

## **Cultivating Enduring and Reciprocal Relationships in Academia: An Indigenous Mentor-Mentee Model**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article takes form following an exchange of letters in which the Chickasaw and Hopi authors reflected on an Indigenous mentorship relationship in higher education as the embodiment of a carved-out space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being. They begin the story of their faculty mentor-doctoral mentee relationship with the memory of the mentee's graduation from the doctorate program and the gifting of a shawl. This moment was both a culminating and rebirthing of a relationship, an Indigenization of the institutional university hooding graduation ceremony. The authors privilege an Indigenous gift paradigm based in values of care and notions of kinship. Together, they ask and explore questions of how such a gift paradigm is created, enacted, and sustained in higher education. They reflect on practices which cultivated, nurtured, and sustained the mentorship relationship through the years from

admission and leading up to the doctoral graduation ceremony, and beyond.

*Keywords:* doctoral mentorship, gift paradigm, indigenous education, language revitalization, relationships in higher education

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## PROLOGUE

This article takes form following an exchange of letters in which we (Kari and Sheilah) reflected on our mentor-mentee relationship that began at the University of Arizona (UArizona). We open with our introductions, positioning ourselves as Indigenous scholars, and then relate a defining moment in our shared story.

KARI: Chokma, saholhchifoat Kari. Chikashsha saya. Greetings, my name is Kari. I am a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation. I am an assistant professor of Indigenous Education at the University of Oklahoma. I am writing from the Chickasaw Nation, where I currently live. Through my scholarship and life's work, I am reclaiming my ancestral Chikashshanompa' (Chickasaw language). I earned my doctorate from the UArizona, where Sheilah was my faculty mentor.

SHEILAH: Askwali, uma yev itamumi tuqayvastoti. Nu' Sheilah yan Pahanmaatiswa. Nu' Hopisino. Thank you for your attention. My English name is Sheilah. I am from the Hopi community located in what is now known as Arizona. I am both an alumna and professor of Indigenous Education / Indigenous Language Education at the UArizona. I work to research ancestral knowledge respectfully, reclaim Indigenous ways of knowing and validate and advance Indigenous knowledge systems as important contributions to scholarship. Kari was my first Indigenous student mentee from admission to graduation.

## A (Graduation) Ceremony

KARI: For many graduates and their families, May 13, 2016, the UArizona College of Education (COE) convocation ceremony was a momentous event. The celebration began early. In the weeks prior to the convocation ceremony, I was selected to receive the outstanding graduate student award for the COE. I was humbled and honored to receive this award, which included the opportunity to give a speech and also to sit on the stage with COE faculty and leadership during the ceremony. During my speech, I gave voice to Chikashshanompa'. It was likely the first time most in the large audience had heard of Chikashsha okla (Chickasaw people) and of our language. It felt good to honor my ancestors, Asipóngni', my family, anchokka-chaffa', who traveled from out-of-state to attend the ceremony, as well as to represent the Chickasaw Nation. After the speeches concluded, it was time for the students to cross the stage and receive their degrees. I lined up among the doctoral degree recipients and waited until my name was called. It was then that you walked out to me, met me at the center of the stage, and wrapped me in a cream-colored shawl with blue and brown accents and teal fringe.

### Figure 1

*The Gifting of the Shawl*



SHEILAH: This takes me back to that very, very, very, precious time, event, and celebration – your graduating and importantly, publicly recognizing, honoring, and sending you off to carry on the “work” through the academy’s tradition of “hooding.” In the Hopi belief, you were a kyeele, a fledgling hawk, who had advanced to maturity and was ready to pave your own path. Now, I was sending you off with all the following: pride, appreciation, gratitude, encouragement, love, respect, and a strong belief that you would do good things and contribute much. All of these heartfelt thoughts, feelings, and spirit were/are embedded symbolically in the shawl, taapalo, itself, and in the process of enfolding you, usitoyna, in the moment with pride. I witnessed this practice of wrapping an individual, usually a woman, in a shawl on numerous occasions; at the core, it is a heartfelt expression of a relationship established over time. In our case, it was a growing reciprocal relationship – your seeking guidance and support and my observation of your receiving, accepting, and acting on it. I now understand how maturity and authentic seeking of support and accepting guidance manifests; it is fulfilling.

## INTRODUCTION

Together, we reflectively explore the evolution of an Indigenous mentorship relationship in higher education. Through our writing, we illuminate how our Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing surface and move us toward a true model of a reciprocal relationship that is informed by our Indigenous sense of relationality. At the same time, we call attention to the neglected history of institutions of higher education as situated on Indigenous lands. Our mentorship relationship began at the UArizona – a land-grant or, more accurately, *land-grab* (Lee & Ahtone, 2020) university in Tucson, Arizona, on the homelands of the Tohono O’odham and

the Pascua Yaqui Peoples. Remaining steadfast in its “institutional invulnerability” marked by “institutional unresponsiveness” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 13), at the time of writing, UArizona has yet to make adequate reparations to Indigenous peoples in terms of building strong, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities and increasing the representation of and support for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty on campus. In terms of graduate education, UArizona touts itself as the leading institution in the US for doctorates awarded to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

During the time Kari attended UArizona, from 2012 to 2016, 30 American Indians and Alaska Natives completed doctoral degrees, accounting for just 1.4% of all doctoral degrees awarded by UArizona during this period (National Science Foundation, 2017). Given that American Indians and Alaska Natives represent just over 5% of the population of the state of Arizona (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), the university projects an equity rhetoric that does little in terms of serving those to whom it is responsible. This situation is not unique to UArizona, as less than one percent of all doctorate recipients in the United States each year and similarly, less than one percent of all university faculty, are Indigenous (Brayboy et al., 2015); this speaks in particular to Indigenous mentorship, a critical institutional support (Pihama et al., 2019). Thus, in the absence of overarching institutional support, Indigenous persons have worked from within the University to “seize academic power” in Indigenous-controlled spaces (Gilmore & Smith, 2005). Our mentorship relationship is the embodiment of a carved-out space for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing work from within the academy propelled by aspirations to benefit our communities. Fundamentally, as Indigenous scholars, we pursue our work from a strong sense of our Indigeneity cultivated and nurtured in the pursuit of our academic aspirations.

We begin telling the story of our mentorship relationship with the memory of Kari's graduation and the gifting of the shawl. We look back on this moment as both a culminating *and rebirthing* of our relationship captured in enfolding of Kari with a shawl, an Indigenization of the institutional university hooding graduation ceremony. This act exemplifies moving beyond survivance (Vizenor, 1994) to *thrivance* – “the ability to flourish and deepen scholarship [and] thoughtways... in the service of [Indigenous] communities, their ancestors, and for generations yet to come” (Walters et al., 2019). Further, the act exemplified what it means to act unapologetically with cultural integrity (Brayboy, 2005a) as Indigenous scholars.

SHEILAH: When I look at the photos, I wonder what reaction and impression we made? I don't recall any one of my colleagues asking me about the shawl prior to the hooding nor after. It was our private celebration – this is what I cherish. The backstory is that I searched to purchase the shawl over several months; ironically, the fact that I've expressed that I am an 11th hour person, I was giddy with the anticipation of the moment of “ung usiitoynaniqu, to wrap you/enfold you” in the symbol of celebration. What I had in mind was nowhere to be found. I sent out word that I was looking for a shawl and possibilities of those who made shawls were offered, and I visited these individuals, but none fit my image. Finally, a colleague contacted me about her intentions to make a shawl; she invited me to her house to show me the material – it was the one; it showed itself to me. So, the shawl was also specially made for you, not just bought off a rack. I couldn't have been happier at how it worked out.

KARI: This memory is so special to me, and I will also never forget what you said later – that you didn't ask for permission from the university for this ceremony; you just did it. I have held this moment close to my heart because of the important teaching it offers:

We, as Indigenous scholars, don't need to ask permission from the university to act with integrity.

In telling the story of the shawl and our mentor relationship, we privilege an Indigenous gift paradigm based in “values of care, cooperation, and bonding” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 30) and notions of kinship. Together, we ask and explore questions of how such a gift paradigm is created, enacted, and sustained in higher education. We reflect on practices that cultivated, nurtured, and sustained our mentorship relationship through the years from admission into a doctoral program and leading up to the graduation ceremony, and beyond.

### **RELATIONAL STORYTELLING AND MENTORSHIP FROM THE HEART**

Our approach to this storytelling is dialogic and relational. We are inspired by Archibald's (2008) conceptualization of Indigenous Storywork and we have drawn on this approach over the years to story our language revitalization and reclamation work (see McCarty et al., 2018; Chew et al., 2019; Chew et al., forthcoming). We have done our best to retain qualities of oral storytelling important in both of our cultures. In order to capture words from the heart (Marmon Silko, 1996) while writing collaboratively, we began our writing process by exchanging letters via email. Letter writing is a way for us to express heartfelt words similar to how we might say them aloud – uncensored, uncited, unrevised. The same words spoken from the heart were conveyed and enacted in real time, such as the public gifting of the shawl – the graduation hooding.

After several weeks of correspondence, we began the process of writing our story in the form of this article. Similar to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Eve Tuck's sharing of personal correspondence in academic writing, we have “ke[pt] back parts [of our exchange] that were just for us, and fine-tun[ed] other portions for a public audience” (Simpson, 2016, p. 19). In speaking to a public audience, we weave excerpts of our written expressions together with the writings and

insights of other scholars to tell a story of Indigenous mentorship in higher education. In the process of merging expressions of perceptions (Ortiz, 1978), we further embody what Ojibwe scholar Scott Lyons (2000) defines as *rhetorical sovereignty*, which couples the inherent right and ability of a peoples to determine their own communicative needs with the role of literacy in respect to the “goals, modes, styles and languages of public discourse” employed. Enacting in real time, the gifting and receiving of the shawl, we assert, is a form of rhetorical sovereignty.

In the same way that we understand our writing as coming from the heart, we understand the work of mentorship as coming from the heart. We consider a distinction between “being” a mentor “where one is fully engaged in mentoring from a heart level and as a core identity” and “doing” mentoring, “where one engages in a momentary or temporary action that would be defined as an act of mentoring” (Barcus & Crowley, 2012; Straits et al., 2020, p. 156). Through our mentorship relationship, we have cultivated the processes of “coming home to our true selves,” nurtured the development of distinct Indigenous academic identities *within* the academy, and continue to support and sustain these anchored conceptualizations of “our authentic selves” beyond the ivory tower, poignant expressions of emerging scholars in a course titled, Indigenous Well-Being Through Education, at the UArizona.

Notions of (re)membering (Absolon, 2011) ourselves to ancestral ways of doing, and more aptly adapting them to contemporary times and circumstances, demonstrate not only Indigenous thriving, but more so, conducting “good research,” and overall “good work” for and with our own *and* the global community (Wilson, 2008; Ray, 2016) from a sense of Indigenous well-being and reciprocity. Thus, we recognize that we were/are inherently guided by Indigenous paradigms, worldviews, principles, and processes that are “wholistic, relational, inter-relational and interdependent with Indigenous philosophies, beliefs and ways of life” (Absolon & Dion, 2015, p.



23). Grounded in this understanding, we extend an invitation to readers to continue listening to our story told from Sheilah's perspective as mentor and giver of the shawl and Kari's perspective as mentee and recipient of the shawl, an encompassing symbolic expression of Indigenous sovereignty, resilience, and love in a space of higher education.

### **COMING TO THE UNIVERSITY, FINDING KIN, AND BUILDING COMMUNITY**

KARI: When I was preparing to go to graduate school, one of my mentors at the time advised me to seek who I wanted to work with rather than seeking programs by discipline, so I reached out. Prior to coming to UArizona to work with you, I completed a master's degree at another institution. I had attended that university to work with a non-Indigenous linguist who was renowned for research on Indigenous languages, including Chikashshanompa'. While I found access to information about my language at the university, this institution was devoid of the Indigenized space within which to claim and develop an identity as a Chikashsha scholar (Chew et al., 2015). When I chose to pursue my doctorate, my priority was not finding a mentor with expertise in Chikashshanompa' but rather finding a mentor who would support me on my personal path. I chose the Language, Reading, and Culture (LRC) program in the UArizona COE because I wanted to work with *you* – a Hopi woman doing the type of research I also wanted to do. I even declined an offer from a university very close to my Nation because LRC was the only program which could offer that.

We share a common passion for and commitment to attending to our ancestral languages; understanding and addressing Indigenous language shift, loss as well as identifying potential sites of vitality are at the core of our work at a very personal level on behalf of our own communities as well as a broader issue for Indigenous Peoples globally. Our academic journeys have been

entwined with strengthening our own linguistic and cultural identities hence offers prospects for reclamation of Indigeneity through language in institutional spaces. Thus, we recognize such institutional spaces as significant if not essential to our aspirations to contribute to community survival, renewal and continuity through language reclamation/ revitalization efforts as an emerging field within Indigenous education. Moreover, Kari's search for mentors to encourage, support and guide her academic aspirations also brought attention to the *potential* she brought into our scholarly community; potential to cultivate, nurture, and protect as well as to *harness* the richness of her distinct cultural identity as assets for inspiration and hope (Wright et al., 2019).

KARI: I remember coming into LRC and this established community of practice. You were assigned as my advisor, and you informed me that Dr. Perry Gilmore and Dr. Leisy Wyman would also be on my committee. I felt taken care of because I didn't even have to ask any of you to be on my committee- you all just came around me. Not only that but you brought me into your professional circles. In the first year of my program, I was going to conferences with you all and meeting other Indigenous scholars whose work I had read and valued. As a committee, which later came to include Dr. Ofelia Zepeda, you all offered me a lot. The mentorship relationship with you and my other committee members was vastly different than what I had experienced in my master's program. Rather than a transactional, "banking model" of mentorship (Freire, 1970), in which advisors treat advisees as "repositories of information to whom they make 'deposits'" (Mullen, 2009, p. 16), the relationship was reciprocal and envisioned in terms of kinship. I'm deeply appreciative of these experiences because they shaped who I am as a scholar today.

Scholars in the field of Indigenous education have successfully paved inroads within academia, creatively using programmatic and academic strategies to foster a *scholarly community identity*, “seeing oneself as a legitimate and fully participating member of a scholarly community” (Gilmore cited in Galla et al., 2014, p. 7). It is an intergenerational mentoring process and strategy recurrent, modeled and sustained through connections and relationships among Indigenous students and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous established scholar-mentors.

Indigenous scholars in academia, themselves, have mapped their collegial relationships onto Indigenous kin relationships. For example, one group of Indigenous women scholars in higher education describe themselves as part of a “collective sisterhood” that connects their “identities, values, and teachings as Indigenous women” to their scholarship (Shotton et al., 2018, p. 636). Finding kinship is vital to creating and sustaining a sense of community within the academy. At the same time, it is critical to note that, because kinship differs across communities, these relationships cannot be imposed but must emerge from a mutual understanding of the relationship and the responsibilities that come with these relational roles (Windchief & Brown, 2017, p. 339).

Through the mentorship relationship, Sheilah came to characterize her relationship with mentees as a godmothering relationship. This affirms that mentorship is a “kinship responsibility” that “is about the relationship, and it has no ties except respect and caring” (Barcus & Crowley, 2012, p. 75; Kuokkanen, 2007). Because mentorship is a reciprocal relationship, in which both parties invest in the relationship to teach and learn from each other, “it is hard to see where [mentorship] begins and it can be never ending (Barcus & Crowley, 2012, p. 75; see also Galla et al., 2014). Further, a kinship model of mentorship situates the one-on-one relationship within a larger network of extended family; Kari as part of an academic genealogy (Sugimoto et al., 2011)

benefited from the mentorship that Sheilah had received as a graduate student and subsequently in her transition into a tenure-line position.

SHEILAH: Your letter takes me back to my transition from graduate student to a tenure-line faculty member in the LRC Department. This was significant for the fact that there was no position open for application; rather, I was on a job search and had short listed at Arizona's two other public universities. Both of these positions were in American Indian Studies. Dr. Norma González, Department faculty approached me at a conference we were both attending. She, Dr. Perry Gilmore, and others had worked together to create a "target hire" position to keep me at the UArizona premised in my work in Indigenous language revitalization. Although a graduate student in American Indian Studies for my masters and doctoral programs, I had established a long-term relationship with LRC faculty through my coursework – Dr. Teresa McCarty, my Chair, and Drs. Perry Gilmore, Leisy Wyman and Ofelia Zepeda in the American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI) housed in the COE. This was truly a significant moment for me because while my attraction to both NAU and ASU was to join their community of Indigenous scholars, the deciding factor was the message conveyed by the LRC to support my continuing work in Indigenous language education and specifically in Indigenous language revitalization.

Through a network of kinship relationships, Indigenous and allied scholars engage in community-making and -sustaining at the university and, in turn, strengthen our aspirations as community-engaged scholars and in advancing capacity building. Established scholar-mentors working with, supporting, and promoting Indigenous students in such scholarly community spaces such as LRC and AILDI demonstrate the potential for cultivating and establishing a pathway from

graduate school to career. Working from and within a sense of kinship and being in good relation to each other, we are able to draw on our aspirational capital, to “hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77), to navigate the university in ways that manifest in Indigenous transformational resistance, and to acquire “skills and credentials through formal education...in a way that enable[s] [us] to serve [our] tribal communities” (Brayboy, 2005b, p. 194).

The community of practice model was broadened, informed, and influenced by the notions of *empowerment* – voice (heard and to have influence) and agency – of our late colleague, Dr. Richard Ruiz (see Combs & Nicholas, 2012). He pointed out that “empowerment” is about teacher-mentors, scholar-mentors, using their agency and power in creating the conditions and environment for students to empower themselves through participation and engagement in transformative possibilities. Such transformative possibilities are cultivated and nurtured within Indigenous *cultural spaces* (Pihama et al., 2019) and into which incoming students are welcomed by a close-knit network of scholars and practitioners who will prepare them to carry the torch forward.

## **BELIEVING IN ONE ANOTHER WHILE NAVIGATING INSTITUTIONAL CONVENTIONS**

KARI: I have one memory that stands out in terms of your mentorship. At the beginning of my program, I took my qualifying exam, which one of my other committee members referred to as “the last friendly exam” of the PhD program. The next exam, the comprehensive exam, was at the end of my coursework. The exam never felt “unfriendly,” but it was certainly more rigorous. I worked hard to prepare as an individual to demonstrate to the committee that I had gained the body of knowledge necessary to move to the next

stage of my training as a scholar. Prior to the exam, we met and you gifted me a root. You told me how to use it as medicine for protection as I went through the exam. This moment was important because it made the exam feel like less of an institutionally-mandated event and more like a rite of passage on my journey as a rising Indigenous scholar. The process became ceremony.

SHEILAH: Academic discourse and conventions have been and remain confounding to me. I recall my own comprehensive exam as extremely intimidating – to have my assumed “understanding” of the body of literature/knowledge that would “inform” and/or “substantiate” my community’s need of language revitalization was largely from an external, western knowledge base; the Indigenous scholarship was barely emerging. As much of the literature as I was introduced to and consumed, I found it challenging to internalize much that would help me demonstrate my comprehensive knowledge base. I struggled to “argue,” or speak coherently on the body of knowledge; this was a profoundly humbling experience. This humbling experience continues to play a significant role in my mentorship. The “root,” or “honngaapi” as it is called by the Hopi people, is one that I keep on hand as a form of “protection” as my mother explained it – protection of our intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual energy – as a shield from and against hurtful energies that surround us. If one believes, one stands empowered in mind, body, heart, and spirit.

Historically, institutional conventions in higher education have conveyed in both implicit and explicit ways that Indigenous peoples, thus Indigenous students are not capable of knowledge production – Indigenous knowledges and perspectives remain invalidated and contested. Such messages are detrimental to the cultural integrity of Indigenous peoples, communities and for

Indigenous students, “plant seeds of self-doubt that are difficult to shake” (Wright et al., 2019, p. 11).

Our interactions around mandatory exams for doctoral students, including the comprehensive exam, reflect ways we navigated institutional conventions from a strong belief in one another manifest in advocacy and protection. The doctoral exam process reflects “the dominant epistemological position of the university” and exposes “conflicting cultural values in the production of knowledge for Indigenous doctoral students” (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 117). The discourse of “comprehensive” exam is not holistic. It separates life and work experience from the intellectual and dismisses the situated knowledge of Indigenous students (Harrison et al., 2017). In addition, to couple it with the term “exam” positions the learner against abstract standardization – whose knowledge is valued and considered as comprehensive. Similar tensions surround the dissertation “defense” – what are we defending and against whom? Through our Indigenous mentor-mentee relationship, we claimed the space around this required doctoral exam and reframed it within our cultural contexts. Key to this claiming of space was the gift of a root, a protective medicine – a *remedy* (Kuokkanen, 2007).

The gift paradigm is not recognized or understood within the oppressive institutional conventions of the academy.

KARI: As a doctoral student, I felt compelled at particular moments of transition in my program – such as the comprehensive exam – to give gifts to my mentors who guided me. A practice that I began while doing research in my community as a master’s student was to gift my beadwork to those I worked with as “a natural gesture of reciprocity for the gifts of time and sharing knowledge and experience” (Chew & Hinson, forthcoming). When I beaded, I thought “about each person and the good work they

were doing for our language [so that] they would also have a piece of my heart entrusted to them” (Chew & Hinson, forthcoming). Because I understood the mentorship I received as a gift, I wanted to reciprocate by offering my own gift from the heart. I beaded a pen for each of my committee members and presented it to them following my comprehensive exam. While this practice was culturally-grounded, it was not understood or always welcomed in the university. As a graduate student, the message I received from the university was that it was not appropriate to give or accept gifts within hierarchical relationships, as these gifts could be construed as bribery. It was difficult to navigate gifting as cultural integrity and gifting within the ethical framework imposed by the university.

This moment offers a glimpse into the dynamic process of *conscientization*, or consciousness-raising (Smith, 2003), assumed over and in the course of establishing an enduring and reciprocal mentor-advisee relationship stemming from Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. *Community* needs, aspirations, and preferences are privileged, and “our own ways” are positioned as critically relevant and significant in the academy. We affirm the need to “revitaliz[e] the mentoring and learning-teaching relationships that foster real and meaningful human development and community solidarity” (Alfred, 2009, p. 56). In this way, Indigenous mentorship is not a top-down hierarchy, but a long-term relationship nurtured and sustained by both the mentor and the mentee.

As Sami scholar, Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) describes, “a central principle of Indigenous philosophies, [is] that of ‘giving back’” (p. 44). While Kuokkanen describes “giving back” in terms of sharing the benefits of research with and for Indigenous communities, in Kari’s case, the gift and gifting of her beadwork to each member of her committee encapsulated a formal



acknowledgment of the enduring and reciprocal relationships garnered with and within the scholarly community of mentors. The gifting of the beaded pen was a “heartfelt” gesture of reciprocal gratitude for “tending to” the potential she brought into the higher education spaces; holding fast to that potential becomes the greatest asset for doing the important work in the transition from graduate studies to career (Wright et al., 2019). Kuokkanen rightly asks, “how can we convince the academy to sincerely accept the gift of [I]ndigenous epistememes?” (p. 44).

### **EPILOGUE**

KARI: It has been four years since my graduation. I am now beginning my first year as a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma, an institution situated near the Chickasaw Nation. Along my way, I have continually returned to your words to remind myself that my integrity as a Chikashsha woman and scholar is my strength, and it is not bound to any academic institution. While the path forward is always difficult, it is less so because of those who have come before. The other day, I received a note from you in the mail with words in Hopi meaning, “Thank you, you accomplished tremendously on all our behalf.” I felt emotional because it has been a struggle to get to the place where I feel that I’m supposed to be. I am thankful to you for your mentorship. As we say in this article, the graduation ceremony was a culmination – of a mentorship relationship focused on arriving on that graduation stage – and a beginning – of a collegial relationship characterized by ongoing guidance and support. I am also thankful to the many others who are not named in this article but have advocated for me along the way. The chair of my new department recently posed the question to new faculty, “Who do you want to be as a mentor?” I will hold onto your words. I plan to hang the shawl in my new office so that I can share this

story with students. I also want to have it as a present reminder of this happy moment and the responsibilities that I am now taking on as I transition into a new role as a mentor.

SHEILAH: Nukwang Talongva, Kari. First, I want to begin by expressing that I am deeply humbled by your story primarily because I have and often still feel sorely inadequate in mentoring students for such important work centered in community yet undertaken in entrenched institutional ideologies and conventions. But, it is a struggle I embrace with heart and soul, to persist and take a stand against continued colonization and internal colonization as an Indigenous woman because I am embracing a critical consciousness of how Indigenous women have been at the forefront and continue to stand up for their children and people. Just writing this is empowering.

As an Indigenous faculty in higher education spaces, I have assumed various academic roles along Kari's graduate school trajectory: academic advisor, course instructor, comprehensive and dissertation chair, grant supervisor and subsequently, colleague. However, this opportunity to *mentor*, "guide" an emerging Indigenous scholar along this continuum has manifested in more than roles but guidance through various "rites of passage" that has cultivated an enduring and reciprocal relationship, one in which I am positioned into a role that I liken to the Hopi concept of a "ceremonial mother" wimyu'at, or godmother, who assumes the role of mentorship and induction into a ceremonial domain.

In the Hopi context, a ceremonial mother has been observed to have knowledge, skills, and characteristics that a family desires for their child and thus approaches the individual with a request to share her knowledge, skills and cultivate similar attributes in their child. Essentially, the potential godmother is gifted with a child to whom she pledges a lifelong commitment of support in developing their talents and potential in ceremonial domains. In a reciprocal fashion, as a

mentor, I have watched and observed Kari and found that she is guided by a deep commitment to her community, taken this sense of “giving back” to heart, and in times of uncertainty sought assistance, listened and followed with acting on guidance given.

In every way, Kari has demonstrated a confidence to do not only important work for her community but to also assume and carry on the role of mentor in new academic spaces. Also, in a reciprocal fashion, this mentorship opportunity has led to a critical consciousness about the evolution of a mentorship paradigm that resurfaces and privileges the logic of the gift paradigm and is informed by an Indigenous episteme. More importantly, I borrow from Cochiti Pueblo scholar, Michelle Suina (2017), to articulate this experience as *coming to know*, “utilizing myself as a starting point of change [that] makes the most sense on my journey” (p. 86) in continuing to establish a scholarly community that welcomes and anticipates the role of cultivating and nurturing the potential of each and every student who comes into higher education. This has been the “medicine.”

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