

Dr. Emma E. Holmes Faculty Fellowship Final Report
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Educational Leadership

**Advancing Ethnic Studies and Student Leadership at
California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR):
A Culturally Responsive Approach**

The Emma E. Holmes Faculty Fellowship allowed me to move beyond studying K–12 education from the university setting and spend intentional time working alongside educators, administrators, and students at the California School for the Deaf, Riverside (CSDR). My original project focused on strengthening Ethnic Deaf Studies curriculum, supporting educators, and expanding leadership opportunities for students from marginalized communities. While the work evolved in response to the school's needs and realities, the experience strengthened my teaching, scholarship, community engagement, and understanding of what it means to engage in truly collaborative work with Deaf communities.

1. How This Work Has Impacted My Practice

The greatest impact on my practice has been the opportunity to be physically present in a K–12 Deaf educational environment and learn directly from students and educators. When I applied for the fellowship, I identified a gap in my own practice. Although my scholarship and community work focus significantly on Deaf students, particularly Black Deaf students and other students from marginalized communities, I had not had the opportunity to immerse myself consistently in a high school environment. I was able to see firsthand the challenges teachers face, specifically Black Deaf teachers, where support lacks, what support is desired, and how K-12 and higher education can better work together.

Throughout the semester, I attended Ethnic Studies classes and student organization meetings, met with administrators and curriculum leaders, researched Deaf-centered Ethnic Studies resources, and participated directly in curriculum development. I also taught lessons and facilitated activities on social identities, privilege, and intersectionality. These experiences reminded me that culturally responsive teaching cannot simply be about adding diverse content to a curriculum. It requires understanding students, their school environment, how they experience identity, and the ways Deaf culture, race, ethnicity, gender, language, and other identities intersect in their everyday lives.

This work has also strengthened my commitment to visual, interactive, and student-centered pedagogy. My original proposal emphasized culturally relevant, hands-on, and visual approaches to learning that center Deaf communities. Working directly with students gave me the opportunity to see where these approaches worked, where they needed adjustment, and why listening to students must remain central to curriculum development.

The fellowship challenged me to continue examining my positionality as a hearing scholar and educator working within Deaf communities. In my application, I described this work as an opportunity to intentionally address hearing privilege and audism, decenter my own voice, and practice JEIE through both action and reflection. My time at CSDR made that commitment tangible, not theoretical.

2. How This Work Will Impact the College of Education

This fellowship will impact my work within the College of Education because I now bring a deeper, practice-based understanding of Deaf education, Ethnic Studies, culturally responsive curriculum, and student leadership into my teaching and scholarship. The fellowship was designed to give faculty opportunities to work side-by-side with educators in local schools and bring that learning back to the College. That reciprocal relationship is one of the most important outcomes of my experience.

In my MSHE courses, I can connect theory more intentionally to the realities of schools and the students they serve. The experience provides concrete examples of collaborative leadership, curriculum change, student voice, identity development, and the challenges of implementing equity-centered initiatives within educational systems. My students, many of whom are current or future educational leaders, will benefit from examples that demonstrate that effective leadership requires relationships, flexibility, listening, and an understanding of the communities being served.

The work also expands the College's connection to Deaf education and creates possibilities for continued partnerships with CSDR and other California Deaf schools and programs. My original goal was not only to support one school but also to develop knowledge, resources, and practices that could inform work with other Deaf schools seeking more inclusive curriculum and student engagement strategies. I see opportunities to contribute to research, professional development, and community-engaged scholarship within the College through this experience. For example, I will be creating a Deaf Ethnic Studies training for teachers and students next year and hope to collaborate and present at the Teaching for Social Justice Mini Conference.

Most importantly, the fellowship reinforced for me that the College's commitment to Just, Equitable, and Inclusive Education must extend beyond our university classrooms. Equity-focused work requires us to be in schools and communities, learning with people rather than only developing knowledge about them.

3. How This Work Renewed My Engagement in the Field

The fellowship renewed my engagement by letting me return to the everyday spaces where students experience educational policies, theories, curricula, and leadership decisions. Something especially meaningful was moving between different spaces within the school—sitting in an Ethnic Studies classroom, attending student organization meetings, planning with teachers, talking with administrators, researching curriculum, and developing learning activities. The experience allowed me to see the school as an interconnected community rather than as a set of programs or issues in isolation.

It also renewed my curiosity as a scholar. Questions emerged from the experience that I would not necessarily have developed from the university alone: What does Ethnic Studies look like when Deaf culture and language are centered rather than added later? What resources are available to teachers who want to teach Ethnic Deaf Studies? How do Deaf students understand the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, language, disability, and Deaf identity? How can

student organizations serve as spaces for leadership, identity development, belonging, and advocacy?

These questions have strengthened the connection between my teaching, scholarship, and community work. The fellowship reminded me that engagement in the field is not simply about bringing university expertise into schools. It is also about allowing what happens in schools to challenge, change, and improve what we do at the university.

4. How I Met My Stated Goals

I entered the fellowship with three primary goals: to enhance the Ethnic Studies curriculum, support educators' professional development, and strengthen student leadership opportunities. I made meaningful progress toward each goal, although the work shifted as I learned more about CSDR's immediate needs and existing structures.

Ethnic Studies curriculum development became the strongest area of progress. I attended the existing Ethnic Studies course, reviewed social identity materials, researched Deaf-centered resources, gained access to existing A–G Ethnic Studies curriculum, communicated about A–G requirements, researched topics such as Japanese incarceration and Deaf experiences, and ultimately began working directly with CSDR's curriculum team on the development of Ethnic Deaf Studies curriculum. This directly advanced my stated goal of helping create a more scaffolded curriculum that incorporates the histories and experiences of Deaf people from marginalized communities.

My work with students also supported the student leadership goal. I attended meetings of organizations including Jr. Black Deaf Advocates and the API student organization and participated in planning culturally relevant experiences. Rather than approaching student leadership through a predetermined workshop model, being present in these spaces helped me better understand students' interests, identities, and existing leadership structures. I organized a field trip for the student clubs (35 students and teachers) to the Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California to view the Black Deaf film *Compensation* with a talkback session with the main Black Deaf actress, Michelle Banks, and a viewing of the institute's current exhibit *Building Our Region's Korean Community*.

The educator development goal evolved during the fellowship. My initial proposal included formal professional development such as Strengths-based coaching, LEGO Serious Play, and collaboration around Ethnic Studies training. As the semester progressed, however, the work shifted toward curriculum collaboration, resource development, meetings with the curriculum team, and direct engagement with the Ethnic Studies classroom. Although we did not implement every originally proposed professional development activity in its original format, the collaborative curriculum work created a stronger foundation for future professional learning because it was grounded in needs identified through sustained engagement with the school. Ultimately, I met the central purpose of my fellowship: I moved from proposing what culturally responsive Ethnic Deaf Studies and student leadership could look like to working alongside Ethnic Studies teachers, the high school principal, curriculum specialists, and the CSDR superintendent, to understand what that work requires in practice. The fellowship reinforced that community-engaged work does not always follow the exact plan written in a proposal.

Responsiveness, relationship building, and willingness to adjust based on community needs are themselves essential components of equitable educational practice.

The Emma E. Holmes Faculty Fellowship gave me space to engage in the kind of praxis I identified in my original application—action, reflection, learning, and returning to action. It strengthened my relationship with CSDR, changed how I think about my teaching and scholarship, and gave me experiences I will carry back into the College of Education. Most importantly, it reaffirmed my commitment to ensuring that my work with Deaf communities remains collaborative, culturally grounded, and accountable to the students and communities it is intended to serve.