

# Chapter 12


## Working Class Men of Color Engaging in Culturally Responsive Practices and Pedagogies

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this chapter, we employ an autoethnographic approach to reflect on the impact our lived experiences as working-class Men of Color faculty from immigrant communities had on our curriculum development as well as our work with campus units at a minority-serving institution. We discuss the communities we come from and the way we develop relationships with students and professionals on our campus. In so doing, we highlight the connections between the unique knowledge we employ as Ethnic Studies faculty and how we contribute to the building of a culture and community of care at a university that primarily serves low-income, first-generation Students of Color.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The journey from student to knowledge producer to pedagogue is one that reveals plenty for an individual. A central lesson that we have both learned is the crucial need to feel supported and connected to our studies, peers, and faculty/university to achieve levels of success that are fulfilling. The thought of becoming university faculty was not an aspiration that either of us could conceive of, or shared as young people. For us, education was presented as a site of possibility but without definitive roadmaps due to the dearth of support systems that were readily accessible to communities like ours (immigrant, working-class, and racialized). Racialized, working-class, and immigrant communities came under specific attack during the tumultuous time-period of the 1980s and 1990s when Reaganomics, the War on Drugs, and concerted efforts to cut government spending that dramatically impacted public education and the social safety net due to neoliberal economic, social, and political reforms (Kang, 2020; Klein, 2008; Kozol, 2012; Simon, 1997). Add to these systemic impediments the decades-long national panic over a “crisis” of masculinity with boys and young men in educational spaces (Ghail, 1996), our path to and presence as working-class men of color scholars in academia have always been precarious.

Despite these challenges we shared a penchant for learning and committed ourselves to navigating and being relatively good students throughout our primary education. Whether it was borrowing SAT prep books from our middle-class peers and erasing the answers to complete the practice exams or delving deep into the study of math and advancing all the way through Calculus BC at a high school that engaged in tracking with limited AP course offerings so one had to go to school year round, we did what was necessary to keep learning. Knowledge acquisition became a central goal for education in our lives. While neither of our immigrant parents had experience navigating the US public educational system they inculcated in us the understanding that learning and knowledge were important tools that could not be taken away by any person or institution. Once we enrolled in higher education we found that building community in college (whether community college or a 4-year university) was paramount to sustaining our educational endeavors. We both built relationships across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines that nourished our personal development and were able to establish networks of support beyond traditional institutional student service units. It was during our graduate school experiences at California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA) that we were fortunate to meet faculty who invested their time, expertise, and mentorship to encourage us to dream beyond our M.A.’s and consider applying to doctoral programs. Our journeys have been circuitous and have overlapped in many ways and this chapter will outline how these inflect our pedagogical and holistic mentorship approaches.

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