

**Practicing Applied Sociology on the Ground, rather than in the Tower: Exploring the
Legacy of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) Course Experiences**

By:

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2020

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study investigates the legacy of taking a singular community-engaged learning (CEL) course on alumni at the University of Victoria (UVic). Thirteen participant interviews with CEL alumni capture a range of lived experiences since course completion, from 1 month to 5 years with respect to their course deliverables (2018 to 2023). This research reveals the long-term impacts of CEL post-course by exploring alumni's reflections. Informed by previous research and literature, this thesis is guided by the following questions: *How do sociology students describe their CEL experiences after course completion; what impacts, if any, does a CEL-applied sociology seminar course have on students post-course; to what degree do alumni CEL experiences change in relation to time since course completion; and, according to alumni, how effectively does CEL teach applied sociology?* The research findings reveal that as a method for teaching applied sociology, a CEL course impacts how alumni practice sociology post-course and how they use, or apply, their sociology as a tool and perspective as they navigate and understand social realities. The data explores how and why CEL alumni continue to make meaning out of their experiences after course completion. Findings suggest that alumni feel that their CEL experiences enhance their critical and relational thinking skills, inspire reflexivity, and increase feelings of self-efficacy. The research reveals that alumni feel more competent in their understanding of sociology and ability to apply sociology post-CEL due to courses' engaged scholarship and experiential learning pedagogy. Overall, this study suggests that understanding the legacies of CEL on alumni could impact how sociology is taught and practiced within and beyond academia.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Degrees and Decrees: Making it Personal

My interest in exploring the legacy of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) experiences after course completion originated from my experience taking a fourth-year CEL course during my undergraduate degree at the University of Victoria (UVic) located in British Columbia, Canada.

During my Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Sociology, I encountered various challenges as an undergraduate student, from maintaining grades and balancing my realities of school-work-life to retaining a sense of self while learning and engaging with influential content and compelling concepts. Undergraduate graduation represented another challenge: transitioning into unfamiliar non-academic and academic¹ spaces was accompanied by the idea of applying *my* sociology beyond a syllabus or degree. This impending transition inspired feelings of fear mixed with excitement. My feelings inspired me to seek an opportunity to apply what I had learned in sociology within the academic world I had come to know. A fourth-year seminar-style CEL applied sociology course delivered by Dr. Bruce Ravelli at UVic represented an opportunity for undergraduate students like me to engage with the sociology I learned and contextualize its practical and potential applications. The CEL course requires students to do reading assignments, complete coursework, and write reflective journals while working with community partners to produce meaningful projects. Learning applied sociology through this CEL course inspired me to think relationally and acknowledge the reciprocal nature of sociology as both a discipline and a conviction. This course changed my experience with sociology, challenged my relationships with academia, and impacted my transition into and navigation of academic and non-academic spaces.

After graduating, I had the opportunity to reflect on and put into practice what I had learned from the CEL course. During my CEL course experience, I learned how to practice sociology in a way meaningful to my values. As I navigated everyday life and encountered critical moments, including my eventual undergraduate graduation, attaining my first sociology-focused job, and debating applying to graduate school, I reflected on my CEL experiences. How

¹ In this study, academic spaces refer to the tangible or intangible platforms and spaces within universities where students, teachers and other actors interact to pursue their academic business. In contrast, non-academic spaces consist of communities and social institutions where sociologists, as actors, interact with various social entities.

I experienced applied sociology and CEL evolved throughout my contemplations post-course regarding its value, usefulness, and potential as a learning pedagogy². Contemplating the impact that CEL had on me inspired me to investigate the experiences of others.

This research continues my learning journey and is a part of my ongoing experiences with applied sociology and CEL. Research is often as much about *who* is doing it and *why* as it is about *how* it is done. Across disciplines, within and beyond academia, researchers have recognized the necessity of self-reflection and location (Kenny, 2004). As a sociology alumnus who actively practices applied sociology within research settings and everyday life, I often think of how I interact and make meaning out of my experiences. My reflections and meaning-making of CEL are impacted by my ongoing interactions, including how I relate to this research. When conducting this research, I found that my applied sociology CEL experience was similar to others. The conversations shared in this research reinforced my ideas of CEL being an ongoing and encompassing experience beyond the course. In this study, I interviewed thirteen alumni of a singular applied sociology CEL course delivered five times at UVic between 2018 and 2023. Following this introductory section that outlined *who* I am and my experiences with CEL and applied sociology, I provide a brief background of applied sociology and contextualize CEL from the student-alumni perspective to explain *why* this research is important. I also address the value of exploring the legacies of CEL courses. I conclude this chapter with an outline for the rest of the thesis and *how* this research was explored.

Background: Applied Sociology and CEL

As a learning framework, CEL³ extends scholarship beyond the classroom through experiential, community, and service-based learning. As a form of experiential learning or community-based scholarship, CEL is a method of engagement that inspires student community collaboration and facilitated reflection (Shaw & Nagel, 2019). Experiential learning courses attempt to combine theory with practice, connect classrooms to communities, and inspire collaborative knowledge creation (Holbrook & Chen, 2017). Nichols (2017) further highlights the value of experiential learning course in their research, noting that experiential learning

² Pedagogical, or pedagogy, refers to the method and practice of teaching, especially an academic subject or theoretical concept (Freire, 1993; Schnee et al., 2016)

³ CEL refers to the pedagogical experiential learning framework that deploys community collaboration between students and community partners, university, and community (Berard & Ravelli, 2021).

courses attempt to give students “real-world experiences and connect classrooms with communities” (p. 318). Western institutions recognize experiential learning as a valuable pedagogy to incorporate into their curriculum through various methods and practices, including CEL (Cajete & Little Bear, 2000; Holbrook & Chen, 2017; Nichols, 2017; Snively & Williams, 2018). It is important to note that Western education and academia is a historically colonial and capitalistic institution deploying Eurocentric learning systems that often dismiss Indigenous ways of thought and knowledge systems. According to Indigenous educators and authors Cajete and Little Bear (2000), and Snively and Williams (2018), cultures worldwide recognize *experiential learning* as a holistic approach to education, emphasizing immersion, storytelling, and reflection, both in traditional settings and modern contexts. The fundamental interconnected, interdependent, and relational aspects of knowledge and its transmission through experiential learning frameworks within academic contexts cannot be separated from Indigenous ways of knowledge (Cajete & Little Bear, 2000; Snively & Williams, 2018). According to Snively and Williams (2018), fostering coexistence between diverse knowledge typologies enhance our understandings:

When [indigenous science] and [western science] coexist respectfully in the science classroom, all students will have a greater understanding of the science knowledge, skills, philosophy, and opportunities they need to direct their creative energies to the benefit of our collective futures. (Snively & Williams, 2018, p. 10)

As a tool in instruction, CEL encourages relational and reflective thinking (Bader et al., 1996). Through reciprocal community-based relationships, CEL establishes a collaborative knowledge exchange (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Lovekamp et al., 2017). Rather than working *for* the university or the community partner, students actively work *with* the community in mutually beneficial partnerships (Jordan, 2007). As a learning method, CEL brings students and the community together to progress mutual understanding between diverse societal groups. CEL offers universities, professors, and students opportunities to transcend traditional coursework and actively engage with scholarship.

This thesis explores CEL as an experiential learning pedagogy supporting the learning objectives of an applied sociology course taught at UVic. As an instructional method at UVic, CEL teaches applied sociology through coursework that combines academic assignments (i.e., research papers, assigned readings, reflective journals, etc.) with community partner projects. CEL has proven particularly relevant for teaching and learning sociology due to its commitment

to public accessibility, social change, and social justice (Lewis, 2004; Romero, 2020). As CEL courses gain acceptance and support in sociology and other disciplines, there is growing consensus that universities should incorporate CEL into their curriculum (Atkinson & Hunt, 2008; Mayer et al., 2019). Current research explores the impacts of taking CEL on students, universities, sociologists, and communities; however, there remains a lack of knowledge regarding the longitudinal impacts or ‘legacies’ of CEL (Mitchell, 2008). The following research intends to address this limitation by exploring the impacts of CEL on students long-term and post-course⁴.

As a sociologist with a background in applied sociology and CEL, I am especially interested in examining how alumni’s meaning-making⁵ processes and reflections interact with lived experiences⁶ post-course (Alexander, 2011). This research proposes to leverage applied sociology and CEL research to gather data from alumni to explore the long-term impacts of taking a CEL applied sociology course.

The Student CEL Experience

CEL derives its usefulness from its capacity as a method to empower students to bring about positive social change (Welch, 2016). Research confirms how CEL courses increase students' understanding of course content (Atkinson & Hunt, 2008; Mayer et al., 2019) and their connections to communities (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Graizbord, 2019; Gullion & Ellis, 2014; Lovekamp et al., 2017). Students involved in community-engaged initiatives, like CEL, often report enhanced learning classroom climates and a better understanding of course material (Abelev et al., 2008). Several benefits for students who take CEL courses are seen across disciplines, including positive influences on overall academic performance (Schmidt et al., 2007; Skolnikoff et al., 2010; Wright, 2000), critical thinking skills, social awareness and civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998; Liss & Liazos, 2010), communication skills (Geller et al., 2016; Gullion & Ellis, 2014; Holtzman & Menning, 2015), and hands-on research experience

⁴ I utilize the term post-course to refer to events that occurred after alumni participating in this study completed their CEL course.

⁵ Meaning-making refers to how individuals understand, and make sense of life events (Park & Folkman, 1997).

⁶ Positioning lived experiences as the beginning, or foundation of, social knowledge is essential for this research investigating complex social relations and interpretations that construct everyday lives (Hannabuss, 2000; Smith, 2005).

(Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Tarantino, 2017). Additionally, students engaged in CEL often attain reflective thinking abilities (Darwen & Rannard, 2011).

Community-engaged scholarship, like CEL, also has implications for students' development of social awareness and responsibility, creating awareness of justice initiatives, community concerns, and community resources (Boyle-Balse, 2007; Boyle-Balse et al., 2007; Huisman, 2010). For the individual, research has shown that CEL courses positively impact students' self-esteem and confidence (Loh et al., 2016; Voss et al., 2015). In helping students develop a broader understanding of social landscapes through coordination with community groups, students are encouraged to develop their sociological imagination⁷ (Mills, 1959). Ultimately, this can help students learn how their sociological capabilities may promote lifelong community engagement and engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1996; Mills, 1959). However, these outcomes need to be more fully researched, and these claims need follow-up regarding their relevance after course completion.

While this research focuses on the student-alumni perspective, it is important to note CEL impacts transcend the individual students, professors, and community partners involved by creating robust local and regional educational networks and increasing partnerships among academic institutions, community groups, and non-profit, private or corporate stakeholders (Astin & Sax, 1998; Geller et al., 2016; Gullion & Ellis, 2014; Holtzman & Menning, 2015; Loh et al., 2016; Tarantino, 2017; Voss et al., 2015). CEL can also impact institutions' organizational capacities by increasing stakeholder access to media and funding opportunities (Astin & Sax, 1998; Gullion & Ellis, 2014; Holtzman & Menning, 2015; Loh et al., 2016; Tarantino, 2017; Voss et al., 2015). There is little research on CEL experiences after course completion, and some suggest this area is overlooked and under-researched (Hok-ka et al., 2016; Savage, 2022).

Thesis Outline

I undertook this thesis to answer my research questions, which are: *How do sociology students describe their CEL experiences after course completion; what impacts, if any, does a CEL-applied sociology seminar course have on students post-course; to what degree do alumni CEL experiences change in relation to time since course completion; and, according to alumni,*

⁷ The sociological imagination refers to the concept established by contemporary sociologist Mills (1959), connecting personal troubles (personal challenges, biography) and more significant social issues (history, culture); this mindset allows individuals to realize the relationship between their experiences and their larger society.

how effectively does CEL teach applied sociology? My research questions were designed to be open and exploratory. They changed and shifted throughout the early stages of my project as I engaged with the literature, and as my knowledge evolved to reveal new information⁸.

Following this introductory chapter, I review the literature relevant to my research questions in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 summarizes the theories and concepts I relied on to analyze the findings of this research. Chapter 4 details the qualitative research methods and methodologies I used to explore my research questions. Within the methods chapter, I disclose the data collection and analysis processes I used, and the ethical considerations implemented throughout the research process. Following, I present the research findings thematically in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. Analysis of the findings are discussed in Chapter 9. In Chapter 10, I provide a final moment of personal reflection regarding this thesis and its role in my own CEL legacy. I conclude this thesis by presenting any relevant contributions and limitations.

⁸ For example, my research questions evolved to encompass post-course meaning-making processes unrelated yet inclusive of undergraduate graduation. Experiences of CEL post-graduation were originally a focus of this research, before transitioning to encompass more events and meaning-making processes that occur post-CEL course.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following review explores the relevant literature on community-based scholarship and experiential learning. I begin by discussing the sociology of education. I review public, critical public sociology literature to enhance comprehension of the connection between CEL pedagogies and applied sociology (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Buroway, 2005). I then discuss the relevance of applied sociology to CEL dynamics and learning practices. Following this, I explore relational sociology literature, analyzing alumni as social subjects and universities as interactive neoliberal institutions (Willis, 2017). Next, the literature assessing long-term CEL impacts, and sociology alumni is synthesized to contextualize how this qualitative investigation of lived experiences and longitudinal impacts extends current understandings (Astin & Vogelgesang, 2000; Hok-ka et al., 2016; Taylor & Raykov, 2014.). Throughout my review, I reframe the literature to provide a foundation to explore the long-term impacts of CEL and applied sociology course experiences.

Sociology of Education

The sociology of education examines the interactive relationships of social institutions, social structures, education, and educational outcomes (Bills, 2004; Davies & Guppy, 2010; Musgrave, 2017). As a field, it explores the relationship between education and society, considering factors such as class, race, gender, and culture. Topics within the sociology of education include educational inequality, accessibility, the role of education, the roles of students, teachers and communities and the impacts of educational policies on individuals and society (Bills, 2004; Davies & Guppy, 2010; Musgrave, 2017). The sociology of education studies how education reflects and reinforces societal norms and inequalities. Sociologists see educational institutions, like universities, as important agents of socialization and agents of social control. As agents of socialization and social control, educational institutions teach societal values, beliefs, and rules through informal and formal learning methods. According to research, education politically and socially impacts cohesion through its ability to create social agents conducive to a productive society (Bills, 2004; Davies & Guppy, 2010; Musgrave, 2017).

In summary, the literature on the sociology of education examines educational institutions, such as universities, by exploring their relational impact on student experiences and outcomes. It underscores the crucial role of education in shaping meaning-making processes and

identities (Bills, 2004; Davies & Guppy, 2010; Dépelteau, 2018; Mills, 1959; Musgrave, 2017). The literature on the sociology of education helps contextualize the interactive nature of universities and CEL as a pedagogical framework with potentially long-lasting impacts.

Critically Applied Scholarship

Sociology is a social science discipline that aims to deepen our understanding of our complex social world, shedding light on social patterns, structures, and forces that shape human interactions and behaviour (Burawoy, 2004). Literature pertaining to public and applied sociology is particularly relevant to this research.

Public sociology literature emphasizes applying sociological knowledge and research to engage with social phenomena, promoting public sociology as a commitment to understanding social subjects, systems, and structures (Burawoy, 2005; Lewis, 2004). Arguments for a more committed, community-based, public, service-oriented, and reciprocal sociology are predominant themes throughout public sociology literature (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Creese et al., 2009; Goldberg & Berg, 2009; Gullion & Ellis, 2014). Researchers in public sociology literature reorientate sociology as a more interactive and, therefore, reciprocal, and communicative research field (Brym & Nakhaie, 2009; Burawoy, 2004; Facchini, 2019; Gans, 2015; Hartmann, 2017; Nichols, 2017).

Sociological theorists and thinkers position public sociology as an act of “revitalization” and an opportunity to improve accessibility and engagement with sociological knowledge (Burawoy, 2004; Gans, 2015; Hartmann, 2017). Promoting accessibility, awareness, and dialogue between academic and non-academic spaces, including teachers, researchers, students, institutions, communities, and various other publics⁹, is seen throughout public sociology literature (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Brym & Nakhaie, 2009; Burawoy 2004; Facchini, 2019; Gans, 2015; Hartmann, 2017; Nichols, 2017). Reviewing public sociology literature, Barton-Bridges (2022) suggests that “Freire’s (1993) critical pedagogy, Boyer’s (1990; 1996) scholarship of engagement, Bourdieu’s (2000; 2003) scholarship with commitment, and Burawoy’s (2005) public sociology all aim to break research and education away from the dominant conventions”

⁹ Publics are groups with common ideas, interests, or ideologies or large sections of society that share some common opinions or objectives but are not necessarily formally organized (Freire, 2006).

that separate educational institutions like universities, and learning frameworks, like sociology from “...whom and for what research and education are intended” (Barton-Bridges, 2022, p. 1).

As an organically evolved sociology, public sociology co-designs research *with* the public, the community, and policymakers, sharing a commitment to co-produce understandings and share experiences (Graizbord, 2019; Zeller, 1985). A more critically informed public sociology that co-designs and carries out research with the public, the community, and the policymakers who share commitments *organically* “fosters equity-promoting policy, changes how policymakers understand social problems and improve how citizens experience policy on the ground” (Graizbord, 2019, p. 2). Collaboration and communication allow researchers, students, and teachers to become co-owners and co-creators of their produced knowledge (Gullion & Ellis, 2014). According to the literature, this enables public sociology to enhance learning and understanding for all those involved (Better, 2016; Brym & Nakhaie, 2019; Graizbord, 2019; Gullion & Ellis, 2014; Zeller, 1985). As Better (2016) suggests, through a scholarship of commitment that engages the public, students, and researchers, “analyzing their own world and communities...make sociology relevant to their lives,” enhancing their understanding of its “methods, tools, and praxis as an impetus for social change” (p. 66).

According to Mellor (2013), investigating the progression of education frameworks and capturing existing and *emerging* interactive relationships between different publics, like universities and communities, promotes the need for critical public sociology. Critical public sociology is a branch that takes a critical perspective on social issues and seeks to challenge and transform society (Mellor, 2013). In this sense, it combines principles of public sociology, which involve engaging with the public and addressing real-world problems, with a critical lens that questions established norms, structures, and power systems (Fairbairn, 2019; Mellor, 2013). Key features of critical public sociology include social critique, advocacy for change, intersectionality, emphasis on marginalized voices, engagement with critical theory, public dialogue, and education (Brym & Nakhaie, 2009; Eckstein et al., 1995; Fairbairn, 2019; Mellor, 2013). Within critical public sociology, feedback frameworks constantly inform learning and teaching stages with knowledge; this knowledge may stem from everyone involved in learning processes, including observers, the observed, academics and the public, as experts in their experiences (Brym & Nakhaie, 2009; Eckstein et al., 1995). Critical public sociology uses

reflexive knowledge¹⁰ to expose hidden values and assumptions underlying understandings and social systems, structures, and interactions (Brym & Nakhaie, 2009; Mellor, 2013). Critical public sociology literature situates communities and non-academic publics as potential sites capable of producing knowledge and, therefore, worthy of sociological and civic inquiry and research (Fairbairn, 2019; Mellor, 2013). Sociology student experiences are already part of various publics concerning their social, cultural, political, and personal positions within and beyond academic spaces (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Freire, 2006; Mellor, 2013; Schnee et al., 2016). Critically engaging with various publics within and beyond academia allows students to experience reflexive recognition regarding ideas of self and relationships and *apply* their knowledge (Schnee et al., 2016). According to scholars, critical public sociology, embodying an applied scholarship with a relational and reflexive commitment, transcends traditional education frameworks that isolate academic sociology (Zeller, 1985). Zeller (1985) shares insights on the purpose of research in sociology in *Academic and Applied Sociology: Marketing Our Services*:

The primary purpose of research for the academic sociologist is theoretical; for the applied sociologist, the primary purpose of research is practical. The academic sociologist wants truth; the applied sociologist wants usefulness. Moreover, the end product sought by the academic sociologist is some general principles of social behaviour; the end product desired by the applied sociologist is some specific regularities. For the academic sociologist, knowledge is an end in itself; for the applied sociologist, knowledge is a means to an end. (p. 66)

Zeller (1985) examines the “similarities and dissimilarities of academic and applied sociologists in terms of purpose, work style, and evaluation criteria” (p. 65). I believe understanding public and critical public sociology as an application of learned sociology engages with sociology's potential to transcend the *discipline* and be both academic and applied. Similar to the CEL course under investigation in this thesis, Better (2016) found that combining service-learning with student-centred projects fosters a focused public sociology and an engaged civic component. Reviewing the public and critical public sociology literature is relevant to this research because applied sociology further advocates for inter-/intra-personal and inter-/intra-disciplinary scholarship and engagement methods (Žažar, 2016).

¹⁰ Reflexive knowledge refers to a type of knowledge or understanding that involves self-awareness and introspection. Going beyond facts or information involves reflecting on one's own thought processes, beliefs, biases, and assumptions to critically examine perspectives, perceptions, and interpretations (Finlay, 1998; Žažar, 2016).

Learning Applied Sociology through CEL

A 2017 report produced by the ASA's *Task Force on Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major* highlights the importance of updating pedagogical practice to ensure that sociology students are prepared for life beyond academia (Pike et al., 2017). This report followed research by Gullion and Ellis (2014), stating that "perhaps the best training for students to apply sociology is through hands-on community work" (p.61). According to Steele and Iutcovich (1997), applying sociology is the "use of the sociological perspective, and/or tools, in the understanding of, intervention in and/or the enhancement of, human social life" (p. 154). Applied sociology is "doing sociology"; it uses sociology's "theoretical models and the methodological techniques...in social situations to resolve problems or improve the quality of life" (Leslie, 1998; Steele et al., 1999, p. xi).

Applied sociology is an ongoing reflexive and intuitive process using critical, public, political, and professional sociological understandings (Dentler, 2003; Leslie, 1998; Steele & Iutcovich, 1997). Applied sociology also supports effective teaching and learning strategies, helping to produce change-based pedagogy that names and deconstructs the interlocking and isolating power dynamics at the root of academic culture (Dentler, 2003; Finkelstein, 2010; Pike et al., 2017). Applied sociology has a unique opportunity to provide reciprocal and responsive knowledge through educational feedback in a rapidly changing world. Mills (1959) argues that as individuals, we shape and are shaped by society; this involves engaging with sociology in a reciprocal back-and-forth communicative learning process. Mills' (1959) influential work, *The Sociological Imagination*, articulated that sociological concepts cannot be applied in isolation from larger social contexts and personal experiences. We cannot apply sociology in isolation because doing so neglects the complexity of society's interdependent and interacting social structures, systems, and relationships. Applying sociology involves a commitment to continuous reflective processes, acknowledging sociology and, therefore, society as relational (Shotwell, 2021).

Current literature demonstrates that perceptions of applied sociology are influenced by community experience (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Geller et al., 2016; Gullion & Ellis, 2014; Holtzman & Menning, 2015). The themes of doing, action and change are referenced throughout applied sociology literature alongside critical public sociology. The positioning of critical public sociology as a framework to orientate and facilitate reciprocal sociology and community

involvement is further developed within applied sociology literature (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Dentler, 2003; Finkelstein, 2010; Kennedy, 1998; Kennedy, 2004; Rebach & Bruhn, 2001; Steele et al., 1999; Stringer, 2007). Finkelstein (2010) argued that CEL and applied learning approaches, commonly referred to as experiential learning or work-integrated learning, promote active collaboration, cooperation, interaction, feedback, and reflection, improving creative and critical thinking skills and abilities. Burawoy (2005) and Steele, Scarisbrick-Hauser, and Hauser (1999) claim that applied sociology is essential for understanding contemporary globalized labour markets and creating an informed citizenry. Applied sociology also prepares students to work with and better understand the communities they partner with and the social conditions they face (Steele et al., 1999). However, there is only anecdotal evidence of students' experiences after course completion and further graduation. Therefore, it is essential to explore how CEL alumni apply and engage their sociological skills and abilities after the course, including when they seek to join the labour force or continue their education (Stanley & Plaza, 2002).

Literature suggests that applied sociology and CEL have the ingredients to help energize sociology by making it “more relevant and meaningful to students,” helping them identify themselves as professionals in the field and committing to their scholarship (Finkelstein, 2010, p. 107). De-centring the academic institution shifts scholarship away from traditional academic norms and markers of success like publications, awards, and tenure; to features of integrity and success that reflect personal commitments or community values (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Fairbairn, 2019). Pedagogical methods that invoke lived engagement, like experiential learning and community-based techniques, including CEL, can help students relate to society and see themselves as agents of change (Savage, 2022; Yogan, 2015). The following research investigates the long-term impacts of a CEL course to understand the effects of experiential learning further.

Employing Sociology: Assessing Alumni

Research on alumni of applied sociology CEL experiences is limited (Guppy et al., 2017). CEL experiences are often investigated in two primary ways: first, by gathering student feedback throughout the course via reflective journals, ongoing dialogue, and interviews (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Savage, 2022) or second; immediately after the course through follow-up surveys or questionnaires (Guppy et al., 2017; Hok-ka et al., 2016; Taylor & Raykov, 2014;

Warchal & Ruiz, 2004). As Fenzel and Peyrot (2005) suggest, missing from these research strategies is information on the specific skills, tools, and techniques that influence students' lived experiences after course completion and/or graduation. In-depth qualitative or retrospective analysis is superseded by quantitative strategies (Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Taylor & Raykov, 2014). Current research on experiential learning simplifies lived experiences through quantitative and scaled analyses that limit our ability to understand CEL's transferability.

Experiential learning and community-based strategies, like CEL, impact academic disciplines beyond sociology, including anthropology, medicine, and psychology (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin & Vogelgesang, 2000; Crew, 1987). According to Hok-ka, Wing-Fung and Cheung-ming (2016), experiential learning pedagogies offer students opportunities to explore different career fields and apply their skills to help confront existing social problems within the field of health and medicine (see also Eyler et al., 1999; Miller & Gonzalez, 2009). In addition, research shows that participating in reciprocal community-based learning, including CEL, is vital for social development, employment exploration, and networking for various science, social science, and humanities disciplines (Taylor & Raykov, 2014). According to Soria, Nobbe, and Fink's (2013) *Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership* survey, community engagement enhances individual lives and social interactions, producing informed and thoughtful citizens and preparing them for the world of work. Their work examined relationships between students' engagement in community service in different contexts throughout classes, student organizations, and work studies at a large, public research university in the Upper Midwest, United States (US).

In a recent study, Savage (2022) researched agency¹¹ and the potential for sociology to increase agentic feelings and optimism among students. Savage's study analyzed students at the beginning and end of a Community Action and Involvement (CAI) upper-level sociology course offered at a metropolitan university in the US southeastern region. According to Savage, the CAI course was designed to present an educational, sociological approach to social change, offering opportunities to think about the "structure/agency dichotomy while guiding students in the exploration of their perceptions regarding social change" (2022, p. 108). Savage analyzed pre-

¹¹ Agency refers to an individual's capacity to act independently and make choices that shape their life and influence the social structures around them; the ability to exercise will, make decisions, and take intentional actions that impact your social environment and consider factors such as culture, power dynamics, and institutional constraints (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

and post-CAI course surveys of students' attitudes and behaviour related to agency, social action, and social change. Savage deploys the sociological literacy framework (SLF) of social change developed by Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016) to analyze how students use their sociological skills to engage with and impact the world around them. Although the sociological literacy goal is a vital component of sociological education, it may be forfeited for the attention of core competencies or what we know as canonized sociology (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016; Savage, 2022; Sweet & Ferguson, 2024). The findings echo other CEL literature with the conclusion that this course benefited students by allowing them to “become more optimistic about the potential of the individual to alter society, believe more strongly in their own influence, and [become] more willing to engage with society” (Savage, 2022, p. 116). There are limitations to note in Savage’s study. Although pre- and post-course surveys are useful for measuring short-term attitudinal change, short-term change does not necessarily lead to long-term change (Mobley, 2007; Savage, 2022). Therefore, follow-up studies are necessary to analyze the course's longitudinal factors or “stickiness,¹²” as stated by Savage (2022, p. 119). This study by Savage contributes to our understanding of the agentic potential of sociological education. The limitations reinforce the need for a qualitative analysis exploring CEL’s ‘stickiness’ and applied sociology experiences after graduation to uncover the complex lived experiences that are otherwise neglected by existing research.

Conversations about CEL

Contemporary Canadian universities and colleges face increasing pressure to address vital economic, social, and environmental problems at the community level. In response, universities increasingly cast themselves as engaged institutions committed to building collaborative relationships with communities and stakeholders. The common campus-community partnership involves collaborative forms of organized learning with under-resourced and marginalized communities (Dempsey, 2010; Murphy et al., 2021). The recent popularity of engaged scholarship, like CEL, reflects several shifts within the academic landscape, including academia’s interactions with neoliberalism and the internalization of neoliberal ideologies (Ang, 2006; Dempsey, 2010; Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Guppy et al., 2017; Hok-ka et al., 2016; Savage, 2022; Taylor & Raykov, 2014; Warchal & Ruiz, 2004). In an era of neoliberal policies and

¹² *Stickiness* is a term Savage (2022) utilizes to discuss the retention of skills and techniques.

shrinking public funding, Canadian universities' social science programs face growing pressure to address social needs not met by government or privatized actors (Usher, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2022). Applied sociology CEL initiatives are positioned to address social issues and negative impacts exacerbated by neoliberal economic policies (Ang, 2006). Fostering partnerships between universities and communities marks a return to sociology's traditions of civic engagement, further resonating with pragmatist traditions of higher education reform (Boyer, 1990; Collins, 2007). While research-intensive university reward systems privilege peer-reviewed scholarships and credentials, community-based frameworks may foster desires for other outcomes, such as social or legislative change, policy initiation, or increased visibility of social issues or problems (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2007).

Amid growing economic instability, rising education costs, and escalating credentialism, universities increasingly need to demonstrate their relevance to various publics (Dempsey, 2010; The National Center for Public Policy, 2008). Within sociology, this issue of relevancy propels the pursuit of engaged and applied scholarship:

In this way, the growing community engagement movement provides a rebuttal to criticisms of universities as 'ivory towers' and enhances perceptions of legitimacy and accountability for its participants (Dempsey, 2010, p. 362).

Ideally, engaged partnerships like CEL enhance universities' goals or 'mission statements' while increasing local communities' capacity to address and resolve the issues they confront (Association of Commonwealth Universities, 2001; Dempsey, 2010; Finkelstein, 2001; Holland, 2001). Existing community engagement discussions are often misleadingly homogenous, as they overlook the complexity of power divisions, structures, and culturally and historically contingent categories within communities (Dempsey, 2010). The power relationships involved with knowledge production and sharing processes, including those within CEL courses, must be acknowledged. Acknowledging neoliberalism, capitalism, and power as interactive social forces is vital in this research (Dempsey, 2010; Finkelstein, 2001; Holland, 2001). For example, campus members often have greater access to resources, knowledge, databases, and time than community-based groups, non-profits, or non-government organizations (NGOs) (Dempsey, 2010; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003). Faculty members and students may receive grants, fellowship support or other accredited compensation, while "community engagement often hinges on the voluntary labour of community members" (Dempsey, 2010, p. 360).

Relationships between those involved in CEL are important to investigate to offer further perspective.

Relevant to this research, Dr. Ravelli delivered the applied sociology CEL course investigated in this research through UVic. Contact with potential community partners was pursued through the CEL office at UVic, word-of-mouth, and community contacts previously established by Dr. Ravelli. It is estimated that about 50% of the community partners have been with the CEL course throughout the five-year deliveries. No tangible honorarium is offered to community partners beyond student labour and the research abilities accompanying university-student involvement, including access to university resources (i.e., libraries, online research data bases, university marketing platforms). Community partners are not locked into a contract and are free to come and go as needed or wanted, as the course was developed as a grass-roots initiative; Dr. Ravelli states that this “relationship is based on trust and is ongoing” (Ravelli, personal communication, 2023).

This literature review underscored support for experiential learning and community engagement strategies, particularly CEL. The review of pertinent literature framing CEL as a method for teaching and practicing critical, public, and applied sociology demonstrates the relevance of exploring alumni's lived experiences post-course. I will now transition to discussing the theories and conceptual frameworks that proved relevant throughout this research.

Chapter 3: Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

To extend the current literature and establish a theoretical framework for the experiences of CEL course alumni, I incorporate theories pertinent to my research questions. I draw inspiration from scholars critically analyzing education as a reciprocal institution, interacting, and communicating with society and its social agents. To begin, I engage with Boyer's (1990, 1996) scholarship of engagement. Next, I explore Bandura's (2001) concept of efficacious contemplation and model of self-efficacy to contextualize meaning-making (Alexander, 2011) and agency, as outlined in *Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective*. While relying on Bandura (2001), I also acknowledge Schunk and Mullen's (2012) analysis of self-efficacy that utilizes Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory because it provides important knowledge that may further conceptualize the relevance of this research. Following, I frame Freire's (1993) critical pedagogy and Dewey's (1933, 1976) pragmatic philosophy as relational educational perspectives. I then utilize Savage's (2022) analysis of Ferguson and Carbonaro's (2016) developed *Sociological Literacy Framework*¹³ to contextualize CEL as an important learning pedagogy for sociology students and sociologists. Finally, I explore Collins' (2019) credential culture to understand academia as an interactive and permeable social institution.

Engaging with Scholarship

Boyer's (1990) standard for academic rigor and optimistic belief in education's abilities influenced North American higher education on an intellectual, social, and civic level (Wendling, 2020). As an influential educator and former president of *the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, Boyer (1990) introduced the concept of "scholarship of engagement" within his seminal work, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. According to Boyer, a scholarship of engagement represents a broadened and diversified definition of scholarship. Boyer (1996) proposed a more inclusive understanding of education to recognize diverse forms of knowledge, acknowledging knowledge and learning frameworks that transcended traditional academic activities focused on research publication. Boyer criticized academic and research-based institutions due to the focus on "tenure, teaching, and research" that disengages "community and disseminated scholarly outputs in traditional academic channels

¹³ The SLF developed out of an extensive literature review by Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016), after they found sufficient overlap in various frameworks depicting generalized learning outcomes for the sociology major (see also Sweet & Ferguson, 2024).

that are not widely available for public consumption” (Boyer, 2014, as cited in Wendling, 2020, p. 131). Boyer (1996) further critiqued academia, specifically university campuses, as spaces “where students get credentialed, and faculty get tenured” (p. 23) and not institutions promoting or creating understanding. Boyer advocated for institutional change and argued for teaching and research that works *in* and *with* communities. The use of scholarly knowledge for learners, teachers, and their respective institutions should “work in conjunction with local communities to advance shared institutional and public goals” (Boyer, 1990, as cited in Wendling, 2020, p. 131). According to Boyer (1990), scholarship requires a more engaged approach to actively involved society. Encouraging engagement, Boyer challenged scholarly work to integrate with the social beings, issues, and systems it studied, theorized about, and influenced. Wendling (2020) suggested that Boyer’s work inspired “institution[s] to bridge the gap between the academy and the real world and reprioritize the recognition of engaged work” (p. 132). Furthermore, Boyer argued for institutional recognition and support for his engagement model, including creating structures that value and reward engaged scholarship, like community and experiential learning pedagogies or CEL.

Boyer’s (1996) model of engagement encourages a reciprocal and interactive community scholarship. The model allows knowledge creation to be understood as ongoing and relational, transcending disciplines and extending beyond universities’ traditional scholarships of intergradation (Boyer, 1996). Further recognizing that complex societal issues often require complex solutions and expertise from multiple disciplines, the “conditions of contemporary society” require scholars to participate in community engagement, and they can no longer be “confined within an ivory tower” if they wish to create useful and applicable knowledge (Boyer, 1996, p. 33). Within Boyer’s model, there are four forms of scholarship: discovery (research), integration (interdisciplinary perspectives), application (action research) and teaching (communication). Boyer argued that these four dimensions should be equally valued and emphasize the reciprocal relationship between academia and the community. An engaged scholarship involves collaboration between scholars and external partners (community organizations, businesses, government agencies, etc.) to address real-world issues and contribute to society. According to Boyer’s (1996) model, the public dissemination of knowledge is important to increase accessibility and relevancy.

Boyer (1996) also encouraged reflective practice, encouraging scholars to critically examine their own roles, the impact of their work, and the dynamics of their collaborations with external partners. Boyer's model significantly impacted higher education, encouraging a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of scholarship. Many universities and academic institutions have embraced the scholarship of engagement as part of their commitment to community service, civic responsibility, and the application of academic knowledge to address real-world challenges (Renwick et al., 2020; Wendling, 2020). The scholarship of the engagement model has proven to be particularly relevant to the field of sociology. For this research, I utilize Boyer's (1996) model to position CEL as an experiential learning course embodying a scholarship of engagement. CEL offers students an engaged scholarship through applied sociology and reciprocal collaborative community partner work. My research explores how this scholarship impacts those who have had the privilege to learn and gain experience from it.

Supporting Self-efficacy

Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory, also known as social learning theory, provides a comprehensive framework emphasizing the role of observational learning, imitation, and modelling¹⁴ to understand how social environments impact the learning process. Bandura's theory goes beyond classical behaviourism by incorporating cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, and motivation, into the understanding of how individuals acquire new behaviours and understandings. Bandura introduced the concept of *reciprocal determinism*, emphasizing the interaction between personal factors, such as cognitive abilities and personality, behavior, and context. Bandura positioned these three factors in a continuous feedback loop or *triadic reciprocal causation*, extending reciprocal determinism and highlighting the dynamic interplay of influence. Bandura's framework can be utilized to understand CEL, as an experiential learning pedagogy that allows learners to interact with concepts within various social contexts, during and post course experiences.

Motivation is a crucial aspect of Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory. Throughout learning, individuals may observe and reproduce behaviors, but they continue to do so, or

¹⁴ Modeling involves observing and imitating the behaviors of others, known as 'models'; models can be real-life individuals, symbolic figures (such as in the media), or even oneself in the past, i.e., vicarious reinforcement (Bandura, 2001).

internalize these concepts only if they are motivated (Bandura, 2001, as cited in Schunk & Mullen, 2012). Various factors, including reinforcement, punishment, and expectations of future outcomes, also influence motivation. Thus, motivational factors play a role in impacting learner's perceived transferability of their understandings (Schunk & Mullen, 2012). Exploring motivational factors, modelling, and the importance of context within feedback loops, led Bandura to introduce the concept of *self-efficacy*. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a particular behavior (Bandura, 2001). Research into academic self-efficacy shows that students who feel efficacious about learning tend to be more engaged and use more effective learning strategies to evaluate their comprehension and create supportive learning environments (Schunk & Mullen, 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). Self-efficacy impacts an individual's motivation, learning, and decision-making; thus, it influences achievement behaviours, such as task choice, effort, persistence, and the use of effective coping strategies (Schunk & Mullen, 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). In addition, as students perform tasks, practice their learning, or observe their knowledge through produced work or projects (i.e., community projects during CEL), feelings of self-efficacy are enhanced.

Schunk & Meece (2006) state that transition periods in education can affect self-efficacy and agency due to the changing nature of feedback. In addition, according to Schunk and Mullen "self-efficacy is a critical personal factor that can affect motivation, engagement, learning, and achievement. Self-efficacy is shaped by personal, cultural, and social factors, making learning and achievement complex socio-cultural phenomena" (2012, p.232). Evaluation standards shift as social references, environments, and stakeholders change, requiring reassessment of capabilities and *efficacious contemplation* (Schunk & Mullen, 2012). Bandura (2001) emphasized that contemplation, as a deliberate act of receptive inner observation and investigation, may, be about self-realization and can reflect an injunction to seek knowledge about your reality. Student outcome expectations and social values (perceptions of importance, agency, course credits) play a role in engagement with academic and non-academic tasks (Schunk & Mullen, 2012). Conceptually, Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory contextualizes the following analysis of CEL alumni.

In addition, Schunk and Mullen's (2012) analysis of self-efficacy utilizing Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, provides important research that conceptualizes this thesis. According to Schunk and Mullen, "social cognitive theory stresses learning from the social

environment” (p. 232). Bandura’s social cognitive theory suggests that reciprocal interactions among personal, behavioural, and contextual/environmental or social factors impact learning and motivation. Therefore, “self-efficacy is shaped by personal, cultural, and social factors, making learning and achievement complex sociocultural phenomena” (Bandura, 1997, as cited in Schunk & Mullen, 2012, p. 232). Bandura’s concepts are relevant to this research’s attempts to understand how CEL alumni are impacted by the engaged learning environment of the applied sociology course; and how causation impacts alumni as they move throughout different environments post-course.

Educational Theories and Pedagogical Philosophies

Influential educational theorists Freire (1993) and Dewey (1933, 1976) made significant contributions to the field of education. Freire’s and Dewey’s educational philosophies share a student-centred approach, emphasizing the importance of considering social contexts in the educational processes, including students’ needs, interests, and experiences. Additionally, both Freire and Dewey valued the development of critical thinking and believed that education should foster an inquisitive and analytical mindset towards social beings, issues, and systems; including academic and educational institutions.

Freire’s (1993) critical pedagogy emerged to position schooling and scholarship as a communicative process of meaning-making with the ‘real world.’ Freire argues for an education system that empowers learners and promotes critical thinking. Freire’s critical pedagogy emphasizes a transformative and liberatory approach to teaching and learning. The key principles of Freire’s critical pedagogy include dialogical education¹⁵, problem-posing¹⁶, conscientization¹⁷, praxis, egalitarian teacher-student relationships, consideration of context, and an overarching theme of social justice and equity¹⁸. Freire’s model advocates for an approach to learning that challenges ‘traditional banking education¹⁹’ frameworks, where knowledge is deposited into or on ‘passive’ students (Freire, 1993, as cited in Barton-Bridges, 2022). Freire’s pedagogy aims to

¹⁵ Communication and collaboration to learn from and with learners, educators, students, etc. (Freire, 1993).

¹⁶ Critical thinking and active participation of students, teachers, and society to collaboratively pose and solve problems (Freire, 1993).

¹⁷ Critical consciousness or conscientization involves raising awareness of social, economic, and political issues to encourage critical analysis (Freire, 1993).

¹⁸ Utilize knowledge and privilege as scholars to support just social change (Freire, 1993).

¹⁹ Freire (1993) is best known for his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he presents his critical pedagogy critiquing the *banking model*, and therefore, challenging traditional hierarchical relationships and power imbalances within educational institutions.

achieve social transformation and liberation through education and praxis²⁰. According to Barton-Bridges (2022), Freire's emphasis on praxis is an important aspect to consider because, within capitalist economies, "universities are increasingly defined through their ability to produce a skilled, knowledgeable workforce" (p. 5).

Freire's (1993) pedagogy is rooted in pursuing social justice and equity, arguing that education should be a tool for breaking down oppressive structures and promoting a more *just* and *equal* society. Integrating reflection and action while encouraging the application of learning to real-world situations, Freire recognizes the importance of acknowledging the relevance of socialization and lived experiences. Barton-Bridges (2022) suggested that through Freire's critical pedagogy, the Western academic tradition of isolation was argued against by, "critical thinking concerned about reality" that "does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (Freire, 1993, p. 58, as cited in Barton-Bridges, 2002, p. 6). Freire states that critical pedagogy is about teaching critical agency and understanding education as inherently linked to society and social change (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Giroux, 2007). From the literature, Freire further argued that thoughts and knowledge only become *meaningful* when paired with action and agency (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Carroll, 2013; Giroux, 2007). In this sense, through reflection and critical consciousness, students and alumni may have the ability to engage in further praxis by recognizing interacting social forces and translating problems and issues to inspire change (Carroll, 2013; Freire, 1993; Giroux, 2007). It is important to note that Freire's critical pedagogy accompanied his imagining of educational liberation as redeeming and freeing for both the oppressed (students and communities) and oppressors (teachers, academia, and institutions).

Freire (1993) may be critiqued for overlooking the interacting realities of different and specific forms of oppression and the history of academia as an institution influenced by capitalism and colonization (Giroux, 2010b, as cited in Barton-Bridges, 2022). Critiques of Freire suggest that critical pedagogy should not be perceived as a simple means to an end, in reference to academic liberation. However, such critiques also convey that Freire's optimistic contributions concerning agency and reflection cannot be discounted when discussing change in relation to complex education systems (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Giroux 2010a; Giroux 2010b). The potential empowerment of sociology alumni as critical agents actively questioning and

²⁰ Praxis can be "reflection and action upon the world [to] transform it" (Freire, 1993, p.57).

negotiating relationships between theory and practice, academic and non-academic spaces, while engaging with scholarship and reflection warrant further analysis utilizing Freire's optimistic approach to learning.

In this research, the tenets of the more pragmatic thinker Dewey (1976) cultivate a holistic understanding of the educational experiences and enduring impacts of CEL. Dewey is a key figure in the pragmatist philosophical tradition, emphasizing democratic education, experiential learning, problem-solving, and the practical application of knowledge. Dewey's (1976, 1980, 1981) theorizations are deeply rooted in democratic principles, promoting education to foster responsible and engaged citizens prepared for social interaction beyond educational institutions. Dewey's emphasis is on providing environments and experiences that allow students to learn through *inquiry*. Dewey's theorizations emphasize practical knowledge, and therefore, they are often associated with experiential learning, including CEL courses, emphasizing learning through hands-on experience and reflection. According to Dewey, education grounded in the real-life experiences of students establishes learning as an active process of *doing*; advocating for a curriculum that integrates subjects within a more democratic education. Dewey viewed academic institutions, like universities, as microcosms of democratic society. In summary, Dewey (1976) argued that education should be a continuous reconstruction of experience, allowing students to build on their prior knowledge and adapt to new situations.

Ultimately, Dewey's educational frameworks encouraged experiential learning and in turn, experiences as the basis of learning. Simply, experiential is the foundation for learning, rather than theorizations, technical terms, methods, and assumptions (Hargraves, 2021). From a practical and experiential perspective, Dewey suggested that learners' knowledge existed prior to theoretical formulation or knowledge (Dewey, 1976, as cited in Hargraves, 2021). Dewey's pragmatic philosophy emphasizes *practical knowledge*. Practical knowledge's primary aim is to be *useful*. According to Dewey, through experiential learning frameworks, students learn how to rigorously theorize and propose potential answers to inquiries relating to social issues and practical problems (Dewey, 1976, as cited in Hargraves, 2021). Due to this research exploring CEL, a form of experiential learning, Dewey's, educational framework is important to discuss and can offer relevant and pragmatic inquiry in relation to my research questions. In the following section I transition to discuss educational philosophies utilized in learning and teaching undergraduate sociology.

Competent Sociologists and Citizens

The SLF framework has two broad categories that organize learning outcomes for sociology: the *Sociological Perspective* and the *Sociological Toolbox* (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016). What makes sociology unique is the combination of these categories and their concepts that work to create a holistic sociological understanding of theory and practice (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016). The first category, labelled the *Sociological Perspective*, contains five essential concepts that are deemed fundamental, including the sociological eye, social structures, socialization, stratification, social change, and reproduction. These five concepts of the sociological perspective are introduced in the introductory sociology course and then explored in depth as the student proceeds through the major (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016). According to Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016), understanding the essential sociological concepts must be accompanied by application to develop competency. The second category, labelled the *Sociological Toolbox*, contains the six essential competencies of a sociology major: applying sociological theories to understand social phenomena, critically evaluating explanations of human behaviour and social phenomena, applying scientific principles to understand the social world, evaluating the quality of social and/or scientific methods and/or data, rigorously analyzing data, and using sociological knowledge to inform policy and public understanding (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016; Savage, 2022). The framework argues that a sociological toolbox allows sociological thinkers to practice and apply the sociological perspective²¹ (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016).

The learning outcome for the sociology undergraduate curriculum is that students understand how to engage with sociology and society. Although many undergraduate sociology students attest to sociology teachings' benefits, many are left feeling "frustrated," "unequipped," and "unsure" of what to do with sociology (Savage, 2022). In other words, their education gives them the toolbox, but students are left feeling like they don't know how to use the tools that sociology has given them. In Mills' (1959) terms, students learning about the sociological imagination often miss out on the "magnificent" parts of sociology "by the fact of [their] living, [they] contribute, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its

²¹ The sociological perspective is a way of understanding society that emphasizes the interconnectedness of social structures, institutions, and cultural norms (Mills, 1959).

history” (pp. 6-7). This can foster feelings of uselessness rather than self-efficacy (Johnson, 2005; Rondini, 2015; Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

Indeed, a keyword utilized throughout the SLF is *applying*. The ability to apply one’s “sociological knowledge and skills to engage with and impact the world around them” (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016, p. 153) is a vital component of sociological education that may be forfeited in favor of core or canonized sociology (i.e., Marx, Weber, Durkheim) (Petray & Halbert, 2013; Savage, 2022). The research shows undergraduate sociology classes can increase cynicism and apathy through exposure to entrenched social problems (Haddad & Lieberman, 2002; Kleinman & Copp, 2009). In contrast, there are empirical studies on experiential and engaged learning courses attesting to increased student empowerment and agency (Johnson, 2005; Mobley, 2007; Savage, 2022). Thus, knowing about social issues, power relationships, injustice, and change does not simply beget self-efficacy, empowerment, or a desire to work for social change. Recognizing one’s agency is a crucial part of reflective thinking and impacts how we feel about ourselves and our abilities, both within and beyond the classroom.

Education and Ideology: The Cost of Credits

First published in 1979, *The Credential Society* by Collins (2019) remains an essential text for understanding higher education and its role in producing and reproducing social systems and structures of North American society. Collins controversially claimed that expanding education to tertiary²² formulations created inflation of credentials through mass education's prescient promise of increased social mobility. The rising production value of education further stymies job requirements and credential hyper-fixation (Collins, 2019). Investigating grade inflation, rising educational costs, and misleading job promises within the undergraduate spectrum, Collins examined how credentialing closes off job sectors and devalues other ways of knowing and learning that cannot be formulated into a credential.

Perpetrating education as a resource allowed Collins (2019) to argue that the massification of education would mirror the production processes within neoliberal capitalistic societies, specifically in North America. Tertiary forms of education exist within capitalist economies that position universities to be increasingly defined by their ability to produce skilled,

²² Third in order or level; when referring to education in Canadian and Western contexts refers to post-secondary education including universities, colleges, and any other form of continued education.

knowledgeable workforces (Giroux, 2010a). Reflecting on Collins' (2019) book, it is possible to see how credentialism impacts monetary, emotional and social investments in Westernized North American higher education. The fundamental social conflicts that drive Collin's narrative can still be observed today as neoliberal and credit cultures exacerbate inequality of conditions with models of merit. Models of merit interact with race, gender, socioeconomic status and so forth; compounding over time to influence accessibility and increase stratification within models of credentialism to impact ever-upward ratcheting of formal degree requirements (i.e., Bachelor, Master, Doctorate).

Universities across North America have become massified; a process whereby an increasing proportion of the population engages in higher education as universities transition from elite to democratized institutions with diversified forms of knowledge²³ (Allais, 2014; Chow, 2007; Guder et al., 2009; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Maynard, 2011; Trow, 2007). This transition was to meet the needs of an increasingly knowledge-based economy and the services that go with it (i.e., better health care and education). However, *democratizing* higher education and making it less exclusive shifted the idea of exclusivity to *credits*. This transition for education to service a larger and more diverse student population drove employers to emphasize credentials; and pressures to obtain a university degree to achieve or maintain a class and/or lifestyle was normalized (Brown, 2016; Trow, 2007). Although massification can widen access to knowledge, skills, and credentials, it can also position the undergraduate degree as a rite of passage and a working-class requirement.

According to research, two things happen when massification occurs. First, a concomitant increase and expansion of education, justifying the production of more specialists, more people able to teach others, etc. (Allais, 2014; Chow, 2007; Guder et al., 2009; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Trow, 2007). However, this is often simply an arms race of credits: the more degrees, the better. Second, stratification within higher education increases as governments or non-profit private institutions expand the number of institutions to meet rising demand; institutions and, therefore, 'credits' do not all obtain the same level of prestige. Simply, where you go and what you do within the university matters. According to data analyzed by the Organization for

²³ Canadian universities began as elite institutions, with access based largely on privilege; cultivating the minds of the ruling; academic standards were constrained, and quality of education was emphasized (Trow, 2007). Increasing access to education through massification diversified knowledge and had many benefits for people who couldn't previously afford education and the process diversified academia (Bowles & Gintis, 2011).

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which compares the percentage of the country's residents who have completed some form of tertiary education. Canada had the second highest level of most educated individuals at 67% (OECD, 2023). Canadian students, including international learners, substantially shoulder the cost of the credential society due to the growing market for post-secondary credentials, including co-ops, internships, or other resume-related extra-credit course credentials, like CEL.

Social scientists abetted this process eluding to education as an investment into social mobility and future earning power (Collins, 2019; Goldthorpe, 2014). Collins (2019) argued against credential cultures, drawing on educational ethnographers like Willis:

Education unproblematically does the bidding of the capitalist economy... The actually varied, complex, and creative field of human consciousness, culture, and capacity is reduced to the dry abstraction of structural determination. Capital requires it, therefore, schools do it... (Willis, 2017, p. 205).

Educational institutions often have power over communities, teachers, and students. Traditional power relationships of learning should be challenged to foster relational knowledge and inspire ongoing critical analysis of learning frameworks like CEL that exist within and beyond educational institutions. Academic training for credentials can occur through experiential learning, including internships or community-based learning pedagogies like CEL. Alumni's experiences of their applications of knowledge influence their reflections on their credits (Renwick et al., 2020). Credentials increasingly encompass learning activities and influence academic innovations and educational systems (Collins, 2019). With education systems valuing credits and merit alongside undergraduate students in Canadian academia credential culture may influence learning innovations and their perceived impacts. It is no longer sufficient to obtain an undergraduate degree; students must also have additional training to distinguish themselves to potential future employers. There remains a need for research to contextualize students' experiences and reflections on their involvement within potential neoliberal institutions and their various pathways for learning and/or success: like co-ops, internships, or experiential learning programs like CEL. This research aims to uncover how credential culture within the precarity of capitalist ideologies is created, reproduced, and maintained or challenged through CEL. In the following methods section I outline how I attempted to answer my research questions and the ethics that guided this research.

Chapter 4: Research Methods

I undertook a phenomenological qualitative methodology²⁴ to answer my research questions: *How do sociology students describe their CEL experiences after course completion; what impacts, if any, does a CEL-applied sociology seminar course have on students post-course; to what degree do alumni CEL experiences change in relation to time since course completion; and, according to alumni, how effectively does CEL teach applied sociology?*

A qualitative methodology aligns well with my exploratory research, focused on unveiling and comprehending the lived experiences²⁵ of CEL alumni (Geertz, 2008; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). I utilize a qualitative approach aligning with my interpretivist or constructionist research paradigm. The interpretivist or constructionist paradigm is an approach to social research emphasizing the importance of understanding and interpreting the subjective meaning and social constructions that individuals and groups attach to their experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005). The fundamental tenet of the interpretivist paradigm follows the notion that reality is socially constructed through shared meanings, language, and symbolic interactions; highlighting the relational and interactive nature of social phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Lather, 1986; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Researchers operating within the interpretivist paradigm prefer qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and participant observation, to delve into the rich and context-specific meanings people ascribe to their experiences. This paradigm's emphasis on iterative reasoning allows theories and understanding to emerge within and from the data, fostering a holistic exploration of interconnected factors. Reflexivity is also central to this paradigm, encouraging researchers to acknowledge their own biases and the influence they bring to the research process. This study heavily relies on the memories and insights of CEL applied sociology alumni to represent their experiences in the final findings.

In this fourth chapter, I outline my research methods, explaining the methodologies I employed during the study. Then, I offer a detailed explanation of my positionality and my connection to the subject. Following, I outline the reflexive techniques I employed throughout

²⁴ Phenomenological methods, or phenomenology, is a form of qualitative research that focuses on studying individuals' lived experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

²⁵ For this research, lived experience refers to CEL alums' knowledge about their experiences that can only be gained through their direct, first-hand involvement and interaction with CEL and its legacy, or lack thereof (Manen, 2016).

the research process. Next, I provide insights into my research setting before delving into a comprehensive overview of my qualitative interview methodology. This includes a detailed account of ethical considerations, recruitment procedures, and sample demographics. I conclude with a thorough account of data collection and analysis processes.

Positionality and Accountable Reflexivity

Throughout the research process, I grappled with my positionality²⁶ and how it might influence this work. During my undergraduate degree, I was exposed to concepts and theories that enabled me to analyze the world around me, including my own experiences with life and education. Through reflective thinking and practicing applied sociology, a singular CEL course at UVic inspired me to think relationally, develop reflexivity as a skill, and acknowledge the reciprocal nature of my sociology as both a discipline and a personal conviction.

During the CEL course, I collaborated with a community partner alliance dedicated to environmental and animal conservation to produce accessible public web-based forums aligned with their mission statement. My CEL project was a joint effort that involved two other students, community members, and the community partner. This project addressed the need for dynamic knowledge dissemination that reflected the diversity of communities involved in conservation efforts. The course inspired me to reflect on sociology's accessibility and applicability to the various communities that make up our social reality. This experience was profoundly consequential because it inspired me to think about how and why I practiced and engaged with sociology. Although reflecting upon the course as it occurred was dictated by the syllabus, these reflective journal assignments only represented the beginning of my retrospective analysis of my CEL experience. As I transitioned and navigated academic and non-academic spaces after the course, I continued to reflect on my CEL experiences.

My time after CEL marked a transition period comprised of critical moments in my life and sociology journey, including my undergraduate graduation, attaining my first sociology-focused job, navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, applying to graduate school, and conducting my own research-based thesis. As I navigated life post-course, I found myself making meaning out of CEL to contextualize my reality. Understanding my CEL experience as evolving evoked

²⁶ Positionality is the practice of self-location or social location of the researcher in relation to the topic they are studying; typically identified by locating the researcher's position concerning three areas: the subjects under investigation, the research participants, and the research design (Holmes, 2020; Leavy, 2017).

retrospective contemplations regarding its value, usefulness, and potential as a learning applied sociology pedagogy (Ylitalo & Meyer, 2019). Contemplating the legacy that applied sociology and CEL had on me inspired me to investigate the meaning-making processes of others. Conversations with fellow alumni inspired me to explore CEL through this research study to mobilize and disseminate our stories. Reflexively, this research continues to make meaning from our CEL endeavors and contributes to the ongoing legacy of our experiences.

Research positionality is important to identify and articulate in social science research (Holmes, 2020). Positionality is discussed in the literature as a description of an individual's or researcher's "world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context" (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, as cited in Holmes, 2020, p. 1). The worldview or perspective researchers bring to the research, due to their personal experiences, concerns ontological assumptions, while epistemological assumptions concern an individual's belief about knowledge and the assumptions about human nature and agency developed from interactions with environments or contexts (Berger, 2015; Holmes, 2020). These assumptions are important to acknowledge because positionality influences how research is conducted, what research methods are utilized, and the organization of findings and results (Berger, 2015; Holmes, 2020; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Kostuchuk, 2021). Positionality is commonly identified in research by locating the researcher in relation to three main areas: the subject under investigation, the research participants, and the research context, methods or process (Arber, 2006; Berger, 2015; Chhabra, 2020; Holmes, 2020; Huberman & Miles, 2002).

Revealing my position to the subject under investigation and the research participants as a CEL alumnus conducting MA research through UVic is important. My positionality is important to understand what drew me to this work and how this study is part of my meaning-making processes (Kenny, 2004; Wilson, 2008). It is also important to acknowledge that revealing or simply having prior knowledge and experience can affect the researcher, participants' perceptions of the researcher, and the data analysis (Chew-Graham et al., 2002; Merton, 1972). Therefore, I utilized Simbürger's (2014) discussion of Gouldner's (1970) reflexive sociology to consider my positionality and practice reflexivity through introspection.

Simbürger (2014) argues that research that invokes analysis into educational frameworks and institutions involves entangling the researcher with the subject and object of the research as they confront the paradox of being inside and outside of the research simultaneously. Throughout

Simbürger's work, Bourdieu's (1993) and Gouldner's (1970) arguments of accountability are utilized to discuss the paradox of conducting, writing, and disseminating ethical educational sociological research. Due to my positionality and my phenomenological methodology, I confronted this paradox throughout my study, investigating experiential learning frameworks and their impacts on CEL alumni post-course through a sociology of education perspective. I was an insider with my own CEL experiences, an active listener and observer of participants' CEL experiences, and an outside investigator. Scholars suggest that confronting this distinction or paradox between insider (emic, part of the community) and outsider (etic, outside of the group studied) perspectives allows researchers to meaningfully engage with reflexivity (Arber, 2006; Chhabra, 2020; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Merton, 1972; Simbürger, 2014). According to Simbürger (2014), Gouldner's (1970) *Reflexive Sociology*²⁷ may invoke an awareness of ourselves in relation to our research and our realities with practical and political implications. As a researcher existing within and doing research on education, moving and having a "meta-perspective" (Simbürger, 2014, p. 58) about research and reality allowed me to occupy an *in-between* position, identifying as neither entirely inside nor outside of the research subject (Arber, 2006; Chhabra, 2020; Milligan, 2016). According to Simbürger (2014), engaging with this paradox can allow researchers like myself, to elaborate on their work and enrich the research experience for themselves and participants.

Moreover, my positionality to the research methods is important to contextualize the feasibility of this research. Pragmatically, Leavy (2017) proposes that researchers must ensure their chosen topic is feasible and accessible to explore. Researching and writing feasible research means that the researcher is familiar with the topic and poses relevant research questions that can be answered (Charli et al., 2022; Leavy, 2017). Additionally, feasible research accounts for objective aspects like time, scope, resources, expertise, or funding (Leavy, 2017). My position as an alumnus of the CEL applied sociology course under investigation makes this research feasible and grants me insight and access that other researchers may not possess (Berger, 2015; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Wilson, 2008). In the context of sociological research, Berger's (2015) three-

²⁷ Simbürger utilized Gouldner's (1970) reflexive Sociology, which resembles the work of Bourdieu (1993) and Mills (1959).

pronged approach discussing positionality concerning researcher access²⁸, relationships²⁹, and background³⁰ is often relied upon to address how researchers can acknowledge their influence and mitigate bias.

My status as a CEL alumni resulted in an ability to access and connect with participants to build a more genuine rapport during our conversations (Berger, 2015; Chew-Graham et al., 2002; Kostuchuk, 2021; Simbürger, 2014). My background and positionality resulted in informative data. Acknowledging the conversational methods of the interview, I introduced myself and my research before transitioning into our *conversations* about CEL. According to participants, the conversational nature of the interviews facilitated the creation of a safe space for them to reflect and make meaning of their CEL experiences alongside someone who “got it³¹.” Further acknowledging the interview as a safe and reflective space to “realize things” and discuss CEL with me.

As I engaged with participants’ reflective CEL contemplations, I also reflected on my own experiences further during CEL, post-course, and my journey to this research. This allowed me to practice *accountable* reflexivity alongside participating CEL alumni. This accountability and lack of traditional researcher-participant relationship was acknowledged bluntly by participants and made evident through their openness to tell stories and share information that went beyond the confines of my interview guide. For example, a participant stated, “This is not what I was expecting when I agreed to an *interview*. And I think I like it?” (Bailey). This was supported by data accrediting the capacity of participants to redirect the conversation or correct my language, tone, or narratives. For example, participants would acknowledge my positionality and experience but also take the time to clarify, rephrase or restate conversational notes that acknowledge the uniqueness of our individual experiences: “Let me rephrase,” “so I think that is so true, but in reality, for myself, I think that I feel...”. Participants often referenced my positionality as a CEL alumnus as an opportunity to be open and honest, while challenging themselves to answer questions and reflect on their experiences.

²⁸ Berger argued that a researcher’s positionality influences access to the sample, setting or field of research in relation to perceived and received participant empathy, and understanding (Kostuchuk, 2021)

²⁹ Researcher-researched relationship influence the information participants are willing to share due to familiarity, openness and general rapport (Berger, 2015; Kostuchuk; 2021).

³⁰ Context and experiences of the researcher influence the language used, research question posed and methods utilized to analyze the data (Berger, 2015).

³¹ My position as a UVic CEL 2020 alumni was disclosed to participants during my introduction of the research and myself at the beginning of our interviews.

Due to the reflective nature of this research engaging in additional reflexive practices³² was necessary. According to Leavy (2017) and Kostuchuk (2021), reflexive notetaking is a practice where researchers note their interpretations and reactions during or after data collection (interviews) and reflect on them during their analysis (coding). I practiced reflexive notetaking throughout the data collection and analysis; coding my reactions, reflections, and any meaningful interviewee interactions that engaged with my various positionalities. This allowed me to practice accountable reflexivity and transparency throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Ultimately, reflexive notetaking works to mitigate biases, enhance understanding of data and enhance the reliability of research findings for researchers and readers:

Benefits of reflexivity included accountability, trustworthiness, richness, clarity, ethics, support, and personal growth—beneficial for the integrity of the research process, the quality of the knowledge generated, the ethical treatment of those being studied, and the researcher's own well-being and personal growth (Probst, 2015, p. 42).

Sharing the sentiment of Probst (2015), Carroll (2021), and other qualitative phenomenological researchers aiming to be ethically just, I regard myself as a continuous learner actively participating in a socio-autobiographical analysis (Chang, 2016; Kostuchuk, 2021; Leavy, 2017; Merton, 1972). A socio-autobiography is a written narrative that explores the social and cultural factors that have shaped an individual's identity and life experiences. It involves reflecting on personal experiences through a sociological lens and considers how societal structures, institutions, and cultural contexts have influenced one's life (Carroll, 2021; Friedman, 1990). As a CEL alumnus, I use socio-autobiography and reflexive notetaking to probe my experiences (Friedman, 1990; Smith, 2005). In summary, I recognize that this research is guided mainly by my perspectives derived from my experiences with CEL and that my background influences the language used, the questions posed, and the theories I apply to the research (Berger, 2015; Carroll, 2021; Friedman, 1990; Kostuchuk, 2021). Throughout this section, I detailed my positionality by locating myself as a researcher; I now transition into discussing the ethical considerations I adhered to throughout this research.

³² Reflexive practices employ strategies to question how our values, biases, prejudices, and attitudes influence our understanding of social interactions; they include the constant awareness, assessment and reassessment of relationships and interactions, including the researcher-research-researched network (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018; Chang, 2016; Kostuchuk, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

After assessing and outlining the ethical considerations and steps in my UVic Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) application, I received HREB approval (ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER 23-0020, Appendix 1). I then conducted my recruitment and research, utilizing the *Tri-Council Policy Statement's (TCPS2) Ethics Framework: Core Principles* article 1.1 and the *Belmont Report's*³³ three ethical principles to guide my research, including respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Respect for persons recognizes and promotes the autonomy, agency, and anonymity of participants (TCPS2, 2022). The *TCPS2* (2022) and the *Belmont Report* state that researchers can demonstrate respect for persons by obtaining informed and ongoing consent from all participants and validating their intrinsic value as human beings (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; TCPS2, 2022). To ensure participants felt validated, I distributed consent forms via email prior to scheduling an interview. In practice, respect for persons was operationalized by ensuring that participants knew that I was deploying informed and ongoing consent and what this meant; including, their rights as participants to review the consent form at any time, right of refusal in answering any questions, the right to stop the interview at any time, and their right to access their transcript and ultimately revoke approval to use their data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Before the interview commenced, I reviewed the consent form and collected verbal recorded consent.

Concern for the welfare imposes an ethical obligation to design, assess and conduct research to protect participants from unnecessary or avoidable risks (TCPS2, 2022). The anonymity of participants is ensured in the following research using pseudonyms according to randomly assigned Westernized gender-neutral names (Kaiser, 2009). In addition, any mention of workplace names, community partner names, or other possible identifiers have been omitted from the research or replaced with non-identifying general descriptors to preserve participant confidentiality (i.e., non-profit association instead of its name) (Kaiser, 2009). Establishing and ensuring respect for persons was integral to my axiology³⁴. This allowed participants a safe and

³³ *Belmont Report* synopsis (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, & National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 2014).

³⁴ Axiology refers to the ethical considerations made throughout the research process to ensure morals and values guide the search for knowledge; these can include defining, evaluating, and understanding the values involved in conducting the research, including data, participants, audiences, and positionality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The morality criterion of my research depicts that I will be truthful in interpreting the data and position the participants' voices at the forefront of the study to ensure the attention is on their safeguarded lived experiences.

secure space to reflect and tell their stories in their own words, with confidence, emotion, and vulnerability' ensuring they did not feel a need to edit themselves or their memories.

Justice within the *TCPS2* (2022) refers to the obligation to treat people fairly and equitably. Participants should be treated fairly and made aware of the potential risks and benefits of the research throughout recruitment and knowledge dissemination processes. The research questions justify the inclusion criteria of this research. Similar to the *TCPS2* (2022) concern for welfare and justice statements, within the *Belmont Report*, *beneficence* is a principle that maintains the welfare of the research participants throughout the research study; arguing that researchers and research should focus on maximizing benefits and minimizing risk for research subjects (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Recruitment materials and consent forms detailed this research's potential benefits, accompanying risks, and mitigation tactics (Appendix 2). Contemplative and collaborative listening strategies and my reflexive practices allow this study to provide rich data and generate information on applied sociology and CEL (Wiebe, 2019). Another benefit to the research is that the stories provided by CEL alumni may benefit the field of sociology, Canadian educators, policymakers, educational legislation, and those interested in community engagement strategies. This study will also contribute knowledge to the literature on experiential learning, applied sociology and the sociology of education. Active reinforcement of beneficence worked to ensure my position as a translator and amplifier³⁵ of the alumni's CEL voices were known to participants. Moreover, various methods of data representation, such as quotes and storytelling, were utilized to communicate the essence of my findings. There was minimal risk associated with participating in this study. I ensured all participants knew their participation was completely optional, that data anonymity would be guaranteed, and that only I would have access to identifying information, as outlined in the consent form (Appendix 2). Transcripts were stored on my password-protected computer and only accessible by myself. Additionally, I encouraged participants to reach out if they had any questions or concerns. The supervisor committee's information and UVic HREB contact information were also supplied to participants. The

³⁵ Amplification focuses on deepening the understanding of the phenomenon within the research context with tactics such as member checking or prolonged engagement, enhancing the validity and credibility of research. Translation involves making the findings accessible (themes, patterns, codes) and meaningful to a broader audience. Both contribute to the relevance of my qualitative research by ensuring that the richness of the data is captured and effectively communicated.

diversity of contacts provided was important to ensure that participants could choose who to trust.

Justification strategies ensured reasonable, non-exploitative and well-considered methods for data collection and analysis. These processes were communicated to participants through the information included on the consent form (Appendix 2). I also answered any questions about my thesis and the relevance of my research after the interview concluded to mitigate the influence of my CEL experiences on the data. Participants could also member-check³⁶ their transcript and/or will receive a copy of the completed thesis. Reassuring the credibility of participants' constructions and following up with participants verified my data, findings, and conclusions; this is an essential aspect of co-creating knowledge (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Research Setting: A Five-Year Cohort

The research reported here focuses on alumni experiences in an applied sociology CEL course at UVic throughout five deliveries between 2018 and 2023. The site for this retrospective cohort study is UVic, an urban university located in Victoria, British Columbia (BC), Canada. In 2018, Dr. Bruce Ravelli offered a fourth-year applied sociology CEL course for the first time. The course continues to be delivered and offers opportunities for sociology students to gain “first-hand experience applying their sociological skills while reflecting on their positionality as students, peers, and researchers” (Berard & Ravelli, 2021, p. 198). Dr. Ravelli's course fosters a collaborative partnership between students and community partners, united in the shared objective of actively engaging with and addressing pertinent community issues. In collaboration with community partners and local organizations, students co-create and complete semester- or dual-semester³⁷ projects while completing coursework. The course work includes writing multiple reflective journal assignments, research papers, and reviewing CEL and applied sociology literature.

Focusing on a singular CEL applied sociology course provides a unique opportunity to investigate the long-term impacts or legacies of the experience. This analysis offers a chance to

³⁶ Member checking “consists of taking data and interpretations back to the study participants so they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Systematically checking the data and the narrative account with a lens focused on participants allows member checking to improve the accuracy of research findings. Guba and Lincoln (1988) describe member checks as the most crucial technique for establishing credibility.

³⁷ To note, the course changed from a semester period in 2018-2020 to a dual-semester course in 2022-2023.

gather data across time and capture a range of perspectives while controlling for the specific university program, teacher, course structure, and community partners (as over 50% of community partners continued to participate or returned throughout the five years). A case or cohort study allows for an in-depth investigation of complex issues in ‘real-life’ settings and the opportunity to explore social relationships and social forces (Crossman, 2021). Case studies using in-depth exploration of a particular program, event, phenomenon, or process gain a deeper understanding beyond the scope of other methods. To gain a deeper understanding of the legacy of CEL courses, I explore the concepts reflected within the range of years since course completion (1 month to 5 years at the time of the interview). A cohort study enables me to analyze experiences within a defined context while allowing time, shifting realities, and differences in meaning-making processes to be explored (Snyder, 2012). However, like any other method, a case study involving various cohorts has areas for improvement. These weaknesses often relate to the generalizability of the findings due to the data being gathered within a specific and narrow context (Hernandez, 2019; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Snyder, 2012; Yin, 2014). Nevertheless, community-engaged, applied sociology and CEL literature emphasize that students and communities have unique needs, challenges, situations, and experiences. Therefore, although the findings from this project may not be generalizable to other academic settings, they reveal the long-term influences of a single CEL course and how learning applied sociology may affect individuals and their relationships.

This study builds on existing literature. In particular, the reflective analysis conducted by the 2018 course facilitators Berard and Ravelli, *In Their Words: What Undergraduate Sociology Students Say about Community-Engaged Learning* (2021). Berard and Ravelli's (2021) study explored what sociology students said about CEL and applied sociology during the course and immediately after it concluded. Although this research created understanding by giving CEL students a voice, there are a few limitations. This research was limited regarding the power relationships of the researcher Dr. Ravelli, as the professor assigning reflective journal assignments, grading student community projects, and potentially being a reference for participants in relation to their CEL experiences. In addition, the study occurred throughout the course and immediately following; thus, the results do not attest to the longitudinal impacts or ongoing meaning-making process involved in reflective thinking. My research aims to add to this by mitigating power relationships between researcher and alumni. In addition, my research

encouraged retrospective self-analysis across various timelines and constructed realities to further understand the legacy of CEL through an interpretivist perspective.

Recruitment Procedure and Sample Demographics

The recruitment for this study occurred in two stages. First, the participant criteria were established. For this study, the participant criteria were relatively narrow; potential participants had to identify as alumni of the fourth-year seminar CEL applied sociology course taught by Dr. Ravelli at UVic between 2018 and 2023. The cohort case study population sample was established through the five-year delivered course lists kept within UVic's classist database. The population for this sample yielded approximately eighteen students per course delivered, therefore a total of ninety potential participants were in the sample population. After ethics approval was granted through UVic's HREB, these class lists were sent a recruitment email and poster (Appendix 4) via a neutral third party as designated by ethical guidelines. Contact with the target population was initiated through the designated neutral third party with legitimate access to contact information: the Sociology Department's Assistant to the Chair, Zoe Lu. In this initial email, potential participants were asked to contact me directly if they were interested in participating in the study. This recruitment method yielded thirteen (N=13) participants for this study, exceeding my original proposed goal of 10 participants. The recruitment yielded at least one participant from each course over the five years³⁸. It was unnecessary to reject any participant who expressed interest in this study. Due to time and resource constraints, thirteen participant interviews were manageable. I believe there is value in creating space and time for reflection and upholding individual stories and experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Second, following an indication of interest, participants were sent the consent form describing the project's risks and benefits and the conversational interview method (Appendix 2). All recruitment materials indicated the ethical guidelines of the research. In addition, the recruitment poster detailed that participants would be offered a small monetary incentive for participating, in the form of a \$10 visa e-gift card, to thank them for their time and consideration (Appendix 5). After reviewing the consent form, I established verbal, recorded consent at the beginning of each interview. I also ensured that participants understood their role in this study and how I would ensure and uphold ongoing and informed consent.

³⁸ Including myself, this study yielded at least 2 participants from each course from 2018 to 2023.

As previously mentioned, the eligibility parameters for this research were relatively narrow, given the nature of a cohort study. I interviewed thirteen participants who met the criteria for this research; randomized gender-neutral pseudonyms were assigned to participants. See *Table 1: Participant Information*. This table includes a brief biography to introduce the participants, explain the nature of their community partner and/or project and what they were shared they were involved in at the time of their interview. This table provides a reference for further findings

Table 1: Participant Information

Participant	CEL Course Year	Community Partner; and, Project	Now
Alex	2020	Child Rights and Development Advocacy; Legal fact sheet research and writing	Community-based participatory action MA research and Research assistant led work
Bailey	2019	Homelessness, Substance and Mental Health Advocacy; Helped develop a pre-employment program	Worked with a community partner through an employment opportunity before transitioning into a current Consulting position for a privatized corporation
Cameron	2021/2022	Affordable housing, shelter, health, and support services; Research into current barriers to access within the services provided	University accessibility program support worker
Dylan	2018	Education and advocacy for brain injury survivors and their families; Interviews	Law school student, with a civil and Human Rights focus
Emerson	2021/2022	Child Rights and Development advocacy; Creation and distribution of survey and results	Volunteering, and working with youth groups across Canada
Finley	2019	Immigrant and Refugee programs for youth; Interviewed association members and other associations involved and interacting with them to create better communication strategies and outline potential projects	Administrative coordinator for a restaurant, and future Law student
Gabrielle	2018	Multi-service, grassroots agency established by, with, and for sex workers; Equity and human rights accessibility audit of the community programs services	Volunteer at sexual assault centre, and Project coordinator for restorative engagement programs responding to sexual misconduct in government institutions
Harley	2019	Therapeutic food growing opportunity for people who have challenges, including mental illness, addictions and/or criminal offences; Feedback survey and report to give back to the organization	Supportive house care worker and Psych Nurse student
Indy	2021/2022	Homelessness, Substance and Mental Health Advocacy; Created video resource depicting information on volunteer services, and ways to get involved with the community partner	Special Olympics support worker and educational advocate
Jamie	2021/2022	Cycling education, celebration, and advocacy; Created and summarized to report on a youth based survey depicting statistics on cycling to school	Worker, counsellor, and educator for people living in physical, emotional, spiritual, and social poverty
Kendall	2018	Society humanizing homelessness through storytelling; Led focus groups exploring strategies the community partner could use for assessment and evaluation, and collecting feedback to understand the needs, and desires of the folks served	Learning exchange program worker
Lennon	2022/2023	Navigation, education and support to fill the gaps in service for folks living with BPD and	Volunteer and Student

		their loved ones; Interviews and informative write-ups	
Morgan	2022/2023	Indigenous-led network supporting research leadership among Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) communities, collectives and organizations; Indigenous allyship resource creation	Integrated substance management youth worker

Although it is important to acknowledge participant demographics, like gender within research, for my findings and data analysis, participants will be referred to using gender-neutral terms. The method was brought forth as an idea by a participant during the recruitment phase in relation to gender identity, reader attachment styles, and perceptions. All participants were asked about pronoun preferences at the beginning of the interview process and consented to gender-neutral terminology for the presentation of this research. Gender plays a significant role in higher education, influencing various aspects, including enrollment rates, choice of fields of study, academic performance, and career outcomes³⁹ (Chan et al., 2021). After reviewing the data and contemplating the research questions a gender-based analysis was not feasible due to the scope of this research. Overall, gender continues to be a significant factor in higher education in Canada, shaping the experiences and opportunities of students and faculty alike. Efforts to research gender as a variable should be addressed in future research.

Throughout this thesis, it is important to note that the duration of the course shifted from a four-month single semester length requiring around thirty hours of community work to an eight-month course spanning two semesters that required around forty hours of community work. Participants reflected on how the length of their course may have impacted their personal relationships with fellow course members, as well as community partners. However, participants did not comment on the length of the course in a comparative way; for example, even when participants knew through friendships, word of mouth or continued relationships with UVic that the course length had changed, they did not offer a comparative analysis in relation to the length of their CEL experience. This is something I would like to investigate further if given the time and space to do so.

³⁹ Historically, there have been differences in enrollment rates between genders, with women often outnumbering men in undergraduate programs, this trend varies across fields of study and differentiates on continued study beyond undergraduate levels. Regarding this research, women tend to dominate in fields like education and health sciences, and have a disproportionate amount of enrollment in sociology (Chan et al., 2021).

Qualitative and Conversational Interviews

My qualitative research explores the legacy of CEL experiences, offering a comprehensive perspective through a dedicated five-year cohort study that addresses the gaps of previous research (Astin & Sax, 1998; Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Geller et al., 2016). A qualitative approach proved adequate for this exploratory research for a few reasons. Engaging in qualitative interviews afforded me the opportunity to attentively listen to participants' lived experiences across the diverse timelines following their completion of the CEL course. Although quantitative⁴⁰ approaches may measure or create information on social phenomena, as evident through CEL literature, analysis is limited. In addition, while qualitative open-ended interview questions surpass quantitative limitations, they are time-consuming and do not account for in-depth conversation, probing, or insight beyond the scope of the researcher's assumptions (Feldman, 1999; Leavy, 2017).

I utilized qualitative methods to conduct conversational interviews. Conversational interviews are semi-structured and open-ended to enable participants to narrate their stories and construct causal pathways that allow further reflection and exploration (Feldman, 1999). Conversation generates knowledge and fosters a transformative discourse between people, creating new understandings of topics through cooperative and collaborative discourse between researcher and participant (Feldman, 1999). Conversational interview methods also inspire storytelling, as participants reveal and unpack their various prismatic experiences⁴¹; “ideas collide and mingle with other ideas and are diluted and complicated in the process...” (Buchmann, 1983, p. 21). Deliberative scholar Black (2013) noted that storytelling and conversational engagement strategies, like dialogue-based interviews, can be a break from the more straightforward exchanges that generally occur in academic research.

Conversational interviewing is a flexible form of interviewing that enables deviation, providing unscripted information and increasing the participants' exploration into their experiences (Feldman, 1999; Han et al., 2021; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). My research methodology allows participants to reflect on the course, their navigations and lived experiences after course completion and how CEL, may or may not have, impacted their past and ongoing

⁴⁰ Quantitative methods obtain numerical and demographic data.

⁴¹ Prismatic investigation sheds light on dissenting voices within and beyond an individual's reflection on their experiences, making space for diverse perspectives (Levac & Wiebe, 2020).

practices of applied sociology. The reciprocal quality of conversations as methodology and method fosters an exchange of information and further rapport between those involved in the research (Feldman, 1999). According to Hollingsworth (1994), collaborative conversations as a methodology support the exploration of cultural, political, historical, and social structures through open-ended and complex exploration of lived experiences. In addition, these discussions acknowledge the constructive or relational nature of knowledge and experience (Dewey, 1933; Hollingsworth, 1994; Shotwell, 2021). Recognition of conversation as a part of my methodology demonstrates my goal for equitable engagement and collaboratively produced knowledge. Inspired by my experiences with CEL and applied sociology and the various conversations that led me to this research, I deployed intentional strategies to inspire participants' storytelling.

A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 3) with open-ended questions or speaking points allowed participants to engage in natural conversations (Charli et al., 2022; Davies & Francis, 2011; Leavy, 2017). Simultaneously, this structure enables me to actively listen and probe, letting the participants lead the narrative while ensuring the research questions inform conversations. Because of the iterative nature of semi-structured conversational interviews, as a researcher, I consistently adjusted and referred to my guide throughout the interviews in response to participants' interests. Leveraging information previously shared, I delved into emerging themes and issues identified by participants throughout the interview process, ensuring the continued relevance of my research questions. For instance, the general topics I initially proposed to explore included motivations to take an applied sociology CEL course, community partner relationship, sense of community, and understanding of sociology and applied sociology, particularly how these relationships changed throughout the course and since course completion in response to their navigation of experiences post-CEL. As conversations unfolded, I recognized the necessity to adapt my guiding questions, incorporating current and more personal topics that respondents felt comfortable discussing with a fellow alumni; this level of comfort went beyond my initial expectations.

Through active listening, I used the context and information mentioned throughout the interview to delve deeper and better explore lived experiences. For example, participants often wanted to talk about their feelings and motivations regarding CEL and applied sociology as it related to their hobbies, interests, ideologies, beliefs, work, school, friendships, partners, and other social interactions. Thus, I asked questions such as: “With where you work now in this

position, was this similar to, inspired by, or in spite of, your CEL experiences?”, and/or “How do you *feel* about your CEL experience now”. Once I established a foundational awareness of participants' motivations and everyday life, I promoted reflective analysis into how CEL reflections may have changed over time post-course. I probed as needed and helped guide participants to expand on their comments when necessary: for example, “When you say you had/have a relationship with [CEL/sociology/work/self/community], what do you mean by that?”

The co-production and re-framing invoked within participants' stories enabled me to explore CEL legacies as relational and ongoing (Hollingsworth, 1994). For instance, many participants acknowledged this interview as a space to reflect on their experiences; attesting to this further, they often remarked how *ironically engaging* my interviews were. My positionality and reflexive practices, as a fellow CEL alumni, facilitated dialogue between the researcher and participants, enabling me to embody and communicate to them that they each had a unique story worthy of telling, translating, and amplifying. For my study, context and nuance were instrumental in helping me understand what the participants were saying. To summarize, qualitative and conversational interviews allowed me to gather information about participants' experiences, body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice (Leavy, 2017). My research broadens the social analysis of applied sociology and CEL by incorporating information not attainable through surveys or other quantitative methods. I also acknowledge that hearing personal stories is a privilege accompanied by a responsibility to ensure ethical considerations are carefully followed.

Data Collection

I collected data for this research through in-depth, semi-structured, recorded conversational interviews via Zoom and in person. These interviews ranged from 35 to 90 minutes in length. All participants provided verbal consent for audio and video recording. As approved by UVic's HREB, receiving formal approval verbally is a sufficient and convenient ethical method to obtain consent. Participants could choose between Zoom or in-person interviews at their convenience. Due to geographic relocation, movement, employment parameters, convenience, and timeliness, eleven participants chose Zoom's video conferencing platform for their interviews. After researching online platforms, I decided to use the Zoom platform due to its popularity and ease of use. Zoom is also UVic's sanctioned secure platform through the university's established VPN. This video platform was beneficial, allowing me to

observe participants' body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, and general being. These are essential observations within qualitative social analysis (Charli et al., 2022; Leavy, 2017). The other two interviews occurred in person at an agreed-upon location in Victoria, BC, that allowed clear recording, easy observation, and privacy. The video and/or audio recording allowed me to revisit the interviews and analyze anything potentially missed or assumed during the initial conversations. These recordings proved beneficial to ensure I was accurately representing CEL alumni stories and amplifying their voices.

Due to the flexibility of conversational interviews, I developed an interview guide (Appendix 3) to reference a general list of topics relevant to my research questions to cover general topics of interest. Still, the wording and order were not adhered to unless they flowed with the natural narratives provided by participants. Carrying on a natural flow of a conversation, I constructed my interview guide, beginning with broader or general questions before narrowing them into more specific ones (Charli et al., 2022). Preliminary questions aimed to facilitate general discussion and inspire reflection regarding participants' perception of CEL and their experiences of applied sociology. To encourage participants to reflect broadly on their motivations for taking the course, their feelings about CEL, and begin to think retrospectively, I inquired about four main topics:

1. Lasting impressions of CEL
2. Impact of CEL on personal and/or academic life
3. Takeaways from CEL (tangible, intangible skills)
4. Transitions and navigation of change and everyday life post-CEL

Following this, I asked participants to interrogate their reflections and contemplate if their feelings and experiences of CEL had changed over time, what caused these changes, or how relational interactions (i.e., employment, education, work-life, personal events, etc.) changed CEL's legacy. Relational exploration into CEL concerning alumni's interactions with applied sociology post-course was an important line of inquiry. This allowed my inquiry to become more specific and focused:

5. Ideas of CEL changing/shifting over time (before, during, after, now)
6. Relationships impacted through CEL
7. Community Partner relationship
8. Ideas about community
9. Understanding of applied sociology
10. Changes to CEL legacy or reflective perspectives regarding experiences

While the guiding questions were relatively simple and few, they allowed participants to dive deeper into their experiences and tell their narratives by taking the conversation where they pleased. To inspire further reflection and in-depth data, when necessary, I relied on probes I prepared in advance in case participants needed inspiration for discussion or conversational responses. In addition, according to participants' the lack of direct or numerical questions and ordering allowed feelings of "ease" and "openness," as it seemed more like an "involved conversation" that they felt "a part of" rather than a unilateral interview. Throughout the interviews, I encouraged the conversation to be multidirectional and answered any questions participants asked about my experiences or research. I thanked the participants after they had shared a detailed part of their story, letting them know I heard them. In addition, I thanked each participant after their interview and asked if they wanted to revisit anything we had or had not discussed.

Throughout the data collection process, I practiced critical reflexivity. Reflexive notetaking during and directly following each interview allowed me to write my initial impressions and personal feelings and note anything relevant, including participant inflections, demeanours, and expressions. This process also allowed me to mitigate any unconscious biases and subjectivities and reframe my assumptions throughout the data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis

During my qualitative analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis model within the grounded theory framework to prolong my engagement with the data⁴². These six phases included familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining, and naming the themes, and producing my findings and results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My analysis was a recursive process. I established a cyclical feedback loop that allowed me to revisit, recode, or recategorize the data as I engaged with it and any emerging patterns. The transcription process initiated the process of familiarizing myself with the data. After the conversational interviews were completed, I transcribed the interviews verbatim, including laughs, sighs, pauses, and everyday colloquialisms. Including

⁴² Prolonged engagement involves sustained immersion in the field, within the context of the study, or with the data, allowing the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the participants, their behaviours, and contexts; further associated with qualitative research, where the goal is often to gain insights into the culture, practices, and experiences of a particular group (Leavy, 2017).

these elements helped contextualize the conversation and derive meaning beyond the words participants chose to voice (Leavy, 2017). The transcription process occurred only after all interviews were completed because I wanted to acknowledge participants as unique individuals and not be influenced by data I was transcribing. This allowed me to approach each interview without comparative thoughts and actively listen to alumni without the influence of others' voices. I saved electronic copies of the transcripts to my password-protected computer.

Mind maps, analytical memos and reflexive notetaking acted as marginalia. Mind maps are valuable tools for qualitative researchers as they provide a means to address researchers' bias and ensure data is collected in a way that privileges participant experience (Rogers, 2018). Wheeldon and Ahlberg (2017) argue that mind maps can “offer a graphic and participant-centric means to ground data within theory” and assist researchers in framing or contextualizing participant experiences (p. 114). Analytical memos accompanied my reflexive notetaking that occurred during the interview process (Snyder, 2012). According to Rogers (2018) and Snyder (2012), qualitative researchers may use analytical memos to note down their reflections and code them as additional data for their research. These methods allowed me to immerse myself in the data in the analysis phase and analyze my own CEL legacy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, memos are critical for integrity because, as a practice, they foster reflexivity, supporting the researcher in reflecting on their ideas and interpretations of the data (Hoonard, 2015, as cited in Barton-Bridges, 2022). Any hard-copy mind maps and reflexive notes taken were destroyed after completing the analysis and constructing the findings.

After familiarizing myself with the data, I moved to the phase of generating the initial codes. I coded each conversational interview inductively, using *NVivo 12 Qualitative Data Analysis* software. This software enhanced data management, reporting, and visualization (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019; Welsh, 2002). NVivo offered me a more secure and organized means of storing and analyzing the data than manual coding due to the length and number of interviews. It allowed me to switch between analyzing the data within a specific code and the general data, within interviews and between participants. Furthermore, the NVivo software allowed me to see the connections between themes and move toward analytical insight (Welsh, 2002). To start, I created a codebook to document the working definitions of each descriptive code as I went through the data. Subsequently, these descriptive codes were collated into categories. Once the data was coded, I began searching for themes to which the initial codes relate. Next, I reviewed

and refined these themes using mind maps to consider their relation to the data set and my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Categorizing by grouping similar codes before finding thematic patterns allows the researcher to seek the essence of the data (Leavy, 2017). Various themes are embedded in qualitative interviews; thus, thematic analysis is and should be a “foundational method for qualitative analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Thematic analysis is fundamental to this exploratory qualitative research because the goal is to investigate participants’ lived realities and ongoing experiences with CEL (Evans, 2018).

This chapter outlined why a qualitative research design centring on an exploratory conversational methodology was most suitable for this study. In doing so, I outlined the research paradigm, explored the value of my positionality and reflexive practices, and explained the cohort case study design process. I highlighted the importance of conversational qualitative interviewing, ethical considerations, sample, and participant demographics, and summarized the data collection and analysis. All methodological steps for this study were followed carefully to explore my research questions. In the following chapters, I aim to organize the data thematically in hopes that readers immerse themselves in the shared stories of applied sociology by engaging with the narratives of CEL alumni and their lived experiences following course completion.

Chapter 5: Engaging with the Sociological Self

I don't even think this is an exaggeration; it was life-changing (Lennon).

All participants noted that they have perceived long-term personal impacts from the CEL applied sociology course at UVic. This introductory finding chapter relies heavily on participants' personal accounts and memories to contextualize how alumni engage with or make meaning out of their CEL experiences. The goal is to provide readers with an understanding of the personal and relational impacts that stuck with participants after their CEL course experience. This chapter explores the conversations inspired by my initial interview questions that aimed to prompt participant reflection. The CEL alumni participating in this study had differing perspectives on how their experiences impacted their daily lives, including their personal sociology, ideologies, and relationships. The main theme that arose concerning participants perceived personal CEL legacies was how the structured reflection throughout CEL helped alumni enhance their skills of reflectivity and relational thinking.

Relational Thinking and Reflexivity as Skills

At the end of the course, I remember just feeling so much more confident in sociology. I felt like I understood sociology so much more, and definitely, that course was what made me think sociologically. It's something that I take into the rest of my life—even now, right now. (Emerson)

Participants in this study endorsed applied sociology as an ongoing reflective and intuitive process and an engaged scholarship that utilized interactive understandings, theories, and methods (Dentler, 2003; Finkelstein, 2010; Pike et al., 2017; Steele et al., 1999). Participants emphasized how they resonated with applied and relational sociology because it rejects the idea that social phenomena should be seen as social substances to observe or study or “something to which we can apply sociology to” (Alex). In this study, seven alumni spoke about the relational ‘reframing’ process that occurred due to practicing applied sociology through CEL; it allowed alumni to “connect their *self* to sociology and society” (Emerson).

According to nine participants, practicing applied sociology involves a commitment to think relationally. Thinking relationally is a way of understanding which gives primacy to the relations between entities as a constitutive element of their existence; in other words, entities are

what they are because of their relations with others⁴³ (Shotwell, 2021). In this way, these participants observed that learning and practicing applied sociology through their CEL course *challenged* them to engage with sociology and, therefore, think relationally. Substantive theorizations, common in academic ways of thought, like “engineering, sciences, maths, maybe even history” (Bailey), were contemplated and valued by participants. However, participants noted that “CEL was apt for sociology” due to its relational potential (Dylan).

In hindsight, Kendall reflected on how they internalized the relational perspectives of applied sociology to “keep thinking relationally post-course.” Reflecting on CEL as a space to practice applied sociology, a participant remarked on how learning about the relational aspect of applied sociology made them think about how they could “co-exist” with sociology, apply it and be true to their moral and social values beyond the confines of the course.

When prompted to further reflect on CEL and how their practice of applied sociology had or had not changed over time, all thirteen participants reported that their understanding and application of sociology shifts. To gather more information and understand what inspires these shifts, I asked participants to compare how they felt about CEL now compared to times they had thought about it in the past. If participants needed further prompting, I suggested more concrete dates they had previously mentioned in their interviews or common social life events: including the time they received their final CEL course marks, conversations they had explaining CEL to others in everyday life or interviews, or their undergraduate graduation. This allowed Jamie to report how they did not think they would be where they are today, without CEL:

You're on such a high after doing a project...I think that you almost don't really reflect on how beneficial CEL has been...But in hindsight, looking back at it, even now, I see it as so much more than just a class...I see it as this very cool experience. An experience I would always look back on in interviews, an experience to reference that was more than a reference [more meaningful than a reference to call or name on a resume]... I look at where I'm at today with what I want to do job-wise, where I want to be, or what the next years will look like...It's all a domino effect. CEL, the community partner, the non-profit society, my love for non-profit work, my need to work with the community, with marginalized sectors of the community...It is really interesting because I don't think I would be looking at things or certain pathways the way I am if I hadn't taken CEL.

⁴³ According to Shotwell (2021), substantive ontologies give primacy to an entity's independent, pre-existing ontological status. In contrast, relational ontologies emphasize interdependent essence and substance in the context of an ever-changing relational world.

Throughout the interviews, I listened to participants tell their stories and depict how the benefit of practicing applied sociology was not fully recognized until post-course meaning-making and reflections. For example, a participant in the study voiced this as they reflected on where their relational skills and processes were derived from and why:

I don't think I noticed how impactful it was until kind of like after when we were like looking around and had that 'oh shit moment'... Where did that come from? That reflection and the retrospective look back on the course that was, in fact, inspired by the course [referring to course reflective journals and literature]. For sure. (Lennon)

As evident by the participant commentary, CEL has value due to its ability to engage with students' various identities during and after the course; although students may not be analyzing CEL as a relational method for learning applied sociology during the course, post-course retrospection allows alumni to reflect on how CEL inspired or taught an embodied sociology. For example, two participants shared the following when asked about how CEL changed them and their relationships with sociology post-course:

It changed pretty profoundly, because CEL gave an opportunity for us to dissect these ideas that have been espoused to us for years through critical lenses, and an engaged lens...that profoundly affected my learning of sociology [post-CEL] and my understanding of so many different ideas. (Cameron)

It's going to change because as you continue to question, you continue to look at society through critical lenses. That [CEL] experience is going to change... the more that you're looking at things and questioning things, the more you'll rely and lean on that [CEL and its experiences] and the role that you played and continue to play in the bigger picture. (Indy)

While there is a myriad of ways to implement community-engaged techniques, the CEL course investigated deploys research assignments and reflective journals to accompany collaborative student-community partner projects. According to all participants in this study, preliminary coursework introduced them to CEL research and literature, providing them with a framework for understanding CEL, applied sociology, and how they intersect. The subsequent collaborative community work then inspired them to practice applying their sociology. Concurrent relational and reflective tasks, like their reflective journal assignments, allowed participants in this study “space” to think about their sociology and their “interacting positionalities” (Bailey). I observed that this reflective and reflexive thinking was often a skill highlighted by participants. For example, Lennon reflected on how the reflective journals

throughout the course allowed them to learn about themselves, their morals, social values and how they wanted to interact with society:

I learned so much about myself through writing those reflective journals, and if you printed them out and put them all next to each other. You could see this like huge shift over the course, which I think is really cool. One of the biggest takeaways from the course is what I learned about myself.

When I asked more about what this meant to Lennon and what they had learned about themselves, they elaborated that it was just a generally profound moment of change, and it was difficult to describe. According to alumni, the reflective journals were “restorative” (Emerson) and “inspirational” (Lennon) during a “tumultuous” (Bailey) undergraduate experience riddled with “insecurity and stress” (Dylan). Thinking reflectively allowed participants to *reconnect* to their sociology and pursue a more engaged sociology going forward: “The original promise of perspective that Mills quoted, I wanted to feel like that again, and I think I wrote that in my journal assignment” (Bailey). Nine participants spoke on how the reflective journal assignments throughout the course allowed them to embody an engaged mindset throughout their lives after the course. In contrast, the professional and academic sociology prior to CEL taught participants to “remove the self,” observe and argue “social facts,” and “theorize about others” without using “I or in my opinion” (Finley). Meanwhile, CEL, as a method for teaching applied sociology, engaged participants because they had to “bring it all back in” and “position yourself within your sociology” (Indy). Morgan voiced how the CEL course prompted them to reflect and that it inspired them to continue to “*be*” in that space of reflection:

I had been trying hard to relate sociology to my own methodologies of being and perhaps my relationships. So with CEL, I was really forcing myself into those positions of reflection.

The language used by Morgan was echoed by other participants regarding the engaged strategies of reflective thinking that allowed “discomfort” to inspire critical thinking and further learning and reflexive skill building. For example, Gabrielle said that CEL “pushed” them to apply sociology and interact with “real humans” because “the actual discomfort comes in with new experiences, when you're alone in a sense, with your sociology and you, and that is when the discomfort and learning happens.” Alumni remarked that this reflective thinking taught them to “sit in that discomfort” and learn more in post-course situations that were diverse, different, or challenging (Gabrielle). As the self was invited back into sociology through CEL, alumni

remarked how practicing reflective thinking during and after the course allowed them to think about sociology autobiographically:

CEL helped me reflect on academia, but also helped me to build that reflective muscle and have it be there literally all day long, every day, which I didn't have previously, or didn't flex it yet. And I think that's what made it so life changing, as I started looking around me and questioning why I was doing certain things or saying certain things, or my relationships with people, my relationship to myself... (Lennon)

Participants' testaments support the idea that for many sociologists, applied sociology is an ongoing reflexive process; utilizing relational knowledge may allow alumni to understand society and what it takes to change social patterns, institutions, and behaviours (Dentler, 2003; Finkelstein, 2010; Pike et al., 2017; Steele et al., 1999). A participant remarked almost to themselves during our conversation after a reflective monologue, "...that was huge" (Dylan). This was a moment where I could see the participant actively thinking to themselves about CEL and the reflective methods it taught. Similarly, another participant's narration started in past tense, prior CEL, before transitioning to life post CEL, proving that this reflective process is an ongoing thing:

But now, with CEL I kind of had and have something tangible I could talk about for what that is and what that looks like. You know, like had I not done CEL, I wouldn't be able to like do this interview and like have things to actually talk about and lived experience and examples to put to the textbook information that, you know, we just sort of sponge and then move on from. I think 100% like things changed and also like the way that I see sociology and how valid and how important it is. That is actually kind of huge. (Indy)

Participants in this study utilized examples of their ongoing reflective mindset to position their reflexive thinking skills as a result or by-product of their CEL experience. For example, a participant reflected on the transferability of CEL regarding applied sociology and the internalization of reflective learning that occurs continuously:

CEL is all about applying the basics of sociology, but it's also for your own learning, like being able to learn from the experiences, not just from books and papers and stuff...learning from everything you do...being able to reflect on how everything is like a learning opportunity at the same time as like, working towards a goal. (Harley)

These chapter findings suggest that learning and practicing applied sociology through CEL fosters a relational perspective within its alumni that personally impacts their lives post-course. The legacy of CEL for alumni includes a commitment or continuous reflective process and acknowledgement of sociology as relational (Shotwell, 2021). My research questions

revealed that alumni continue to interact with and reflect on various aspects of applied sociology due to the more relational and personal nature of its fundamental values. In this sense, I observed participants relate to their past, present, and future applications of sociology due to their CEL experiences.

Throughout the interviews, four participants actively acknowledged that the space the interviews provided was reflective. The nature of the conversational methods in themselves endorsed further retrospection into alumni's applied sociology and, therefore, the legacy of their CEL experiences. I found hearing the stories of alumni and the legacy that CEL has on their sociology, their self, and the relationship between them to be profoundly impactful. As alumni continued to reflect on the course as an opportunity to practice applied sociology, they began to reveal their perceptions of CEL as a pedagogical experiential learning framework. This inspired participants to position CEL within their general experience within academic sociology. In the following chapter, I explore these findings.

Chapter 6: Engaging with Knowledge Creation

This chapter builds on alumni's conversations about their personal practice of applied sociology. My interview questions explored participants' perceptions of CEL as a method for teaching applied sociology. I asked participants to reflect on the influence that learning applied sociology through CEL had on their accumulated sociological knowledge and its generalizability. Three subthemes emerged from the data: CEL as an opportunity to practice sociology and bridge the gap between theory and practice; the impact of CEL on understanding the field of sociology; and revelations of sociology's interdisciplinary potential through exposure to diverse communities and knowledge creation.

Bridging the Gap between Paper and Practicality

Community-engaged collaborative techniques such as those introduced through CEL can facilitate and encourage the linking of theory to practice (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Boyer, 1996; Cress, 2003). Participants in this study supported findings that CEL as a technique may be especially salient in the context of applied sociology, as the course introduces students to concepts that require enhanced comprehension of sociological theory and its transferability (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Cress, 2003). Concepts such as social "normativity" (Alex), "stigma management" (Cameron), ascribed and achieved "status" (Finley), "marginalization" (Bailey), "institutionalization" (Dylan), "policy politics" (Kendall), and "intersectionality" (Lennon) were contextualized through participants' practice of applied sociology during CEL. Theory and methods provide sociology with a basis for understanding the social world, as it is through theory that we come to understand relational reality (Shotwell, 2021). One of the key benefits of CEL is the ability to inspire student comprehension of abstract concepts and theories (Cress, 2003; Darwen & Rannard, 2011). Linking theory and concepts to contexts allows CEL to fill the gaps left by textbooks, lectures, and students' personal experiences of social issues.

Allowing students to reflect critically on these practices through CEL can invoke students' sociological perspective, which may be difficult to extract when separated from the realities of practicing and applying sociology (Berard & Ravelli, 2021). In the CEL applied sociology course taught at UVic, students remarked on this bridge-building capacity and how it made them feel more competent:

I was really excited for the opportunity to practice sociology in the communities I would be working, living, and existing in after graduation. (Emerson)

Applied sociology's advocacy for sociological tools to bridge the gap between theory and practice allowed CEL to connect participants to sociology post-course. While theory and praxis provided participants with a basis for comprehending canonized, professional, and academic sociology, the application and practice of sociological theory within CEL allowed alumni to understand their social world through a more public approach (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Collins et al., 2019; Willis, 2017). Participants noted that the CEL course represented their "first opportunity" to apply their sociology and "practice the theory they had been taught and tested on" or bridge theory with "real-world experiences" (Cameron). Two participants shared similar trains of thought with their statements:

Because sociology is, it is studying society. In my mind it is silly to study society and do nothing about it, or gaze at it from afar. So, why not engage with real stuff and do it [CEL]. (Alex)

I felt this was the first time that I felt that my work could be applied in a real way. (Kendall)

Learning applied sociology through literature was understood by participants as part of the experiential learning framework process. In this study, participants reflected on how applying sociology at the end of their sociology major through CEL was an opportune time to practice the theory they had learned:

I stepped into it, not really knowing what it was...But then, I felt like I had so many, almost epiphany moments: where I'm like, 'oh my goodness, this is so relevant, this is why we talked about this last semester, and now here I am doing it like'. I see it. I see the vision. I've got it. (Indy)

It made me feel more certain about post grad because it's such a community-based experience and you're working with the partners outside of the university, not just working with fellow students. Working with organizations you're working for potentially in 'real life', who have 'real' problems instead of theoretical questions...(Jamie)

Throughout the study, I observed participants feel empowered to apply skills they had learned throughout their degree during their CEL experiences and after. For example, Finley spoke on the topic of applying sociology through CEL:

...for sociology, I think it was a great way to really wrap up all those loose skills and assignments like I learned these skills. But how do I apply it? And, you know, it gave me confidence right at the end of that degree to move on from it.

In addition, Cameron discussed how CEL allowed them to "practice articulating complicated ideas in an understandable way...", which ultimately led them to "...a much deeper

understanding of sociological ideas”. Another participant mentioned that this form of learning empowered their use of the sociological toolbox in a way that allowed them to “test out” all the “tools” they had acquired prior to the CEL course (Finley). Correspondingly, Bailey reported that the course itself served as a “tool” for their sociology regarding the opportunity CEL provided to practice “applications of the sociology degree”. Throughout the conversational interviews, participants continuously referred to applied sociology as a “tool” that they used or “flexed” during and after their CEL course experience. Corresponding research suggests that CEL frameworks allow undergraduate students to utilize the tools and skills they have learned throughout their degree (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Rhodes et al., 2018).

The ability to critically evaluate the application of sociological theory to understand social phenomena and the social world was a competency reported by participants in this study as a result or by-product of their CEL experience. In this sense, engaging with the reflexive understandings of applied sociology allowed participants opportunities to practice questioning the methods and data utilized by social researchers, academics, and themselves as sociologists. Alumni noted that through CEL, they observed a shift in the way they practiced and applied sociology. Alex shared that during CEL, their internalized sociology and therefore their practiced sociology changed:

It definitely shifted from formal sociology, departmental and academic research sociology, to public sociology. In that like, I understand that there are reasons to produce theory and theoretical papers and things like that however I found that after that course I was a lot more interested in doing critical research and doing research that actually has benefits outside of academia...that's the big shift...from conventional western sociology and sociological thought to more critical public and applied sociology. Let's use all this time of writing papers and studying to actually do stuff and make change.

Participants in this study also emphasized CEL was a course that left them “wanting more” (Bailey) due to the relational and integrative nature of course assignments and community projects. For example,

It definitely made sociology...more applicable, relevant, fun, interesting, all of those things. It aligned it closer with my values. (Gabrielle)

This statement exemplifies how CEL can provide its alumni with the sociological competencies and tools to engage with sociology. Ultimately allowing the practice of applied sociology to bridge the gap between theory and practice. I observed that as a sequential

progression, learning frameworks can and should include experiential learning frameworks like CEL as an opportunity to apply sociology.

Academia as the Ivory Tower: Can We Climb Down?

The ivory tower metaphor...I remember that to this day, I think that's legit. (Dylan)

In 1996, Boyer called for an increase in community collaboration, arguing that the conditions of contemporary society require scholars to participate in community engagement and can no longer be “confined within an ivory tower” (p. 33). An ivory tower is a metaphorical place, institution, or atmosphere where people are, knowingly or unconsciously, cut off from the rest of the world in favor of their own pursuits, usually mental and esoteric ones (Boyer, 1996). Participants suggested throughout their stories that learning and practicing applied sociology through CEL allowed them to acknowledge their relationships and positionality within and beyond academia. Furthermore, alumni reported that the ivory tower of academia was an apt metaphor for their educational experiences in sociology and across disciplines (political science, environmental studies, law, and gender studies).

Throughout the interviews, participants remarked on their academic institutionalized undergraduate sociology and its ability to “overlook” (Alex) the society it was supposed to be studying. Learning applied sociology through CEL allowed alumni to analyze their relational ontology as students existing within academia and its various power relationships, positioning them to “climb down” (Dylan) and experience society. All respondents in this research reported that working with their community partner was an important aspect of learning to apply their sociology beyond “academically sanctioned syllabi” (Alex), beyond “ring road” (Bailey)⁴⁴, and outside of the “brick and mortar of a classroom” (Morgan).

According to participants, CEL stimulated a consciousness regarding academic sociology as an embodiment of the ivory tower. Accompanying these observations were participants' remarks that applied sociology inspired them to relate to and exist with and within communities that they had felt separated from. In this sense, the intersections and positionality of universities as institutions of learning rooted in historical and culturally contingent oppressive frameworks were acknowledged.

⁴⁴ Ring Road is the physical roadway around the inner campus at UVic.

It was an interesting experience that gave me a glimpse into the world of non-profit...I think it was an extremely beneficial explorative moment and one of the most beneficial courses that I took. (Alex)

The opportunity to take a CEL course is like a shaking. Shaking all of us little undergrads out of our little ivory tower it is humanizing...there are real people with lived experiences. They [people, community members, and communities] are varied and complicated and directly impacted by these social forces, problems, and institutions that we study. (Cameron)

These quotes underscore that participants of this study felt that the CEL course represented an opportunity to experience the society they would be a part of after graduation and “escape the ivory tower” (Alex). Academia is often seen as a separate place, environment or institution, but through community-based projects and CEL experiences, students can make connections and begin to think critically about the various social systems they are a part of, including and beyond the academic institution where their learning occurs. According to participants, CEL invited them to acknowledge academia as an ivory tower and opportunistically observe and explore methods to reconnect sociology to society or “blend academics and community” (Cameron) and “take sociology with” them wherever they went (Alex).

Participants went on to share that the CEL course inspired them to acknowledge the privileged space that academia occupies and, thus, the space they, as students and alumni occupy during and after they leave it. Bailey’s reflective narration of CEL as a learning opportunity regarding knowledge creation and dissemination provides an example of this. Before CEL, Bailey, like eight other alumni’s in this study, didn’t know how to connect knowledge positioned within and ‘below’ the ivory tower, metaphorically representing power hierarchies of society in relation to the creation and dissemination of knowledge. However, their community work in CEL exposed them to diverse forms of knowledge and dynamic frameworks for knowledge creation. Additionally, Bailey reported that CEL taught them how to actively listen and translate or amplify knowledge or “voices of experience” to a decibel that could reach the so-called “ivory towers of the world,” including non-academic spaces that have “multi-level stakeholders,” “existing on a ladder of power” (Bailey).

According to participants, the legacy of working with the community partner was composed of various meaning-making processes: interacting with diverse communities, unveiling social structures and power relationships, and increased communication between academic and non-academic communities. Through CEL students gained access to segments of

the population to which they had not otherwise been exposed to and participants accounted their observation of the social construction of inequality and the social construction of marginalization (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Savage, 2022). Likewise, participants reflected on how CEL experiences increased the visibility of marginalized groups they had only theorized about (Murphy et al., 2021).

Participants also spoke about their “privilege” existing within the “ivory tower” as they reflected on their time within academia and how access to such knowledge should not be discounted (Finley). Another participant reflected on how CEL allowed them to acknowledge the “responsibility” that accompanies sociological consciousness regarding knowledge of power relations:

...having that depth of knowledge and that privilege of education and understanding and not using that necessarily against people or to your advantage. I think that's really important. I think that comes back to CEL themes like advocacy and responsibility. Like you have responsibility to value the fact that you are privileged in the fact that you've got education, but you also have the education to then advocate for people and you need to be responsible for that. (Bailey)

Participant conversations indicated that this lens of consciousness stuck with participants after course completion, impacting the legacy of CEL and their reflections on their experiences throughout their degrees. Kendall reflected on how their CEL experience interacted with their moral values to influence their skills and ideas of self-growth within their personal life, their continued pursuit of an MA sociology education and their current employment field:

CEL gave me the seeds of many skills...I still had a lot of growing to do...but the course maybe watered the seeds or ideas of social responsibility that I had and my ideals and showed me a glimpse of how I wanted to deploy those while working within society.

Increased exposure to the diversity of social issues and the social groups, patterns, and institutions sociology theorizes about, allowed participants of this study to reflect on how CEL inspired engagement with a critically applied public sociology. Ten participants remarked how exposure to different community groups and practicing applied sociology through CEL offered an opportunity to “unlearn” or “relearn” (Morgan). This “unlearning” could be applied to their socializations and the towers they had built that overtly “separated them from society” (Alex). I observed that CEL offered a sociological perspective that stuck with alumni because it allowed them to position themselves in relation to the towers of society, including academia and other power hierarchies. Additionally, participants reflected that CEL got rid of the “barricade” or

“tower” (Dylan) they had erected between not only communities and academic sociology but also between themselves and society. Forming this link was particularly important for sociology students as they continued to engage with their sociology after the course.

This section explored the impact CEL had on alumni and its ability to increase the visibility of the relational intersections of academic institutions; fostering a more engaged sociology within the communities it studies “on the ground, rather than in the tower” (Emerson). I needed to understand why participants believe CEL course experiences represent an opportunity to disengage from a ‘sociology’ they perceive as overtly political, professional, and removed from relational entities. As conversations continued, participants began to discuss the pedagogical frameworks of sociology as a discipline and reflect on CEL as a method for learning applied sociology.

Knowledge Exchange: Who is Sociology for? Beyond the Pale, Male and Stale

I feel like there's not that many opportunities in academia to actually sit down and question why we're learning something or who it serves to learn that for, or how we're coming to what we're learning, how do we relate to what we're learning. CEL space fostered an opportunity for us all to build an ability to reflect on all of that. (Lennon)

As an instructional method, CEL applied sociology is an experiential form of scholarship that invokes knowledge to be interchanged between social groups and communities to foster further learning (Holland, 2001; Reynolds, 2009). CEL engages the researcher and the community in a collaborative and generative knowledge process. Instead of working for the community, community-engaged scholars work with the community in mutually beneficial partnerships, connecting students with the broader social landscape in which the academic institution operates. One tenet of CEL is its ability to contextualize knowledge by bringing together academic and non-academic communities to create collaborative knowledge. Through a progressive exchange of diverse knowledge between different groups in society, CEL has the potential to inspire a more holistic understanding of social issues. The findings in this cohort study concur that as knowledge is interchanged and relational links established, students begin to understand society's interacting and intersecting networks.

Participants recognized that connecting with marginalized groups and different communities through the CEL applied sociology course had a connective capacity; bridging theory and practice, and/or the academic and the personal, establishing a “dialogue between self,

society and sociology” (Dylan). By working in close coordination with community groups, alumni were exposed to diverse forms of knowledge. All the participants stated they were aware of the contingencies accompanying different community partners in their own and their hypothesized course members' reflective experiences of CEL. Community partners are social entities with “contingencies, stakeholders, and realities that are impacted by interacting social forces” (Bailey). These interactive social forces were acknowledged by participants to create many diverse forms of knowledge that can further be impacted by power relationships to marginalize, oppress and/or uplift different types of knowledge. For example, Cameron’s retrospective analysis explored how their CEL experience fostered a critical lens to analyze social change tactics and their interactions with power hierarchies:

It awakened me regarding how organizations that are intended to help people. Don't always help people, or don't always have those primary interests, because they're still like a bureaucratic organization, and in reality, non-profits shouldn't exist because we should be working to them not existing. That is the goal...I think CEL gave me like a big reality check in that regard. Because one of my deepest drives is, I love social justice, I'm a big believer in justice, and I want to see it happen and work with folks to have justice and care happen in spaces. But the CEL experience really reminded me that it's not always going to happen, and sometimes it's going to be really slow. And sometimes you just have to live with that and know that. You know there are people still pushing and we're all part of this big, this big process of trying to make justice happen in spaces...that was a really-big learning experience.

These influences were mentioned as something participants reflected on post-course when interacting with institutions of knowledge, such as community-based programs, academia, workplaces, and government or non-government organizations. Six participants in this study reflected on how they initially “felt intimidated” interacting with diverse communities because they had put themselves in the ivory tower in a sense and made themselves into an “academic imposter” (Kendall). In addition to altering the student experience of learning, CEL alumni recognized that knowledge exchange goes both ways; thus, there can be impacts from community-engaged work on the communities they interact with. Creating partnerships that involve direct participation from community partners heightens the visibility of social issues and gives voices to communities that may otherwise be diminished within traditional academic endeavours (Savage, 2022; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). Entering community partnerships requires commitment from all parties involved (student, professor, university, community contact, community partner, community members, etc.). This did not go unrecognized by

participants. Developing an exchange of knowledge and resources was paramount to participants of this study, to ensure reciprocity both during their CEL community partner work and now throughout their everyday lives within and beyond academic spaces.

In speaking with alumni, I was enraptured with how they articulated their processes of determining that the “community initiatives should be priorities” and that they themselves were “representatives with a responsibility” (Bailey). As participants discussed this with me, they suggested that CEL offered them opportunities to question who their sociology was for and pivot in their application of it during and after the course:

I am not publishing in an academic journal, if that cannot be done in a cooperative or collaborative way, where you know a community partner can also be accredited on that and benefit by that claim. I'm looking for like co-benefits in research and purposeful research. Doing it for and with the community rather than for some obscure weird academic reason... It's like I have to do something where I can work with the community on a specific issue or concern that they have. Not something that I have and am applying to them. (Alex)

In the above, Alex is reflecting on how CEL impacted their movement within academic and non-academic spaces with their continued education, academic research, and research assistant (RA) work. When I probed Alex about the impact of CEL on their current work, they suggested that they won't do research for “self-serving academic purposes” because CEL changed their “mindset” to one where public and applied sociology “should be ‘the’ sociology practiced.” According to most participants, fostering a critical lens for context, knowledge creation and social change is important:

It also is important to teach us to be critical, in that not every new idea in social justice is actually good... it's also good to be critical of ourselves and our own perspectives [as sociologists]. Even within the social justice sphere, it can be pretty easy to become pretty darn arrogant. We should recognize our privilege to even take sociology in the first place... (Emerson)

In addition, three other participants recognized the “privilege of their education” regarding “advocacy and responsibility” to those “being theorized on” or those positioned by social factors as “less than” (Alex, Bailey & Harley). Accompanying the exposure to diverse communities came an increased sense of their personal positioning and privilege:

People who are experiencing various levels of systemic marginalization. I know for them like having their voices not heard or having them extracted for academics and for other people, while they're not receiving anything, is awful. (Cameron)

Furthermore, four participants acknowledged the risk the community partner was taking by trusting them to make a “fair exchange” (Lennon), as they supplied their confidential information, their produced knowledge, and their experiences to someone who was “just a student” (Cameron). Participants also cautioned that CEL is about balancing the exchange. According to them, it is about “intentional” reflective acknowledgement of communities:

I just think you have to be careful in a course like this, when you're an academic privileged person who does not or may not have the lived experience or understand the lived experience of the people that you are aiming to serve or engage with...you just have to be careful about the Savior complex... I've fallen for that stuff, too, in my ignorance... making sure that [community engagement] is done in a meaningful and earnest and honest way...it is all about intent. (Cameron)

To investigate this further, I asked participants how unveiling power relationships during CEL impacted understandings or applications of sociology after the course. Jamie reflected on how CEL impacted their tactics and advocacy for social change with their advocacy work for accessible education, within and beyond academic spaces:

Unless you're a 40-year-old Ph. D. sociology professor who teaches theory...during all those core classes in your second and third year [undergraduate degree], you wonder how the hell you are going to apply sociology to a corporate setting or just a different setting than a classroom really...With CEL, it shakes things up in a healthy academic way; it teaches you healthy ways for social change within institutions. (Jamie)

As participants applied their tools and perspectives derived from learning and practicing applied sociology through CEL they reflected on their ongoing relationship with knowledge creation and dissemination processes:

I am feeling more confident in approaching conversations when, not to stereotype, but like, you know, potentially someone male, pale and stale is saying something. I'm like, oh, you know, tell me a little bit more about why you think that. Whereas before CEL, I would've not even known how to navigate that conversation, just attacked them, or questioned if that's even my place to have such a conversation. And now I am willing and able to converse about issues, perspectives, other forms of knowledge. (Indy)

Ultimately, interactions with diverse knowledge creation, dissemination and formulations inspired alumni to acknowledge that they can apply their sociology to various communities within and beyond academics. This also allowed participants to rationalize that while they may not be able to fundamentally alter existing social conditions of inequality and oppression, practicing applied sociology has an important role to play in community understanding and transformation. Upon further prompting, participants revealed to me that CEL allowed them to

apply sociology more efficaciously after graduation because they had evidentiary experiences from the course that rationalized their sociology knowledge usefulness, both to and for themselves and others (i.e., employers, administrators, family, and friends). For example, Alex shared that after CEL, they now reserve time and effort to utilize applied sociology principles to inform their everyday life and work because the “community-oriented sphere” instilled in them from CEL is now “integral to [their] core beliefs.”

This chapter detailed the legacy of learning and practice applied sociology through a community-based course that values community knowledge and collaborative knowledge creation processes. This legacy impacts how participants seek, apply, and create knowledge post-course, including self-motivated alumni learning within and beyond the field of education.

Chapter 7: Engaging with Academia

This chapter will discuss participants' reflections on CEL as a pedagogy for teaching applied sociology. This chapter aims to provide readers with an understanding of the post-course impacts that learning applied sociology through CEL has on participants' academic pursuits. Throughout the interviews, two themes arose: the legacy of CEL as a method for teaching applied sociology and the impact of community-based work on CEL alumni's continued relationship with education.

Pedagogical Choices

CEL was like that little light bulb. You can always find sociology everywhere and in everything. (Jamie)

During the interviews, participants reflected on how CEL was a manifestation of applied sociology and an engaged scholarship in a communicative process with the 'real world' (Freire, 1993). An argument can be made that critical thinking invokes an active communication of meaning-making involving self-reflection and consciousness (Freire, 1993; Park & Folkman, 1997). According to participants, an engaged learning framework that encourages reflection, like the CEL course under investigation, evokes students' and alumni's critical consciousness. Reflecting on their CEL experiences as part of their sociology storyline allowed participants to observe the legacy of learning applied sociology through an engaged critical pedagogy:

I think this type of learning and teaching opens doors and offers a lot of opportunity for people who need to connect in a different way to their course content...You feel much more connected, and I think those connections that you build are invaluable. You cannot put a price on a course like that because you literally learn so much. I think I learned more from that course and from my experience in that course, than any other educational experience. (Bailey)

It [CEL] was a really cool way to practice sociology...it impacted me after Grad, [because] I think I just still feel like excited about sociology. (Cameron)

These quotes suggest that participants believe that the pedagogy of this CEL course allowed them to further their sociology by practicing applied sociology and engaging with sociological praxis and critical agency (Carroll, 2013; Freire, 1993). According to participants, engaging with sociological praxis and critical agency by practicing applied sociology "extended" their relationships with sociology:

I noticed some people came in with their previously learned viewpoints of just wanting to like cut down trees, not knowing how to plant any trees. But then when they had to go do something [community project]...coming back to build something, like what can we do? What is possible, where do we agree, and what can we do together[solution wise]?
(Gabrielle)

According to participants, the lack of collaborative and constructive narratives throughout undergraduate education exacerbates the ‘crisis of sociology’s relevance’ within their internal conversations of transferability regarding sociological competencies (Carroll, 2013). Participants noted that sociology’s challenges include inaccessible, jargon-filled writing (Fox, 2018; Graizbord, 2019; Stein & Daniels, 2017), a reluctance to step outside of the ivory tower (Berard & Ravelli, 2021; Fox, 2018; Graizbord, 2019), and the negative perception of the field’s applicability. With its emphasis on critical thinking and social problems, sociology can shroud itself in ‘crisis’ and ‘doom and gloom’ theorizations that foster “sociological depression” (Yogan, 2015, p. 2; see also Graizbord, 2019; Savage, 2022). Without a visionary “commitment” (Morgan) to engagement, the relationship between future possibilities that inspire critique or public hope for sociology will be shrouded. The participants’ emphasis on sociology’s crisis of relevance symbolizes the need for more certainty about methods like CEL that explore how sociology can be practiced in an increasingly complex world.

Participants in this study attested to how engaged pedagogies, like CEL, that work on “balancing the critical with more pragmatic solution sociology” are important to overcome frustrations with sociology (Emerson). Alumni recognized that the CEL course was an engaged embodiment of the relational ontology they believed sociology ‘should’ apply:

The very action-oriented criticism of the discipline, that engagement piece and emphasis on community work of CEL, definitely did change my perspective and understanding of sociology...it [CEL] renewed hope that it [sociology] could be something beyond the average. Before that [CEL] course...I was pretty ready to drop out. Really, really, ready. I do think it is because of that course that I didn't...I think after CEL, I felt more enlightened and inspired by the discipline, similar to the way that I had initially been when I first started my undergrad. (Kendall)

Critical agency is associated with awareness of relational ways of being and the influence of social forces on perspectives (Freire, 1993). Another participant observed that learning applied sociology through CEL allowed them to think critically about sociology rather than just critique it as a discipline; “...honestly; it gave me a lot of hope because, at that point, I was like very, very like fuck this place, fuck sociology” (Cameron). In addition, Gabrielle also reported feelings

of discontent with the sociology curriculum and how CEL rectified and reorientated their learnings with their values because it made sociology “more applicable, relevant, fun, and interesting” while also allowing it to align closer with their “values”. In addition, Lennon supported this statement:

I think I'm a good sociologist because I realized at the end that my sociology, what that means is [pause] what sociology means to you and your practice of sociology is really personal because it's how you question everything and how you critically reflect on your world around you and your relationships. It is a worldview, a personable thing, even like a personality trait or just like a way of seeing the world. It's not necessarily like a set of theories or practices or things or facts. So, it [CEL] totally changed my view of sociology.

Echoing Mills' (1959) perspective, all participants in this study argued that you cannot apply sociology in isolation because doing so neglects the “complexity” of society and, therefore, reality. Throughout this study, participants reported that CEL, as a learning framework for applied sociology, is imperative to understanding themselves as relational subjects and agents of society (Finkelstein, 2010): “CEL made me think much more interdisciplinary” (Alex); “It gave me hope” (Cameron); “It gave me a relational perspective that was realistic” (Bailey). Alex reported that before this course, they believed they were “stuck in the silo of sociology”. When I probed further about what this “silo” was, Alex discussed how academic sociology, prior to CEL, made them feel stuck and sequestered from areas of accessible knowledge. Actively communicating with other forms of knowledge through CEL enabled a “more comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of issues” (Alex).

Similarly, Emerson discussed how learning applied sociology through CEL impacted their reflective analysis of their own education and their continued self-analysis of academics, including their contemplations of different sects of knowledge, pedagogy and methods of change. To gather more information on how their CEL experience was involved with this, I asked Emerson to compare their way of thinking pre-and post-CEL to explore how and why this occurred:

Through CEL, one of the things that changed was I definitely prioritized the practical learning more than the theoretical. It showed me some of the holes in academia, and with how and what I was learning in other courses, because, on one hand, theory courses with a syllabi and test, in the calendar are insanely practical, and yet on the other hand they aren't. Practicality comes from practice. And CEL teaches that. (Emerson)

Four participants conveyed that learning applied sociology through the CEL course inspired their awareness of how meaning-making is an interactive and constructive personal process. In this sense, as an event or phenomenon, CEL course experiences can be reimagined and reflected on by those alumni who experienced such to trigger further sociological meaning-making after course completion: “You can’t teach that in school, you can’t learn that in a classroom, that comes from your own reflection and meaning-making of your experiences” (Bailey). In this section, I explored participants’ retrospections of CEL as a critical pedagogy. Moreover, these narratives serve as a foundation for understanding how alumni realities post-course may shift and complicate retrospective self-analysis.

Continuing Community-Oriented Learning

Seven participants in this study continued to pursue education after the CEL course. CEL alumni participating in this study sought out more schooling or credentials for reasons related to continued learning (including courses to finish their undergrad, different majors, and degree continuation), job acquirement or career exploration (specific trades, including law and medicine). Participant endeavours led them to diplomas, certificates, complementary (sociology MA, international politics MA, health, and social sciences Ph.D.) or supplemental degrees (science BA, nursing BA, and law). When I asked how participants reflected/reflect on the impact of CEL in relation to their continued learning endeavours (including areas of law, medicine, sociology, political science, environmental policy, business, and marketing), I observed these participants construct a relationship or connotation between CEL and their continued learning. According to participants, the legacy of applied sociology impacted participants as early as seeking out further opportunities to apply their sociology through academia, including the application process:

Doing CEL made me feel confident applying for my MA, because it was like I have practical community experience. Attaching that to a CV coming out of bachelor’s degree similar to like if somebody did a Co-op and they worked with something/somebody, I felt more confident applying for jobs and applying for my MA than if I had I not done it. Because it’s like I did a BA I got my sociology degree but it’s like I did that...but I’ve also worked with this research, this non-profit, and I think that gives you a leg up when looking for employment or applying for like other academia pathways (Alex).

The six other participants, continuing to seek education, supported these claims that learning applied sociology through CEL fosters a relational “consciousness” of knowledge

creation that cannot be ignored: “It is like a muscle that, once flexed, cannot be unflexed” (Gabrielle). Participants believed their CEL experience enabled them to apply sociology to future academic pursuits. For example, two participants suggested:

I am about 2 months away from being a lawyer and I feel like CEL, maybe subconsciously set me up for that (Dylan).

Since that CEL course, I've made even more of an effort in my master's to do that same kind of community-engaged work, whether it be formal or not...and to know if it's helping people, you need to ask them, not assume that it is. That kind of like 'go ask them' mentality [from CEL] has definitely stuck with me. (Gabrielle)

According to the seven participants continuing their education, they had internalized a “community-based conviction” that influenced them to embody a relational ontology post CEL (Dylan):

I feel like community-engaged learning is a good way to like continue to gain experience and build your CV while also benefiting people in your life, communities in your life. I think that's why it became really important to me and plays a super integral to my current research...realistically I only seek our research where I see a community involvement because who else are we doing sociological research for? (Alex)

The above statement comes from a participant who continues to pursue sociology “only” because of the potential they saw for it as a discipline through the reflexive contemplations of their applied sociology CEL experience. Participant consciousness of various knowledge creation processes (i.e., historically contingent, collaborative, community, spiritual, cross-disciplinary) and community-based pedagogies, like CEL, inspired alumni to pursue academic endeavours that would support their embodied sociology. For example, Dylan and Finley reflected on CEL and its relational reorientations that inspired their pursuit of law. These two participants attributed the legacy of learning applied sociology to their application to law school and, more particularly, their community orientation and civil rights specialization. For example:

Now, I want to do immigration and refugee law, really, that was just like the gap I saw when I was working in that field with my community partner during CEL. The work that we were doing [in CEL], was a Band-Aid solution right then in there... We need more people that care, and that also have like a law degree. So that's what I want to do, I want to fill this gap. (Finley)

According to participants, applied sociology made them feel like they were responsible for making knowledge, including sociology, more accessible. For example, Harley wanted to practice applied sociology in a “more direct way, with those communities most impacted by

societal issues” and sought out education within the discipline of psychological nursing to “access communities in need”. According to Harley’s reflections, a nursing degree with a psychological specialization allowed them an opportunity to extend and transfer their knowledge. In this sense, they could practice applied sociology on the “front lines of society” with those “who might need it most” (Harley).

Within this chapter, I discussed participants' retrospective contemplations of CEL as a part of their academic journey. Indeed, according to alumni participating in this study, learning applied sociology through CEL as a pedagogy fosters a relational ontology network that connects paper to practicality, sociology to society, and student to community. Throughout the interviews, participants explored the legacy CEL had and continues to have on their relationships with sociology. Practicing applied sociology through CEL fosters a critical consciousness that sticks with alumni throughout their pursuits of academic knowledge post-course:

If I am not learning something that will be critical to society, critical to my work with societal groups or critical to making change and impacts? Why am I even doing it, you know? That thinking, I think comes from my own convictions for sure, but that seed of thought I saw it in CEL. (Alex)

Chapter 8: Engaging with Communities and Corporations

This chapter contextualizes participants' perceived transferability of their applied sociology derived from CEL course experiences. This chapter investigates the transferability of the personal and academic legacies explored by participants within environments and contexts they encountered post-course. I aimed to understand how participants rationalized the transferability of CEL and applied sociology to various post-course contexts and environments; including labour markets, employment, and/or community work. Participants' responses can be comprised of three themes: cost-benefit reflective analyses of applied sociology within a capitalist society, the marketability of applied sociology within a globalized economy, and the legacy of CEL as a relational lens for dealing with interacting personal and social issues, like COVID-19.

Cost Benefit Analysis: Co-oping Your Sociology Degree

Within Canada, credentialism and the massification of higher education have positioned the undergraduate degree as the plausible next step, a rite of passage, and an employment necessity (Collins, 2019). With the massification of education, everyday citizens, like the CEL alumni participating in this study, shoulder the impact of a hierarchal credential society (Collins, 2019). Credential culture increasingly permeates learning institutions like universities, as governments, corporations, and labour organizations influence the market; additional post-secondary credentials combine degrees with supplemental options like co-ops, internships, and resume-related extra-credit courses, like CEL. Participants of this study suggested that there is an unwritten norm of an undergraduate degree as the “bare minimum” (Alex). Participants seeking opportunities, experiences, and credits sought out CEL to transcend normative coursework, add something to their degree, and “supplement their sociology syllabi” (Bailey).

Throughout this UVic cohort case study, participants reflected on the cost-benefit analyses of CEL in relation to their sociology degree. Participants commented on their choice to take CEL as a *consciousness* of the unknown transferability or appearance of a sociology degree to a “capitalistic society” that exists within a “constant cost-benefit analysis” (Bailey). Seven participants reported that, the decision to take CEL was impacted by capitalism and, by extension, credentialism. According to Bailey, CEL offered a credited opportunity, in the form of experience, to apply sociology and learn how to exist and move through economic frameworks:

“I am an anti-capitalist, living in a capitalist world” (Bailey). The cost-benefit analyses mentioned by participants of this study parallels return on investment (ROI) scales constructed by neoliberal ideologies (Rhodes et al., 2018). Alumni in this study often incorporated their CEL course into their own ROI during the interviews, positioning applied sociology as valuable or a “beneficial investment” (Harley).

According to all participants, the benefits of CEL outweighed the costs (i.e., time, workload, collaborative differences); CEL provided experience, practical proof of sociology’s relevance, resume skills, and networkable contacts. This demonstrates that participants in this study reflect on CEL as a chance to apply an “embodied” sociology while receiving a credit that could factor into their degree worth (Gabrielle). A comparative analysis of the cost-benefits and value of CEL occurred in relation to other programs and merits as well. Examples of this were outlined by various participants who shared their experiences of CEL and the legacy it had on them through comparative relations to co-op programs. For example, Alex remarked that they sought out CEL to “fill the gap of a co-op” and the credits and work experience that accompanied such. In addition, Gabrielle, saw CEL as an opportunity to learn from previous academic and employment experiences within other degrees and take “advantage of any opportunities offered to network, make connections” and “apply the value of my [current sociology] degree while learning it”:

When I went back to do a second bachelor’s degree, I was absolutely committed to doing it differently and learning in ways that were applicable to the work world, cause I had already had jobs, and I knew what was valuable [to take] from academia [to employment]. So, when I saw this course, that [tangible experience] aspect stood out as a chance to make the most of this time in academic sociology. (Gabrielle)

Similarly, Jamie reflected on their decision to take CEL, after seeking out and diverging away from the social sciences co-op program at UVic due to the lack of applicability and integration involved with sociology co-ops, “it just didn’t really feel right or developed for sociology... it [didn’t] really line up values wise”. In addition, Emerson spoke on how they sought out CEL after completing a co-op program because CEL was seen as an opportunity to fill the gaps left by their co-op experience regarding sociology’s applicability and transferability. According to participants, the credentials associated with CEL (i.e., experience working with the community, references) have more of a legacy on course alumni’s applied sociology because of

experiential learning's relevance to social sciences and their connective capacities.

Comparatively, Harley positioned CEL as more relevant, affordable and accessible than a co-op:

I think our chosen community partners were more focused, whether or not like, they were actually familiar with sociology or had a specific sociological background...for the most part they were more applicable to sociology.

In addition, Jamie argued for CEL's relevancy to sociology in comparison to co-op opportunities offered at UVic:

I think that one thing, one thing about co-ops versus the CEL class, co-ops to me gains you work experience, but I don't need all of that work experience if it is not aligned with sociological roles... so that was like a really big push to want to do CEL to find more of what I was actually working with and learning in sociology.

Conversations in this study revealed that participants felt that "gaining more than a grade" in relation to their tangible projects, resume references, CV's and skillsets. Findings in this study indicate that five alumni considered accompanying community-based ROI reflections that included them in their calculations as students "worthy of risk" and "responsible investments" (Morgan). This occurred for CEL alums through their retrospective analysis into the cost-benefit calculations from a more community-conscious perspective after evaluation and course completion. The cost-benefit analysis underlying current research suggests that the impacts of CEL are assessed through ROI scales constructed by neoliberal universities (Rhodes et al., 2018). However, how alumni assess their ROI regarding their own educations needs to be included in research to contextualize CEL as a potential factor in degree evaluation. Bailey captured this with the following statement:

I'm so proud of myself for like doing this and even finishing the course...Even leaving a bit of a legacy is cool. Feeling like you have done something to be used [the project] beyond a grade...you feel something, when you hand in that big project, you feel like you're making a bit of a mark, and that's a big thing, huge, really.

Credits beyond a grade came in various forms for participants in this study: praise, visible projects, constructive criticism, resume skills, resume references, and personal degree validation. Nine participants described the 'costs' of taking CEL in relation to the urge to "make the most out of the course", while "proving sociology's worthiness" (Indy). In this sense, alumni often reflected on how they often felt the "urge to keep going" with their partner projects past the point of allocated syllabi estimated hours because they wanted to prove their worth (Dylan). Ironically, Bailey stated that they became so engaged with attaining a credit that they sometimes became

disengaged with the community aspect of the course. According to participants, this balancing act between engagement, usefulness and grade ability forced alumni to reflect on their socialization regarding their internalized scales of worth and value measurement strategies. For example, personal ideals of perfectionism and internalized hierarchal value systems impacted by education were contemplated during and after the course.

I felt like I had to really maintain that connection to that work because it felt really important to me and like I didn't know how to give it up or like, yeah, set boundaries or do it on a smaller scale. I let CEL rule my life for sure. (Lennon)

When asked to elaborate on the above statement, Lennon reflected on how the power relationship of being a student with a new opportunity left them “starry-eyed about it all”, so they “definitely put more into it than was intended” because it was this “cool” new thing. In retrospect, Lennon reflected on how CEL allowed them to gain perspective and a sociological eye for institutions of power. Elaborating on this throughout our conversation revealed that the legacy of CEL impacts alumni’s sociological lens regarding institutions as social systems that can take advantage of its social agents, like academia and its students, employers and employees, and society and its marginalized communities. Additionally, Lennon was the only participant who mentioned taking another community-based course at the university level. They found that their MA-level course allowed them to think critically about the power relationships at play during their undergraduate CEL course:

As I started this other course in grad school, we had a critical conversation about CEL. I was exposed to more material around the challenges involved with it...the balance between community work and community burden is quite a grey-area; like how to actually make it [CEL] reciprocal...I think there's a balance there and I didn't see all those complexities when I was in the course, but I did afterwards. (Lennon)

The benchmark of perceived academic achievement within capitalist economies like Canada is often impacted by symbols of success that align with social values impacted by neoliberal capitalism ideologies; for example, accolades, further higher education, credits, and employment (McGrew, 2011; McKinney, 2010; McKinney et al., 2004). Students are consistently asked, ‘What do you plan on doing after you graduate?’. The participants in this study were no different. Participants throughout this study remarked that CEL supplied them with a reference for how they could leverage sociology to get a job that they felt valued in; both morally and financially. Additionally, reflecting on CEL and making meaning out of such experiences showed participants how they could attain social symbols of success (i.e.,

employment, basic needs met, material wealth, etc.) while retaining a sense of self and the sociological imagination.

Transferability: Working with the Legacy of CEL

As a result of participating in CEL to learn applied sociology, alumni report feeling better connected to the community, further equipping them to enter and succeed in fields that align with their feelings of social and civic responsibility: “I really like sociology, despite everything society tells me” (Dylan).

Reflecting on CEL helped alumni understand themselves and the contexts of practicing applied sociology in “reality” (Bailey). Giving sociology students adequate time to reflect on their experiences, biases, and understandings of applied sociology through CEL practices was instrumental in allowing alumni to believe in the transferability of their sociology. The term transferability was used by participants in their reflective analyses of why they took CEL and their contemplations of post-course legacies. Throughout my research, I wanted to investigate this further regarding what stuck for alumni. According to the literature, CEL can be linked to greater career certainty and direction among sociology undergraduates (Darwen & Rannard, 2011). With this research, I attempted to ascertain the transferability of applied sociology within employment or labour contexts. Alumni in this study mentioned how CEL gave them an opportunity to learn how they wanted to practice applied sociology within our Westernized capitalistic reality:

The number of people who would say to me; ‘so can you get a job with a sociology degree?’ and turns out absolutely. I darn well can! (Emerson)

I do think that I saw the most benefits afterwards in my professional and student career...I really do think that taking this course gave me that [confidence]...to step up and show them I had the skills for my role. (Finley)

Participants reported that CEL increased the visibility of applied sociology’s practicality. For example, when discussing the lasting impression of their CEL, Emerson revealed the following in relation to their “work-life”;

It just kind of affirmed what I already wanted, as I already knew I wanted to practice sociology. I already knew that I enjoyed this, that it was important to do community work. But taking the course, affirmed that, and showed me the kind of avenues in which it was possible for me to actually do it, and potential opportunities where I could make money.

In addition, during our discussion, Kendall revealed to me that their relationship with sociology and the work they currently do for marginalized communities regarding access to education was an “academic-community intersection” that was “introduced to them during” their CEL experience:

Trying to rebuild those relationships between the university and the community. I guess university and community is an intersection that I have been sitting in for 5 years now since I took that course...I really wore my academic sociology, like a security blanket...But afterward [CEL] I was able to skillfully engage with different and diverse folks, fight my demons of impostor syndrome and see myself as someone who was a valuable person to be in those community spaces. (Kendall)

The transferability of applied sociology, and sociology in general, was a concern for alumni. Participants reported that when reflecting on their CEL experiences after their completion, they can see how prior to the course, they were “floating around the social sciences” (Bailey) because they were “unsure of the possibilities” (Cameron) when confronted with external and internal questions of transferability, like career pathways. For example, one participant gave the following advice during our conversations: “If you're in a place where CEL comes along, and you're at a fork in the road for knowing what you want. I would do it” (Jamie). With participants bringing up the transferability of CEL and their continued practices of applied sociology within various employment contexts, this research data was able to link all alumni's current applications of sociology to be impacted by their CEL experiences. Furthermore, participants in this study reported that CEL allowed them to see how they could make meaning of their applied sociology through reliable tangible experiences that could be construed as relevant within capitalistic contexts:

Nobody's hiring sociologists to be sociologists. You have to argue why you did it and what your experiences are and how that stuff sort of like collects or like contributes to you as a person. And I think having that CEL is that...I've done sociology and then I've used my sociology skills to work with the community partner to address these issues. (Alex)

Participants in this study described CEL as a resume “booster”, something that fosters intangible and tangible “CV skills”, and an “experience to converse about” during career conversations. Following the theme of transferability, participants often spoke on the exposure to applied sociology's interdisciplinary potential due to the method of CEL. Collaborative and interdisciplinary environments to practice applied sociology were something alumni sought out after the course, through employment, within and beyond academia to emulate this:

I work with a lot of different people and demographics and I think that CEL gave just such a strong foundation for what I'm able to bring to that organization...it kind of gave me more of like a critical analysis lens to look at an organization and see if it aligns with my values and how I think. You know, like a collaborative environment and what it should look like. (Indy)

In this sense, participants in this study continued to make meaning out of their experiences and practice applied sociology throughout various fields while attributing this interdisciplinary consciousness to CEL. For example, Bailey is currently employed in corporate consulting and reported that CEL impacted their ability to “market” sociology because of the “intersectional approach” sociology enables them to have as a “socially responsible business person.” When seeking contexts to apply their sociology beyond CEL, all the participants in the study attributed their choices to being influenced by a need to continue to employ community-based applied sociology. Reflecting on CEL as an avenue for applied sociology allowed the participants of this study to think through the transferability of more generalizable sociological skills.

The relationship between the community, community partners and participants impacted the transferable legacy of CEL for alumni. CEL alumni reflected on their applied sociology coursework, community partner projects, and contributory relationships that impacted perceived and proclaimed transferability. For example, eight participants mentioned having an “ongoing” and “good” relationship with their community partners after the course. These eight participants utilized terminology under the resume skills umbrella, like “communication”, “teamwork,” and “community-based collaborative research” in relation to CEL. In addition, these eight participants attested to having a letter of reference or utilizing their CEL community partner as a resume contact in following course completion. For example, Jamie, who attained work with a non-profit specializing in community-based drop-in housing services following their coursework, stated: “The job that I got post-grad was because of CEL that I got it, no question.” The other five participants who had somewhat unreliable relationships (lack of communication, stressful interactions, and lack of personal connection) or convoluted experiences with their community collaborators/partners reported that they relied on general skills to promote the transferability of CEL. For example, these participants used resume terminology like “experience working with a community group,” “qualitative and quantitative research analysis,” “project coordination,” and

“statistical analysis”. They relied more on CEL as a learning experience rather than a direct instance to reference for future endeavours. For example:

But you get hands-on experience and open up a field of research or a field of - I keep wanting to say field of economy, a job, an economic area of employment. That you maybe even didn't know existed prior. I think that's the other good part about it, even if you have like a shit or bad experience with your community partner at least you're walking away knowing what areas you don't want to work in. (Alex)

Participant statements attest to the fact that CEL alumni were impacted by self-reflective analysis of transferability and contextualization of applied sociology within capitalistic and neoliberal realities. To summarize, following their CEL work, six alumni reported pursuing employment that allowed them to practice their applied sociology. Other participants mentioned their pursuit of various “work” avenues to extend their applied sociology, including volunteering, interning, community-style living, and working for various community-based organizations. Four participants in this study worked with or volunteered for their respective community partners following the completion of their CEL course projects. Treating their volunteer work like CEL and applying their sociology to volunteer experiences was a common theme amongst alumni who entered fields of civic service and non-profit:

I treated it [volunteer work] as if I was in CEL. I thought about all my sociological skills; regarding 'how can I apply it to this organization' ...Then the career and the roles that I did wouldn't have happened if I didn't sell myself, and...what I can do, and I think that the CEL course gave me the empowerment to do that, to sell myself as a useful sociological thinker. (Finley)

It is interesting that CEL alumni wanted to “mirror” or “just keep doing what CEL gave hints of” (Morgan) regarding their employment and practice of applied sociology within and beyond academic spaces. According to participants, CEL “opened doors” (Bailey) for them and allowed them to explore “employment areas” (Harley) or “professional avenues” (Lennon) they may not have considered or been confident enough to pursue. In addition, participants hypothesized that without CEL on their resume, they would not have been considered for certain opportunities post-course; including employment and higher education; “it allowed me to get my foot in the door” to working with communities “I wanted to work with” (Bailey). According to these participant narratives, the legacy of learning applied sociology impacted alumni’s employable sociology.

I observed participants reflect on their applied sociology and how transferability and meaning-making process influenced their CEL legacy. In this sense, navigations of realities post-course impact how alumni reflect and make meaning out of their CEL experience. A situation that impacted how alumni made meaning out of their CEL experiences was the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19: Applying Sociology to Understand a World in Crisis

In Canada, many facets of life continue to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. To date, Canadians continue to live with COVID-19 and its effects in a myriad of ways (Appleby et al., 2022). Alongside health impacts, the Government of Canada (2022) reviews the major social and economic impacts on the lives of Canadians and on Canadian businesses, highlighting potential longer-term structural changes moving forward. According to research by the Government of Canada (2022), the pandemic has had significant indirect and direct impacts that will affect the future lives of Canadians economically, socially, and medically. The pandemic impacted public safety and social cohesion: social unrest, issues of inequality and civil order concerns (Government of Canada: COVID-19, 2022).

Following an ecological perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic could be analyzed through an interdependent lens that accounts for relational interactions between individual and community dimensions (Appleby et al., 2022; Marzana et al., 2022). Adopting an ecological perspective allows sociologists an opportunity to examine the relationships between human societies and their environments (Duncan et al., 1959; Mancoske, 1981). This perspective emphasizes the interactive and interdependent relationship between social systems and the world: including, events, ecosystems, global infrastructure, and interconnected community⁴⁵ systems (Duncan et al., 1959; Mancoske, 1981). This perspective includes the individual emotional dimensions (anxiety, self-efficacy, hope) and their community dimension (connectedness, emotional sharing, and solidarity). The COVID-19 pandemic and the correlated Canadian restrictions impacted the lives of people and communities. Participants in this study

⁴⁵ Community and its meaning can be viewed in through the ecological perspective to account for the interrelations among people, roles, organizations, resources events and problems, that impact the complex reciprocal interactions of a community; the premise of the ecological perspective is that intervention should contribute to the development of the entire community (Alexander, 2011; Duncan et al., 1959; Mancoske, 1981).

suggested that as an event, the pandemic shifted their “realities” (Bailey), their navigation “tactics” (Alex) and their “ideas of community” (Morgan). Participant conversations involving COVID-19 were focused on two areas: how CEL inspired them to apply reflexive sociology to help them cope with the social effects of COVID-19, and how COVID-19 impacted alumni’s ideas of community.

Due to the nature of this study spanning a five-year deliverable period, from 2018 to 2023 and the peak of COVID-19 impacts in Canada occurring throughout the beginning of 2020 to the end of 2021, the pandemic was mentioned by almost all participants. The time COVID-19 occurred for participants of this study varied depending on when they took the CEL course; nevertheless, almost all participants reflected on how COVID-19 impacted their education, their communities, and themselves. Note that six participants took and completed the CEL course before 2020, one during the federal shutdown of education institutions during 2020, and six during ongoing health measures altering education delivery formats (i.e., mask mandate and online learning).

According to participants’ the reflective perspectives inspired by their CEL impacted how they navigated the new social reality of a pandemic and its effects. Five participants of this study also claimed that CEL helped redefine, reframe or contextual what community meant to them. For example, Bailey, who finished the course in 2019, reported:

It made me quite a hyper-aware, hyper-conscious individual...going through the entire pandemic and just thinking about all these various concepts...you really start to think about collective consciousness and agency and structure...It was really helpful to have perspective...It was almost like a therapeutic moment to be able to investigate this global issue affecting social life as it was happening. Again, it really helped me personally.

Another participant elaborated on how this related to community-engaged practices and applied sociology regarding their sociological perspective and how it impacted their interaction with society during the pandemic:

When COVID happened, I definitely saw it as kind of almost like a call to arms...I think it [CEL] really gave me a feeling of responsibility....you can't teach that [the social impacts of COVID] in school. You can't learn that [how to adjust and navigate them] in a classroom. Nothing really can prepare you for that feeling of responsibility (Bailey).

Participants of this study reflected on how the sociological perspective and imagination stuck with them after course completion because it allowed them to see how individual and community dimensions were impacted by COVID-19. According to participants, this helped

them “rationalize” their personal struggles, “relate” and “connect” to others even when social distancing was enforced and position themselves to preserve within different environments that were “not mentally healthy” for them to be in (Alex, Bailey, Indy, & Kendall). Participants also brought up the point of economy and the reality of a post-COVID-19 reality for sociologists who are hyper-aware of the indirect and direct social impacts of the pandemic:

I think as far as takeaways go, I think having the confidence to say those thoughts and your theories out loud and sharing those regardless of how scary or deep or negative they may sometimes be, I think, reality can be that way, especially considering the past few years we've had [referencing COVID 2020 and since] and kind of where we're going as far as our economy goes. But knowing that eventually, you know, there is, there is a cycle to all of this. And a reason and we won't know until maybe far after is humbling but also invokes feelings of being ok with where you are. The pandemic and its effects will make a great social event to study with sociology (Bailey).

Participants in this study deployed CEL resources to feed their sense of connectedness, emotional sharing, and solidarity, thus counteracting negative emotions and the uncertainty of the moments impacted by the pandemic. Participating in CEL fosters a sense of collective responsibility that may be utilized as a tool to get through changing ideas of community. This is a theme found within collective psychology research (Brooks et al., 2020; Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Van Bavel et al., 2020). From the literature on COVID-19 we know that individual and collective responses are largely influenced by contextual experiences. These research findings have positioned CEL applied sociology as one of these contextual experiences that impact students beyond the course timeline (Prosser et al., 2020). We are living in an era where the ideas of community and learning are evolving. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique opportunity for lasting and beneficial changes from CEL experiential learning courses to be realized.

In this chapter, I explored participants’ reflective analysis of the transferability of their learned applied sociology. Understanding how participants rationalize the transferability of sociological concepts explored within the context of a CEL course to other contexts or environments (labour markets, employment, community work, etc.) post-course is an important contribution made by this research. Through retrospective cost-benefit analyses of applied sociology within a capitalist society, the interdependent neoliberal and capitalist influence within institutionalized programs like CEL was explored by participants. Reflecting on the “training wheels” CEL provided them in relation to employment environments, allowed alumni to observe

the legacy of learning applied sociology on their continued “working” relationships with sociology (Cameron). Rationalizing the employable aspect of applied sociology within a globalized economy was an important legacy of CEL on alumni regarding their navigation of capitalistic reality and social issues, including globalization and COVID-19.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Analysis

In this chapter, I present my interpretations of the data. These chapter insights were shaped by pertinent literature and theory. In this discussion, I analyze the data by applying Boyer's (1996) scholarship of engagement and Bandura's (1997, 2001) concept of self-efficacy. I rely on Schunk and Mullen's (2012) research into engaged learners and self-efficacy to further contextualize Bandura. Following this, I apply Freire's (1993) critical pedagogy and Dewey's (1976) pragmatic philosophy to explore the data. Then, I apply Savage's (2022) interpretations further to dissect what 'sticks' with alumni post-CEL and why, in relation to Ferguson and Carbonaro's (2016) developed SLF. Finally, I discuss the relevance of Collins' (2019) credential culture and apply it to the findings. Throughout the discussion and analysis, I apply Alexander's (2011) definition of meaning-making and Bandura's (2001) efficacious contemplation concept to position participants' legacy of CEL as an ongoing relational process liberating alumni's sociological imagination.

I use these lenses to explore the conversations I had with participants to answer my research questions: *How do sociology students describe their CEL experiences after course completion; what impacts, if any, does a CEL-applied sociology seminar course have on students post-course; to what degree do alumni CEL experiences change in relation to time since course completion; and, according to alumni, how effectively does CEL teach applied sociology?* Specifically, how might this research affect how we teach applied sociology in the future? The findings highlight four fundamental legacies of taking a CEL course at UVic.

The Legacy is Personal: Reflexivity as a Skill Increasing Self-Efficacy

First, the findings suggest that as a method for teaching and practicing applied sociology, CEL fosters long-term personal impacts due to an engaged scholarship that instills reflexive skills and relational perspectives that increase alumni's feelings of self-efficacy. In preliminary discussions, participants reflected on how CEL allowed them to practice and engage with their sociology, agency and, therefore, themselves. The engagement methods and relational lenses were fostered through participants' CEL. Throughout this discussion, I will apply Boyer's (1996) model of engagement and Bandura's (1997, 2001) concepts of self-efficacy to the findings.

Throughout the interviews, all thirteen participants noted that they continued to engage with, and practice applied sociology in various forms. Learning applied sociology through CEL

allowed participants in this study to learn and embody a scholarship of engagement. Findings revealed that participants often reflected on how their personal convictions, their internalized ways of thought and their sociological perspectives changed in *relation to* or *because of* CEL. The findings attest to the potential of applied sociology and experiential learning frameworks like CEL that engage with sociology and students (Gottdiener & Feagin, 1988).

The data is consistent with Boyer's (1996) scholarship of engagement that positions CEL as an experiential learning method that inspires participants to apply sociology. Boyer's four forms of engaged scholarship can be applied to aspects of CEL to better understand how and why this learning method impacts alumni: scholarship of discovery (research), integration (interdisciplinary perspectives), application (action research) and teaching (communication). Boyer's scholarship of discovery emphasizes that the creation of knowledge through research and inquiry should contribute new insights to fields or subjects. Boyer advocates for original research that advances the knowledge of learners and society. The data showed that alumni found CEL to be particularly engaging due to its methods that positioned them as collaborative partners working to create and advance knowledge needed by communities. For several alumni, CEL was their first opportunity to apply sociology and work with the community rather than "theorizing about them from afar" (Kendall). Relying on the data further, Cameron eloquently voiced their CEL experience as an opportunity:

I saw it as a really incredible opportunity to engage in thoughtful content. That is, community-based, that has tangible results.

The testaments from CEL alumni reinforce that a scholarship of engagement should advance sociology's pursuit for understanding society in the pursuit of and support of just methods of social change (Alexander, 2011; Boyer, 1997; Mobley, 2007; Savage, 2022). Next, the scholarship of integration involves the synthesis of information throughout disciplines, topics, times, and places (Boyer, 1996). This aspect of Boyer's (1996) model can be applied to the findings of this research due to participants' narratives attesting to applied sociology bridging the various gaps within their sociology, particularly between theory and practice. Indeed, participants shared stories that highlighted the connective potential of CEL in relation to its ability to cross disciplines and intersect with various forms of knowledge. Relying on the data:

It is not just you, you're working and collaborating with the community. And it's not just sociology that CEL office cross-references and interacts with, you are interacting with

multiple departments of knowledge. I pulled on my knowledge of weird, mundane shit, everything beyond and within academia. (Alex)

Through CEL, participants were able to see the interdisciplinary potential of applied sociology. For example, during our interview, Indy spoke to me about the “interconnectedness” of society, culture and history and the visibility afforded to these “interplaying” relational aspects that came from their engagement with their self and sociology during CEL. Participants internalized a relational perspective that allowed them to engage with applied sociology during CEL and their various realities post-course as alumni. Furthermore, alumni were able to reflect on these processes during their post-course interactions and lived experiences through a relational ontology. Throughout the interviews, there were notable examples of alumni connecting past and current events to their CEL experiences using verbiage like *domino effect* or *planting seeds* to describe the course and its impact. A notable example was shared by Morgan, who reflected on the interdisciplinary potential of applied sociology during their interview in relation to their current work in memory politics and history:

...memory politics is just sociology, or the sociology of history...how does understanding the past, or how we remember the memory of the past, influence our identities today and national identities? And I'm like, oh, that's just sociology. That's just my degree. But without applied sociology, I don't know if I could connect such. (Morgan)

Boyer's (1996) scholarship of engagement evokes the rigorous application of disciplinary expertise to yield results. For alumni, CEL impacted their application of sociology post-course because they had practiced and seen the results of its disciplinary potential during course experiences. The data found participants engaged with CEL because it reflected “something more” (Alex) by allowing them as students to practice and apply their trained sociology to produce “tangible and valuable” (Cameron) results “beyond grades” (Dylan). Relying on the data, Emerson shared that producing a project for their community partner through CEL and making a difference for marginalized communities *engaged* their sociology:

I think CEL is a course that gives students, like myself the opportunity to not just learn about sociology, but to become a sociologist and to do sociology in a practical way in the community (Emerson).

In addition, the public dissemination of knowledge was important to alumni as they worked to increase accessibility of their sociology and prove its relevancy to others and themselves. The scholarship of teaching and learning invokes a systematic study of teaching and

learning processes (Boyer, 1996). By engaging with CEL, an experiential learning framework that “differed from normal scholarship” (Alex), alumni were invited to reflect on their learned sociology, their educations, their positionality within and beyond educational institutions, and how they embodied agency as a social subject interacting with society. As participants began to reflect on their positioning and the gaps between theory and practice, they became empowered as critical agents, actively questioning and negotiating with social analysis, common sense, learning and social change tactics (Boyer, 1996; Giroux, 2010a; Giroux, 2010b). Relying on the data, Emerson detailed a perception shared by other participants when they explained the engaged scholarship of CEL:

...one of those courses that does get you to engage a lot more. It engages your feelings that it changes your mind. It engages your identity as a student. It engages your identity as a worker, your various aspects of positionality and intersectionality, and it just makes you a more engaged citizen.

The research findings indicate that alumni continue to make meaning out of their CEL experiences due to the course’s experiential learning methods that embody a scholarship of engagement (Alexander, 2011; Boyer, 1996). Practicing and engaging with applied sociology allowed alumni to acknowledge their self-efficacy. According to Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is a critical cognitive variable that impacts how people engage with society. As a concept, self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief in their ability to succeed in situations or accomplish a particular task; in this study, participants’ self-efficacy was tied to the ability to engage with the world. This research supports the literature confirming that undergraduate sociology curriculum potentially increases cynicism, apathy, and low self-efficacy through continuous exposure to entrenched social problems (Haddad & Lieberman, 2002; Kleinman & Copp, 2009; Schunk & Mullen, 2012). In contrast, empirical studies support the findings, attesting to CEL’s ability to increase feelings of self-efficacy, empowerment, and agency (Bandura, 2001; Johnson, 2005; Mobley, 2007; Savage, 2022; Schunk & Mullen, 2012). CEL positioned alumni as efficacious agents (Schunk & Mullen, 2012) who could desire and work for social change in rational, feasible ways; for example

Every aspect of your life...you can and should look at through the lens of sociology. You can't get away with not doing it after a course like this [CEL]. You have to interrogate yourself in this course; you can't come in the course and leave the same way as you came in. You have to be more reflective by the end of it. You have to be a more solution-based thinker. (Emerson)

Bandura (2001) suggested that high self-efficacy is associated with a greater willingness to take on difficult tasks, increased persistence in the face of obstacles, and a higher likelihood of achieving success; conversely, low self-efficacy leads to self-doubt, decreased motivation, and a higher likelihood of giving up in the face of challenges. Throughout the findings, alumni's pessimistic narratives and pathologizing perspectives of sociology prior to CEL mirrored Bandura's conceptualization of low self-efficacy. Throughout the findings, alumni's perspectives of sociology and its transferability shifted in relation to their CEL experiences. For alumni in this study, CEL represented an influential environment in their reciprocal causation feedback loop because it influenced their feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001). For example, I observed alumni suggest they were ready to "give up" (Cameron & Indy) on sociology and or "quit" (Alex) the program before CEL.

According to Schunk and Mullen (2012), motivation affects students' *engagement*. Schunk and Mullen (2012) further utilize Bandura's (1997, 2001) social cognitive theory to explore self-efficacy as a key cognitive variable of motivation and engagement. Participants noted that exposure to social issues, power relationships, marginalized groups and social injustices within lectures and syllabi does not necessarily offer them a sociological perspective or instill sociological tools to analyze or inspire social change. Practicing and engaging with social issues, power relationships, marginalized groups, and social injustices through CEL allowed alumni to increase their feelings of self-efficacy and enhance their sociological motivations (Murphy et al., 2021). Motivation is a crucial aspect of Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory; throughout learning, individuals may observe and reproduce behaviors, but they may not continue to do so or internalize these concepts unless they are motivated (Schunk & Mullen, 2012). CEL alumni's motivation to practice sociology post-CEL was influenced by various factors occurring within their course experiences: reinforcement (more than a grade), punishment (fear of reality), and expectations of future outcomes (transferability). Alumni's optimistic tones when discussing CEL diverged from cynical, apathetic, and pessimistic narratives of their sociology undergraduate degrees. With respect to tone of voice, I observed the participant's tone shift from a more monotonic descriptive narrator to an emotional and enigmatic storyteller when describing CEL and their applications of sociology post course. The findings of this study suggest that practicing applied sociology through CEL allowed participants to rationalize the feasibility and applicability of sociology by increasing feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001).

The data indicates that this enabled alumni to gain confidence in their capabilities to efficaciously embody a sociological perspective. According to Schunk and Mullen (2012), the role of self-efficacy can alleviate stressors regarding academic success and transitions. In their research, Schunk and Mullen apply Bandura's (2001) theory to conclude that students who feel efficacious about learning but "disconnected from [their] school environment or mainstream society may be unmotivated and disengaged" (2012, p. 229). This research data supports such claims; alumni make meaning out of their learning because of CEL's collaborative involvement with communities and, therefore, society.

Attesting to this application of Bandura (2001) is the participant narratives throughout the findings that engage with efficacious contemplation. Efficacious contemplation refers to a form of thoughtful reflection or meditation that is purposeful and effective because it makes meaning out of experiences to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 2001; Franzese & Felten, 2017). In the context of this research, *efficacious* implies that alumni's contemplation of CEL was not merely passive or idle but rather an intentional process that advanced goal achievement and rationalized personal insights (Alexander, 2011). I use the term here to suggest that the act of alumni contemplating their CEL experiences is not only meaningful during this interview but also because it evidently produces tangible and impactful personal effects according to alumni's testaments. While all participants spoke about how their reflections on the course have allowed them to make meaning out of their experiences post-course, the term *efficacious contemplation* was not directly used to describe this process. For example, many participants referenced realizations that occurred *after* the course. Notably, two participants described this reflexive skill:

After the course[CEL] I started thinking a lot more critically, just about all the maybe not so obvious, more subtle things, and the things that I didn't realize I could do. It showed me my blind spots, and how to be more aware of those blind spots...my unrealized skills and biases. (Emerson)

It's taking something that's like 2D and making it 3D. We've learned all of these things, now how does it actually apply in the real world? And what's your role in all of it, cause when you're learning about it in a classroom, you're not really investigating how you're coming to all of these ideas and concepts. So, it [CEL] involves learning about yourself in relation to sociology, while also doing something to better your community, but it doesn't hit you till after. (Lennon)

The findings indicate that participants pursued CEL because they were motivated to manifest a scholarship of engagement that could support and enhance their feelings of self-efficacy. Comments riddled with insecurity in relation to sociology's applicability speak to the importance of learning applied sociology through an engaged scholarship like CEL and the legacy it had on alumni (Schunk & Meece, 2006; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). This aligns with Boyer's and Bandura's models that suggest practicing theory increases engagement and enhances learning. As Boyer (1997) stated:

Education must prepare students to be independent, self-reliant human beings. But education, at its best, also must help students go beyond their private interests, gain a more integrative view of knowledge, and relate their learning to the realities of life.

The Context of Education: Pedagogical Problems

Second, the data demonstrated that CEL, as a pedagogy for teaching and practicing applied sociology, is valued by alumni as a learning method. According to alumni, CEL allowed them to bridge gaps between theory and practice. In this section, I use Freire's (1993) critical pedagogy and Dewey's (1976) pragmatic philosophy of education to conceptualize my findings further. Throughout the data, participants reflected on how CEL allowed them to practice and engage with their applied sociology in a critical way.

I apply Freire's (1993) critical pedagogy to further conceptualize how the key principles associated with his model allowed alumni to extend their relational sociology and continue to engage with their practiced applied sociology post-CEL. According to the findings, CEL embodied an influential critical pedagogy due to its transformative approach to teaching and learning (Freire, 1993). Throughout the findings, alumni positioned CEL as a liberatory approach within traditional education frameworks. Alumni mirrored Freire's critiques of the oppressive nature of social systems through their advocacy for education as a tool for social change. Similarly, participants advocated for CEL throughout the research findings as an educational framework that "empowers individuals to critically examine and transform their social reality" (Cameron). CEL methodologies resonated with the key principles of Freire's critical pedagogy, including dialogical education, problem-posing education, critical consciousness or conscientization, liberation through education, praxis, egalitarian teacher-student relationships, consideration of context, and an overarching theme of social justice and equity. Within CEL, these principles worked in combination to foster learning. This was evident within the data.

The data indicates that CEL followed Freire's (1993) model regarding the community-partner work that embodied problem-posing education pedagogy. By working with "real life issues" (Bailey, Cameron, Indy, Finley, Kendall, Lennon, & Morgan) and being able to solve problems and meet the needs posed by their community partners, alumni felt engaged with their sociology (Freire, 1993). For example, participants embodied a "reflexive" (Morgan) praxis due to a critical "consciousness" (Dylan) that was established through an egalitarian and democratic "dialogue between community partner[s], students, professors, and the self" (Bailey). The overarching engagement methods of CEL fostered further discussion of education as an institution and its liberatory or limiting potentials. Additionally, applying Freire's model, this analysis suggests that alumni's knowledge only became meaningful when paired with action and agency. The findings of this research indicate that alumni's sociology became more meaningful through CEL's critical pedagogy that allowed them to bridge the gap between theory and practice; therefore, they could "climb down" (Jamie), "dismantle" (Harley), and "destroy the ivory tower" (Alex) of hierarchal power and institutionalized academic sociology. Through reflection and critical consciousness, alumni had the ability to engage in further praxis during our interviews and other events post-course, recognizing interacting social forces, translating problems, and inspiring solutions (Carroll, 2013; Freire, 1993; Giroux, 2010b; Simbürger, 2014).

The findings indicate that through CEL's critical pedagogy, alumni began to analyze sociology as a discipline and universities as social institutions. In this sense, through CEL, alumni started asking, "Who is sociology for?" (Bailey). Alumni reflected on their enhanced critical thinking skills and increased conscientization regarding learning frameworks and social systems. The awareness of relational ontologies and "being...within and beyond them" (Emerson) allowed alumni to challenge and exist within societal structures as "liberated" (Alex) and "privileged" (Cameron) sociologists (Freire, 1993). A total of nine participants reflected on the positionality, privilege, or responsibility that accompanied their sociology. Within the data, I observed how reflexive praxis and conscientization enabled alumni to acknowledge the privilege of learning sociology. Participants were able to position sociology as an educational tool supporting social justice and equity and as a part of an academic system in need of further liberation. I draw on a narration from Kendall that captured this process:

I think the realization that, my education is here for me, there's no one else. I've been trying to prove myself to someone invisible...realizing I don't have to prove myself to some imaginary entity that I've made-up in my head that is judging me. It's just me here,

and I can make of it what I want. I can make meaning out of what I want to make meaning. That's the kind of mindset that I brought to my assignments [post CEL].

The data indicates that learning applied sociology through CEL furthered alumni's ability to utilize their education as a tool for social justice and equity post-course in employment opportunities, continued education, volunteer work or even throughout their day-to-day lives (Barton-Bridges, 2022; Loh et al., 2016; Voss et al., 2015). To note, participants engaged with critiques of Freire (1993) and his lack of attention to interacting realities concerning educational institutions concepts, contexts and histories. For example, participants spoke on how this *particular* CEL course "only grazed the surface of what community-based scholarship could do" (Alex). Additionally, Dylan noted that "in hindsight, it [CEL] was ok, but I was left wanting more, more community-based learning opportunities." The data indicates that participants understand that critical pedagogy should not be considered a means to an end regarding liberation or social change; rather they need to also embody a critical agency and continue to practice applied sociology (Freire, 1993).

Next, I apply Dewey's (1976) pragmatic philosophy to consider the context participants invoked concerning experiential learning as critical pedagogy within a capitalist society. Dewey's analysis and participant narratives similarly emphasize the need for scholarship, like CEL, to provide environments and experiences that allow students to learn through inquiry, immersion, and reflection. Dewey's ideas are deeply rooted in democratic principles; promoting education, particularly experiential learning, as a means of fostering responsible and engaged citizens prepared for social interaction beyond educational institutions. The data shows that participants believed CEL provided them with an environment and experience that immersed them in knowledge and centred their *self*. Alumni spoke on how CEL engaged their scholarship and promoted their agency as responsible and social citizens within and beyond educational institutions. Participants in this study further echoed Dewey's advocacy for democratic and experiential learning through CEL in relation to the "hands-on experience" (Finley) and "experimentation" (Bailey) that the course provided. Additionally, like Dewey, all CEL alumni participating in this study believed that their education should be connected to *real-life* experiences.

In a capitalist context, Dewey's (1976) pragmatic philosophy advocates for an education system that prepares individuals for active participation in a democratic society. Relying on the

data, alumni positioned CEL as an opportunity to practice their skills and participate in the communities they would be a part of post-course. CEL allowed participants to feel like they could work to contribute to society by applying sociology because their holistic self, alongside their sociological skills and abilities, were “enough” (Morgan). Alumni believed that education should not only transmit knowledge but also help them as students develop the skills necessary to adapt to a dynamic and evolving capitalist environment. Participants stressed that without CEL they struggled to perceive the transferability of sociology beyond the realm of academia and may have been limited in their choices post-course. For example, “I cannot attest to what I would have done without CEL, but I can assume things, and let me tell you I don’t see myself *doing* sociology” (Cameron).

While both Freire (1993) and Dewey (1976) share some common ground in their emphasis on student-centred learning and the role of the teacher as a facilitator, their overarching philosophies and goals for education differ, reflecting their distinct philosophical foundations and socio-political contexts. In summary, the application of Dewey’s philosophy highlights processes of preparation within CEL that resonated with alumni as they reflected on their experiences. The application of Freire’s model allows the data to position sociology education as a means of challenging and transforming oppressive social structures inherent in capitalist systems that resonate with participants as sociologists, including the very academic tower they received their university educations from. These commitments interact, combine, or contradict each other within alumni’s thoughts and perspectives post-course.

Change Over Time: Practicing the Preached

Third, participants shared how they continue to make meaning from their CEL experiences as they practice applied sociology. The data indicates that participants continue to practice applied sociology because of the space CEL provided for alumni to demonstrate their sociological competencies. The findings of this study support that what ‘sticks’ with alumni of CEL is dependent on an applied sociology framework that supports students in attaining their sociological toolbox and sociological perspective (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016). Within this section, I will apply Savage’s (2022) analysis to unpack what ‘sticks’ with alumni post-CEL and why in relation to Ferguson and Carbonaro’s (2016) SLF.

The sociological toolbox contains essential competencies that sociology students should be able to demonstrate at different points in the sociology curriculum (Ferguson & Carbonaro,

2016). According to the SLF⁴⁶ a holistic sociology major introduces students to skills and theory, develops knowledge, and encourages the practice and application of sociological methods and methodologies as the sociology degree progresses. I observed participants in this study attest to the perception that the themes of the SLF are what they believe a sociology undergraduate degree should provide them with. Learning applied sociology through a fourth-year CEL course represented an opportunity for participants to use their sociological toolbox and test their sociological competency by linking theory to practice.

The SLF developed by Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016) has two broad categories that organize learning outcomes for sociology: the *sociological perspective* and the *sociological toolbox*. According to Ferguson and Carbonaro what makes sociology unique is its holistic approach that combines these categories and their concepts to create understanding. The framework argues that a ‘sociological toolbox’ allows sociological thinkers to practice and apply the ‘sociological perspective’. Throughout their framework, Ferguson and Carbonaro emphasize the ability of students to learn and practice sociology through *applying* it. Although the sociology major introduces and develops students’ sociological skills and theories, the data supports the literature that suggests that connecting and applying theory through *practice* is important (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016; Savage, 2022). Applying sociology is a key testament of competency and understanding; however, this research suggests that as the sociology curriculum progresses, students become frustratingly disconnected from the promise of the sociological perspective (Mills, 1959) due to the tendency within academic sociology to sideline an engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1996). According to alumni, the favoring of professional and academic stylized syllabi limits applications of the sociological toolbox and therefore impacts the development of students’ sociological perspectives. Participants in this study noted that the gap between theory and practice is exacerbated by a sociology curriculum that increasingly “theorizes about” and “focuses on social problems and issues” from “afar” (Alex). For example, Cameron voiced this:

I don't think you can be critical without proposing solutions, that is not a critical lens, it's just being a philosophical ass. That is not sociology in my opinion, or it shouldn't be.

⁴⁶ Revisiting the Sociological Literacy Framework (SLF) reviewed by Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016) and their second category: the *Sociological Toolbox*.

The data implies that this disconnect and general disciplinary “depression” (Kendall) may manifest in a “pathologically problematic” (Bailey) reductionist and analytical sociology. Relying on alumni’s testaments, this may disengage the self from sociology, theory from practice and thus the sociologist from society. According to alumni, without a holistic understanding connecting the sociological perspective to their toolbox, sociology can foster feelings of “inadequacy” (Indy), and “inapplicability” (Bailey); these findings are corroborated by research from Howard and Butler (2018), Johnson (2005), and Savage (2022). CEL allowed alumni to reconnect with their sociological perspective, fight feelings of frustration or helplessness, and prioritize a more holistic and “solution-stylized sociology” (Kendall).

According to the data, a relational sociology that promotes a holistic and ecological perspective often remains unpracticed, unapplied, and therefore unrealized by sociology students *until* CEL. The findings indicate that alumni continue to utilize their CEL experiences to emphasize their sociological abilities and apply their competencies. Of course, not all students will experience this progression or leave traditional sociology courses feeling frustrated. In the same instance, not all students will seek out opportunities to engage with sociology beyond traditional course requirements (Savage, 2022). The participants of this study acknowledged this through their reflective contemplation of their motivations to take CEL. According to participants, they were “intentional” (Emerson) and “purposeful” (Alex) when they sought out opportunities to “flex” their sociology (Bailey).

Ultimately, the data suggests that learning applied sociology through CEL was an opportunity that “restored” (Harley), “revived” (Dylan) and “reconnected” (Jamie) alumni to the SLF tenets. Subsequently, the data showed how alumni reflected on this further post-course due to their self-attributed CEL-derived sociological perspective that fostered ongoing and intentional reflexive and relational ways of thought. Thus, these findings offer a compelling argument that CEL, as a method to teach applied sociology, should be considered a vital pedagogical addition to the undergraduate sociology curriculum⁴⁷. In short, Savage (2022) captured participants’ experiences in this research when stating:

Helping students learn to engage with society should not be some- thing left to chance. A course that intentionally deals with the “What now?” question can be a responsible

⁴⁷ Beyond UVic curriculum; participants in this study did not all start and end their undergraduate journey having only attended UVic.

pedagogical decision; it can support students looking to gain the tools they need to feel empowered and confident. (p. 117)

Throughout the interviews, alumni argued that practicing applied sociology through community-based methods, like CEL, should not only be encouraged and supported but also made a *necessary* component for sociology undergraduates. For example, three participants “recommended” CEL (Jamie), or “wished for more CEL” opportunities (Cameron & Morgan) during our conversations. These findings revealed that what ‘stuck’ with CEL alumni post-course was the beneficial methods utilized by CEL to teach applied sociology. According to alumni, through CEL, they were “exposed” (Bailey) to a diverse, “relational” (Cameron), and “collaborative” (Alex) knowledge that provided them with all the “connections they wanted” (Finley) from their promised introductory sociology: including, self, community, academia, theory, practice, and application. The data indicates that CEL positions students to “do something” (Bailey) about their feelings of frustration as their sociological degree progresses and their sociological perspective gains focus.

In addition, this research indicates that the ‘stickiness’ of CEL methodologies relates to the perceived transferability or applicability of the SLF in its holistic entirety to the realities encountered by alumni post-course. This analysis suggests that alumni recognized that this course was unique in its intentional focus on applied sociology (Ferguson & Carbonaro, 2016; Howard & Butler, 2018). The research suggests that CEL, as a pedagogy, allows alumni to practice engaging with society and applying their sociology in an impactful way. Although sociology may provide students with a toolbox full of theories and methodologies, students may still feel like they do not know how to use or apply their sociological tools. The ability to practice or “test out” (Jamie) applications of “sociological knowledge and skills” (Cameron) was a vital component of the legacy of CEL on alumni. According to the findings of this research, a sociological education without the opportunities accompanying CEL may forfeit its ability to ‘stick’ with students (Savage, 2022).

Navigating Labour-market Challenges

Fourth, the findings reveal that participants continue to reflect on the transferability of applied sociology during their navigations of capitalist and credential ‘realities’ post-course. Participants articulated how CEL fit into their cost-benefit analyses of applied sociology in

relation to the transferable aspect of their sociology. I apply Collin's (2019) credential culture concepts to these findings.

Participants considered how navigating situations and events post-course, like employment or COVID-19, could inspire shifts in meaning-making or reflection. Participants' personal reflective introductory discussions progressed to more critical and reflexive retrospection of the course and concluded with narratives about their ongoing and past experiences with practicing applied sociology and how or why it evoked contemplation of the legacy of CEL. Within this section, I utilize understandings from the sociology of education literature to contextualize my application of Collin's (2019) credential culture analysis further.

Revisiting literature on the sociology of education, the massification of education manifests in two predominate ways: first, a concomitant increase in graduate education, justified in the same terms as the expansion of undergraduate education, graduate education produces more specialists, more people able to teach others, that accumulate within an arms race of credits; and second, increased stratification as governments, or non-profit private institutions, expand the number of institutions to meet rising demand (Allais, 2014; Chow, 2007; Guder et al., 2009; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Trow, 2007). In relation to the data, I will discuss the prevailing 'arms race' of credits (Collins, 2019).

Credential culture generally refers to a societal emphasis or reliance on degrees or formal qualifications as a measure of a person's abilities, knowledge, or qualifications (Collins, 2019). In a credential culture, individuals may be evaluated and judged based on their academic or professional certifications. This often places significant importance on formal qualifications as a marker of competence and can have various complications for society and its social subjects; including potential biases that may not fully capture an individual's practical skills, experience, or other valuable attributes (Collins, 2019). Critics like Collins (2019) argue that strict adherence to a credential-focused approach might overlook individuals who possess valuable skills and knowledge outside of traditional educational or professional pathways (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Collins et al., 2019; Giroux, 2010b; Trow, 2007).

The influence of capitalism and neoliberal ideals on massified education was articulated by participant narratives, as evident within previous discussions evoking metaphoric analysis of power, positionality, and privilege. The data indicates that CEL alumni had an awareness of society's credential culture and its impacts on society and its social subjects, including

themselves (Rondini, 2015). Throughout the findings, all the participants articulated how they continued to make meaning out of their CEL experiences in relation to CEL as a *credit*. As participants continued to reflect on CEL and applied sociology during their navigations of capitalist and credential ‘realities’ post-course, they embodied an awareness of how social values, norms, and beliefs were influenced by the reality of capitalism and credential-based “systems of success” (Bailey). The findings indicate that students and alumni reflect on their internalized awareness of networks of power and power relationships within capitalist society; participants utilized a capitalist lens to interrogate their CEL experiences, including the events that led and motivated them to take the course.

Obtaining a credit in the form of CEL allowed alumni to “capitalize” on their education while remaining true to their “moral value and beliefs that initially” drew them “to sociology” (Finley). The data indicates that alumni utilized CEL as a credit to get a “foot in the door” (Bailey); into programs to further their educations, into jobs, and into a state of being that could acknowledge and overcome their feelings of “imposter syndrome” (Kendall). Participants acknowledged that they had to exist within the “globalized and capitalistic system”; even if they wanted to change it (Bailey); therefore, CEL as a credit allowed alumni to overcome the potential biases of credential culture while “being a sociologist still” (Bailey & Dylan). Relying on the data, Jamie articulated this:

I think CEL allowed me to write those tangible skills of research analyst, etc. on my CV or resume. But it also allowed me to realize I had other valuable attributes beyond the CEL experience. However, realizing that was in part because of the confidence I got from having CEL as a credit to reference back to. I could back myself up in a sense.

In addition, the findings reveal that the legacy of taking a singular CEL course on alumni relates to perceived transferability from employers, legislators, or administrators based on “refined” (Dylan) “skills” (Kendall) and a “distinction” of sociology’s usefulness (Indy). To expand on such, Indy articulated the following:

...the people, you interact with after [CEL]. It unveils sociology to them too, to what sociology can do. But in society it’s all about recognition, so I think that would be really cool if there was more recognition, more distinction.

Participants also revealed that “in hindsight” (Bailey) even though CEL was impactful “beyond a grade” (Alex) or “credit” (Dylan), how they make meaning out of their course experiences and how they position CEL as a credit within a society that values such, is an

ongoing interactive and reflective process. Moreover, the data indicates that alumni were able to position their CEL in relation to credential culture and “despite of it” (Bailey).

Meaning-Making: An Overarching Theme

According to the meaning-making models (Alexander, 2011; Park & Folkman, 1997), when encountering stressful situations or change, people are likely to cope by reappraising and seeking an understanding of the situation and its implications that resonates within their knowledge (Alexander, 2011). According to Alexander (2011) a possible mechanism for the utility of meaning-making is “coping” with situations that may cause an individual to question their positionality or their value and impact. In this sense, meaning making processes can enable people to reframe their experiences and possibly make a core adaptive adjustment (Alexander, 2011; Ching et al., 2012). The tendency of alumni to actively reflect on the meaning or value of CEL as an experience was pronounced throughout situations that forced adaptation; including feelings of imposter syndrome, reframing CEL experiences to fit certain CV and resume needs, and even dealing with global events like COVID-19 and the social impacts of such. To note, Dylan articulated this:

CEL is an expanded learning opportunity, that situates the classroom away from the classroom...[CEL] provides avenues of learning that are community informed, grounded in the community, and as academic by-products [as students and alumni] of this interaction we should reflect on it.

The current study has shown that, in response to challenging or changing situations, alumni increase their tendency to reflect on the meaning of their CEL experiences as a credit or as simply a “valuable experience” (this phrase was seen across all interviews in various forms and contexts). This provides both contemporaneous and long-term impacts of CEL to be acknowledged. Making meaning of CEL experiences can be an adaptive strategy to cope with the “illuminating” (Dylan) knowledge that comes with alumni's sociological perspectives. In turn, meaning-making may also allow CEL alumni to pose solutions to problems, adapt to various situations and simply navigate their realities, including capitalism and COVID-19. To summarize the data:

Once you turn it on, you can't turn it off. You cannot see society in black and white anymore without seeing all the shades of grey or vice versa. But what you do with what you see, that's up to you. (Dylan)

As the time between course completion and CEL increased, alumni had more opportunities to practice applied sociology and make meaning out of their CEL experience. The myriad of experiences contemplated by participants increased in relation to the years since completing the CEL course. In other words, the number of years between course completion and interview impacted the range of experiences alumni were able to reflect on; utilizing an ecological perspective considers multiple factors (employment, education, relationships, etc.) involved in analyzing CEL as a “social phenomenon” (Bailey). For example, Gabrielle, who completed the course in 2018, went on to pursue multiple degrees in international politics and developmental health sciences. Gabrielle acknowledged that they contemplated their CEL experiences differently depending on contexts post-course; “it is all connected and relational. But isn’t that the point? Is that not the sociological perspective?” In contrast, Lennon, who completed the CEL course in 2023, initially summarized CEL as a “life-changing” while also acknowledging that this reflection “could very well change over time” as experiences multiplied due to the unknown things the “world has to offer post-grad” (Lennon).

Furthermore, the data indicates that the legacy of CEL does not necessarily change over time; rather, alumni’s relational lens and sociological perspective impact meaning-making processes as they interact with copious realities and contexts post-course. From the findings presented, I believe I can theorize a connection between students who engage in CEL and alumni who practice reflexive skills to apply sociological competencies post-course. I observed this to be evident in the interviews as alumni utilized their sociological toolbox and perspectives to explore their stories and make meaning out of their CEL through a reflective and relational self-lead analysis; I merely acted as a guide and now as a translator.

Chapter 10: Concluding Statements

A Personal Synopsis: Reflections of the Researcher

My research sought to explore the impacts or ‘legacies’ of learning applied sociology within a CEL course on alumni. The inspiration for my research developed from my own experience as a 2020 CEL UVic course alumni. Throughout the research process, I shared space with participants as an alumnus. Within this section, I voice my interpretations of the data and offer a reflective synopsis to attempt to further understand the legacy of CEL as a progressive and evolving experience that *we* alumni may make meaning out of. Our CEL stories as fourteen alumni emulated our experiences with sociology; CEL was a part of their story as it is mine. I quickly came to understand that each alumni have/has their own unique knowledge, values, and experiences. Furthermore, I attempted to acknowledge participants' unique stories throughout the structure of this thesis. Reflecting alongside fellow alumni, I revisited the origins of my journey in sociology and CEL as an experience, comparing it to our current state of ‘now’ during the time of the interviews and throughout the writing process. The stories of CEL alumni emulated the socialization we experienced within the field of sociology. Throughout our stories, I observed sociology transition from an optimistic protagonist to a problematic antagonist. As our sociology undergrad progressed, all alumni, including myself, increasingly felt disconnected from sociology and like unreliable narrators of our own stories. Through our interviews, I observed alumni narration as a method to reconnect, reflect and contemplate their CEL experiences further. Learning and practicing applied sociology through CEL offered an opportunity for personal and relational perspectives to embody reflexive ways of thought and re-engage narrators to stories. This was evident in reflective and efficacious contemplations invoked by participants' consciousness of sociological competencies and perspectives.

My participants' meaning-making processes inspired me to reflect further on my sociology and practice reflexive thinking. I attempted to emulate this reflective loop, evoking a reorientation to the personal throughout this thesis, situating participants' voices at the forefront of this student-/alumni-centered research. Learning applied sociology through CEL inspired me to think relationally and acknowledge the reciprocal nature of sociology as both a discipline and a conviction. CEL changed my experience with sociology, challenged my relationships with academia, and impacted my transition into and navigation of academic and non-academic spaces,

including the formulation of this research. Moreover, this research is as much a part of my meaning-making process as my participants in relation to our CEL experience reflections.

Contributions

This study aimed to determine how learning and practicing applied sociology through a singular CEL course impacts alumni. The research reported here focuses on alumni from a UVic course delivered five times, between 2018 and 2023, to capture a range of timelines and explore a multitude of lived experiences. By focusing on a singular course, this comprehensive case study enables a more holistic understanding of the impacts of CEL after graduation. The scope of this research allowed me to include thirteen participants in this study, with at least two alumni⁴⁸ from each course deliverable consenting to an interview. Although the evidence from participant's experiences may not be widely generalizable, my research questions aimed to offer insight into the lived experiences of practicing and applying sociology after taking a CEL course. Through my explorative work, I wanted to value the individuality of lived experiences and allow alumni as social agents to tell their stories. I believe this allows the narratives shared by participants in this study to inform our understanding of CEL impacts post-course.

In the following, I will summarize the contributions of my study in relation to my research questions: *How do sociology students describe their CEL experiences after course completion; what impacts, if any, does a CEL-applied sociology seminar course have on students post-course; to what degree do alumni CEL experiences change in relation to time since course completion; and, according to alumni, how effectively does CEL teach applied sociology?*

First and foremost, this research found that CEL alumni continue to make meaning out of their experiences after course completion; in this sense, CEL had an impactful legacy on alumni. These findings highlighted several impacts that 'stuck' with CEL alumni post-course, including an instilled reflexive and relational perspective. The findings suggest that CEL increases alumni's feelings of self-efficacy, thus motivating them to continue to engage with and practice an applied sociology post-course. CEL's scholarship of engagement strategies allowed alumni an opportunity to integrate their knowledge, rigorously practice applied sociology and discover or renew their commitments to community and agency. Second, the data demonstrated that CEL is made meaningful by its ability to bridge gaps between theory, practice, and non-academic and

⁴⁸ Including myself as a 2020 CEL alumni in this sample.

academic spaces. Through applied sociology, alumni learn what it means to embody a scholarship with commitment and “exist within the intersection between university and community” (Bailey). The idea of knowledge accessibility was pragmatically discussed by participants, further highlighting the ability of CEL to inspire interdisciplinary contemplations and contextualization of sociology. Third, this study’s findings indicated that participants continue to reflect on CEL’s transferability and sociology’s applicability during their navigations of ‘realities’ post-course through their instilled sociological perspective. Therefore, the legacies of CEL may not change over time, but how alumni make meaning out of their experiences interacts with social context and constructed and compounding lived experiences. Finally, this research found that CEL is indeed an impactful method for learning and practicing applied sociology. Alumni felt more competent in their understanding of sociology and their ability to apply sociology post-CEL course. Moreover, CEL proved to be particularly relevant for applied sociology due to its focus and commitment to public accessibility, social change, and social justice (Romero, 2020).

This research contributes to the literature on experiential learning and the sociology of education in various ways. By relying on alumni’s voices and lived experiences with CEL and applied sociology post-course, I addressed the need for research exploring first-hand, long-term impacts of CEL experiences. Ensuring participants’ lived experiences remained at the forefront of this research allowed alumni’s meaning-making processes to reveal the most memorable CEL impacts. Throughout existing literature, I found that most publications attested to the beneficial impacts of taking singular experiential learning courses on students, personally and academically. However, I found this lacked context that could be provided by an interpretive paradigm exploring alumni’s lived experiences. Therefore, this research is useful because the findings offer insight into the impacts of CEL for sociologists, educators and policymakers who can make changes to educational philosophies and pedagogy within universities. Additionally, this research holds implications for both sociology learners and educators, as the findings shed light on barriers to understanding and applying sociology. In conclusion, the findings of this study allow readers an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of CEL and applied sociology. This research will be available through UVic’s sociology department digital thesis library.

Addressing Limitations

The qualitative research methods of this study explore the complexity of CEL alumni's live experiences to generate a deeper understanding of course-based impact. The challenge of this research is in evaluating both the quality and usefulness of findings derived through qualitative methods (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). I argue that my examination produced valuable qualitative research, due to my techniques: including, sampling, the multiple coding steps, the respondent validation methods and the my reflexivity (Crossman, 2021; Hernandez, 2019; Johnson & Waterfield, 2004; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Snyder, 2012; Yin, 2014).

While there are benefits to a cohort case study sample that controls for course structure, professor, and community partners, there remain possible limitations. For example, this study may not be generalizable or representative of all CEL applied sociology alumni across Canada. I also acknowledge that not all CEL courses focus on teaching applied sociology and that there are other relevant ways to learn and engage with applied sociology at the university level. Future research could explore the relationship between applied sociology and CEL further. In addition, expanding the study by increasing the number of participants, programs, courses, and universities in future research could support or diversify findings further. Restricting the sample to a UVic CEL applied sociology course and its alumni also limited the diversity of participants in relation to student demographics. Therefore, future research should prioritize interdisciplinary and intersectional recruitment approaches to include more diverse alumni and participants of all genders, ages, races, and social statuses.

This exploratory case study included 13 interviews investigating lived experiences. Capturing a range of 1 month to 5 years, since course completion the interviews investigated alumni's meaning making of a CEL course, post completion through their own accounts. Future research could work to enhance findings by increasing number of participants or exploring a larger post-course timeline to support longitudinal findings further. As participants in this study suggested including "cross-disciplinary CEL courses" (Alex) or comparing "applied sociology teaching techniques" (Lennon) could also enhance future research. However, these options were not feasible given the scope of this research and the confines accompanying an MA thesis, regarding time and resources. Reflecting on the interviews, I identified an area that could be influenced by association concerning CEL and applied sociology. Most participants reported that CEL impacted them and that it changed how they practice or apply sociology. However, due to

the nature of the course being associated with applied sociology, participants may have been referencing the interactive and relational nature of their applied sociology, applied sociology in general, or how they apply sociology and make meaning out of CEL as separate or interacting entities. This was something that I could not decipher within the scope of a graduate thesis. I was made aware of this when revisiting the data and through a participant's statement during their interview that further articulated this, "unpacking and viewing applied sociology as a sociology muscle to exercise and flex is some metaphorical bullshit that is more of a Ph.D., doctorate dissertation topic, than a thesis though isn't it?" (Dylan).

To gain deeper social insight into the legacy of CEL, future research should consider interviewing inter- and cross-disciplinary CEL courses. In addition, researching other methods of teaching and learning applied sociology may offer comparative analysis to corroborate this study's findings. Nevertheless, community-engaged, applied sociology and CEL literature emphasize that students and communities have unique needs, challenges, situations, and experiences. This study *uniquely* reveals the long-term influences of a single CEL applied sociology course taught at UVic on 14 alumni through their own voices and narratives that value their positionality as interactive individuals and relational beings. Moreover, I believe this research provides useful qualitative research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Certificate of Ethics Approval



University
of Victoria

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Bruce Ravelli (Supervisor)	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER 23-0020 Expedited review - delegated
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT: Reanna Sexton Master's student	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 27-Feb-2023
UVIC DEPARTMENT: Sociology SOCI	APPROVED ON: 27-Feb-2023
	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 26-Feb-2024

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Legacy of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) Course Experiences

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS:
Anelyse Weiler - Contact, University of Victoria

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
tcps2-epc2-certificate.pdf - 30-Jan-2023
Email Script.docx - 03-Feb-2023
Interview Guide.docx - 04-Feb-2023
Interview completion follow.docx - 04-Feb-2023
consent_form_group2_Feb23.doc - 23-Feb-2023
consent_form_group1_feb2-23.doc - 23-Feb-2023

Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Amendments
To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Dr. Sandra Gibbons
Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Dr. Matthew Murphy
Vice-chair, Human Research Ethics Board

*Note: Signatures and personal information including contact information have been redacted from appendices documents.

Appendix 2: Consent Form**University
of Victoria***Participant Consent Form*

Exploring the Legacy of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) Course Experiences

I appreciate your interest in participating in my study entitled: **Exploring the Legacy of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) Course Experiences**. Please find below the information about the consent you will be required to give verbally if you wish to be interviewed for this research.

As a Master's (MA) student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria (UVic), this research is required to complete my degree. I, Reanna [She/her], will conduct this study, under the supervision of Dr. Bruce Ravelli (contact information redacted). My committee also includes Dr. Anelyse Weiler (contact information redacted)

If you have any questions, you may contact me by email (contact information redacted) or by phone; (number redacted)

Purpose and Objectives: What is this study about?

This research project aims to explore the experiences of alumni from a CEL and applied sociology course at UVic (SOVI 438/439) and its impacts after graduation. I am interested in learning about your lived experiences and, if or how, you use and reflect upon your CEL experiences and applied sociology in everyday life. Your voice and your experiences will be remain at forefront of this study.

Importance of this Research

This research is important because it will create information on CEL and applied sociology experiences after graduation. While efforts have been made across Canada to explore CEL undergrad sociology course experiences during their occurrence, research is limited as it often views graduation as a 'cut-off date' or 'finish line'. This research aims to think relationally about your experiences and continue the conversation of CEL and applied sociology experiences to include your lived interactions in everyday life after graduation. Your contribution will also offer an opportunity for this research to critically explore the long-term impacts of CEL and applied sociology.

Participation and Consent

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your experience in the CEL and applied sociology course at UVic. You were contacted by Zoe Lu, Administrative Officer of the Sociology Department at UVic. The researchers are not provided with your names or contact information.

Participation is entirely voluntary. However, should you choose to participate, it is essential to note that you should only feel obligated to answer questions you want to or resonate with, and you may lead the conversation. Further, you may withdraw from the study at any time during and up to two weeks after the interview date. If you wish to withdraw from the study after the interview, please email me (email redacted)

What is involved?

Suppose you consent to participate in this research. In that case, your voluntary participation will include a forty-minute to one-hour-long, semi-structured conversational interview on Zoom (audio or video) or in person at your earliest convenience. This interview will be informal, offering more room for back and forth and less structure through the questions I pose unless necessary. During the interview, you will be asked about your perspectives, reflections, and experiences with CEL and applied sociology after graduation

With your consent, interviews will be audio or video recorded and transcribed verbatim. The recordings will be securely stored in password-protected files on my password-protected computer. This recording and the coinciding transcripts will only be accessed by myself or my committee member, Dr. Weiler. The recording and transcribed data will be destroyed one month after the study is complete.

What will happen to your responses?

This data will be used to complete my MA in Sociology at Uvic. However, it may also be used for future presentations or publication opportunities, but only in its finalized thesis format. All data from this research will be electronically destroyed one month after completion of my MA.

Risks?

Please be advised that information gathered about you for this research study and any identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect your anonymity indefinitely. There are no significant risks to this study. However, due to the ongoing supervisory relationship with Dr. Ravelli and his involvement with the investigated course, Dr. Weiler (email redacted) will act as a sounding board for my research during the data collection process. There are no consequences to stopping the interview or withdrawing entirely.

Benefits?

I will provide a safe space for all participants in this study to speak freely about their experiences in the CEL and applied sociology course and their everyday lives after graduation. The data of this study will be useful for anyone interested in learning more about sociology or community-based practices like CEL. In addition, it will create information for educators and policymakers who could lead change in Canadian academia. Further, you will be contributing to a snapshot of the experience of living with CEL and applied sociology beyond the current understanding that cut off at course completion and graduation.

Anonymity

Participant safety is my top priority. Precautions will be taken to protect your identity. Should there be any concerns during or after the interview, you may request that specific responses not be included in the final project.

Dissemination of Results: What happens after the interview?

After the interview, you will be given a debriefing document and offered an opportunity to review completed transcripts before data analysis. If interested, I will also provide you with a digital copy of the research findings. The results will be disseminated during my thesis defense and presentation and through UVicSpace, a public forum that posts defended MA theses. In addition, I anticipate that the results of this study will be shared with participants directly. Finally, this study could potentially be published in sociological and educational journals. If this occurs, participants will be notified.

Honorarium

To compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given a \$10 CAD Visa e-gift card immediately following your interview. If you consent to participate in this study, this honorarium will be provided as a thank you. This honorarium will not be dependent on how you answer questions, or which questions you may or may not choose to respond to. Further, if you withdraw from the study during the data collection or anytime up to two weeks after, you will still receive the \$10 Visa e-gift card.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher may have a relationship with potential participants from my own personal experience taking the CEL and applied sociology course. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps have been taken; consent will be ongoing and verbally confirmed throughout the interview process, member checking of transcribed audio recordings will be an option for all participants, the interview questions will be shared with participants whenever they request such information (before, during or after the interview process). Participants will also be able to see the final data in its thesis form, Finally, a committee member with no relationship to the course will act as a neutral party (Dr. Weiler, email redacted). These steps are in place to allow your voice will be amplified during the interview and analysis process, and I will simply act as a conduit for your experiences.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

Primary Researcher: Myself, Reanna Sexton (she/her)

Supervisor: Dr. Bruce Ravelli (he/him)

Committee member: Dr. Anelyse Weiler (she/her)

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria.

Your verbal confirmation will indicate that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project. This verbal confirmation will be noted in a password-protected excel spreadsheet file, to be destroyed alongside other data one month after completing my degree.

A copy of this consent will be left with you.

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Introduction and Verbal Consent

Introductions of self and participant (name, pronouns, etc.). Introduce research and my motivations for doing the research.

Land acknowledgement; is dependent on the space and place of the interview.

Read over the consent form with the participant allowing them to ask any questions. Reaffirm informed an ongoing consent understanding. Attain consent to begin recording and attain voluntary verbal consent.

Background information

Ask participants to introduce themselves (name, pronouns, age current). State the year of their CEL and who their community partner was for the purpose of the recording.

Icebreakers

What initially drew you or motivated you to take the CEL course when registering?

Interview

- 1. What are your lasting impressions on the sociology CEL course?**
 - a. How would you describe the impact of taking a CEL course on your personal and/or academic life?*
 - b. What Stuck v. un-stuck*
 - i. Partner
 - ii. Community Partner
 - iii. Professor power relationships
 - iv. Other students
- 2. What did you take away from the CEL course at UVic?**
 - a. When you reflect on transitioning to life after graduation, entering the world of employment, changing employment, and navigating everyday life do you feel like you use/used skills and abilities from your CEL experiences?*
 - i. Do you believe you still use these _____ are relevant to your everyday life? Work-life?
 - ii. Navigation of graduation – work/life/school (motivation, careers are dead, dream job, steppingstone etc., and why?)
- 3. When you reflect on your overall and potential ongoing experience with CEL, did your ideas of CEL change over time?**
 - a. What do you believe impacted these changes, from motivation to take the course, during, after and now here in this interview?*
 - i. When you say you had a positive/negative/etc. Experience throughout the course, what was it that made you feel this way? Did these feelings change over the time that the course occurred?
- 4. What is or was your relationship like with your community partner?**
 - a. What was the project produced for your community partner? How did you feel about this project during the course, after, and now?*

5. **Did your understanding of sociology shift or change as you experienced CEL?**
 - a. *Did your experience applying sociology CEL in this course impact your understanding/feelings/views about what practicing sociology could look like/feel like after you graduated?*
6. **When reflecting on your CEL experience and all we have discussed during this interview, is there anything you want to revisit or any realizations that stand out to you as important?**
 - a. *If you wanted to explain CEL and applied sociology courses to a prospective student, or even your past self (i.e., would you take it again knowing what you know now), what would you say?*
 - i. What buzzwords would you associate with CEL sociology course experiences?
 - ii. Work-op, co-op, internships, employment exploration, experience

Concluding Remarks

7. *Is there anything else that you would like to add?*
8. *Any questions or statements you would like to revisit or unpack?*
9. *Any general questions about the research or for me or my experiences?*

Thank the participant for their time and participation in my research. Reiterate that this interview will remain confidential, and anonymity will be ensured indefinitely. Remind the participant of the follow-up email they will receive that will include all research team contact information, their honorarium, and their transcribed audio if they indicate an interest in receiving and/or reviewing such. Explain that this member checking will be available for participants' consideration for up to two weeks following their indicated interest during their interview and the sharing of the respective transcript.

Answer any questions and end the recording.

Appendix 4: Recruitment Email Script

Hello, my name is Reanna Sexton (she/her), and I am studying the legacy Community Engaged Learning (CEL) experiences at the University of Victoria (UVic) for the completion of my Master's (MA) thesis in the Sociology Department at UVic.

My study entitled **Exploring the Legacy of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) Course Experiences** looks at the live experiences of CEL courses after graduation. I will conduct this study, under the supervision of Dr. Bruce Ravelli (email redacted). My committee also includes Dr. Anelyse Weiler (email redacted).

My study aims to discover how CEL UVic course experiences change within the context of life after graduation. Through this study, I hope to bring the lived experiences and voices of CEL alums to the forefront of the research.

Have you taken a CEL course at UVic?
Would you like to talk about your CEL experiences?
Are you interested in participating in this study?

Suppose you choose to participate in this study. In that case, a conversation-based interview will occur, ranging in length from about forty-minutes to one-hour. We will converse about the CEL over Zoom, a secure video platform, or at an agreed-upon in-person location in Victoria, BC, Canada, at a time that is convenient for you.

You will have the option not to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with and direct the conversation to the aspects of your story you want to narrate. Any identifying information will be kept confidential, including your name and the names of any referenced community partners, employers, etc., and will not be included in the final paper.

You will also have the option to receive a copy of the final paper at the end of the study. Additionally, the time you take to complete an interview and participate in my study will be compensated.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope to hear back from you soon!

If you want to participate or have any questions, you may contact me by email (email redacted)

Reanna Sexton (she/her)

MA Student, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria

Lk^wəŋən and WSÁNEĆ Territories

A settler who works, lives, and plays on the unceded territories of the lək^wəŋən peoples. I acknowledge the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Appendix 5: Recruitment Poster



The poster is a white rectangular card with a slightly wavy top edge, hanging from two black vertical lines. At the top center of the card are five short, light blue diagonal lines. The main text is in large, bold, black capital letters. Below the text is the University of Victoria logo, which consists of a shield with a book and a sun, followed by the text 'University of Victoria'. Below the logo, the text 'STUDY:' is followed by a paragraph describing the research. To the right of this paragraph is an illustration of a stack of books. Below that, the text 'ELIGIBILITY:' is followed by a paragraph describing the eligibility criteria. At the bottom left, the text 'If interested, please contact:' is followed by a grey rectangular box containing the text 'Email redacted'.

TAKE PART IN A 1 HOUR INTERVIEW ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING!

 University of Victoria

STUDY:
THIS RESEARCH AIMS TO EXPLORE THE EXPERIENCES OF ALUMNI FROM A CEL AND APPLIED SOCIOLOGY COURSE AT UVIC AND ITS IMPACTS AFTER GRADUATION



ELIGIBILITY:
DID YOU TAKE THE APPLIED SOCIOLOGY CEL COURSE AT UVIC WITH DR. RAVELLI? (SOCI 438/439)

If interested, please contact: Email redacted