



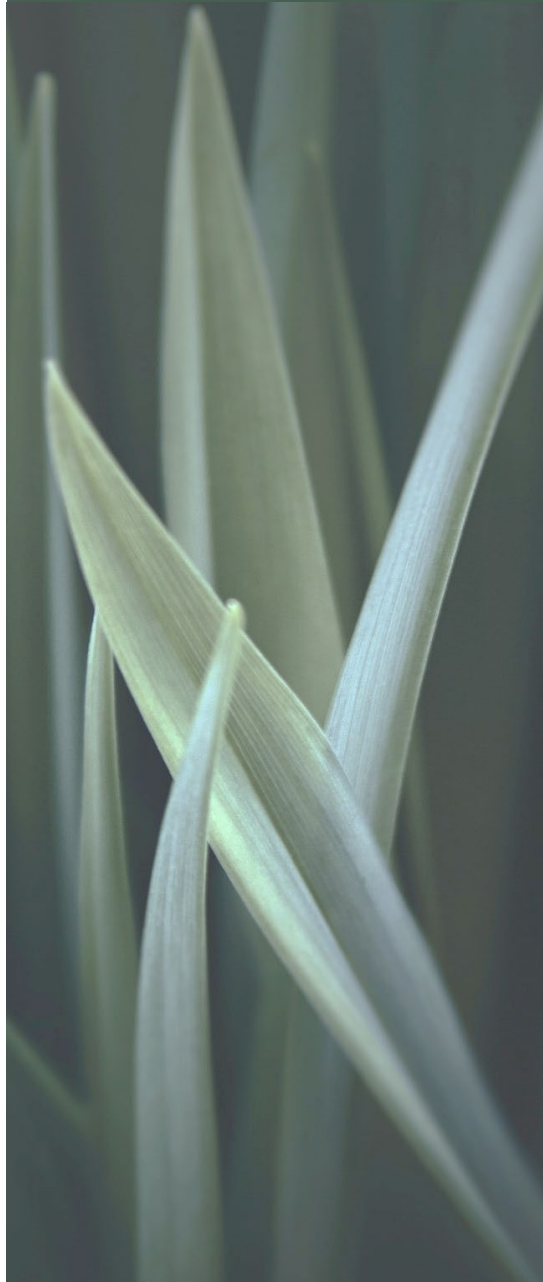
# MENTORING & EMPOWERING GRADUATE STUDENTS

Dr. Virginia Montero Hernandez  
CSU, Stanislaus



# The Landscape of Graduate Education

- ❖ There is an achievement gap at the graduate level
- ❖ Graduate programs seek for cultural diversification
- ❖ Limited understanding of the motivations and participation of adult learners in graduate education (Taylor, 2008)
- ❖ Our understanding of the unique challenges of graduate students from marginalized groups is constrained (Garces, 2014; MacDonald, 2014; Orfield, 2011, 2014; Posselt, 2014; Posselt & Garces, 2014; Schwartz et al., 2003).
- ❖ Graduate students who are first generation and who come from historically underrepresented groups require a specific type of guidance to understand the academic culture



I am a first-generation, low-income, former foster child, foster youth, [from a historically underrepresented group]. I had no immediate family members who had attended college. Neither my mother or my grandmother graduate college. Although I knew from 6<sup>th</sup> grade that I wanted to attend college, and had set my mind on that goal, I had very little support for this endeavor. I had internalized messages about what I was capable of. I needed a lot of support, validation, and encouragement that I was smart enough, capable, to get to college, to get through it, and to make something of myself. I was facing internalized messages and systems/structures that reinforced my own ideas I didn't really belong. Finding my way to the doctorate program was a long journey. By the time I got there, I had belief I could "do it" (the doctoral program) but had no idea how, what it really meant, or what it required. I was blindly diving in because I knew this degree was a tool I could use to help my communities. I was terrified by excited, and felt slightly delusional that I could make it work. However, I knew I could try my hardest and I would somehow succeed.

Doctoral Student

# Positionality & Methodology

Graduate  
faculty  
(11 years)

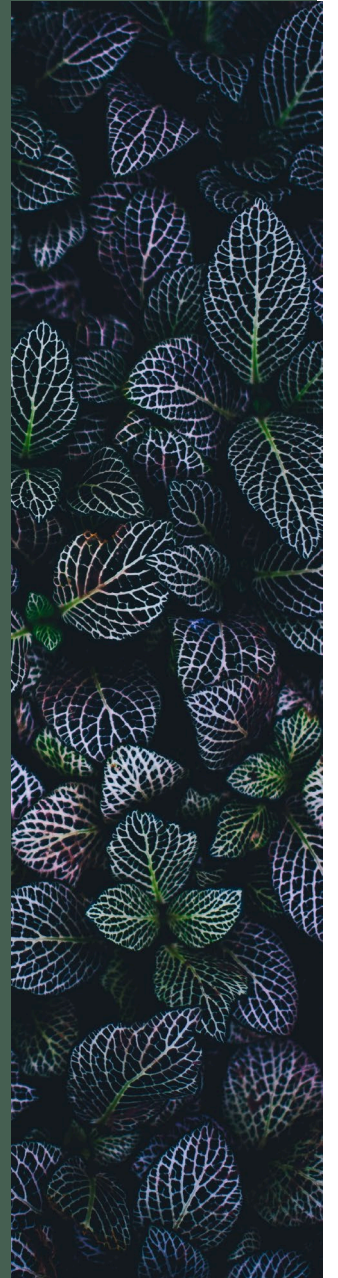
Worked in 2 countries: MX/US

Research/Professional graduate  
programs

Chaired 20+ doctoral and master  
students

## Narrative inquiry

1. Critical self-reflection
2. Analysis of mentoring sessions
3. Scaffolding materials
4. Students self-report



# Previous Research



Historically underrepresented groups requires us to...

1. Understand their stories
2. Familiarize ourselves with their learning styles
3. Design responsive strategies for mentoring

# Equity, diversity, and Inclusion Discourse

Symbolic violence and colonizing practices in educational Institutions

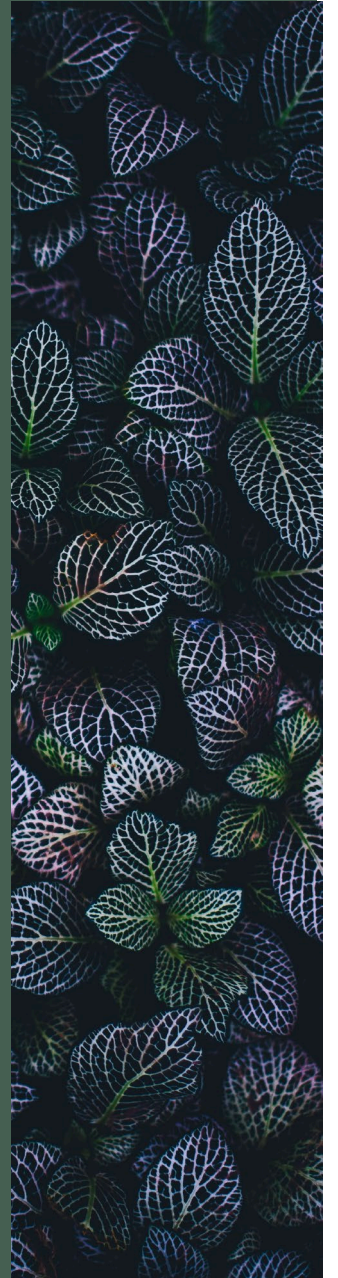
**Context/Challenges**

- Decolonize
- Healing

**Goals/Actions**

- **Personal and social awareness**
- **Empowerment**
- **Community revitalization**

**Outcomes**

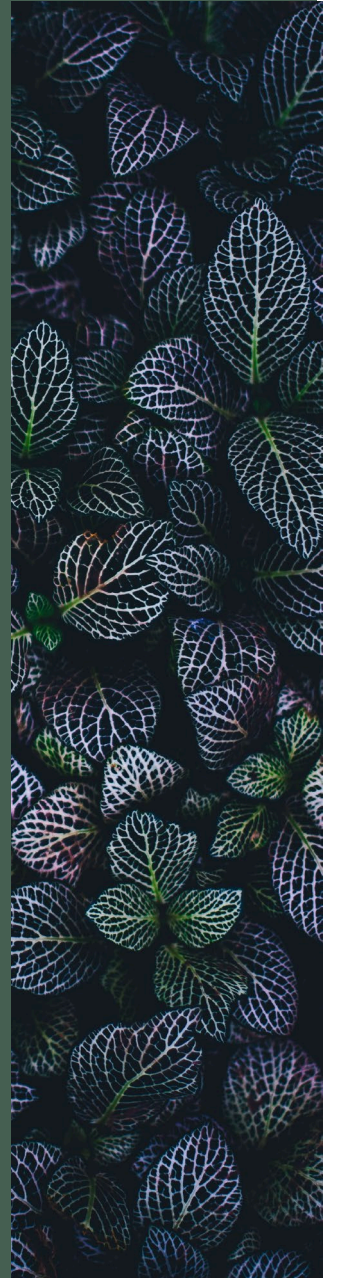


# Psychological empowerment

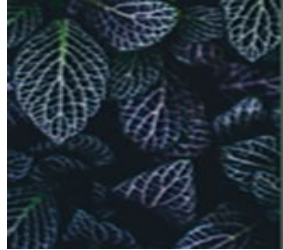
The psychological processes through which people gain greater control over their lives, take a proactive approach in their communities, and develop critical understandings of their socio-political environments (Zimmerman, 1995).

Psychological empowerment includes one's skills and motivations to make social and political change, the knowledge required to do so, and the interpersonal relations and behavioral actions that can contribute to social and political change (Christens, 2012).

**Power= Ability to affect outcomes**



# EMPOWERMENT DIMENSIONS



**Skills** (critical self-reflection, negotiated dialogue, effective decision making)



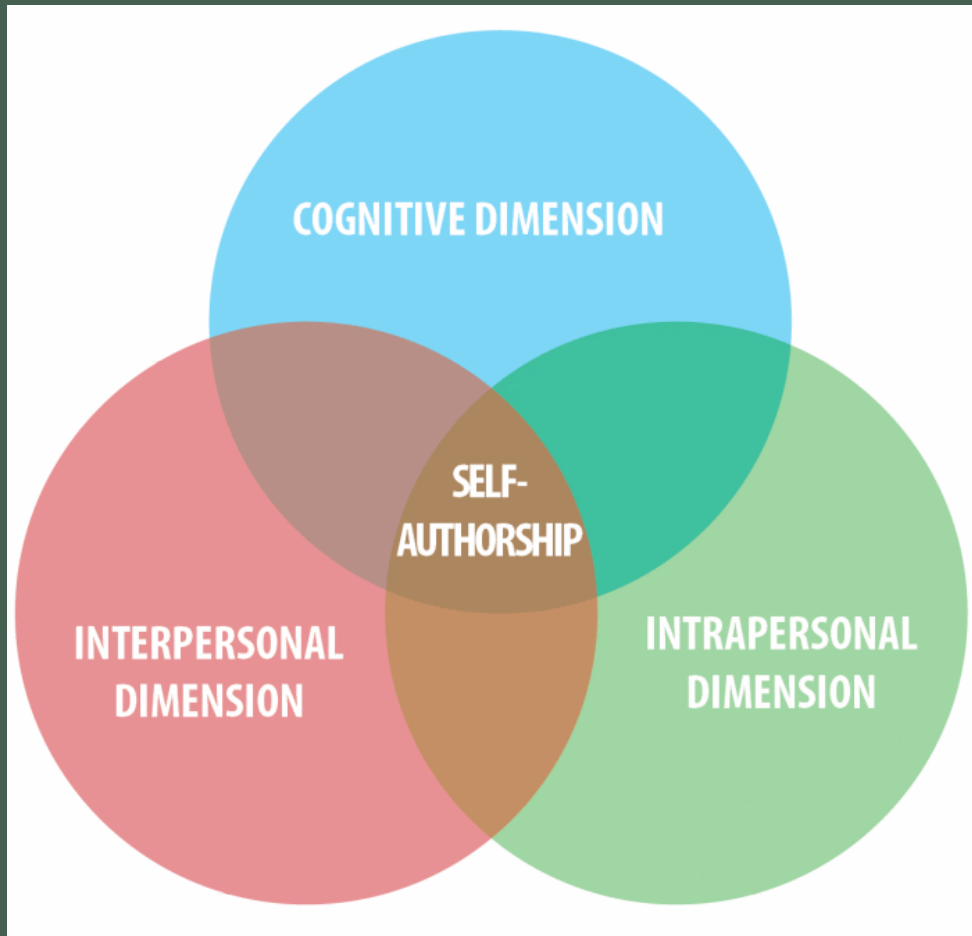
**Self-perceptions** (personal competence/self-efficacy, control, self-esteem)



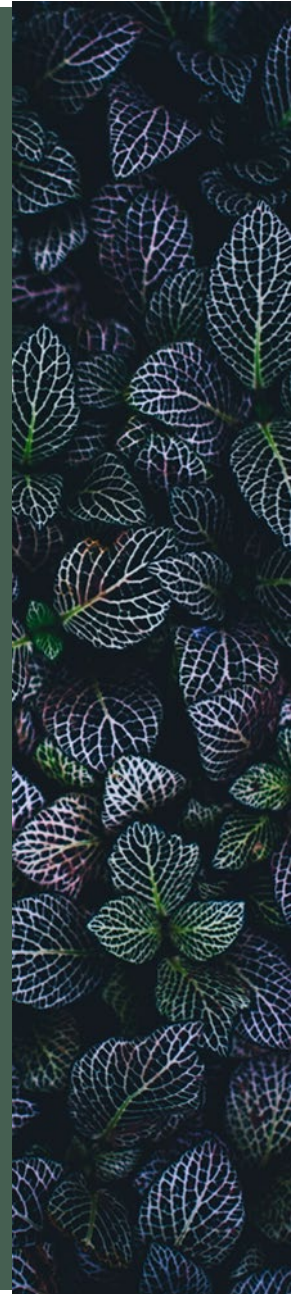
**Understandings** (social power and community systems)



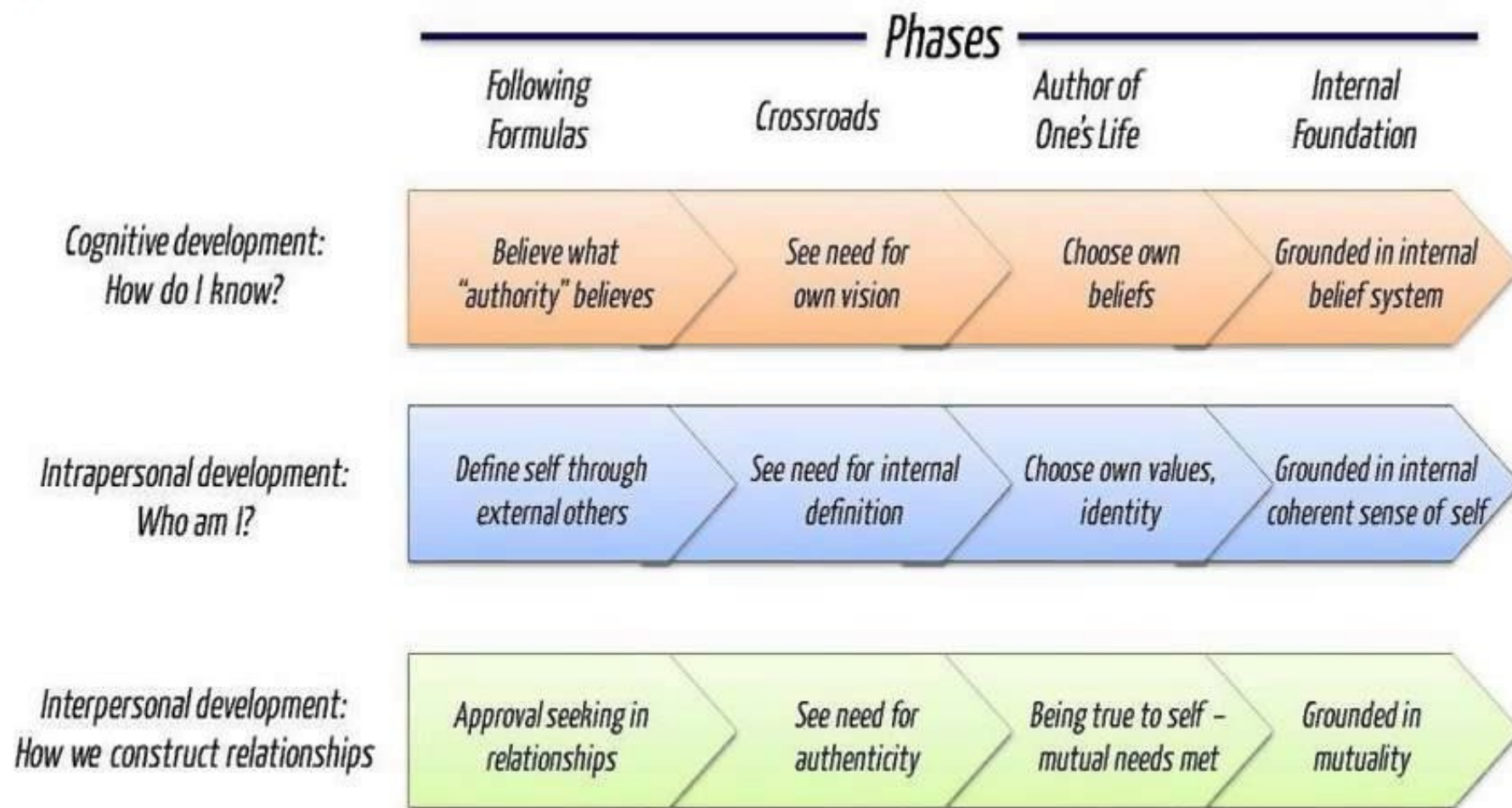
# Self-authorship



**Self-authorship is defined as a person's capacity to move from an external to an internal locus of authority based on the understanding of one's own internally defined beliefs, goals, and sense of self (Pizzolato, 2003; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994).**



# THE 4 PHASES

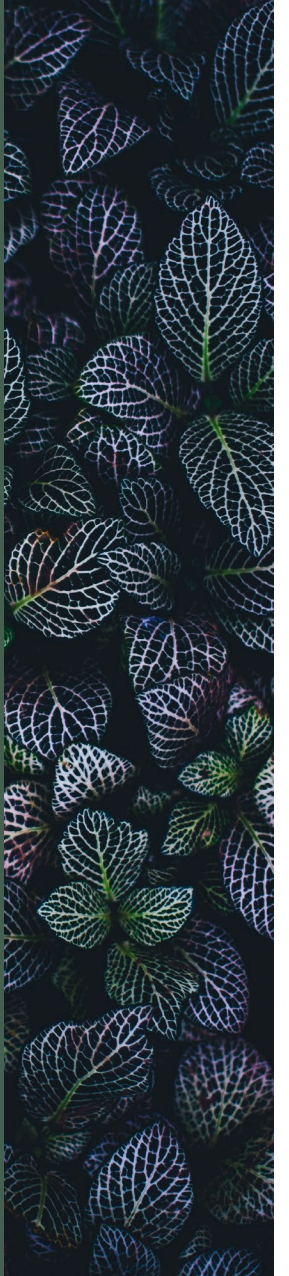


# Empowering Mentoring Framework

Relational conditions

Co-constructive pedagogical strategies

Developmental outcomes



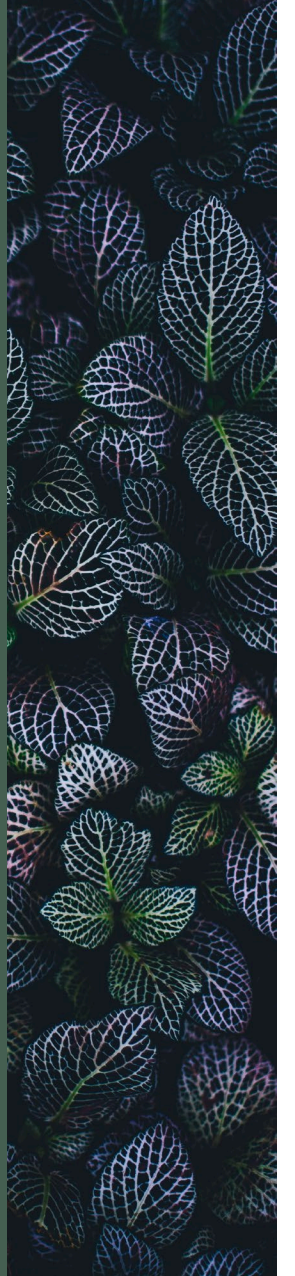
# Relational conditions


Appreciating students' cultural wealth and stories

Nurturing students' voices and expertise

Honoring students' advocacy agenda

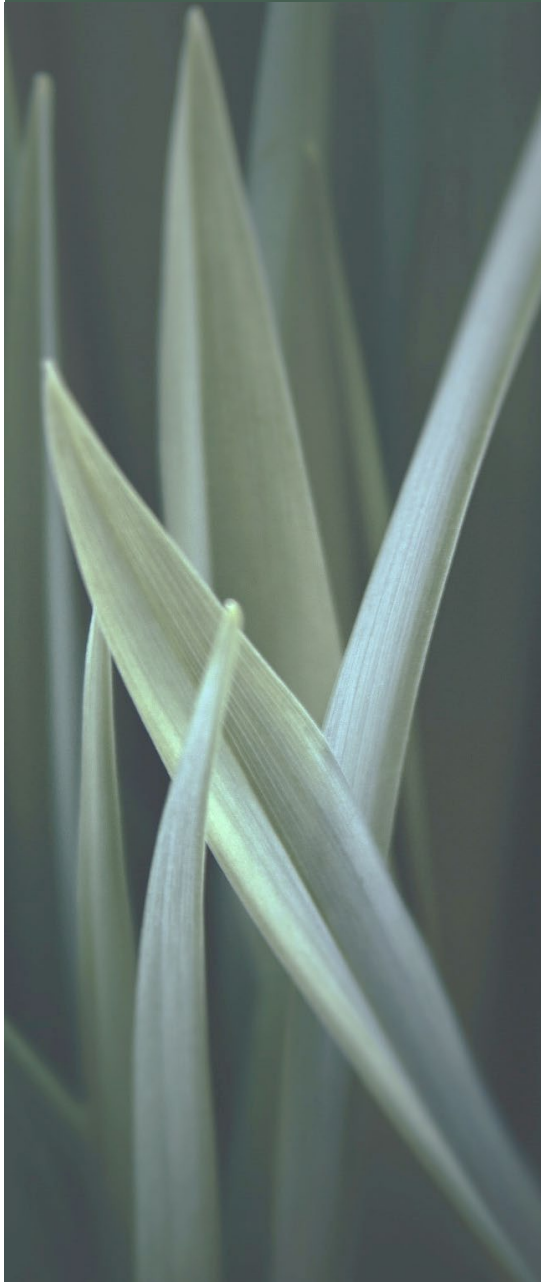
Developing epistemological skills through rigorous caring



A close-up photograph of several green grass blades, showing their texture and sharp points. The blades are set against a dark, blurred background, creating a sense of depth and focus on the natural elements.

I submitted my first paper to you, and it was rejected calling for a resubmission. The initial paper was covered in red ink, and I was in disbelief. A required resubmission?!? I was not happy. You were right though... I just wasn't ready to see it... You were taking my work on its own merit and were addressing things that were needed to improve it. If you would have let me get away with just meeting standards, the program would not have had so much impact on my professional and personal development... You supported me in so many ways, pushed me when needed, and let me grieve and rest when I needed it. I see time and access as the biggest gift from you as my advisor.

*Joseph, University professor*




Especially as we were going through the global pandemic, seeing you via Zoom was something I looked forward to. Yes, I received clarification for a specific section of my dissertation in our meetings. Still, I was also getting to communicate with someone I trusted and looked up to outside of the tiny pod of family members I was quarantining with. It was lovely to have an intellectual and artistic conversation during a time that felt extraordinarily lonely and confusing.

*Milissa, community college dance professor*

## CO-CONSTRUCTIVE PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS



Deconstructive questioning (exploratory phase)



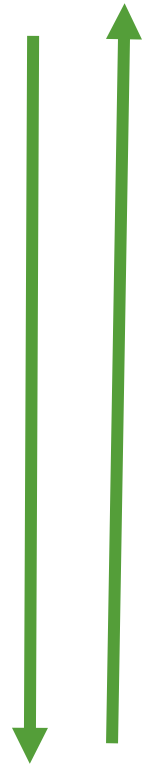
Creative dialogue (expansive phase)

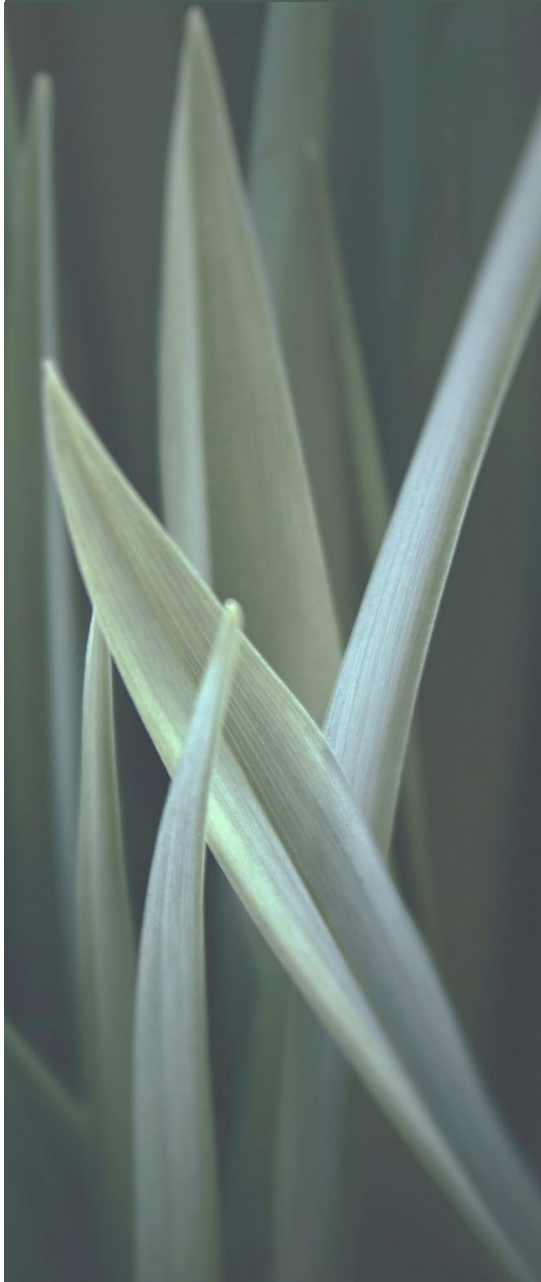


Organized argumentation (Integrative phase)



Co-created drafting (prototyping phase)

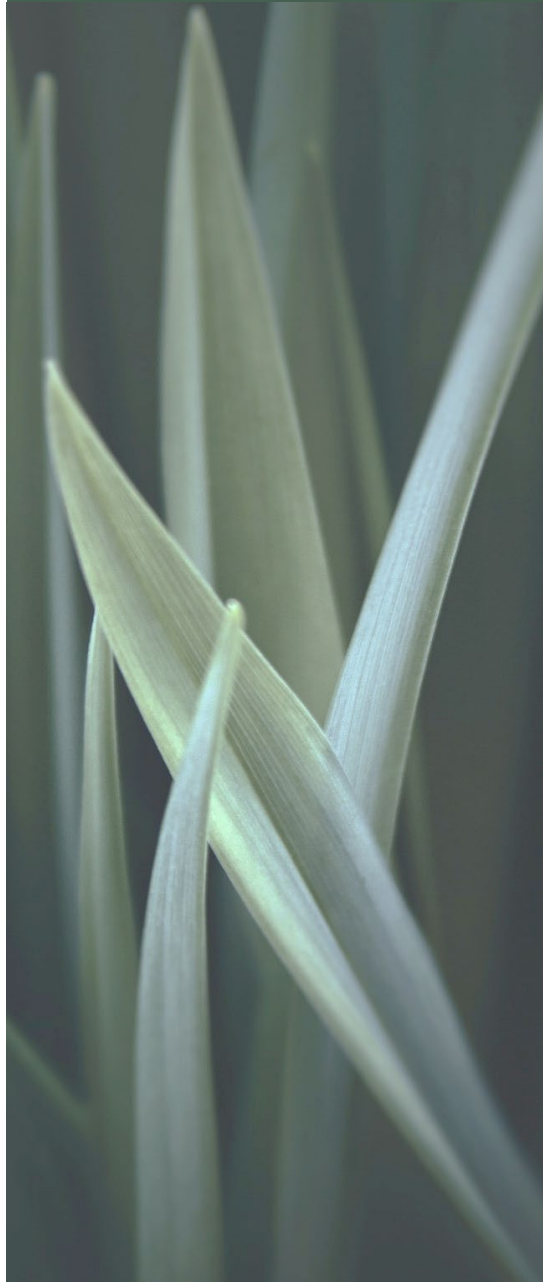




Being the wordy person I am, [our mentoring sessions] help temper my tendency to use ten words when five would suffice. This speaks to the technicalities of writing and editing, but it does not adequately address the profound impact experienced when sharing a table and a conversation about the meaning and intention of the work I had crafted. These moments were valuable because for that brief moment in time, not only was I being guided toward academic improvement and scholarly thinking, but someone other than myself was an active and engaged participant in the mental and theoretical exercises taking place as a result of my research and writing.

*George, School principal*





“[Our mentoring sessions] walked me through how to process the information I received from research and put it together in a sentence. You sat with me and modeled within my dissertation of how to structure my sentences and paragraphs to showcase the purpose of my dissertation then gave me the autonomy to do a few with you or independently. More than that, you allowed my work to reflect my own voice. You mentoring challenged my thinking and processing of the information I received from my interviews in a manner that was positive and productive. You approached our conversations as a coach – asking me questions to help me do my own self-reflection and guide me to a deeper understanding of my own work. There were a number of times where I had an idea but did not know how to connect it and you served as a thought partner to help me bridge my idea within academia.”

*Luangchee, High School Counselor*

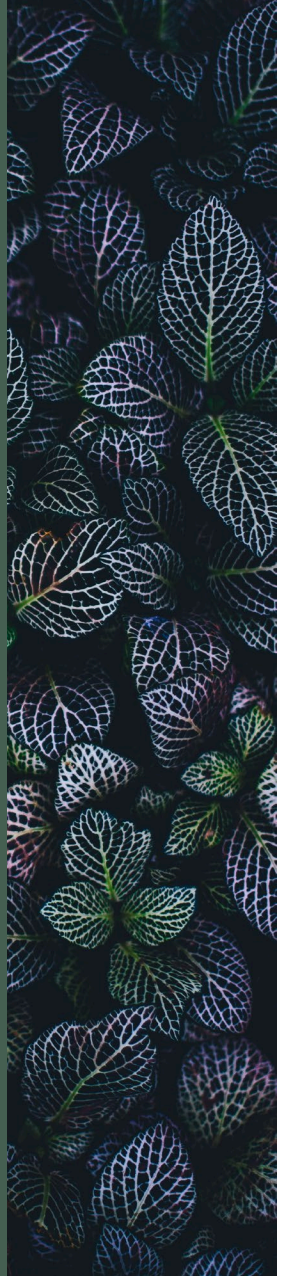
# Developmental outcomes

Transgressive voices & creative selves

Community revitalizing agents

Critical scholars

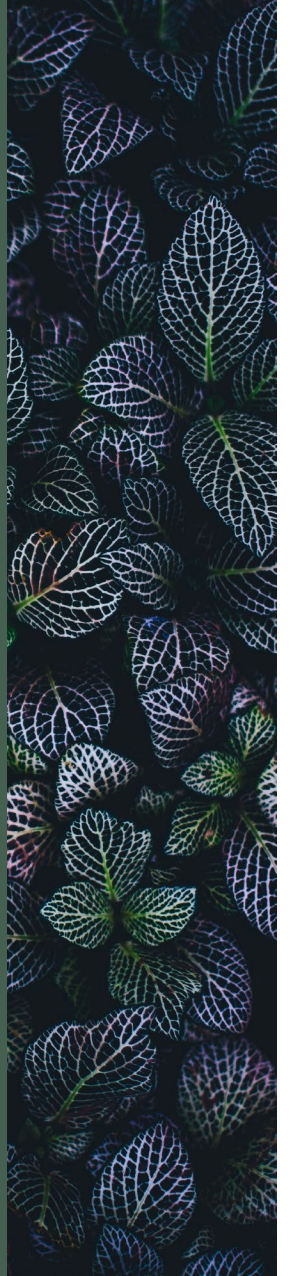
Compassionate leaders



# Developmental outcomes

You constantly challenged my intellect while encouraging me. Later, I understood these two aspects were crucial in developing my voice and identity as a leader. Working with you allowed me to develop a growth mindset further. I am now a forward-thinking and solution-driven leader. Some of the dispositions I developed because of your guidance include self-awareness, effective communication skills, accountability, responsibility, and a clear focus on my own vision

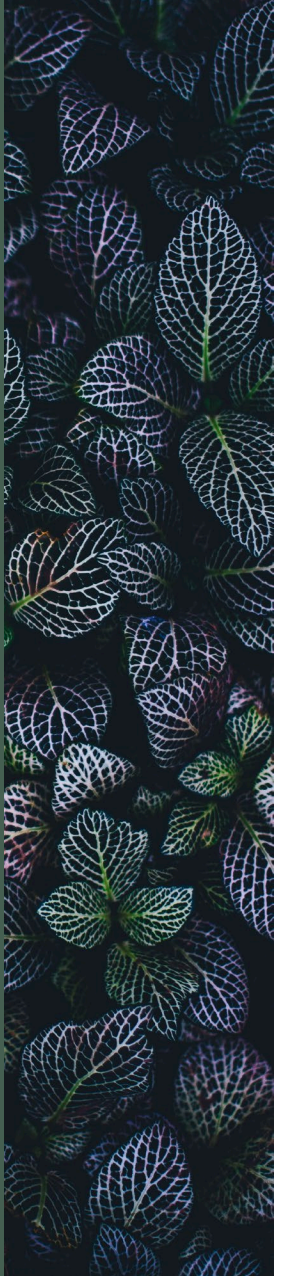
Javier, high school principal



# Developmental outcomes

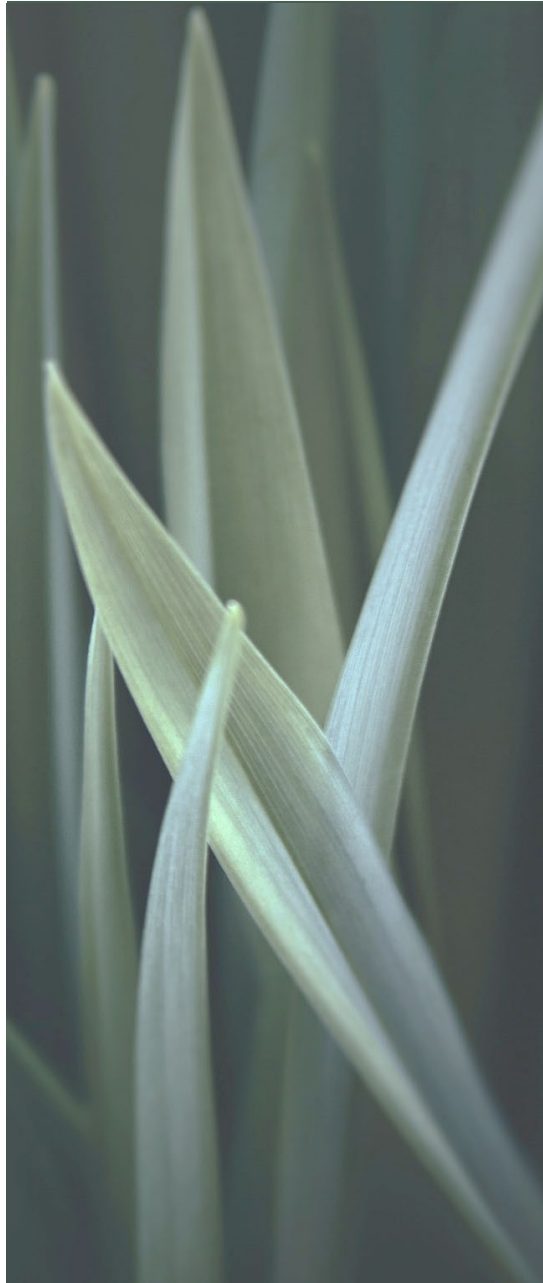
I wore a coat of confidence. It was sewn bit by bit with my accomplishments. It was shallow, inconsistent, unsteady. Through your help and this process I no longer wear a coat; it is skin deep. It is not something fueled by accomplishments or small acts of success. It is something that I have internalized. This is important for me, as I have struggled with sense of self and self-esteem for most of my life. I used overachievement as a tool to move through trauma. Now I don't need to achieve to feel something for myself, but believe in myself in a way I hadn't before. I KNOW my worth, I don't have to adorn myself with small acts of success or accomplishment to feel it or trick myself into believing it for a bit. I have emerged as a leader, not just a scholar. I feel capable and excited to engage in future leadership opportunities. I don't know what they are, but I am confident. I also have developed a critical awareness that is one of the most important things I could have gained from this program and your mentorship.

Stephanie, university counselor



## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

1. Empowered students come from empowered instructors
2. Become a curious, humble, and firm ally with your students
3. Be willing to create a partnership, engage in co-teaching
4. Be observant of the content and relationships you create each session
5. Giving credit to students' ideas is building power
6. Be a creator: Build materials for scaffolding



# GRACIAS

[vmonterofernandez@csustan.edu](mailto:vmonterofernandez@csustan.edu)