

# **Collaborative Conversations Between Teacher and School Leader Candidates: A Co-Mentoring Network Develops**

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*A co-mentoring network developed as teacher and school leader candidates met together during their preparation programs to discuss culturally sustaining, socially just pedagogy. The discussions were structured to be collaborative and conversational using shared anchor readings. This study reports the processes and practices used in establishing the co-mentoring network, themes that emerged from the candidates' collaborative conversations, and how the candidates developed the co-mentoring network. The co-mentoring network used a relational mentoring stance (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007), exploring the three tenets of relational cultural theory: interdependent self-in-relation, growth-fostering interactions, and systemic power, which can affect mentoring relationships. Network participants sought to establish communication styles and trust which encouraged participants to share vulnerabilities with each other (Zachary & Fischler, 2014) while seeking to learn from each other's experiences through discussion and reflection. It was through these discussions and the candidates' reflections on their conversations that a co-mentoring network began to develop.*

*Keywords: co-mentoring, co-mentoring networks, co-mentoring between pre-service K-12 teachers and aspiring K-12 school leaders, culturally sustaining, socially just pedagogy, collaborative conversations between pre-service K-12 teachers and aspiring K-12 school leaders*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this study, the authors explore how bringing teacher candidates (TCs) and leader candidates (LCs) together to learn about and discuss culturally sustaining, socially just pedagogy (CSSJP) may support the development of TCs' and LCs' understandings of CSSJP as well as foster co-mentoring networks. Our study began through ongoing talks about the ways we each focus upon various topics related to CSSJP, including the importance of meaningful family engagement, in our respective teacher and school leader preparation courses. These conversations led to deeper discussions about our approaches, assignments, and practices for our respective students. While exploring student learning outcomes from previous years, the idea emerged to bring our students together to discuss CSSJP, through what we began calling collaborative conversations (CCs).

In bringing the TCs and LCs together, we sought to establish a safe space for them to discuss ideas and practices related to CSSJP, a place where the candidates could offer their differing perspectives, lived

experiences, and professional expertise. It was in this shared space that the co-mentoring network developed as the candidates discussed, reflected, and assessed their current practices, understandings, and potential for growth and development as culturally sustaining, socially just educators.

### **Mentoring Perspectives**

Our mentoring perspectives come from foundational mentoring scholarship which underscores the developmental aspects of mentoring relationship formation and how these relationships develop over time (Allen & Eby, 2010; Kochan, 2002; Mullen, 2005; Ragins & Cotton, 1999) and across different contexts, communities, and cultures (Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003), specifically mentoring conducted in the workplace (Kram, 1985; Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007; Ragins, & Verbos, 2007). The co-mentoring network used a relational mentoring stance (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007), exploring the three tenets of relational cultural theory: interdependent self-in-relation, growth-fostering interactions, and systemic power, which can affect mentoring relationships. We also embrace new understandings of the term *mentoring* presented by Domínguez and Kochan (2020). First in their study of the term mentoring, Domínguez and Kochan (2020) focus on the idea of “developmental networks,” in which the mentor is “a portal to networks of people, data, and information” (p. 8). Next, Domínguez and Kochan (2020) examine how the concept of “reciprocity and mutuality” is evidenced in the mentoring relationship (p. 8). A third layer to their investigation of the term mentoring describes how “mentoring is a worldwide phenomenon and the manner in which it is conceived, implemented and assessed includes a wide variety of forms, formats, and relationships” (p. 8). Last, Domínguez and Kochan (2020) include a description of how technology will “influence the purposes and processes of mentoring” going forward (p. 8). We concur with Domínguez and Kochan (2020) that these components undergird a foundation for mentoring relationships and mentoring networks.

Our definition of co-mentoring aligns with the definition of co-mentorship described by Mullen (2005) as occurring when “individuals or groups proactively engage in reciprocal teaching and learning and transform power structures to honor egalitarianism” (p. 25). While we recognize that power exists in all relationships, Mullen’s (2005) definition of co-mentoring invites those entering into and conducting mentoring relationships to keep in mind how power may affect the mentoring relationship. From our perspective, we want power to be discussed openly among the co-mentoring network participants as there is inherent power differential between teachers and school administrators, such as the principal.

Writing about the importance of collaborative relationships in co-mentoring, Kochan and Trimble (2000) underscored that co-mentoring includes “elements of collaboration, shared decision making, and systems thinking” (p. 20). These components of co-mentoring were explored as the CCs occurred and as the co-mentoring network began to form. For example, communication during the CCs was designed to allow for self-study and reflection about one’s communication style, providing a space where candidates could be open and share vulnerabilities with one another (Zachary & Fischler, 2014). Drawing on the model for mentoring conversations described by Zachary and Fischler (2014) we sought to have our TCs and LCs learn more about the “five levels of conversation” (pp. 165-169). In our CCs we aimed to go beyond what Zachary and Fischler (2014) call the “interaction” level of conversation and strive for a conversation level of “collaborative engagement” (Zachary & Fischler, 2014). Learning about these levels of conversation helps one be thoughtful as an “interaction” level of conversation can lull one into falling into this type of conversation each time one meets. While an interaction level of conversation can be helpful in the beginning of a mentoring relationship, when exchanging basic information and getting to know one another, striving for a level of collaborative engagement can result in conversations that accelerate the mentoring relationship. In a collaborative engagement level of conversation participants are willing to share concerns or even failings with each other, and be very open and vulnerable about their experiences and ideas. In a collaborative engagement level of conversation trust can begin to grow among the participants. As experiences were shared through the CCs, trust began to grow and the learning became more reciprocal. Issues of power inherent in the mentoring/co-mentoring process were discussed, so all the candidates and the authors were aware of how power might have affected the co-mentoring relationships.

We used this foundational and current mentoring scholarship focusing on relational mentoring as we formed the space for the CCs among our TCs and LCs. Fletcher and Ragins (2007), citing work by Ragins and Verbos (2007), stated, “relational mentoring represents the relationship state of high-quality mentoring” in which there is “an interdependent and generative developmental relationship that promotes mutual growth, learning and development within the career context” (p. 374). Relational mentoring was infused with a co-mentoring approach in the design of the CCs (Cowin & Newcomer, 2019) as we sought to create the potential for high-quality relational co-mentoring.

### **Perspectives on Beginners**

We have also examined the literature about what beginning teachers and school leaders go through as they are inducted into their new professional work (Podolsky et al., 2017; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Villani, 2006). Podolsky et al. (2017) found that “providing mentorship and support” was among the five most effective strategies that positively affected new teachers remaining in the classroom (p. 23). A study by Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) which drew on three years of data from the Schools and Staffing and Teacher Follow-Up Surveys, and the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study, found that “mentoring programs, beginning seminars, and supportive communication from school leadership” were among the key practices which helped teachers stay in the profession as well as stay in their specific schools (p. 407).

The transition long-time professional educators make moving from a teaching position into school leadership can cause veteran teachers to experience a return to feeling like a novice (Armstrong, 2009, 2010, 2015; Celikten, 2001; Searby, 2010; Searby & Brondyk, 2016). Often these transitions from teacher to school leadership are fraught with unexpected feelings from those making the transition. For example, there may be feelings of loss. These feeling of loss can come from the administrative hierarchy that can set school leaders apart from teachers. There can be feelings of uncertainty in their new position complicated by feelings of novicedom, formerly being a veteran educator but now as a school leader feeling like they are a beginner again. Our perspectives in working with pre-service teachers and aspiring school leaders gave us much to explore as we considered bringing the two groups together. In fact, the impetus to bring the TCs and LCs together came from our frustration at the silo-ing of their roles and our desire to see if bringing TCs and LCs together might provide an opportunity to unpack this idea of why TC and LC preparation programs are often kept separate.

The research questions explored were: What processes help to establish the co-mentoring network? What themes emerge from the discussions and reflections among the TCs and LCs? In what ways, if any, does the co-mentoring network, as established through CCs, contribute to the development of TCs and LCs as culturally sustaining, socially just educators?

### **METHODS**

Thirty-four participants from two campus locations of Washington State University participated in the CCs, eight LCs and 26 TCs. The LCs were serving as teachers, instructional specialists, or counselors, and one LC was already acting as a vice principal; three TCs were enrolled in the traditional teaching program, while the rest served as paraeducators completing an alternative teacher certification program. All participant names used are pseudonyms.

Data include video-recordings of in-class discussions, instructor field notes, written reflections, electronic discussion-board posts, and class assignments. We brought participants together for four in-class collaborative conversations (CCs) of approximately 100 minutes each. Candidates completed six shared readings, and after each session completed these assignments: self-assessment of their cooperative learning role and the group’s completion of the CC objective during small and whole group work, a reflection form, and a discussion-board post.

The authors met together to plan the readings and agenda for each CC and to debrief and reflect after each CC concluded. We analyzed data inductively for emergent themes, using open-coding and thematic delineation techniques (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). We engaged in ongoing analysis throughout the semester, meeting nearly every week to debrief our observations, share field notes, and plan for future CCs.

Trustworthiness was established by cross-checking emergent themes between the researchers and through triangulation of data sources.

CC#1 included getting acquainted, establishing group agreements (Gibbs, 2006; Palmer, 2011), reviewing cooperative learning roles, discussing self-assessment of one's work in the selected cooperative learning role and the completion of the small and whole group objectives (Kagan, 2010; Gillies, 2007), structured written formats for reflection (Arredondo-Rucinski, 2005; Rodgers, 2002), and a discussion-board post after each CC. Time was planned for candidates to share about themselves, their background that brought them to education, and about their school contexts.

The group agreements focused on being respectful, kind, and gentle with one another. We also asked everyone to use a practice of pausing if something came up that caused an emotional response. We stressed that the work we were engaging in had emotional content so it would be important to first reflect on why those feelings might be coming up before responding or acting. We acknowledged that the work would stretch each of our thinking and sought to honor that stretching in ourselves and others. And finally, we considered each opportunity to have a CC as a practice session in using our communication skills, noting that no one was expecting perfection, and that we would be generous with each other as we practiced during each discussion.

Cooperative learning roles were taught (Kagan, 2010; Gillies, 2007) and each participant completed a self-assessment of how they completed their cooperative learning role after each session concluded. This process for teaching and assessing the cooperative learning roles for the group work was helpful to keep the group work focused on completing the assigned work and was reported by the participants to help in their own growth in participating in and leading group processes. The self-assessments also provided a way for the authors to evaluate how group members were working together and to assess if there were any concerns in the group work that needed addressing before the next CC.

A formalized method for completing written reflection was introduced (Arredondo-Rucinski, 2005; Rodgers, 2002). The authors reviewed the written reflections each week and throughout the project as a part of the ongoing planning of each CC and as data analysis. The process for each CC was presented via an agenda available for students before and during each session. The topics and corresponding anchor readings for CC#1 were: deficit thinking (Hadjistassou, 2008) and everyday literacies and community resources (Bausch, 2003).

CC#2, CC#3, and CC#4 each began with a review of the agenda. First on the agenda were brief self-re-introductions, a review of the group agreements, a review of the cooperative learning roles and the handout for self-assessment of one's cooperative learning role, a review of the process for the written reflection and the discussion-board post. The topics and corresponding anchor readings for CC#2 were: culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and Funds of Knowledge (Moll et al., 1992/2005); for CC#3 the topic and related anchor readings focused on what CSSJP may look like in practice (Newcomer, 2019; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018); and CC#4 focused on a reflection on the CCs process and revisiting all six articles. The sessions were video recorded with transcription available. We also made field notes while observing and listening to the CCs and when we reviewed the video recordings during data analysis.

## **ESTABLISHING THE NETWORK: PROCESSES AND PRACTICES**

To establish the network, group agreements outlining how we will work together were established and agreed to by all the participants. The group agreements focus on communication styles, mutual respect, attentive listening, and deep self-reflection, especially when a topic comes up in discussion that may be difficult or challenging to one's own value system or beliefs. Our group has agreed that we will use a process of self-inquiry and introspection when a topic comes up that makes us uncomfortable or that we do not agree with. Our group practiced this form of reflection and introspection before speaking to assure that what we do say to each other is always respectful. We did want to practice stretching our thinking and communication skills and did not want participants to shy away from difficult or challenging topics.

Participants were to practice thoughtfulness and respect, and were encouraged to use words in a way that was educative and could help us all grow in our thinking.

We also use a form of cooperative learning in how our whole group and small group work is completed. We assigned roles for the work in small groups with each member of the four-member small groups fulfilling a role such as timekeeper, recorder, reporter, and gatekeeper. The timekeeper assured the work was completed on time and kept the group apprised of the time used and remaining. The recorder assured the group's key discussion points were recorded on the recording form along with the participants' names. The reporter reported out for the small group when the whole group convened. The gatekeeper role focused on introductions so all the group members knew each other, assuring each member of the group has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion and that the time to speak in the group is shared equally. The roles were taught and all participants completed a self-assessment of their performance of their role as well as an assessment of the work the small group completes.

A format for structuring the small and whole discussions is taught before the first CC, and reviewed before each additional CC begins. The discussion prompts are used at each CC so participants could be prepared and have established procedures for each CC. The written reflection process was also taught and used at all four of the CCs. This ensured that the CC processes and practices are reviewed each time before beginning the conversations.

## **RESULTS**

Across all four of the CCs, candidates grappled with recurring thoughts, feelings, tensions, and questions about how to enact CSSJP. Examples of the kinds of questions candidates asked were: What does it look like? How is it done? What if you don't have the support of your administration? How do you develop relationships with students without overstepping boundaries? Family engagement is important, but how can families be authentically engaged?

One theme to emerge was concern about the scope of the work of enacting CSSJP. For example, candidates saw a great need for CSSJP in their classrooms and schools, but were often unsure about how to begin, or how to build on existing practices. They also worried about trying out new teaching practices such as making home visits and not having support for these methods from fellow teachers or the administration of the school. The candidates also expressed concern about work-life balance and either not doing enough or trying to do too much and burning out or even failing. A second theme that arose as the candidates discussed these questions and concerns was the idea that enacting CSSJP involves risk-taking and courage. Candidates' comments revealed their belief that courage was necessary in the face of such risk. Finally, a third theme to present itself was the need to extend flexibility and grace – with one's self and with others.

Next, we highlight key excerpts from our first and final sessions together, CC#1 and CC#4 because these conversations represent the beginning and the culmination of our time together. These snippets demonstrate how the candidates co-mentored one another, listening, reassuring, and building upon each other's ideas.

### **Establishing a Co-Mentoring Network – Collaborative Conversation #1**

We could see signs of a co-mentoring network begin to emerge during our very first CC. During this first CC, students had read Bausch (2003) and Hadjistassou (2008) and we used a "Save the Last Word for Me" protocol to structure our discussion. Each small group of four or five students first discussed one of the two articles using our open-ended prompts, and then selected a quote to share with the rest of the class that resonated with the group. The quote was presented for the rest of the class to discuss and then the group that chose the quote was able to share why they had chosen it. In this way, each group was able to share their thinking or "the last word" on their selected quote.

LC Marie's group shared the following quote for the others to discuss: "We connect the worlds of literacies, not to assimilate them as if one size fits all" (Bausch, 2006, p. 220). In response to this quote, TC Michael, commented, "I like this because it seems like it, sort of, implies that we should, you know, trust students to hold the knowledge and not try to control and be the holder of all of the knowledge ourselves,

but trust them to be responsible actors in the act of learning.” Next, in response to Michael’s idea, TC Carol made the following comment:

To me instead of forcing everyone to try to learn from the same text, the same literacy things, you’re bringing things they understand better from their own background, instead of we all read this same book, you bring in things they might understand better.

In relation to her comment, LC Ned shared the following:

In thinking about that, because when you’re actually teaching, you will have a curriculum that the district paid a lot of money for and they will expect you to use it, so you have to find a balance. You can’t just go, no, I’m not going to teach any of that and I’m not going to follow the pacing guide. I’ve tried it. I’ve tried it. [A few soft laughs.] You will get a lot of pushback and so you have to find a way . . . that you can make it relevant to whatever you’re teaching, you can get relevancy out of it, by making it relevant. The children might not see, the students might not see the relevancy right away, but if you can bring in, if you actually know your students, then you can actually make it relevant for them and work with what you have to teach. That’s the reality of it.

This comment shows how Ned, in this moment, is acting as a co-mentor to the TCs by sharing his experience with the reality of getting pushback from administration for straying too far from the mandated curriculum while also offering them a strategy for negotiating the school’s curricular policy by finding ways to make the prescribed curriculum relevant to the students.

The conversation continued for a few more moments and then it was time to finish class. We, the instructors, began to wrap up the conversation. As we did so, however, students had more they wanted to say, and we observed two LCs, in particular, actively begin to co-mentor the TCs, by encouraging them to approach their administrators, even when conversations might be difficult, and encouraging them to continue on their professional path toward becoming school leaders themselves. Renee, an aspiring LC who currently worked as the counselor at her school, asked if she could make another comment. She began by acknowledging how difficult conversations may be with school leaders, but invited all present to think about “welcoming them.” Renee said:

How do you open those conversations with your administrators? And I’d invite everybody to do that. Some of this stuff is very scary, but all of us that are in that program are super nice, and hopefully, your administrators are super helpful for you. They might be intimidating, but most of them I’ve ever worked with are great, so once you get in those roles, you are welcome to do that..

After Renee shared this, another LC, Jason, who currently already worked as the vice principal of his school, went on to add that:

There are some people who talk about administration, we’ve got a bad administration and where I’m at, I’m just like, well, you can change it. Become an administrator. That’s exactly why Renee and I are in the program. It’s these bad administrators year after year and it’s just like, instead of allowing it to continue, let’s change it, let’s get into the program, let’s get certified, So, just don’t stop, once you’re in the program, if there’s things that continue to bother you, fix it. Put yourself in a position to fix it. Don’t settle.

Jason spoke these words passionately and his desire to communicate this idea to the TCs that they, too, could become certified school leaders in order to change the circumstances at their school and to become the kind of administrators they wished to see, was clearly evident.

In this very first CC, we see important co-mentoring beginning to happen at several moments of the conversation. We see a powerful moment first occur when TC Carol shares her group's idea that being a culturally sustaining, socially just teacher may necessitate being flexible with the curriculum. Seemingly wanting to help with this idea and yet gently let her know about some of the constraints she might face with this, LC Ned shares his own experience with trying to avoid teaching the prescribed curriculum. He explains that he got pushback for doing this and that such an approach may not be possible. Yet, he goes on to suggest that there are still ways to make the prescribed curriculum relevant. By sharing his own personal experience and offering advice for how to negotiate curricular mandates, Ned is acting as a co-mentor. Later, toward the end of the conversation, in fact, as we, the instructors, were wrapping up and explaining the next steps, both LC Renee and LC Jason felt compelled to speak up and offer the rest of the group, particularly the TCs, the idea that they could, in fact, approach their administrators and have similar kinds of meaningful discussions with them. Or, if they were unsatisfied with their current school leadership, they could change this situation by becoming certified school leaders themselves.

These moments illustrate several aspects of co-mentorship at work. First, we see how the LCs are acting as a network of "people, data, and information" as suggested by Domínguez and Kochan (2020, p. 8). We also see how the group is wrestling with the power imbalance that can exist between teachers and school leaders. LC Ned explicitly cautions the TCs that they will "get pushback" if they try to completely abandon the district's adopted curriculum. Yet he shares his experience that finding ways to "make it relevant" is possible. Later, LCs Renee and Jason also encourage the TCs to feel empowered to approach their administrators – or, if this is not possible, to become school leaders themselves. This kind of dialogue shows how the candidates are engaging in the kind of "reciprocal teaching and learning [to] transform power structures to honor egalitarianism" as envisioned by Mullen (2005, p. 25).

#### **The Co-Mentoring Network Continues to Expand - Collaborative Conversation #4**

For the fourth and final CC, the candidates were asked to review and reflect upon all of the shared readings they had completed together and to discuss key ideas that stood out to them from across the conversations. As with every conversation, they began their discussions in small groups first and then later, the reporters shared key highlights from the small group discussions. This was followed by time for a whole group open discussion. We have selected key excerpts of dialogue to highlight, which again show how the candidates continued to co-mentor one another.

This next excerpt begins with TC Janice who expresses how her group appreciated the specific, practical strategies that were shared in the last set of readings we had completed and how these strategies could be applied to their own contexts. For example, teachers could consider how to ensure one correctly pronounces each student's name or what to think about before making a home visit. We begin with Janice's quote below:

We really felt like with the article, it gave us a bunch of practical ways of implementing Funds of Knowledge, which we thought, in terms of learning from teachers and paraeducators, they actually modeled, kind of what the practical part of what we should think about as teachers, going out into the communities, home visits. Thinking about social justice, which is, you know, an idea that many educators now, we're just not really thinking about. I mean, the ones I've observed.

This quote shows how the candidates were feeling energized and positive about the work. However, they were also still grappling with some of the same worries and concerns that they had expressed early on, as may be seen in the following quote by TC Michael:

How much energy do you put into trying to do the family engagement? How much energy do you put into trying to bring in all the other cultural things and stuff around there before you get yourself burnt out, and go overboard? When do you know that it's enough, that you've done enough, or that you're going overboard? Like it's kind of a slippery slope

because you always feel like you need to do more, but at the same time, you need to take care of yourself and your own mental health.

In response to his concerns, LC Jason shared a story about taking a risk with his students. His story stems from an art class he had taught in Hawaii. He relayed how several students did not want to do the art assignment he had given. Rather than demanding that the students complete the art assignment, he gave the students the option to play their ukuleles instead:

You know ... the kids liked it and kids were drawing and they were singing along with the songs ... and that's not traditional, you know, because a traditional way would have been more or less like no, you have to do the assignment.... if people come in and they see what I'm doing, I don't think I would be criticized or anything like that but it was a risk that I definitely took.

Through his story, Jason seemed to be reassuring the others that risks could work out. Building on this story, LC Ned, offered his perspective that enacting CSSJP is manageable:

I love [his story] because being authentic is, you see so many curriculums that are like so formulaic and traditional with trying to be, like, culturally inclusive and a lot of the best inclusivity, I think happens on a case by case basis ... It's just being flexible.

Finally, building upon all of these ideas, a third LC, Andrea, offered the notion of being flexible with ourselves, saying:

We all have to give ourselves grace. Whether you are a teacher or you're practicing or administration ... You want to do all of these things and then you end up not being very good at any of it. And then you kind of beat yourself up over it. And so really making sure that you are giving yourself grace and being patient.

Finally, toward the end of our last CC, the LCs and TCs reflected on the value of being able to have these kinds of conversations together. TC Gian remarked that he had never had these kinds of conversations with the teachers and leaders at his school:

We talked about how one thing that we would reflect on is how we would be able to have these conversations with admins and teachers within our schools ... I'm really thankful for this because this is something that, you know, we nev-, at least, I, [never] get to experience with my admin at my school or my teachers within.

As may be seen in the exchange above, the co-mentoring that began in our first CC continued to develop and is clearly present in our final CC. Collaboration (Kochan & Trimble, 2000) and reciprocal teaching and learning (Mullen, 2005) may be seen taking place as the candidates intently listen to each other and use the shared readings to inform their comments to one another, as for example when Janice references the specific strategies they gained from one of the articles. This exchange also demonstrates how candidates are building upon each other's ideas and offering support based on their own experiences and contexts. This may be observed when LC Jason shared his experience with taking a risk as an art teacher and how LC Ned, visibly excited, built upon this idea by sharing his own experience that part of enacting CSSJP is being authentic to the moment. Their final discussion also demonstrates how they upheld our group agreements in order to create a safe space to discuss worries and concerns. Finally, technology (Dominguez & Kochan, 2020) was also used to help establish our co-mentoring network as we were working over Zoom for the last two CCs.

In the CCs, we strived for the Candidates to use a model of conversation called "collaborative engagement" (Zachary & Fischler, 2014, p. 168). In collaborative engagement conversationalists are



willing to share at a level at which concerns, vulnerabilities, and even failings are discussed openly. Candidates were encouraged to share their ideas and experiences and not hide parts of their ideas and experiences for fear of what others might say or think about them. The culture of the CCs as a learning community was studied, with each Candidate embracing a stance embodying reciprocal teaching and learning (Mullen, 2005). For example, LC Ned shared his experience as a teacher, describing a time when he had not adhered to the prescribed curriculum and pacing guide for that curriculum and experienced “pushback” from his administration. LC Ned encouraged the TCs with his story by showing that there are ways to navigate this pushback and make the curriculum relevant to one’s students.

TC Gian commented that he had not had many opportunities to have conversations with his administrative team. In relation to this, in the first CC, LC Renee encouraged Gian and the other TCs not to be afraid to approach their administrators. Following up on this comment, LC Jason echoed Renee’s suggestion to consider pursuing a position as an administrator, as he and Renee were both completing the certification program and becoming administrators themselves.

The final story that illuminates this idea of collaborative engagement, as well as reciprocal teaching and learning, is the story LC Jason told about a day he “took a risk” in his classroom as a teacher. The day Jason took a risk was when some of his art students did not want to complete the drawing assignment he had given. He instead allowed those students to play their ukuleles for the rest of the students who were completing the drawing assignment. Jason explained that if his administrator would have walked in right then, the administrator would not have seen all the students drawing, but all the students were still creating art.

## CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that CCs can support the development of a co-mentoring network, one which contributes to TCs’ and LCs’ understandings of CSSJP. Today’s data-driven assessment of teachers and school leaders is often focused on measuring performance and production – test scores of students served and counts of services provided. In this environment, the development of a co-mentoring network may provide a safe space for future teachers and school leaders to think, reflect, discuss, and plan together based on their experiences, values, and beliefs. We suggest that developing CCs as a co-mentoring network during teacher and leader preparation programs could provide opportunities to establish a culture for future teachers and school leaders to collaborate and learn from each other *before* they begin their professional service. It also could be that these CCs deepen the possibility for co-mentoring to continue once they become teachers and school leaders. We are planning to continue this work of bringing TCs and LCs together to discuss not only CSSJP but how they see the prospects of a co-mentoring network enhancing their future work in schools.

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