

CUNY-INITIATIVE ON IMMIGRATION AND EDUCATION

GROUNDING PRINCIPLES

The work of CUNY-IIE is firmly grounded in a set of principles, all of which reflect several overlapping themes that inform our thinking and our work. One of our primary goals is to **learn** about and understand the experience of migration, from the point of view of immigrants themselves. We seek also to be cognizant of the history of this country, which was founded with lofty ideals but in reality was built on the twin pillars of slavery and the dispossession of Native peoples. Confronting some of these ideas may feel uncomfortable at times, but we believe that discomfort is often a necessary part of learning for all of us. Lastly, as part of our goals to **act** and **advocate**, these principles address stances that educators can take as we all strive to center our shared humanity and build toward equitable policies and educational opportunities for all.

Black Immigrant Lives Matter.

CUNY-IIE stands in solidarity with all those fighting for equality and justice in the Black Lives Matter movement. It is therefore important to approach this work with that sense of solidarity in mind. Although Black immigrants make up the smallest percentage of immigrants in the United States, they are more likely to be targeted for deportation. By centering the lives and experiences of those who are most vulnerable, we can advocate for equality for everyone.

No one is illegal on stolen land.

We believe that no person should be defined in terms of their immigration status, and we are opposed to the dehumanization of anyone through the use of the term 'illegal'. This notion is further complicated by the history of colonization in the United States. New York State resides on lands stolen from Native people: Lenape, Haudenosaunee, Mohican, Abenaki, Erie, Canarsie, Rockaway, Algonquin, Merrick, Massapeguas, Matinecock, Nissaquogues, Setaukets, Corchaug, Secatogue, Unkechaug, Shinnecock, Montaukett, and Mannansett.

We are not all immigrants.

The fabric of the US includes not only immigrants, but also the Native Americans whose land was stolen in the creation of this country, as well as the descendants of enslaved people who were brought to this land against their will. We refrain from statements like "we are all immigrants" and "this nation was built by immigrants," because this further invisibilizes the Native people and lived realities of slavery and the Black experience in the United States.

The immigrant experience exists beyond the Latinx narrative.

The rhetoric on immigrant rights in the United States often centers Latinx communities, and specifically the Mexican experience. In fact, the immigrant experience in the US encompasses many countries, races, and ethnicities. As we seek to advocate for equitable opportunities for all immigrants in the New York context, it is vitally important to recognize and make space for immigrants outside the Latinx diaspora.

Immigrants and students labeled as "English Language Learners" are not interchangeable.

Approximately half of all multilingual learners in New York are US-born, many of whom grow up in multilingual homes and require additional support to learn English via bilingual education or English as a New Language (ENL) programs. In addition, many immigrants arrive from English-speaking countries and/or are already bilingual. Ideally, all students - and especially those who speak a home language other than English - will be given the opportunity to become bilingual and biliterate in school. It is important that we not conflate the two distinct (though overlapping) categories of students who are immigrant-origin with students who are categorized as English Language Learners.

The immigration experience is complicated.

Reasons for migrating to the US vary among individuals and families, but leaving one's home, family, language and culture is often traumatic. And even though some immigrants come to the US for economic opportunity, financial issues may continue to be a challenge for new immigrants. Nevertheless, mainstream rhetoric upholds the narrative that immigrants are happier to be in the US than in their home country. This perception is reinforced by messages extolling assimilation and patriotism. However, in addition to other challenges, immigrants are often treated like second-class citizens or denied citizenship altogether; immigrants also experience violent laws and policing practices that often make the US a hostile space for immigrants.

Migration can be traumatic.

Our work recognizes that the experience of migration through militarized borders can be difficult and painful. While there is a vibrant Migration is Beautiful movement often symbolized with the imagery of a butterfly, we must recognize that students' and community members' experiences with migration may have been traumatic. We wish to understand and recognize these experiences by incorporating mental health resources and socioemotional support in our work.

Xenophobia is systemic.

Anti-immigrant discourse has blamed immigrants for a broken economy, failing schools, and for overwhelmed medical resources. Research has continually shown that immigrants don't have a negative impact on any of these services. In fact, immigrants often provide a positive impact, both socially and economically. Immigrants are vilified because xenophobia, much like racism, is a systemic issue in the US. As a result, immigrant students often have less economic mobility, attend under-resourced schools, and are provided with fewer social services.

Teaching through translanguaging is central.

We believe the home language practices of immigrant-origin students, which include different languages and varieties, are a strength that must be a part of their education. Translanguaging pedagogy, which deliberately integrates flexible language practices into education, allows for students' voices and learning opportunities across programs, content areas and levels. All instruction should draw on students' many linguistic resources, regardless of whether they have been labeled as English Language Learners.

We aim to move beyond allyship to working as accomplices.

Our work seeks to provide opportunities for educators to engage as allies, and to move from ally work to accomplice work. An ally engages in activism by standing with an individual or group in a marginalized community; an accomplice focuses on dismantling the structures that oppress that individual or group—and such work will be directed by the stakeholders in the marginalized group. As we continue to educate ourselves and others, our work seeks to develop allyship while also addressing and changing structures that impact immigrant students and communities.



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English