

Chapter 5

Storying Co-mentoring



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Wherever a story comes from, whether it is a familiar myth or a private memory, the retelling exemplifies the making of a connection from one pattern to another: a potential translation in which narrative becomes parable...Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories.

—Mary Catherine Bateson (1990, p. 11)

Abstract How can the relationships of colleagues strengthen the relationships we have with our work and the people we engage with? Using a storied approach, we recall our memories of one another, reflecting on how we came to be together. We explore co-mentoring as a way for maintaining and building relationships not only both as colleagues and friends but also with students in higher education. This co-mentoring has led us to know one another deeply, being in better service to our own deepening knowledge and intentionality as educators. Teaching in the same early childhood program while studying in the same educational leadership doctorate allowed us to bridge our knowledge to create change that would impact our students. We discuss the power dynamics present for contingent faculty as we sought ways to integrate our new knowledge in meaningful ways for our work. We explore the power of vulnerability in our teaching and how this aligns with supporting im/migrant students in higher education.

We begin here with our stories, our memories of one another. We think carefully about how we came to be, situating ourselves in an ethic of care for one another, our students, and our profession. Our relationship is situated in our experiences not only as both educators and students working in tandem but also as friends and colleagues. In this chapter we hope to show you who we are and how we have grown, with and alongside our students, learning to share space and voice.

Revisiting the research questions from Chap. 1, this story connects most closely with:

- How, as scholars, can we observe and participate in cultures different from our own?

- How can we observe the layers of power relations, culture, access, and possibility while maintaining respect in all situations?
- How do we promote activism and avoid voyeurism?
- How can we place these complicated findings into practical and hopeful programs?

5.1 Two-Gathering

We share with you our ideas together, or two-gather (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). These ideas of two-gathering are engaged with our care and intention for being in reciprocal, cyclical relationships. Phillips & Bunda (2018) describe their theorizing of two-gathering as:

We imbue our work in values-- within a set of guide ropes-- that remind us of our humanness, rather than give ourselves over to cyborgian effect....In reflecting on our practice, that is, what we have done and what we are aiming to do, our affinity with stories draws us close so that we *two-gather* to write this text. (p.1)

Just as Phillips & Bunda two-gathered their stories and experiences, we shall too.

We spent time thinking about our relationship and the ways that our relationship grew over time. We found that as our relationship strengthened, we became in tune with each other and with our students and their concerns. Now we story some pieces of our relationship, weaving them back and forth, two-gather.

Adria: The first night of our doctoral program, anxious students and numerous faculty were packed into a somewhat small room. I see Dr. Quintero talking to a woman excitedly as I walk up. I knew there was a person, a new hire in our Early Childhood Studies program, who was also starting the program with me. As I approached, Dr. Quintero introduced me, “This is Larisa, the one I told you about.” I wasn’t expecting her to be so young. How did this woman have it together enough to get her bachelor’s and master’s AND now be starting a doctoral program at such a young age? I was both intrigued and a bit jealous. I had managed to be at the same place as her, but it took me an additional 20 years to get there. I was still determined to get to know her and hoped that our mutual connection to early childhood would bring us close. We were the only ones with an early childhood background. Others in the program had various experiences in K-12 and higher education. As I sat down, I motioned to Larisa to sit with me in a large chair, small loveseat. We were smashed together, and the entirety of the sides of our bodies pushed against each other. This would later turn out to be our relationship. Close and personal, with an understanding that only we shared together. Our viewpoints, our fire, our vulnerability, and our connection of knowing what each other has to offer always somewhat smooshed together in calming comfort.

Larisa: The first night Adria and I met was the first night of our doctoral program. I had driven 7 hours and changed out of a sweaty dress, hurrying to our meeting only to see Dr. Quintero walking slowly down the path to our meeting space. I squealed, noting that her “hair had changed color!” and she squeezed me. As we walked in, Dr.

Quintero introduced me to Adria, one of the faculty members in the Early Childhood Studies program. I remember feeling nervous, knowing that I was the new kid on the block and that Adria had joined the early childhood program after I had graduated from it years before, leading me to wonder if the program still felt the same.

That night after Adria and I squashed in a chair, I did my typical thing of picking at my fingers while introductions were made. I am a bad listener when I am nervous and am usually trying to think of what to say while others are talking. Imposter syndrome took over and when it was our turn, Adria stood and boomed out her introduction, making me feel even more nervous to be next to someone with such a loud and confident voice. That loud and confident voice was always there, often with an accompanying belly laugh that could be heard across any space, whether that be a classroom or the lawn while we eagerly supported our graduating seniors. I didn't know how to engage with her in the beginning, or if we shared the same values or orientations to our teaching and pedagogy. Her depth of experience in the field made me nervous. Goodness knows she knew more about working in early childhood than I did.

Adria: Our ability to be vulnerable with each other was something I came to rely on. While attempting to title our dissertation work, a task that seemed innocuous, we were lost in how to really convey what we were doing. We decided that this conversation was suited for happy hour. As we sat together in a crowded restaurant, we laid out our thoughts. Our conversation was raw and emotional. As we ordered our second drink, the ideas flowed between us. We laughed and wrote in notebooks to reflect on later. I left with a title (which Larisa is a pro at putting into words) and the knowledge that I would always want to collaborate with someone who is so graceful in articulating her purpose.

Larisa: We came to be together, slowly at first and then all in a rush, like how a small trickle of a stream meets others and begins to flood together. While we often had different approaches, our core values were the same. We worked in service to our students, placing value on their personal experiences and helping them to become the teachers they envisioned being.

I used to come to the office and on my desk would be snacks, left for me by Adria who I soon came to see as my work wife/mom. She took care of me. I used to sneak snacks and ibuprofen from her desk when we weren't in there together. I owe this woman more snacks than I can count. We used to spin, whip-fast around in our office chairs to interrupt each other with questions we had about work or school, often intertwined. I used to joke that I couldn't get any work done if we were both in the office, but I think we both know that the best work got done when we were together.

Adria: Many days, weekends, and late nights occurred in our shared office as we completed homework, graded student work and then, writing our dissertations. Our music loud, and the back and forth of asking each other to "read this" "what do you think about that?" Often, we would trade desks to read through what the other had written. Asking questions, clarifying intent, or simply reassuring each other that we could do it when we were tired and/or fed up with the heaviness of being a student, and a teacher at the same time.

Larisa: In our last year of study together, in the middle of data collection, we galvanized to Copenhagen for that year's Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education conference. On one of the first nights, Adria told me her sister was taking us to dinner. Adria's brother-in-law helped to pick me up from my hostel, let me wash my laundry at their house, and off we went to dinner. Let's just say that it was one of the most extravagant and lush (and I mean this in more ways than one) dinners of my life. As we all toppled outside onto the chilly late-night street where sleeping babies laid in their prams, Adria and her family said I must come home with them. I squabbled, saying that I could just come back in the morning for my laundry and I'd get myself home. They insisted and made me a bed on the basement floor. The next morning when I thanked them again, feeling like I had intruded and imposed, Adria shrugged over a cup of coffee and smiled saying, "You're family."

And family we were. The next year, my dad died. Adria would walk into our office sometimes, look at my face, and say, "Come here, lovie," the same pet name she uses with her children, and hold me while I cried tears I didn't know were waiting under the surface. Our emotional selves and our connections to our work in a deep, vulnerable, and emotional way truly impact our pedagogy. Our classrooms are our homes. Our homes are our classrooms.

Two-gather: Too many things have changed since that time, yet many things are the same between us. Our families are in survival mode, like many others at this time. We face the pandemic, staring into the vast unknown which is scary but offers room for possibilities of change. We both share family members who are extremely ill, not due to COVID-19, but for other reasons. Jobs have been lost, children ripped from their schools and friends, the weight of a move half-way across the country, losing a sense of place, sense of time, and sense of belonging. These are our lives during the pandemic. People are in a constant cycle of grief. Other families that we know and study with face challenging circumstances as well. Older siblings must care for and help educate younger ones while parents are at work, families have inconsistencies in work, childcare, and the ability to maintain financial security. Some students have no security, finding themselves homeless during the pandemic, relying on the University to maintain their housing. And too many families find themselves ill with COVID-19, and experience losses due to the pandemic. We understand the privilege we both have in safe homes, access to healthcare, and having a support network. We know for many of the families we work and study with, these are not privileges they are afforded. We continue in our work as educators, meeting students where they are, listening, and adapting to support them and their contexts. We move forward, together, in our own spaces now, no longer sharing an office, but zooming from our homes. But in a relationship like this, we don't need to be together to *see* one another.

5.2 Storying as Co-mentorship

We didn't realize it at the time, but we were/are in a co-mentoring relationship. Mentoring is typically a hierarchical relationship where the older person mentors

a younger person. In our situation, we created a co-mentorship relationship. The term “co-mentoring” was first used by Bona et al. (1995) to describe a nonhierarchical mentoring relationship, where the individuals involved foster opportunities for shared knowledge and perspectives. Further, feminist co-mentoring relationships stem from the principles of McGuire and Reger (2003), which encompass equal balance of power in the relationship, mutual empowerment, and acknowledging the interconnections of work and home life in each individual. We, as the participants in a co-mentoring relationship, serve both roles of teacher and learner. These contributions are rooted in critical dialogue (Freire, 1993), which emphasizes humanizing and empowering those involved.

Co-mentoring, as opposed to a classical mentor/mentee relationship, is “reciprocal and mutual” (Bona, et al., 1995, p. 119). These mutual understandings of each other unfolded through our everyday experiences with each other; from sharing our individual stories and creating a new one. Our experience can be further explained by Mullen and Lick (1999) when they conceived “synergistic co mentoring.” When we collaborated together, our results were greater than the sum of each of our individual parts in part due to trust and vulnerability.

Because we both worked at the same institution, we had very close shared experiences in our work. We shared the same administration, students, and for us, we even shared an office. These shared experiences were also gathered in a place of “otherness.” Connelly and Clandinin (1999) explain that the place we teach is influential in shaping our identities as educators. The place is not only a specific location but also holds meaning to the people who occupy it (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004). As lecturers at a four-year university, we occupied a space within our institution that often felt liminal, situated in a strange insider/outsider positionality that required expertise in our classrooms, but was not always included in greater programmatic decision making that affected our work and our students’ engagement. Our place was in-between, for Larisa it was in between two academic jobs, shuttling back and forth, and for Adria between her community leadership and her academic role.

In our program, we taught a large percentage of the courses and were also advising students as well. We felt a sense of belonging with students, yet also understood that we were on the fringes of the institution regarding the inner workings and collaboration of others. We came together as an equal, collective, and cooperative structure (Angelique et al., 2002). In this capacity, we found ourselves in many ways able to understand the position of our first-generation im/migrant students who may also feel a place of “otherness” in higher education. While we acknowledge our place of privilege, we also embraced our dual identity as a higher education institution’s marginalized population. Our shared understandings, albeit different from our students, gave us a sense of community with each other and allowed us to bring those feelings to better understand the position of our students.

Co-mentoring offers space to hold one another up and accountable as we learn together. For example, we often have different approaches to change. One of us (Adria), often finds that small, incremental changes will result in large changes over time. The other (Larisa) is of the position that we should often burn down existing structures and begin anew. While both approaches have the potential to be impactful,

we've found that a happy medium often suits our needs. We draw from Paulo Freire's (1998) guidance on patience/impatience to support our relationship:

Patience alone may bring the educator to a position of resignation, of permissiveness, that denies the educator's democratic dream.... Conversely, impatience alone may lead the educator to blind activism, to action for its own sake, to a practice that does not respect the necessary relationship between tactics and strategy.... Virtue then, does not lie in experiencing either without the other but, rather, in living the permanent tension between the two. The educator must live and work impatiently patiently, never surrendering entirely to either (p. 44).

While we recognize that the tension must exist within ourselves, having a co-mentor who helps to balance you and maintain tension is a gift. We challenge one another to strengthen our action through a back and forth tug-of-war, settling in the balanced position appropriate for that particular situation. Our students benefit from this too—by teaching and showing patience/impatience in our teaching and work together, we help to build well-rounded activists who are ready to play with their own tension, teetering their own scales back and forth as necessary to take action in their own classrooms and communities.

Our co-mentoring relationship not only existed for us, together, but also with our students. We both deeply believe in co-constructing knowledge and learning from experiences together. Our classrooms and our communities are better for it. These reciprocal relationships allowed us to go deeper in our work. We embraced critical theory and a problem-posing format in our interactions, not hierarchical power dynamics. It seemed too that, for both of us, the more we learned about each other and became empowered through our study of educational leadership, the less we felt the need to engage in performative ways. For example, as lecturers living on the bridge of power dynamics already at our institution, and for some years without doctoral degrees, we initially felt that we needed to assert our knowledge in specific “appropriate” ways. But what we remembered quickly was that the things we learned that made us good early childhood teachers and administrators were also what made us good university instructors.

Co-mentoring together, and with our students (and our students with one another), has afforded us to deeply know one another. We know what lens each of us works through. Knowing one another's lenses helps us to work better together even when we don't take the same perspectives. We live in mutual respect for one another's understanding and we push one another to take other perspectives and consider multiplicities often. It's us saying to one another, I value your perspective, but more importantly, I value you.

5.3 Pedagogy of Vulnerability

Reflecting on chapter three, we again look at how scholar Katz (1993) posits that those of us whose work is primarily in teacher preparation expand on the idea of

professional learning. As in chapter three, the intersection of who we are as people and who we are as educators is embedded in each teacher being valued for who they are. She says:

Some in-service educators are especially intent on getting something accomplished for the children, and seem to construe the situation as ‘getting to the kids through the teachers.’ If we want to help children (and no doubt we do), then we should do so directly instead of trying to ‘use’ teachers. The focus should be on helping teachers as persons worthy in their own right. Define [your role] as someone who helps and works with teachers for their own sakes. When we do that wholeheartedly and well, the children will surely benefit also (p.16).

Katz clearly builds the connection that we ask our teacher educators to bring the humanity of our work with children into our work with adult learners with the same commitment and importance we ask of them to bring into their work with children and families. Our goal then is for the teachers to see the intersectionality of what they themselves receive and what they give to those in their care. We ask that those of us guiding teacher preparation programs understand what we expect of teachers in classrooms, and model that same introspection within the context of their growth. In addition, we hope our counterparts can go beyond the “banking” idea of educational concepts and transfer personal experiences within their work. In order to bring personal connections to our college students, we acknowledge the obligation of intentional vulnerability.

Vulnerability is the backbone of storying, when we can be honest in our feelings, insecurities, and our strengths. We must note that while vulnerability can be construed as weakness, Brown (2012) argues “vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences” (p. 12). We do a disservice to ourselves and others when we inhibit our vulnerability as it leads to less interpersonal potential growth. As people, it is imperative that we recognize our students’ humanity and that they are filled with emotion albeit in preschool, high school, or college. Emotionally, whether you are an instructor or a student, feelings are inescapable. Further, Parker Palmer (1998) explains how “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher...in every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood- and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning” (p. 10). We can say with certainty that these tenets have brought us close with our students and we have seen the impact of vulnerability and humanity in our classrooms.

5.3.1 Making Room for Emotion

I (Adria) would like to share a story of embracing vulnerability in my classroom and its transformative impacts. The evening started out as a regular fun college night at a dance club where a lot of our students were in attendance. The night ended with a mass shooting that killed 12 people. It was one of the most shocking and sad events

that has ever shaken the community. Not only was I emotional, as I grew up in the community, I also had numerous students reach out to me via email about being late on assignments. Students were telling me that the emotional stress of dealing with such a trauma had affected their ability to concentrate on their schoolwork. Of course, I understood, I was also feeling the inability to focus as my mind raced about how to best reconcile my own feelings.

A cool November day we reconvened in class just days after the shooting event. I was standing in the front of the room as students with glazed looks slowly began entering. One student, in particular with whom I had an existing advising relationship with, walked in, looked at me, and literally ran into my arms. Tears came in a flood for her. Another student followed in suit. Straight to me, arms open and needing comfort. Both of these students were in the shooting. I, too, was engulfed in tears. As more students entered, it became a room of hugging, crying, and anxious people. We were all in a place of extreme vulnerability and it was necessary to address the feelings that were spilling out from the students. It never occurred to me that I should do anything but comfort at that time. As we gathered ourselves and sat down, I could see in their eyes they were not in a place to hear a lecture. And I wasn't in a place to give one either. We decided we would instead use our time to console and support one another. Some students needed to just tell their stories, some needed concrete information about what we would do in our classroom should something so frightening happen on campus. We spent time unraveling our thoughts and checking our window openings and options to flee from the second story. One student asked another to help them move a large file cabinet to block the door of the classroom. Moving that cabinet and checking the windows was cathartic in many ways.

I consider the experiences of the im/migrant families in our communities. For those who are undocumented, they live in fear of the unknown constantly. The fear of whether ICE will appear on their doorstep or follow them to their workplaces. They wonder about how they will care for their children should one adult be deported. Our families' fear for their safety mirrored my students. The numerous questions reminded me of a student-teacher who had reported to Larisa that when she asked the mother about taking the children on neighborhood walks, she replied with questions: What will happen if we encounter ICE? What will the school/teachers do? Where will we go to be safe?

I reflect on my own emotion and as an instructor how I "should" have handled this experience. Did I cry too hard? Did telling them I was scared also make it better or worse? Should I have gained composure to teach that day? My answer was a resounding no. It was then that I also realized how motherhood had affected me in my workspace. Most of these students had moved away from home, were living in dorms, and hoping for a wonderful college experience. I knew the parents of my students would want to know they had a person who cared for them and who was willing to give them what they needed at the time. I hope someone would do the same for my own daughters if needed.

A couple of weeks later, a candlelight vigil was held on campus. I attended and held the hands of students again as the memory of terror brought another rush of tears. My heart ached for them and I have never felt so right in the emotional ways of

my own personhood. As an educator, as a mother, and most importantly, as support for students, I was comforted in knowing we had each other. When those students finally graduated, the immense pride I felt in their resilience was overwhelming. I was there for them, they were there for me, and together we persevered. What an education we received.

5.3.2 *Leaning into Love*

I (Larisa) keep recalling moments of goodbye recently. I have been looking back to the days I taught preschool. I took a note from an amazing mentor I worked with when I spent time in her preschool classroom over 10 years ago. She was never afraid to tell the children that she loved them. Because of her, I, too, was never afraid to show and tell care in my classroom. One year I was teaching with a new team and we were at the end of the fall term, the day before we would get two weeks at home to rest for our winter break. I had brought presents for the other teachers and we surprised one another, each running to a different closet or cubby and pulling out gifts to share at nap time. I had written cards to each of them telling them how much I appreciated them. One cried, and said that she had learned so much from me. I started crying and said, “No way. What? I’ve learned so much from you!” She replied that what she had learned from me was to be silly. She said that I didn’t take things too seriously and had fun with the children and had taught her to do that. I have always worn my heart on my sleeve.

When children “graduated” from our preschool we would host a wonderful celebration for families to gather. The children would receive diplomas, share work they had made around the classroom, we would enjoy a meal, and we would dance. The families of the children in our classroom delighted in this celebration. Our families were multilingual im/migrants, many of whom were sending their first child to school. On graduation day, I always dressed nicely so that I could take picture after picture with them for their families. But on the last day of school, I always went back to my exercise pants and crocs, dressed comfortably, so that I could do a really important thing. I knelt down before each child as they left my classroom, gave them a hug, and told them how proud I was of them. Perhaps this is a small gesture, but it solidified for me that I was leaving them with love.

Fast forward to 2019, to a classroom that only contained about two-thirds of our normal class. As I am trying to talk with our students about culture and the deep ways we must look to understand different family backgrounds and experiences, a student says, “They sent it. Here’s the email.” I went over, picked up her phone, and read the email to all from there—our campus would close for the next two weeks in an abundance of caution due to the COVID-19 pandemic. And while the room twittered with a nervous conversation, all of us feeling more unsure, full of questions, I returned back to class to finish the night together. I thought “This is my favorite class. If we have to study online for two weeks, I should finish it.” And while we have learned earlier in the chapter from Adria that perhaps the more responsive thing to do

would have been to stop and discuss the pandemic that we still did not understand, I pressed forward.

We took a class selfie like I always do at the end of every semester, with the fear we might not see one another again. We finished up the content we had been working on, then went out onto the lawn at nearly 10 pm, dew on the grass, with everyone spread out to do an exercise that I have found is often impactful in ways I can't explain. I began to read statements from the light of my phone asking students to step forward or backward depending on the experiences they had. The purpose of this is to demonstrate privilege and to debunk ideas surrounding meritocracy. I do this after much rapport has been built in the classroom, once students feel safe to do it. My intention is for them to think about how this impacts the way they interact with children and families and what they will do to meet people where they are and lift them up. In the end, with some students standing far apart in both directions on the quad, I asked people to share their experiences. Perhaps it was because emotions were high already that night, but several cried and others left their spots on the lawn to hold one another. They talked about overcoming, about being grateful even if not being afforded privileges, and about wanting to use their privilege to make the change. After our conversation, I sent them home. But several students came to me that night, thanking me for class, and asking for hugs. I thought quickly about the pandemic. We were supposed to keep our distance, right? But I hugged them tightly instead. I am glad that I did because I will never see any of them face to face again. It was my last semester at the institution, a hard time changing my trajectory. So many loose ends, and many things that felt unfinished. But I think back to those students that I got to squeeze one more time, just like my preschoolers years before. It was one more opportunity to let love shine through.

5.3.3 Bringing Ourselves to the Table

Brookfield (2006) explains “Personhood is the perception students have that their teacher is a flesh-and-blood human being with a life and identity outside the classroom. Students recognize personhood when teachers move out from behind their formal identity and role description to allow aspects of their life and personality to be revealed in the classroom” (p. 10). This part of our personhood was exposed on a grand level during those overwhelming times. Students not only appreciated vulnerability but were comforted by it. hooks (1994) further describes how some faculty do not understand the role emotion plays in a classroom and rather they feel their “academic purpose has been diminished” (p. 155). hooks goes on to explain that while educators place their importance on the content they teach, they must realize and embrace that we are teaching people who have outside lives and struggles and have feelings and emotions unrelated to academia. Our students have always known and experienced this with us. Our vulnerability lies in instances of sorrow and fear like the Borderline tragedy, the 2016 presidential election, or the numerous fires that ravaged our communities and took students’ homes. But also in instances of

joy like the celebration of their graduations and honors convocations, lunching with them and their cooperating teachers while children napped, or romping around with children in the community on Saturdays wearing exercise leggings, tennis shoes, and sunglasses. We bring who we are to our work, people who care about people, authentically ourselves.

It may not be clear in sharing these stories how this connects carefully to studying with and engaging with migrant and refugee children, families, and higher education students. The authenticity that we bring into our spaces which reflects our identities and formative experiences, our continued growth as educators, and our desire to meet students in a space of shared leadership and communication does a really important thing. Being who we are allows our students to be who they are. There's something about bearing your soul, sharing your story, connecting personally, and advocating for responsiveness to our communities that helps students become comfortable being themselves as a teacher, not the idea of "what a teacher should be". And when our students who are the first generation to college, from working-class backgrounds, immigrants or the children of immigrants, undocumented Dreamers, Spanish speaking, proud Chicanxs and Latinxs, bring their authentic identities to their classrooms, to then help groups of children feel authentically themselves, we see the power in vulnerability.

5.4 Whipping up Generative Change

Action is the name of the game in our work. This can be largely attributed to our epistemological and ontological framing and to the scholars we study closely. We spend time theorizing, along with university students and with children, thinking often about who we are as members of communities—classroom, cultural, and familial in the broader sense. Then we spend time using this knowledge to apply it toward meaningful and powerful learning experiences. While we studied in our educational leadership doctorate, we worked in actionable ways to envision and re-envision possibilities for higher education. I think we were used to doing this in early childhood, but the structure of higher education seemed too elusive, top/down, and frankly, too powerful to tackle or topple systems and structures that weren't serving us or our students. Studying in our coursework though helped us realize that these systems could be improved upon through small, thoughtful changes. And we had the opportunity to embark on our journey, combining what we knew best about early childhood and higher education, to support our students.

One example of us making change for our students involved creating systems that would support advising. Together, both of us advised all of the students in our program at the time. We were enrolled in a course on Community College Administration. During the course, a classmate gave a presentation on Guided Pathways, an approach to streamlining students' experiences in college which supports students by providing a clear path toward timely graduation (Bailey, 2017). One important aspect that stood out to us was the possibility of including checkpoints in their educational

journeys to ensure they are on track and prepared. We began to wonder how we could use this as an additive practice to our existing advising system. For us, it became an issue of integrating field placement coordination with advising in meaningful ways. So, we started working backward, beginning with a final checkpoint prior to/during their senior year. We wrote and sent out a thoughtful letter to students describing the process of submitting their intent to student teach (that is still being used in some capacity today, though things have changed), and then proceeded to individually check the graduation and course requirements for every student who submitted their intent to student teach. We used a stoplight system to ensure they were ready, using green to proceed to student teaching, yellow to follow up with them about courses/experiences/GPA/etc., and red to prevent students from student teaching with an advising session to help them prepare to reach this step in their undergraduate education. What we found was amazing. Students who had never really had advising before sought it out for the first time. Students who were ready to graduate but didn't know and needed to be told to apply. Students who needed support got it because we could see it and offer it at this juncture. We became better advisors by making this small and effective change to our work.

Advising students in our program was a privilege. One that we held with much regard and intentionality. I (Larisa) was a first-generation college student, and I rarely relied on or trusted my academic advisors because I was afraid that I would be misinformed (something that is often advised by more senior students). I simply read my catalog closely, figured it out, and proceeded to the best of my ability. As a transfer student, I had to learn what things counted at different institutions, what courses I would need to make up, etc. This perspective changed the way we both advised our students. We put relationships with our students first. We helped them to know that they could trust us and that we were working on supporting their best interests. Many of our students were Latinx, first-generation to college, and transferred from a community college. There are many unknowns and questions they have when we first advise. Initially, students needed help with their classes and we got them settled. But as they continued with us, we not only continued to plan schedules but also provided advising related to their career choices and prospects and graduate school and credential program requirements and admission. The two of us have probably written more letters of recommendation and provided more reference calls than we can count. Because the work we did with these students was transformational in a way. They learned that there were people in a system that were more than the system. That we would work with them to figure things out, even when they went outside of our scope of work. We did this in service of decolonizing the architecture of higher education in service to our students. We tried to make higher education a place that felt accessible. A place that belonged to *them*.

Iorio et al. (2018) present us with the notion of hope and how it informs teacher educators as public intellectuals. They conceptualize hope and its relation to our humanity, "This understanding of hope presents the possibility of hope as anti-storying of neoliberalism—a way to see what could be possible" (p. 300). This seeing of what could be possible in our classrooms, communities, homes, and relationships characterizes our engagement with our students. Our care and concern for their

learning are situated in students' hope for themselves and their own worlds, while also drawing them into a community of minds (Nelson et al., 2003) that supports their continual questioning of: Who am I? How do my formative experiences shape my identity as a teacher? How do the experiences of the children I work with continue to shape my understanding of the world and myself?

Teaching, advising, researching, and studying all at the same time allowed us to think about possibilities for change, ones that honored our bridging between early childhood and educational leadership for higher education. Our perspectives helped to shape and shift the work we did with our early childhood students, but our backgrounds also shaped our approaches to leadership which we were able to share with our cohort members in our doctoral program. We took chances to explore what could be, which helped us open up to new possibilities in our work as educators.

5.5 Relationships Onward

Our relationships as colleagues and friends extend to one another, and also to our students. If studying educational leadership taught us anything, it's that we can create systems and become change agents in service to our students. That we have the tools and skills to be both leaders and researchers, and that when we share that leadership with others, those with marginalized voices become centered in our stories about higher education. We think about the ways we encourage teachers to become self-reflective and engaged citizens of the world. And how that citizenship extends as loving-kindness in their classrooms. Loris Malaguzzi reflected:

Teachers-like children and everyone else-- feel the need to grow in their competencies; they want to transform experiences into thoughts, thoughts into reflections, and reflections into new thoughts and new actions. They also feel a need to make predictions, to try things out, and to interpret them.... Teachers must learn to interpret ongoing processes rather than wait to evaluate results. (Wurm, 2005, p. 96)

Focusing on the ways we reflect to generate action and the idea that we must think and generate this endlessly, churns our ideas and theories around and helps us know that the work of education is never done. We are lucky to work together, churning around our ideas together, taking perspective, and moving forward in a way that honors our work, our place, and our people.

We came out on the other side of our doctoral studies transformed, not only because of our study but also because of our work together. Going through all of this together has helped us understand our own agency, we have emerged on the other side of things confident that we do not know everything but can continue learning. We know who we want to be in our classrooms and our lives, people who share agency, a way of be/coming together. Although we engage in different positions now, we both know the challenges with power structures in the academy, the red tape, that often stands in the way of our service to our students. We carefully, with intention, care and respect, continue to cut the tape.

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