# Chapter 9
# Reimagining My Self-in-Practice: Relational Teacher Education in a Remote Setting


**Brie Morettini**

**Abstract** In this chapter the author aims to better understand her self-in-practice as a relational teacher educator who takes up social justice, in part, through modeling humanizing pedagogies. Specifically, she examined her pedagogical practices to see how these might reimagine her identity as a relational teacher educator when teaching remotely. To do this, she conducted a self-study and analyzed the data set through the dimensions of relational teacher education with a nod to extant self-studies. The findings are within the dimensions of relational teacher education. In this way, the self-study to explores her practice in times of radical change. By analyzing the data through the dimensions of relational teacher education, the saw how teaching remotely actually enhanced the scope of her role and the intentionality of her efforts to relate to students. In particular, there were instances when she took on the role of caregiver for students, transcending the role of teacher educator, and providing support for preservice teachers even beyond the purview of the course. In sum, this inquiry prompted a reimagining of previously-held manifestations of relational teacher education. Findings from this study extend the conversations about humanizing, person-centered pedagogies in remote teaching and learning environments.

**Keywords** Relational teacher education · Self-in-practice · Humanizing pedagogies · Remote teaching

In the last several years, the term "social justice" has appeared frequently in the lexicon of educational research and has come to represent a larger pantheon of ideas related to advocating for the rights of marginalized people and working against systemic oppression. I take up social justice in teacher education by designing and

B. Morettini (✉)
Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ, USA
e-mail: morettini@rowan.edu



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teaching courses that acknowledge, examine, and scrutinize the powers and privileges that extend from differences in groups' and individual's racial, cultural, linguistic, gendered, socio-economic, and neurodiverse identities in our social institutions and settings. In this way, a major goal of my work as a social justice-oriented teacher educator is to prepare prospective teachers to create more equitable classroom practices through my own modeling of humanizing, person-centered pedagogies.

Such pedagogies include learning experiences that critically address equity issues both through classroom instruction and also through prospective teachers' emerging professional identities (Martin, 2018a). The relational nature of my pedagogy has always been *a way in* to building more equitable and socially just learning experiences for prospective teachers. How I relate to prospective teachers, how I scaffold classroom conversations through critical questions, how I model active listening and thoughtful responses *in the classroom* are some examples of how I use relational teacher education to foster equitable learning environments. In this way, I take up the notion of a relational teacher educator (Kitchen, 2002, 2005a, 2005b). Relational teacher education is the heart of my commitment to social justice; and, as an S-STTEP (self-study of teaching and teacher education practices) researcher, I turned to self-study to navigate changing and trying times.

In the fall of 2020, given the COVID-19 pandemic and with a pivot to remote teaching from traditional in-person teaching, I felt suddenly unmoored—how would I transfer my relational pedagogy to an online platform? How would I design equitable learning experiences without physically being with students[1]? I realized I needed to operationalize this as a self-study in order to learn and grow as a relational teacher educator.

The following questions guided my study:

- How does teaching remotely shape my identity as a relational teacher educator?
- What can I learn about my own relational practice by teaching remotely?
- How does teaching remotely influence the ways I convey respect and empathy for my students?

## 9.1 Conceptual Framework

I drew on relational teacher education (Kitchen, 2002, 2005a, 2005b) to theoretically frame the study. As a teacher-researcher with a commitment to criticality in my own practice, I acknowledge the power and privilege I carry with me into my work as a

[1] I use the terms prospective teachers, preservice teachers, and students interchangeable so as to avoid repetition.

teacher educator. Reflection on my practice allows me to critique the power and privileges I have as a teacher educator and the ways I leverage my role to model more equitable and humanizing learning environments for prospective teachers.

Specifically, I employed the dimensions of relational teacher education (Kitchen, 2002, 2005a, 2005b) to make sense of my changing identity as a relational teacher educator in a remote setting. To do this I analyzed my data sources through the dimensions of relational teacher education. Like others (e.g. Trout, 2018), I situated the findings within these dimensions to explore relational teacher education in a remote setting. In this way, self-study was ideally suited to explore my teaching practice during this exceptional time of radical change (Berry & Kitchen, 2020).

### *9.1.1 Relational Teacher Education*

Relational teacher education captures how I have built my identity and understand myself as a teacher educator committed to social justice. Kitchen (2002) developed the framework of relational teacher education to encompass an approach to working with preservice teachers grounded in conveying respect and building relationships. He developed this based on the perspective that we live and know in relation to others (2005a, 2005b). Relational teacher education comprises seven dimensions as defined in Table 9.1.

Relational teacher education resonates with me because it aptly describes my approach to working with prospective teachers, and yet a great deal of my relationship building with students has been achieved informally during the moments before or after class sessions, in the hallways, or through running into students

**Table 9.1** Dimensions of relational teacher education

| Dimension | Definition |
|---|---|
| Understanding one's own personal practical knowledge | Drawing on past experiences to inform one's practice |
| Improving one's practice in teacher education | Enriching one's knowledge and skills through ongoing reflection and inquiry |
| Understanding the landscape of teacher education | Framing individual's challenges as extensions of larger institutional and societal challenges |
| Respecting and empathizing with preservice teachers | Recognizing that preservice teachers face difficulties when confronted with the realities and complexities of teaching |
| Conveying respect and empathy | Demonstrating consistent respect and empathy to preservice teachers |
| Helping preservice teachers face problems | Supporting preservice teachers as they reconcile tensions in personal and professional issues |
| Receptivity to growing in relationship | Being open to co-learning with preservice teachers |

Adapted from Kitchen (2002, 2005a, 2005b)

on campus. My self-study is, therefore, situated at the tension (Berry, 2008) between creating authentic connections with prospective teachers and engaging with them remotely.

## 9.2 Methodology

This study centers my relational practices and the (re)formation of my professional identity in a new context, and hence self-study methodology is employed. I used two well-established frames for self-study research in this inquiry: intimate scholarship (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015) and personal history self-study (Samaras et al., 2004). Together, these approaches helped me to explore the influence of past experiences on my relational practices and allowed me to envision new possibilities in my practice. Specifically, intimate scholarship represents a subjective onto-epistemological commitment to meaning-making through relational understanding (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). Intimate scholarship acknowledges the inherently relational nature of teaching and asserts that educators' practices are shaped in relationship to the needs of those with whom we share a context (Hamilton et al., 2016).

Intimate scholarship was theoretically salient because the inquiry was conducted from my perspective and prompted me to acknowledge and share my vulnerabilities (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). My inquiry also focused on the particular—the nuances of my identity as a remote relational teacher educator with a particular group of prospective teachers. In alignment with intimate scholarship, I made myself vulnerable by opening up about my feelings and experiences teaching remotely. Thus, the study unfolded on shifting ground as I considered my self-in-practice (Fletcher, 2020) throughout a semester of teaching remotely and during the ensuing research process (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015).

In addition to intimate scholarship, I took up personal history self-study (Samaras et al., 2004). Like intimate scholarship, personal history self-study is perspective-driven, and it can uncover tacit and hidden influences on teachers by looking for "connections between what educators think and feel and how they teach" (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 908). Personal history self-study is defined as "the history or life experiences related to personal and professional meaning making for teachers and researchers" (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 910) and is used to explore identity formation by uncovering the hidden personal narratives and stories we live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999) that influence how teachers relate to and work with students (Samaras et al., 2004). Self-study scholars acknowledge that personal history is useful for "self-knowing and forming – and reforming – a professional identity" (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 913) as it requires us to scrutinize our identity and "risk needing to reform and recreate the self" (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 915).

In my own stance as a self-study scholar, I embrace the process of always *becoming* based on changing perceptions that account for my social, cultural, and material contexts (Hordvik et al., 2021; Martin, 2018b). And, intimate knowledge of my own

personal history opens me up to new understandings of self-in-context (Greene, 1978, 1995). While self-study scholars embrace many methods for conducting personal history self-study, I call upon two specific forms: journaling and my education-related life history (Samaras et al., 2004). Taken together, intimate scholarship and personal history self-study are appropriate approaches for this inquiry because they opened me up to creating new understandings of self as I embarked on enacting relational teacher education in a remote setting. In the spirit of personal history self-study, I now offer up my personal history narrative as a teacher educator.

### *9.2.1 My Personal History as a Teacher Educator*

I entered teacher education as a happy accident (Mayer et al., 2011). I was quite content as a kindergarten teacher. I taught in what can be called an urban characteristic (Milner, 2012) school with a significant immigrant population; my students were treated unfairly by the system, and over time I began to have bigger questions about the U.S. education system. I knew some of my students would be completely disenfranchised by the school system before they reached eighth grade; by that time, they would lack the academic record to attend one of the magnet schools that many students wanted to attend. I recall speaking with teacher colleagues about how to best draw on students' home languages and my colleagues' responses that I needed to stop allowing that and to make sure my students spoke only English.

I strove to provide resources to my students and their families only to be met with colleagues' suggestions that I just needed to put some of my students in basic skills instruction (i.e. segregated remedial classrooms) or retain them for another year of kindergarten. It was in my graduate program that I was exposed to critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Critical race theory gave me the vocabulary to articulate the systemic racism I witnessed through my lived experience as an urban kindergarten teacher. Critical race theory, therefore, anchored me and sustained me; it gave me hope that others thought like I did, and my resistance could be part of larger social justice efforts to change how schools operate and how we educate young children. Now, as a teacher educator, I draw on my lived experience and social justice commitments to inform my practice. One of my goals, for example, is for prospective teachers in my classes to realize the systemic and institutionalized forces that empower some and disempower others.

My experiences have shaped my understanding of the relationship between teaching and learning. I acknowledge "the reciprocal learning between teachers and students" (Freire, 1998, p. 67). I believe there is no teaching without learning, and as a result, I strive to learn from my students, to critically reflect on my own practice, and to disrupt deficit-based perspectives of urban students and communities. My identity as a teacher educator, therefore, attends to the relational nature of teachers' work and advances a social justice commitment.

### 9.2.2 Context of the Study

The focal course for this self-study is *Working with Families and Communities*. This course is offered in both programs with which I am affiliated—urban education and inclusive education—and is intended to deepen prospective teachers' understandings of the roles that families and communities play in the education and development of children. The course situates communities and families from an asset-based perspective in which children are understood in the contexts of their families, communities, schools, and the wider society. Prospective teachers in this course develop skills in working effectively with diverse families in order to provide positive educational outcomes for children in urban and inclusive settings.

The assignments in the class assist students in identifying community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and recognizing the importance of students' funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Studying and working with diverse communities different from their own requires prospective teachers to engage in an ideological examination of their assumptions and biases. Since I am a teacher educator in the U.S. where the vast majority of teachers are White females (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), this course can be a heavy lift for students. With that in mind, I use three overarching questions (specified in my course syllabus) as a way to promote prospective teachers' emergent critical consciousness of systemic oppression:

1. What sorts of families and communities do schools empower?
2. What makes you think so?
3. How could schools empower all families and communities?

To unpack these questions, I craft assignments, discussions, and exercises that help students realize the myriad systemic injustices in our society and how they play out in schools, particularly urban and urban characteristic schools (Milner, 2012).

To support students' thinking and speaking openly about systemic oppression, I facilitate conversations to foster trusting relationships *with and among* my students so they do not shut down and shy away from these challenging topics. In the fall 2020 semester I felt unsure of how my course would unfold in a remote setting given its sensitive nature. How, if at all, would (or could) I enact relational practices without sharing a physical classroom? And, could this change in the teaching context help me develop new understandings of self-in-practice? These wonderings sparked the self-study detailed in this chapter.

### 9.2.3 Data Sources

For this chapter, I drew on the following data sources from *Working with Families and Communities*:

1. 14 Lesson Plans for classes
2. 14 Weekly Reflective Notes

3. 14 Course Meeting Transcripts
4. Course Syllabus
5. Email Communication with Students
6. Anonymous Student Course Evaluation Document

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for the use of these data sources. Some of the data sources were developed before I taught the course (course syllabus and draft lesson plans), some of the data were developed while I taught the course (weekly reflective notes, course meeting transcripts, email communication with students), and some of the data were developed after the course ended (anonymous student course evaluation). The sequenced data collection was purposeful; I wanted the corpus of data to capture the progression of my thoughts over time, and I wanted to be intentional about the construction of the data corpus so as to establish trustworthiness (Feldman, 2003).

### *9.2.4 Data Analysis*

The entire corpus of data was compiled after the course ended and after final grades were submitted. I compressed all of the data sources into one electronic file; then, I engaged in an immersive engagement through multiple readings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Next, I conducted a document analysis (Bowen, 2009) of the data set. Building off extant self-studies (e.g. Forgasz & Clemens, 2014) the data were first analyzed holistically and iteratively to engage in the "deeply reflexive process [which] is key to sparking insight and meaning" (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p. 77). As I began coding my data, I collapsed the relational teacher education dimensions of *respecting and empathizing with preservice teachers* and *conveying respect and empathy* into one code, *feeling and conveying respect and empathy for preservice teachers,* given that these dimensions were overlapping in my analysis. Then, I used the five remaining dimensions as a priori codes to look for instances wherein teaching remotely influenced my self-in-practice (Fletcher, 2020). I specifically looked for critical moments in which my role and identity as a relational teacher educator were stretched or altered as a result of remote teaching. After a round of initial coding, I reexamined my data sources to support triangulation and more fully develop the codes into emergent findings.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study I attended to collaboration and openness (Barnes, 1998) in two ways; first, I held bi-weekly consultations with a thought partner, a colleague teaching another remote section of this course. In our consultations, we discussed challenges and successes of translating this course to an online platform. We also discussed changes and adaptations we were making to specific assignments and in our own pedagogies along the way. Next, I shared the findings of this study with another teacher education colleague as an additional mechanism for establishing trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was further bolstered by my attending to three suggestions in self-study literature (Feldman, 2003): an explicit

description and identification of data collection methods; an explanation of how I constructed the corpus of data; and, evidence of the value of the pedagogical changes this study prompted, which comprise the findings below.

## 9.3 The Dimensions of Relational Teacher Education in a Remote Setting

Having engaged with intimate scholarship and personal history self-study methods, I analyzed the data through the dimensions of relational teacher education. I have organized the findings within those dimensions to offer a nuanced understanding of myself and my pedagogical practices in a remote context.

### *9.3.1 Understanding One's Personal Practical Knowledge*

I drew on my personal practical knowledge from prior semesters to adapt the course for online instruction using a balanced approach for readings and assignments. I knew from years of personal experience as a teacher educator that as the semester progresses and more assignments become due, students start to skim assigned readings, which makes meaningful discourse harder to achieve. To account for this, I decided to balance readings with podcasts in the second half of the semester and suggested for students to "listen to these podcasts while going for a walk or sitting outside if possible" (Class Meeting Transcript, 10/20/2020). Also, I thought podcasts would be more manageable for prospective teachers who might be oversaturated with screen time. Below is an excerpt from my reflective notes that details this moment:

> I told students about my pedagogical move here—in the course design I wanted to attend to their mental health by trying to strike a balance of lectures, readings, and assignments throughout the semester. Since many of our bigger assignments are due in the second half of the semester, I wanted to front load the lectures and readings in the beginning of the semester. I then told my students that when they are teachers, they should also consider things like this for their own students because teachers need to think about what is going on in students' lives *outside* of class and be responsive to that *inside* the classroom. (Weekly Reflective Notes, 10/20/2020)

In addition to incorporating digital media in the required readings, I also made sure to balance the due dates of major assignments throughout the semester; each student received extensive formative feedback before submitting work to be graded. I drew on my prior experience as a teacher educator to develop these considerations for course design. And, I found that being explicit with students about how my personal practical knowledge informed a balanced course design proved to be particularly useful in a remote class for modeling teacher thinking and responsiveness to students' lives outside of the classroom.

### 9.3.2 Improving One's Practice in Teacher Education

Teaching remotely reminded me of the need to center and prioritize systematic self-reflection and professional learning as a means to improving my practice in teacher education. After the immediate pivot to online coursework in the spring 2020 semester, I knew I needed to improve my skill set for online teaching. I, therefore, enrolled in a series of professional development workshops at my institution focused on improving remote pedagogical practices. In the workshops I learned how to utilize the chat feature in Zoom as means to solicit more participation and student engagement.

As a result, I leveraged the capabilities of the online platform to improve my practice and be more responsive to students in a remote setting. Specifically, I did not require students to keep their cameras on, although our institution urged us to, or to verbally participate; instead, I gave students options to use the chat feature—either to me privately or to the whole class—in addition to direct verbal participation through Zoom. For example, the lesson plan for week eight states that students will complete the Community Building activity in class.

> Share your 'wins' this week—what happened that gave you hope, brought you joy, or moved your work forward? Students should respond to the community building questions verbally to whole group, in the whole class chat, or in a private chat to me. (Lesson Plan, 10/20/20)

These choices reflect my identity as a relational teacher educator who does not value control, but rather honors the humanity of my students and their experiences.

These choices are also particular to the remote setting of my course, and as I reflect on my practice, I realize that I had never given students options for participation in traditional face-to-face settings because I never had the occasion to reimagine how such participation might look. My own identity as a relational teacher educator engaging in self-study encouraged me to see and appreciate these pedagogical changes.

### 9.3.3 Understanding the Landscape of Teacher Education

My knowledge of teacher education influenced how I revised and modeled classroom activities for students in an online environment. As a beginning teacher, I remember wishing that I had had more practical knowledge of teaching than the theoretical knowledge I gained in my teacher education program. In my current work with in-service teachers, they critique the emphasis of theory over practice in university settings. One of my pedagogical approaches, therefore, is to show prospective teachers how the content we discuss translates into *actual* classroom practice by modeling mini-lessons. On September 11th, for example, I wanted to model a virtual read-aloud of a 2002 children's book called *Fireboat* by Maira Kalman. This book provides a way for teachers or parents to engage children in

conversations about tragic events, particularly those of September 11th, 2001. Each fall semester I model this mini-lesson but in a face-to-face environment.

Modeling this mini-lesson online required me to ensure the students could see the images and text in the book in much the same way they would have been able to in a traditional classroom; so I needed to first scan each individual page of the book and insert each scanned page as a slide on a PowerPoint presentation. I screenshared these with my students during our online class meeting. Before I read the book, I shared a Google document with students where they could post anonymous thoughts and questions before, during, and after our reading. After reading the book I made sure to address all of the anonymous questions from students. In this way, the prospective teachers now had a model for engaging in a virtual read-aloud and facilitating conversations about difficult topics.

Modeling classroom read-alouds of children's books is something I have always done, however, doing so in a remote environment gave me the opportunity to model a shared reading of a critical text using online tools. In this way, relational teacher education and my knowledge of the critiques we face as teacher educators influenced how meticulous and careful I was with modeling this activity; I wanted prospective teachers to remember this activity in the chance that they find themselves teaching young children online. As we all continue to embrace the new landscape of education at this moment, it is important for teacher educators to be responsive to the virtual elements of modeling how concepts translate into actual classroom practice.

### *9.3.4 Feeling and Conveying Respect and Empathy for Preservice Teachers*

Teaching remotely altered *how* I conveyed respect and empathy for my preservice teachers by offering greater flexibility to them and explicitly focusing on their mental health and wellness; it also increased the degree of respect and empathy I felt for them because of the uncertainty of our times. Today's preservice teachers are not only experiencing radical shifts in the educational world, but they are learning to become educators with the knowledge that they themselves might be tasked with online or hybrid teaching in P-12 schools.

I respect and empathize with their situations and the challenges these radical shifts present. I convey respect and empathy with preservice teachers over time through my planning, feedback to them, and responsiveness to their needs. I devote attention to the organization of my course, the materials I select, the expectations I share with students, and the rituals I generate with them. I also demonstrate care in personal communication and correspondence with students and make myself accessible to them, inside and outside of class time. Taken together, this approach signals to students that I care about their growth and development.

To further convey my feelings to students, I implemented flexible due dates for assignments, which was admittedly outside of my comfort zone as a teacher educator. Any assignment for our course was due on Friday, but I would accept assignments as late as Monday without the need for students to request an extension. I told students this was intentional planning on my part to show that I wanted to "respect [their] weekend time but also allow [students] to use the weekends to work if [they] needed to" (Class Meeting Transcript, 9/8/2020). I also told students that if they needed time for any assignment beyond Monday, that they should email me, text me, or call me to request an extension. To this end, I had several opportunities to make good on my promise of flexibility. Below is an email which demonstrates how I used the flexible due dates and extensions to convey respect and empathy for students.

> Dear [Student],
> I completely understand the difficulties associated with this semester, the time overall right now, and the challenges with getting formal accommodations. You can absolutely have an extension. In addition to the extension, please let me know how else I can support your learning this semester. In my perspective as a former classroom teacher, each and every student has unique needs that may or may not be formally documented—I make accommodations either way. (Personal Communication, 10/31/2020)

This approach demonstrates the respect I have for my students as prospective teachers and the empathy I have for their new online learning environment. When teaching face-to-face, it never occurred to me to offer this degree of flexibility; teaching remotely provided the occasion for me to reconsider the degree of control I felt I needed and to reimagine the ways I convey respect and empathy for students.

Over time as I got to know more about my students and their needs, I realized that they needed a dedicated time and space for processing their experiences as remote learners. Around week five I began to open class with mental health/wellness check-ins. I would ask students to think about something that happened recently that moved their work forward, that brought them joy, or that gave them hope. In other instances, I asked students to think about how they processed their feelings, or how they were managing their time during this remote semester. In response to this pedagogical move that centers respect and empathy, one student wrote, "I love how Professor Morettini started every class with a 'mental health check in' to see how we were doing, or to share anything going on in our lives. It made me feel valued as a student" (Student Evaluation, 1/4/2021). In this way, I centered students' mental health and wellness as a way to convey respect and empathy for them as human beings.

Through a focus on the *particular* of this experience, I became more intentionally responsive by centering students' wellness and mental health; I ritualized this practice in my teaching and offered a way to model building meaningful relationships with students in a remote environment by creating a space for their mental health and wellness and then being responsive to students' needs. The analysis revealed that teaching remotely influenced my relational practices in that it deepened my efforts toward conveying respect and empathy.

### *9.3.5 Helping Preservice Teachers Face Problems*

Helping preservice teachers face problems and reconcile the barriers to the teaching profession in the U.S. with their ambitions was unique in a remote environment because it required me to spend more structured, out-of-class time with them compared to when I share a physical classroom with them. In my years as a teacher educator working in a traditional face-to-face classroom, I would often address prospective teachers' problems while I set up for the day, often with their help, as they arrived for class. Since remote teaching lacked that informal space of togetherness, helping prospective teachers face problems emerged as a distinct need. During one of our remote class meetings, for example, I joined students in a Zoom breakout room and quickly noticed that they were not discussing the prompts I had assigned, but instead were engaging in a frenzied discussion about how to prepare for the upcoming Praxis exams.[2] Since the exams are high-stakes, they remain a significant source of stress and anxiety for the prospective teachers at my institution.

What is more, the Praxis Lab—the physical space at our institution that houses study guides and tutors—was closed because of COVID-19 restrictions. Rather than redirect students and try to assert control over their breakout room discussion, I showed them some online resources our university had and empathized that this was indeed a high-stakes and high-stress assessment. Then, after class, I wrote a message to all my students with Praxis study guides attached to the message. I realized, however, that a simple email was not enough and that I needed to redouble my supportive efforts.

I began to log onto Zoom for class 15 minutes early and told students we could use this time to chat informally and talk through issues; it was not required. Additionally, since students did not have easy access to their advisors on campus, I began setting up proxy advising sessions online with students, fielding questions about how to prepare for the Praxis exams and which courses students should take next semester to stay on track in their course sequence. Below is an excerpt from my reflective notes.

> Last week a student asked if she could call me to talk through some options for her schedule of classes next semester, since she did not pass the benchmark Praxis exams required to register for the next courses…she ended the conversation with a lot of gratitude. She said, "I talk to everyone in our cohort and we all feel the same way that you are so in touch with what we're going through this semester." (Weekly Reflective Notes, 11/5/2020)

Through this experience, I realized I needed to be more intentional about how I supported students in dealing with their problems. Being a relational teacher educator in a remote environment, then, required me to broaden the scope of support services I offered preservice teachers because other support services and resources were not readily accessible or available to them.

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[2] The Praxis exams are a series of standardized tests of content knowledge and pedagogy for prospective teachers, and they are required for teacher certification in the state where this self-study was conducted.

### *9.3.6 Receptivity to Growing in Relationship*

Freire (1998) reminds us that there is no teaching without learning, and so I opened myself up to learning and growing more comfortable with remote education in new ways by allowing students to co-construct assignments with me; thus, I situated preservice teachers as the experts rather than myself (Kitchen, 2005b). I am a product of face-to-face classrooms, and my socialization into the role of teacher educator occurred in the context of face-to-face classrooms. As I look back on previous semesters, I realize that I often told students about my willingness to learn from them without tapping into my students' skills and knowledge because I was cushioned by the familiarity of my classroom technologies.

To harness the potential of the online class environment, I leveraged preservice teachers' knowledge and skills to support my growth. My students are, admittedly, much more adept with technology than I am, and I was transparent with students from the first class about my own anxieties related to teaching remotely. I told students that I was "going to be learning alongside [them]" in the remote environment (Class Meeting Transcript, 9/1/2020). Thus, I laid bare my own vulnerabilities with students and invited students to draw on their burgeoning knowledge of teaching and technology to co-construct final assignment formats. The students surpassed my expectations; I received close-captioned videos, Jamboards, Padlets, and Google sites. And, the preservice teachers seemed genuinely excited to harness their technological skills in a professional way.

## 9.4 Reimagining My Self as a Relational Teacher Educator

Through intimate scholarship and personal history self-study, I gained new understandings of my self-in-practice (Fletcher, 2020) by revisiting and reimagining my previously-held manifestations of relational teacher education. From this study, I was reminded of the need to center and prioritize systemic self-reflection and professional learning as a means to engage in criticality of my teaching practice. I revised and modeled classroom activities for a remote environment and learned how remote teaching deepens my feelings of respect and empathy for preservice teachers. And, through this inquiry I realized that helping preservice teachers face problems in a remote environment required me to spend additional time with them to account for the loss of informal interactions before and after in-person classes.

By drawing on intimate scholarship and personal history methods, I see how teaching remotely actually broadened the scope of my role and enhanced the intentionality of my efforts to relate to students. In particular, there were instances when I took on the role of caregiver for students, transcending the role of teacher educator and providing support for preservice teachers even beyond the purview of our course. Further, I centered students' emotional well-being and mental health in a way I have never done in traditional in-person classes, which I am unsure I would

have done if we had been together physically in a classroom. This study, therefore, prompted me to reimagine my relational self-in-practice in order to meet the demands of remote teaching. As a result, I will be more intentional and imaginative in my relational practices in both remote and face-to-face settings in the future.

For teacher educators, this study reminds us of our need to be responsive to the changing pedagogical *and emotional* needs of prospective teachers living and working in radical times. In framing my practices within the dimensions of relational teacher education, I learned that a remote setting does not erode my identity as a relational teacher educator if I reimagine how I manifest my relational practices. This study, therefore, provides a framework for other social-justice oriented teacher educators to reimagine their relational practices and their self-in-practice in remote settings. Future studies could revisit the construct of relational teacher education to extend and nuance what we know about its specific dimensions as remote teaching and learning become more commonplace.

## 9.5 Conclusion

At its core, this research demonstrates a commitment to improving my practice through self-study (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; Loughran et al., 2004). In the self-study community, we acknowledge the self is always in the process of becoming, based on perspectives (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015), personal histories (Samaras et al., 2004), relationships (Beijaard et al., 2004), and contexts where self is formed (Biddle, 1979; Hordvik et al., 2021). This study contributes to conversations on ways we can use self-study methodology to learn about and enhance professional practice; the study also extends the self-study literature by providing an understanding of relational teacher education in radical times.

I am reminded that teachers are unfinished beings (Freire, 1998) and that self-study methodologies can provide valuable insights about areas in need of growth and renewal in my ongoing efforts toward social justice. Teaching in a new, remote context sparked my curiosities about how to maintain and reimagine my identity as a relational teacher educator. And, as a relational teacher educator with a commitment to social justice, the study prompted me to revisit criticality of my own practice as I entered into an epistemological space in which I was open to learning about and from *self* in new ways.

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**Brianne (Brie) Morettini**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary and Inclusive Education in the College of Education at Rowan University. She teaches doctoral courses on research literature and analysis, and undergraduate courses on working with families and communities, inclusive education, and elementary education. She draws on a sociocultural theoretical framework to research beginning teacher identity development, beginning teachers' perspectives on teaching, and the use of self-study methodologies to uncover and acknowledge epistemological frames. She considers the intersections of theory and practice in her teaching and research. She has published her work in book chapters and peer-reviewed journals. She also presents her work at national and international research conferences.