingly, we also

conducted two hour-long semi-structured interviews with program directors at two of our longest standing community partners.

Methods

We utilized a 12-question protocol that incorporated a range of question types, including informational, evaluative, and hypothetical questions. The protocol addressed the following topics: (1) students' identities and how those identities pertain to the course; (2) students' motivations for taking the course; (3) students' expectations and how curricular elements met those expectations; (4) students' trajectories before and after enrolling in the course; and (5) students' reflections on their experiences with this CEL course. In accordance with the iterative nature of qualitative research, we reevaluated and improved our protocol throughout data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Given COVID-19 restrictions, we conducted hour-long interviews over Zoom.

To develop our codebook, co-authors reviewed all interviews independently to identify codes; this initial list was synthesized into 15 parent and 23 child codes. Code types included descriptive (e.g., "learning goal"), interpretive (e.g., "personal privilege"), and categorical (e.g., "types of interpersonal relationships"). Using Dedoose, one co-author conducted multiple passes of coding with a research assistant, resolving coding discrepancies through discussion and documentation of decision-making with analytic memoranda. Of the themes that emerged from this coding process, we selected the most prominent and those that shed new light on the literature. Taken together, these steps increase the replicability and credibility of our analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Findings and Discussion

Stated Curriculum: Serving Different Learning Goals

Immigrant Students Learning the Academic Language and Serving Their Community

Similar to Mitchell and Donahue (2009), we found that immigrant and nonimmigrant students had different motivations for taking EDUC197. While both groups had individual variations in these motivations, we identified certain predominant motivations for each group.

For immigrant students, one recurrent motive was the desire to gain "academic language" to better understand their own experiences. As one Korean American student, Carrie, explained, "I thought taking this class would help me understand, digest my own experience so that I can hopefully use that knowledge to help other people." EDUC197 provided a research-based understanding of issues impacting the social, psychological, and physical well-being of immigrant youth through scholarly readings and lectures, similar to many academic offerings. Instructors directed students to reflect on their own experiences in light of class readings and write four

reflection papers that brought experience and theory together. Unlike more traditional academic offerings in which students' experiences are subordinated to theory (Rogers, 2001) or dismissed as "single story" narratives, however, EDUC197 worked to center and validate students' lived experiences. As a result, all students, but particularly immigrant students, could put their lived experiences in conversation with theory, gaining a foothold in academic discourse in which they could articulate their experiences and identify shortcomings in scholarship. One Mexican American student, Jack, described the usefulness of these reflection papers in helping him achieve his learning goal of self and community understanding:

> I really enjoyed the parts where we reflected on those experiences because . . . it's hard when you don't have enough time to do it yourself, so the papers helped me really reflect . . . and be like, okay, this is what's going on. It was a really good experience to ground myself in my experience and recognize that my [on-site] work is in combination and uniquely different than the theories happening in class.

Carrie's and Jack's statements also highlighted another key motivator for immigrant students: the desire to better understand and serve their communities. One can see a clear connection between EDUC197's partnership component and this learning goal. In describing his desire to serve as a tutor for an after-school program serving low-income, immigrant middle school students, Jack stressed:

> That's why it was so important to help out however much I could . . . when I was growing up, I didn't have a lot of representation of seeing someone who looked like me and that would have been super important. . . . I hoped to do something similar to that.

Many immigrant students expressed similar sentiments: Veronica's sense of "civic responsibility" to help the next generation enter college or Melanie's desire to tutor English language learners so that they would avoid her parents' struggles.

Students were also motivated to serve through a modality often overlooked in the literature: scholar-activism. These students hoped that having the academic language to describe their experiences would help them advocate for communities that often find their concerns pushed aside partially because they are not "legitimized" through scholarship. As Veronica, a Mexican American first-year student, explained:

> [I]mmigration is very relevant in my life. . . . So I wanted to learn more about the immigration experience, especially on children. . . . I feel like what we're talking about in class is that you need the resources to help you cope with the trauma you're going through as an immigrant child. . . . It was really comforting seeing that there was a field established addressing issues that were so prominent for me. . . . That's something I didn't know. Being in high school with people just letting all this happen, it was like what are people doing to try and help us? But there is research being done and progress being made elsewhere, that was really comforting for me. I know it's definitely going to impact my career choices.

Although the latter learning goal—serving one's community—and its corresponding course component—community partnership—may appear obvious to CEL scholars, it addresses the question Mitchell et al. (2012) raised: What can SOC learn at a partner site that feels like a return home rather than a boundary crossed? Although immigrant students in EDUC197 may not have learned by leaving their "bubble," unlike their nonimmigrant peers discussed below, they accomplished a learning goal equally meaningful to them. Additionally, we find the experience of returning "home" replete with unexpected learning opportunities for immigrant students, as discussed below.

Nonimmigrant Students Leveraging Privilege and Leaving the "Bubble"

Similar to their immigrant peers, nonimmigrant students in EDUC197 wanted to become better advocates for immigrant communities. For these students, EDUC197's curriculum (i.e., readings, lectures) was less about gaining academic language to help them translate their lived experiences for a broader audience and more about gaining context on immigrant communities to inform their advocacy. As one nonimmigrant student, Celeste, explained:

> My two reasons for going into this class were to understand what was going on [at] a macro level and also try to figure out where I fit into that, to make a difference, because I firmly believe that's the only valid use of privilege is to dismantle what gave you privilege and the best way to do that is to know where to stick your nose and not be a white savior.

The context that these nonimmigrant students sought from EDUC197 took two forms. Some desired context to help them discern truth from lies in smaller-scale conversations with family, peers, or strangers. According to Andrea, "I wanted to be more informed on topics that I was having strong opinions about. I wanted more education surrounding the opinions that I was forming and arguing with family or peers that might have different opinions." Others desired context to help them distinguish "academic" truths reflected in the scholarship from "actual" truths occurring in immigrant communities. For example, through her experience working with predominantly white scholars prior to EDUC197, Celeste realized that grasping academic language on immigration does not mean that one's scholarship will successfully capture the realities of the immigrant experience or translate into effective advocacy. Celeste's negative experience with this research team demonstrated the importance for scholars to work with a community and establish understanding relationships before engaging in academic research. She explained:

> I worked with [a professor] over the summer on a large project . . . because the people at the top really didn't have that connection at the ground level or understanding of what these problems are, the project ran into a lot of issues because it was like, oh, well, we never thought about that. . . . I was like, really? This lack of connection makes

research less effective and all the work that went toward the project had to be siphoned off to fix these problems that could have been seen ahead of time if there had been a greater connection between the community and researchers.

In addition to wanting to become better advocates for immigrant communities, many nonimmigrant students who took EDUC197 sought to break out of the Sunnyvale bubble, an experience that Mitchell et al. (2012) call "boundary crossing." Many nonimmigrant students wanted to learn what lay outside their "perfect" Sunnyvale campus or relatively privileged racial and/or socioeconomic upbringings. For example, Andrea, raised in the affluent community surrounding Sunnyvale, shared her desire to learn and do more after her first exposure to one of EDUC197's partners, an underserved mobile home park:

> I had never been into the park. . . . I didn't know anything about its history. . . . I think in the first meetings, my goal was to learn and not impose my opinions on anybody there. I think that learning the history of the park is absolutely critical to understanding the experiences of the people that are living there because . . . it wasn't all that long ago that they finally got security of their homes and their ability to stay in the space that they call theirs. . . . that was really eye-opening for me because it showed me how ignorant I had been to local politics. I vaguely remembered a bunch of people protesting, but I didn't understand what they were talking about or the larger issues until I started taking this course. . . . I had been in private school and that wasn't something we were taught. That was something that really struck me, and it made me frustrated with the way that I had been educated, and also with myself and the lack of awareness I had growing up in this area due to divides created by privilege.

EDUC197's readings and lectures would have provided the perspective Andrea sought on the "larger issues," but it was the partnership component that brought Andrea into contact with the children and families that galvanized her to act.

Relatedly, Andrea and other nonimmigrant students cite the local nature of their partnerships as another useful element of the course. The localized component helped students see themselves as part of the broader community, shattering the illusion of a Sunnyvale bubble, and cultivated students' budding sense of self-efficacy to advocate for immigrant communities. Taylor elucidated this relationship of localization to self-efficacy:

> A more local focus often gives me a greater sense of agency because then it becomes clear, like there's this policy that's written by these people that's causing this or there's this organization doing this to help these people. I feel like if you focus on a wider national lens, it's harder to see points of entry for support and for change.

Localization served as a buffer against a sense of powerlessness, inaction, or "compassion fatigue" (Picower, 2015) that can arise when faced with problems seemingly too large or complex to tackle. To actively engage at their partner sites, students did not have to understand the myriad issues of immigration nationally; they only had to understand the historical and social contexts of immigrants in their community. This undertaking made working with a partner more manageable, and therefore beneficial, to all students, although this point arose

more often in nonimmigrant student interviews. Perhaps due to a lack of knowledge or lived experience of immigration, nonimmigrant students benefited from this scaffolded, localized approach more than did their immigrant peers.

The above findings reveal another departure from the current literature. While many nonimmigrant students entered the course lacking knowledge of issues impacting immigrant youth, none of the students we interviewed lacked knowledge of their privilege or positionality as white, often middle-class people (i.e., racial dysconsciousness). In fact, it was this desire to understand their positionality and leverage privilege that drove many of these students to take EDUC197. While these students' understandings of privilege were not perfect or nuanced, many students remarked on the ways that the partnership component shaped their perspectives on privilege and allyship. We are not suggesting that all nonimmigrant students were committed to leveraging or acknowledging this privilege. Nonetheless, the nonimmigrant students we interviewed expressed attitudes and an openness to growth that contrasted with students' racial insensitivity or "white saviorism" in the literature.

Hidden Curriculum: Empowerment and Understanding

Immigrant Students Finding Their Voice and Community

Interviews also revealed a hidden curriculum that went unnoticed by both students and instructors at the time of the course but contributed to potentially more important outcomes for both student groups. Unlike the hidden curriculum of whiteness depicted in the literature, we found an overwhelming consensus among immigrant students that this course provided one of the more empowering, impactful experiences of their undergraduate careers. Students felt that the environment instructors created to foster inclusion and the unique student community of each quarter combined organically to produce this empowering experience.

Immigrant students felt empowered through their sense of being seen, heard, and centered—some perhaps for the first time—on their predominantly white campus. Maya, a Mexican American student who previously felt she had to hide her immigrant identity to fit in, recalls feeling safe in this course:

> My own experience growing up as a child of immigrants was so valued. . . . I never knew that you could lean into that. I didn't know that you could own up to that and say, yeah, my childhood as a child of immigrants, that's why I am the way I am. It seems really intuitive, but no one had ever given me permission to think like that or know that, especially in this university.

Probing students' answers, we found that centering students' lived experiences through reflection papers and lectures provided the sense of "permission" that Maya felt. By remaining open to critique of existing scholarship, as opposed to treating researchers as the expert voices on immigration, immigrant students felt supported to step into their own voices and explore how their experiences aligned with or differed from other immigrant stories in the literature, in class, and at their partner sites.

The instructors not only emphasized students' lived experiences but also took an assets-based approach in doing so (Expósito & Favela, 2003). Although the instructors engaged candidly with immigrant youths' struggles, they spent more time discussing the unique individual and community assets linked to being an immigrant or child of immigrants. For example, in a class session on immigrants in schools, instructors discussed the ways in which bilingualism is a cognitive and social asset, provided examples of effective dual-language programs, and highlighted immigrant parent organizing to support English language learners. Instructors and students worked together to identify the assets that immigrants and their communities possess that can be nurtured as opposed to taking a deficits-based approach of what is missing that needs to be supplemented.

This approach provided an alternative perspective to the negative stereotypes of immigrant communities in dominant culture media, empowering immigrant students in various ways. Incorporating positive portrayals of immigrant communities relieved immigrant students of the responsibility of bringing this perspective to their peers and offered opportunities for them to build on the portrayals in course content. Additionally, this approach helped immigrant students unlearn racist and xenophobic stereotypes to which they had been exposed. As a Nigerian American student, Melanie, explained:

[My knowledge of immigration was] far too simplistic and embedded with racist assumptions. It was in that class that I realized all these beliefs I've been surrounded with throughout my education, and I was really shocked because I didn't ascribe to any of these beliefs, but I had still been taught them. I think this course was an important step in beginning to unlearn a lot of the things I had been exposed to living in South Georgia.

As with many CEL courses, the in-class and partnership components of EDUC197 complement each other. In this case, the partnership component further solidified this hidden curriculum by giving students confidence in owning their identities as immigrants or children of immigrants. Joy, a Vietnamese American student, described the power in connecting these experiences:

Working with my language partner, I got a deeper look into her personal experience. I was able to relate that back to my parents and friends back home in terms of their experiences. So I would just say it largely solidified what I learned in class and gave it a sense of legitimacy.

Not only were students, such as Maya, Melanie, and Joy, able to find their voices as immigrant students in their predominantly white university, they were also able to own their voices with confidence and pride.

Such empowering experiences are not attributable to only the efforts of EDUC197's instructors or community partners. Immigrant students were also empowered through the creation of an academic community that looked like them and shared their interests. As the literature suggests, it can be difficult for minoritized students to find supportive communities for reflection and advocacy in classes or extracurricular activities at

predominantly white institutions. This close-knit community continued to support students after class ended. Jack, a senior who took EDUC197 as a first-year student, reflected on this community:

> The stuff that I really gained from [EDUC197] was the people who were around me. I think it was awesome, because I was able to continue having classes with people I already knew and get to know other people who were so deeply interested in this work as well . . . who really became the support network in my life.

This community also created a space for immigrant students to process the complex and sometimes emotion-laden issues they encountered in class or at their partner site. As Melanie recounted:

> When I think about that class, I think of us five and how we all have immigrant/child of immigrants statuses. . . . I recall one day, a [non-student] volunteer was asking really big questions [of her tutee] and it was revealed that [the tutee] was undocumented. The line of questioning that followed was really inappropriate. I remember the debrief I had with my [Mexican American] roommate [in the course] where we were like, I can't believe that just happened. That was so insensitive, so wrong. We had to drive between the university and the Center and we'd always use that space to debrief everything and emotions that were coming up for us.

EDUC197 could not shield immigrant students from the challenges of navigating their predominantly white institution or the tensions that arose at their partner sites, such as the one described above. Nevertheless, by providing an in-class experience that centered immigrant students' voices and highlighted their assets, coupled with a supportive and protective community of peers, the class offered a space where students could be their full selves.

Nonimmigrant Students Taking a Learner Stance

For the nonimmigrant students in EDUC197, the hidden curriculum was less about stepping forward into their voices and more about stepping back into a learner stance, which departs from the centering of whiteness found in the literature. Although many nonimmigrant students entered the course generally aware of their privilege, EDUC197 helped them identify the ways in which privilege manifested in their lives. For example, through the first class reflection paper that asks students to think about their experiences with immigrant communities, Terry realized that much of his knowledge of immigrants was based on—albeit positive—stereotypes and that he knew little about immigrants' real lives or struggles:

> We actually had a nanny from the Philippines who was undocumented. . . . She's lived with us for 18 years. I saw her very hard work. I guess immigrants are hardworking people. I feel like Trump certainly made them out to get a bad rep. . . . I didn't really know much about mental health or physical health for immigrants.

Nothing really. Maybe my nanny from the Philippines, she probably feared [deportation], especially the beginning. But we saw her go from undocumented to green card to citizenship. Our experiences couldn't have been more different.

Throughout the interview, Terry discussed how the readings, reflection papers, and partnership component provided him with more nuanced, accurate depictions of immigrant communities. Terry also described how his learning reduced the distance he felt with immigrants, which was rooted in his perceptions of "difference." Adopting a learner stance allowed him to identify the roles racism and xenophobia played in creating those differences. As a result, Terry began to connect "[his] service-learning experience to the larger structural changes [he] can advocate for as a citizen in a democracy" (Green, 2001). He described this transformation from a non-immigrant student with a simplistic view of immigrant communities to a learner and ally who supported his partner in many contexts over four years:

Professor came to speak at the reunion of the [partner site]. He was like, "Raise your hand if you've been a student here." And I can see all these moms, dads, and kids raise their hands . . . then I'm like, wait. I've been a student here too. I've learned so much from them. That's why I'm doing this work and will [keep doing] it.

As Green (2001) and Mitchell et al. (2012) discussed, asking white students to step back, listen, and learn conflicts with the status quo that rewards stepping forward and speaking. With this challenge in mind, Sunnyvale's Center for Community Engagement set forth the following principles to scaffold students' CEL: reflection, humility, respect and inclusion, reciprocity, preparation, safety and well-being, accountability, and evaluation. The EDUC197 instructors integrated these principles in their course, with a particular emphasis on reflection, humility, respect, and reciprocity. Instructors and students worked together to answer: What does it mean to be a partner? How do I let my tutee lead and take a learner stance? As Terry explained, this course felt welcoming, albeit challenging, to him and many of his peers:

It definitely challenged me to be in [a] space where I don't have personal history to talk about things. There are kids that bring very different perspectives from me so it shows me what those situations can be like. But I also thought Professor did a very good job of being accepting of kids from each background and making everyone's story feel important. I think it comforted me.

At first glance, a classroom in which SOC share their experiences and white students listen and learn may appear similar to the burden of teaching that SOC shoulder in the literature (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2012). However, there are three crucial differences that subvert the exploitative and unequal dynamics seen in those classrooms. First, such exploration and sharing were welcomed in EDUC197, while neither obligatory nor expected. Second, because of the assets-based approach in the course, immigrant students were not put in the position of educating

their peers on those assets. Third, the shared commitment and challenges of relationship building provided the conditions for both immigrant and nonimmigrant students to collaborate on creating the knowledge they sought from the course, as discussed below.

Finding Common Ground: Shared Commitments, Shared Challenges

Although immigrant and nonimmigrant students entered EDUC197 with different experiences and learning goals, both groups found common ground based on their shared commitment to and challenges encountered during relationship building at their partner sites. To support their clients, nonimmigrant students had to have a nuanced understanding of their clients, their clients' families, and the broader social forces impacting their clients, which they acquired by sharing stories and developing genuine, reciprocal relationships. This deep understanding helped bridge the knowledge gap that inherently exists between nonimmigrant and immigrant students, which immigrant students may have been expected to fill in another CEL course. In addition to removing the burden of teaching from immigrant students, this commitment to relationship building and attendant understanding meant that nonimmigrant students could contribute in class by sharing their unique experiences centered on peoples' stories. As Moira, a nonimmigrant student, summarized:

> I think that having the service component allows anyone to engage who wants to engage and it allows people to come in at the ground level and talk about their experiences. I think it's still not even because it's a different kind of lived experience. Obviously if you lived it yourself versus if you got to engage with someone who's living it. . . . But I think it does provide an experience that is more personal to each person. So there is something of substance for everyone to talk about. I think that also creates more of a sense of humility among everyone in the class, that they have this understanding that everyone's doing something to make a difference throughout the week. It's a shared commitment to the partner and to learning.

Despite immigrant students' deeper understanding from lived experience, EDUC197's partnership component presented new learnings and challenges for them as well. Immigrant students not only mentioned commonalities between their experiences and those of their clients but also mentioned unexpected differences. For example, Veronica considered her background similar to that of her mentees since she was a child of immigrants from a poor community; however, her CEL experience forced her to realize that she also possessed privileges:

> What was really challenging for me was that my middle school experience was slightly different than theirs just because of the type of student I was. I avoided drug usage, sexual intercourse, anything. And so my experience was really distant from theirs in some senses. So hearing from them that there were people getting pregnant. Or using drugs. I was working with one girl one-on-one, and she was telling me that she kept

getting suspended because she was getting in fights and the teachers have it out against them. Just hearing all of that, it was really, really challenging for me to know what to say.

In this regard, immigrant students shared a challenge with their nonimmigrant peers, who also had to face and unpack their misconceptions. Even though showing humility and taking a learner stance may have been a more common thread in the hidden curriculum for nonimmigrant students, this shared challenge reinforced the need for humility in both student groups.

As evidenced above, in EDUC197, instructors avoided placing the burden of teaching on its immigrant students while also providing opportunities for all students to learn. Is it possible that EDUC197 shifted the burden of teaching from immigrant students to partners in the process? Interviews with partner staff suggest otherwise. Although partners taught Sunnyvale students, such teaching was necessary to ensure that the students had the information needed to build strong relationships and successful partnerships. As one staff member, Marianne, explained:

We teach English, but we really consider it a ministry and developing relationships with our students . . . walking alongside them during their hard times and celebrating with them. The way I see it, [this is] valuable time for both your and our students. [Your] students get to see how [our] people live and hear people's stories. And for our students it gives them a chance to talk with people outside the community and learn from college students . . . just the opportunity to talk about themselves. I don't think they get a chance to talk about themselves much or express their ideas. And so this conversation where [Sunnyvale] students draw out their ideas is very beneficial for our students and affirms their own personhood, their own selves.

Class assignments pushed Sunnyvale students to ask questions of both partner staff and their tutees with the goal of helping all three groups bond. This reciprocal arrangement benefited our students in their relationship building efforts while providing immigrant tutees the platform to be heard and understood.

Unlike the divisiveness of CEL depicted in the literature, EDUC197's CEL shows promise for uniting university students with different motivations and experiences by bridging knowledge gaps and giving every student something generative to share. Additionally, the challenges that immigrant students encountered at their sites further support the claim that SOC can still cross boundaries and learn even in places that seem like home.

Implications

The positive learning experiences of immigrant and nonimmigrant students from EDUC197 reveal multiple pedagogical practices that may prove useful to CEL educators and practitioners.

First, our findings highlight the importance of nurturing students' understanding of their positionality. One can cultivate this understanding through structured opportunities for students to reflect on their

experiences on-site as well as how those experiences relate to students' previous experiences and identities. Hart et al. (2006), among others, underscore the importance of embedding structured reflection to help students develop deontic reasoning (i.e., moral reasoning regarding civic duty) and commitment to the public good.

The combination and trajectory of the four reflection papers in EDUC197 help concretize these ideas of positionality and civic duty. As described in Table 1, in Reflection #1, students identify their previous experiences with immigrant communities. In Reflection #2, students begin to delineate how those experiences are similar or different from those of their tutees. In Reflection #3 (as well as in students' policy briefs), students combine their previous experiences, course knowledge, and partnership experiences to advocate for immigrant communities in a hypothetical conversation on a current issue. Finally, in Reflection #4, students reflect on their partnership engagement, highlighting areas of personal growth and challenge as well as providing recommendations to partner staff. These assignments, coupled with in-class discussions, help students develop understanding of their positionality necessary to engage effectively at their partner sites and, ideally, in future service or advocacy work with immigrant communities.

Second, our findings highlight the importance of identifying and addressing hidden curricula in CEL courses. Harmful hidden curricula, such as the curriculum of white supremacy identified in the literature, should be promptly redressed. We offer the measures we have taken to amplify EDUC197's previously hidden curriculum as a potential antidote. As discussed above, we found that by validating students' lived experiences, instructors created a hidden curriculum of empowerment and understanding. Reflecting on this positive curriculum, we realized that it is essential that instructors adjust course content in response to student contributions, as encouraging sharing without instructional response merely reproduces the disempowering dynamic of SOC teaching to the detriment of their learning.

We have identified two measures to ensure a consistent instructional response. Through weekly post-class announcements to an online board, instructors share new literature and media that build off of conversations from that week's class. Moreover, through weekly pre-class questions and comments that students post, instructors tailor their lectures and discussion activities to the topics of greatest interest to students. Taken together, these measures cultivate an environment in which students, particularly immigrant students, can be both affirmed as experts and supported as learners.

Third, our findings highlight the enduring power of the critical service learning approach (Mitchell, 2008) in creating positive learning experiences for diverse groups of students. EDUC197's goals of building strong community relationships and transforming students into long-term advocates are grounded in critical service learning. Accomplishing these goals is challenging; although our pedagogical practices are not perfect, we can improve them so that students can grow from their misconceptions and mistakes by returning to these goals rooted in critical service learning. This consistent pedagogical improvement and focus on growth, rather than a "perfect" CEL course or CEL student, ensure the positive learning experiences discussed above.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although our sampling of highly engaged students yielded a rich dataset necessary for strong analysis, we recognize that this selection is also a study limitation. Less engaged students might not have as positive or transformative learning experiences. For example, had Terry been less dedicated to building long-term relationships at his partner site, he may not have been pushed to address his stereotypical view of immigrant communities. We hypothesize that the inclusion of structured discussions and assignments that help students reflect on their positionality will encourage such growth in even less engaged students. However, future research must assess the effectiveness of similar approaches across a range of student engagement levels. Furthermore, future research should study a range of student identities to better our understanding of the diversity of students' learning goals and experiences in CEL. Even within the identity of immigration status, there remain many understudied dimensions, such as documentation status and language abilities, that our student sample did not allow us to address.

Given the intense political and social divisions in society today, future research should also probe the relational element of CEL—in terms of relationships formed both in class and at students' partner sites—as a promising antidote. The finding that emerged as central to our study was the importance of such relationship building. Navigating the challenges of building authentic relationships provided both immigrant and nonimmigrant students with opportunities for personal growth and collective reflection on positionality. Scholars should continue to explore how CEL might be used as a powerful tool to help students from different backgrounds find common ground, rather than sow further division.

Conclusion

"We've never told students they were going to be saviors or lead clients to a better place. We've told students to get to know their client, to build a relationship. That's always been the focus of this course." This quotation from one of the course's instructors encapsulates the guiding philosophy of EDUC197: that of an inclusive, empowering learning experience for all students. Instructors opted to focus on the ways that Sunnyvale students could support the assets present in immigrant communities rather than reinforce a deficiencies-based view of immigrants in which students are seen as providing something "better" to their clients than what they had before. This approach, in tandem with a student-centered curriculum, created a space unique to Sunnyvale University and useful for all practitioners of CEL—one in which immigrant students could explore and embrace their identity and nonimmigrant students could escape the Sunnyvale bubble and push beyond their surface-level understanding of immigrant communities.

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