

Transcript of Monica Zegers, PhD, talk at Commencement 2022

Prof. Kris Gutierrez

Now I'd like to introduce the doctor of philosophy speaker, Mónica Zegers. Monica is a PhD candidate from the Human Development Education Program at BSE. She was born and raised in Chile, where she earned a BA in psychology and a professional degree in clinical psychology from the Pontificia Universidad Católica of Chile. She later worked for two years as a therapist for children with developmental learning disabilities while completing a graduate diploma in pediatric neuropsychology. From 2014 to 20, Monica worked as a researcher at the Institute of Human Development at UC Berkeley. Her work focused on evaluation of parenting programs for Latino families in the US. She started her PhD in 2016, and in 2019 she earned an MA in Human Development and Education from our school.

Monica's dissertation focuses on Chilean parents' social cultural literacy activities with their children. She also has research projects examining the intersections between parent practices and childhood literacy development and early detection and diagnosis of dyslexia among Spanish speaking populations. Please give a warm welcome to Monica Zegers.

Mónica Zegers

Thank you, professor. What an honor to be here. So coming from a country where PhD's are kind of a new thing, I was often asked, even by close family members and friends, "What does a PhD in education do?" Maybe you were asked the same thing. And I would argue that a PhD in education fulfills the same three roles that every educator plays: to teach, to lead, and to serve.

I would also argue that each educator chooses their own way of fulfilling these roles based on their lived experiences and on their values. Before coming into graduate school and through our years in it, we are exposed to events that shape the type of educators we want to be. And today I would like to talk about three experiences that reflect the way that I was taught, led, and served.

First, to teach. I was taught to reflect profoundly on the topic being studied in an effort to capture their complexity. As an undergrad, we are often instructed how to think about certain topics. Here at Berkeley, on the other hand, we were challenged to have more questions than answers. We were taught to think critically, creatively. We were guided to the discovery that in science, often answers are not yet settled.

Second, to lead. I was led by example to strive for excellence through continuous efforts of self improvement. As students, we often have the misconception that once you have achieved the level of knowledge and status that our professors here have every content you produce is close to perfection. My advisor, however, models that you can always do better. So, for example, she was invited to contribute to a handbook, and she extended this invitation to a classmate and to myself.

We submitted a chapter, and we received positive feedback exclusively. And while many people would have been content with the work done, my adviser decided that we could do better. She asked our peers

for feedback, and even after we addressed their suggestions, she continued to look for relevant evidence. Great role model.

Finally, to serve. I was served with profound care and respect as a human being. My husband and I are international students. We completed this program. We started the program with a nine month old baby and we had a second baby in our third year. And likely like many of you we had sick children, sleepless nights, visa problems, money issues, challenges with fulfilling our milestones, and more.

But at the same time we had professors, peers, family members and administrators that went above and beyond to support us; had family members and friends that frequently checked up on me. I have peers who review my work over and over and over again. I have professors who sacrifice their time and I think especially their sleep to meet some of my needs. And administrators who are extremely supportive through daring times. Now that we are closing an incredible period of our life

it's also an amazing time to reflect about the experiences that we have lived. So I would like to invite my fellow graduates to look back and reflect on the ways they were taught, led, and served.

What lessons did they transmit to you, your peers, your friends, your family and your professors? What people marked you? What values did you build up? Meditating upon these events, I hope will help us to continue to decide what kind of educators we want to be. And in this reflection we might discover that it's easier to think of ways to teach and to lead than serve because of our positions as scientists and educators.

Nevertheless, as Gabriela Mistral, Chilean educator, poet, and Nobel Laureate, splendidly stated "There is above all the beautiful, the immense joy of serving." She, as an educator, calls us to the following, and I apologize for the translation. "Where there is a tree to plant, plant it yourself. Where there is an error to amend, amend it yourself. Where there is an effort that everyone avoids, accept it. Be the one who separates the cumbersome stone from the road. Be the one who separates the hatred between the hearts and the difficulties from the problem."

What a challenge is Gabriela Mistral inviting us to accept. I am sure that accepting it will give us unique experiences and we will use the richness of these new lived experiences to continue to become unique, competent, incredible professionals as we were unique, competent and incredible professionals (students). And I wish you all the best on this endeavor.

Congratulations graduates.

(Audience clapping.)