



TRANSCRIPT

**“When I let someone into my house,  
you become my family.”**

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GUEST SPEAKER

**Fernanda Leporace**  
*Owner, Paleta Family Day Care*

HOST

**Kate MacCrimmon**  
*Public Humanities Fellow*  
*Center for the Humanities, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

*Transcript made with assistance by Rev.com*

\*\*\* part 1 \*\*\*

Fernanda: Thank you for the opportunity first. I started doing child care in 2004. I had a child in 2002, and I wanted to care for him. But I was working at a different place and I didn't know about child care until I found a person that helped me to care for my son. She was a family child care provider, and I said, oh wow, what is this? Because where I come from, I've never seen anything like this. She told me about it, and explained about how to become a family child care provider. I can do that. I started taking classes and I applied (for daycare classes) actually in 2003. I took some classes. I applied for a child care center. When I moved to the States from Argentina. I started doing family child care in 2004. I worked at a center and it all started because, I was going to have a child. This was in 2003. I mean 2002, and in 2003 I started looking for child care because I had to work. I was pregnant and we didn't know what we were going to do, or how we were going to take care of my son, because we didn't know the system. We were new in the United States. So, I have my son - my husband and I will take turns for the first year. We took turns, taking care of him. Then when I started looking for options, I found out about family child care, and I found this beautiful place with this family child care provider who took care of my son for about seven months. I thought it was amazing that she could take care of my son and they actually were like family to us. So I asked her how do you do this, what do you need? I think I can do this and take it off my son and take other children. I started taking classes. I applied to a center to gain some experience. Once I learned about family child care. I thought, oh I can do this and take it away. I used to be a teacher, so it was what I wanted it to do. So, I started taking classes, applied to a child care center to have my son with me. I worked there for three years while I was getting ready to start my own business. That's how it all began. In 2007, I got certified and accredited. I could then get licensed because I lived in a town house. Little by little, I just started thinking about new ways, looked for another space, rented a house, and became licensed; and here I am!

Kate M.: Here you are! That's quite a journey. It sounds like when you first moved here from Argentina - you had been a teacher in Argentina?

Fernanda: I was an art teacher but it was for middle school.

Kate M.: So, you had been an art teacher in a middle school. Then you came here and then you were pregnant and needed to have a place for your son, took care of him - sounds like you were tag teaming with your partner, going back and forth, and then got interested in early childhood. You worked at a center for three years while you were kind of getting ready to open up your own place. Then you said

you were certified because you were in a townhouse, so you weren't able to be licensed?

Fernanda: I wasn't able, because of the building codes.

Kate M.: What were the building codes that said you couldn't be licensed? Do you remember? Was it the fence? Because sometimes with licensing you have to have a fence. If you were in a rental, sometimes landlords are not very understanding or supportive and they won't, they won't give you a fence.

Fernanda: No, this was actually nice. They wouldn't allow it because my house was attached to another household on both sides. I think it was to one side, then it would apply, but because I was in between two houses, I couldn't. The fence rule didn't exist at that time. After a year I moved to a house and then I got my license.

Kate M.: So, that's how you became a family child care provider. How long have you been doing this work?

Fernanda: As a family child care provider, since 2007. Yes, because between 2004 and 2007, I worked at a center as a teacher. But as a family child care provider, it's been 13 years.

Kate M.: Yes, how was it different from the center that you worked at? What makes it different from all other kinds of child care? What makes one family child care provider different from another one? Because there's many child care providers, but you're special and unique because it reflects you and your values and all the things that you believe in. You work long hours every day and that's different.

Fernanda: I think one important thing is that the name says it, family - family child care. Each family is different. Each family child care is different. I mean the difference between family and center. For me personally, thinking about it, of what I do as my job, is more work, because I have to prepare meals, I have to do laundry, clean the house. Working at a center, you have other people taking care of that - like cleaning, the meals, the laundry. I still have to think about activities that we'll do with the children, I still plan for the children, meet with the families - parent provider discussions about the child. I think what makes the biggest difference to me between family child care and a center; first, that is the continuity of care that you have with the children. In centers, children go from one teacher to another, every year. In family child care, I have the children with me at two weeks old sometimes until they're five. So, like they become part of my family. I think that's the big difference between centers is that when I let someone into my house, you become my family, it's my house. In the family, you also get to know each other

because it's a small group, they get to know each other. We do a lot of get together - it's a small community that we create as family child care providers, in my experience. Getting to know the child better every year that passes. In contrast with every year, having a new child walking into your room, when you are in a center - every year you have a new child coming to your room. It's great to get to know more children - you get to know more children, just a little bit, for a little bit. In family child care, in my experience, I get to know these children for the first five years of their life.

*So for Fernanda, FCC begins when a child is a new infant, it's what she expects to be a lifelong friendship and partnership where she plays a major role in that family's life. By loving and caring for that child, the families love and care about her back making it a reciprocal relationship. In addition, she really treasures the length of time she gets to know a child over the five years she has them and even gets her own son involved in the joys and challenges of being a provider.*

Fernanda: Like my son, he has fed every baby a bottle, for the children that I care for. He picks up babies because he's so used to it.

Kate M.: What a gift! It's sad to say in our culture, where for boys and for men, caregiving, isn't like a natural attribute. It's like, it's something that they don't really get that opportunity. So, for your son to just be able to feed babies their bottles and to be able to pick them up and like develop that nurturing side of themselves is such a gift. That's so sweet. Now he's a teen, he's going to carry that through his life. It's changed him forever.

Fernanda: Like today, I was reading a book and one of the children just started crying because he wanted to do something else. He walked away and went to the door and started crying. I guess he started missing mom or dad because I was waiting in there, and I wasn't giving him much attention. So, my son came in and started talking to him and started playing with him. He felt that attention that he needed and he got it. My son gave it to him and that was really sweet.

*It is difficult to imagine situations where teens or older children are given the opportunity to be a special somebody to an infant or very young child but that's exactly what happens in FCC where a provider's entire family gets involved in caring for children. In this case, it's natural for Fernanda's son to comfort and care for a child - it teaches about love and care for other people when children are young, setting the standard early. Learning about systems of care from the get-go can have transformative effects for society as a whole. Fernanda talks about how long these caring relationships last and how important that is to her and the children and families she cares for.*

Kate M.: When you think of family child care, you're talking to a new parent, what are the things that come to mind that you'll tell that parent, or maybe somebody in your community about your work and why it's so special?

Fernanda: Good question. I think all that I say makes it special, very special. Relationships, I think the relationships is one of the most important things that make a difference. Those relationships that will last, I still get a letter in the mail every year for Christmas, from most of the families that I work with. Sometimes, like two months ago, I went to Minnesota for a camping trip and I contacted the family that used to come here and they wanted to say hello. They stopped by to see me for a moment. You keep those relationships. In my experience, working at a center, didn't talk to anybody else. Sometimes I'd run into people that I remembered, but they didn't remember me. They were so young they didn't even know who I was. To see them grow, for them to understand and know that, Oh, somebody took care of me. Who took care of me for my first years of life besides my parents and my grandparents? I think my perspective and from what I come from, it's important. I think it's important for children to know that what happened when you were growing up, right? Like, who was there? They spent here at least nine, ten hours a day for five years of their life, right? Eight to twelve hours they sleep right?

*After experiencing working as a child care provider in a center, Fernanda did not find it satisfying because she felt more like a worker and her work went unrecognized or forgotten. As a FCC provider, she has more autonomy, authority, and importance and therefore makes her feel more professional. In a field that has been slow to recognize the ECE workforce, most of whom are women, as professionals, and has even acted to de-professionalize providers through mechanisms such as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems such as YoungStar, FCC providers value the recognition they receive from the families in their care.*

\*\*\* part 2 \*\*\*

Kate M.: We're back with Fernanda for just a few more questions in this interview, just talking about is family child care and what do family child care providers do? One of the things I was hoping you would talk about is how has COVID impacted you in your program and what are the changes that you've made and how has that changed things?

Fernanda: Actually, it impacts, but not as much as I thought it would, or not as much as other providers have been impacted. I think what greatest, what helped not be such a problem for us, for me and the families I work with, is that we communicate. When this all started, I asked them to join me in a Zoom meeting. They all say they could and they wanted to, and we share what we were doing - what each of us were doing from home to stay healthy to avoid contracting the virus. We came up with a plan altogether. My families are amazing. I'm so thankful for the families I have, I work with. So yes, we made a plan. We agreed that wherever we go, we take all the families and children that come to this house with us. So, whatever we're doing, it can affect them too. We trust each other, which has been very important. We trust that everyone of us is doing it.

Kate M.: What was in your plan? What did you include in it?

Fernanda: What we are doing right now is when families come in, I have a sign in the window, a green and red. Is green on one side, red on the other. When it is green, parents can come in. They come in one at a time. A parent and child, come in wearing a mask. Parents wear a mask. They say their good-byes, I take the child to the bathroom to wash hands, the parent grabs a sanitizing wipe, and wipes everything that the parents touched on their way out. When they came in, if they touch the door, then they wipe the door and also disinfectant. I have hand sanitizer outside the gate, so before they enter the gate, they use the hand sanitizer. They wash the child's hands and then on their way out of the bathroom we flip the sign. So, another parent can come in. So, I flip it to red when someone comes in, and when they leave, I turn it back to green.

Kate M.: So, you only have one parent coming in at a time?

Fernanda: Yes, because the space is small in the entrance. To avoid crowding - to avoid having too many people at the same time. So that's what we're doing. It's working. I order most of the groceries online, which is that it's a little bit of a load of work.

Kate M.: It's a, maybe a pain to do?

Fernanda: Yes, because sometimes you don't know what to ask for. So, I've been going to get the milk because I get a different type of milk than I ordered. So, now once a week I just go pick up milk, take care of myself, wear a mask.

Kate M.: So you go pick up the milk once a week?

Fernanda: Yes, but the rest of the groceries - I order them. We have a farm that brings us meat - I have a CSA.

Kate M.: So you feel like with COVID, it's impacted you, but it's promoted a lot more communication and you're talking and sharing information and you come together as a group and agreed to what you're going to do together and to be really careful. Did you end up closing at all?

Fernanda: I never closed.

Kate M.: You never closed.

Fernanda: I say, this is what's happening, what do you think? That's what we talked about on Zoom meeting. I said if you need me, I'm here, but I need everybody to be on the same page, take care of each other, and I won't close. Most of my families were working from home, they need to work. You can't work for nine hours if you have a young child.

Kate M.: Do you feel like parents have been more appreciative of you since COVID?

Fernanda: Yes.

Kate M.: I'm sure they're always appreciative, but it's been so hard for parents since COVID and it just seems like the people who are fortunate enough to have child care must be feeling very grateful to have it.

Fernanda: Yes, please don't close Fernanda! We'll do whatever you want! I think we're all happy with what is happening. It hasn't affected us a lot. Nobody has gotten sick. Actually, last week I sent a survey asking a few questions about if they wanted me to make a plan in case somebody gets sick because I haven't made a plan. With these families, we take things as they come and so if they want to talk together, like when I had that surgery, they all helped. They are amazing.

Kate M.: I know a short while ago you made the decision to close on Fridays. I was wondering if you would be willing to share a little bit, why you wanted to do that? How has it been since you've done that and has it changed things?

Fernanda: Yes, I was reflecting about how I was feeling in the past years, maybe two, three years. I was feeling very tired. I wasn't enjoying my work with the children. I mean, I was enjoying the children, and doing my work, but it was work. I had to go to work, I have to get up, and I was so tired because I didn't have much time for myself. Saturdays, I would find myself cleaning the house and doing laundry, and

having to do grocery shopping, and planning meals for the week and activities, so it was work. I was working every day of the week. So my Satellite consultant.

Kate M.: Your accreditation consultant!

Fernanda: Yes, she asked me, Fernanda, what do you think about closing one day maybe? You can do all the work and try to put it on that day so you have the weekend for yourself. But it took me two years to make that decision and say, okay, you know what I have to do it and that's another thing because of COVID. Because it was too much. What am I doing? Now this is happening, we've got this pandemic. We don't know where the world is going. I had to take care of myself. I decided to close Fridays. I gave a three month notice to my families. They all thought that was amazing. They were all so happy for me. It makes me cry! I wasn't expecting!

Kate M.: No, it's so huge. I mean, I didn't realize that it took two years to make that decision. You have such a depth of care for your families. You care about them so much, making that decision was so hard. I think that what's really interesting is that a lot of people aren't familiar with accreditation, but, but you've been in Madison where they offer accreditation and then having that consultant just kind of support you with, Hey, Fernanda, maybe think about this, think about taking this day off. It's probably going to be just fine, but it was such a big thing like for you to do. But in some ways, that was one of the silver linings of COVID because you were like, wait a minute, I've got all this extra cleaning and I've got to do all these extra things and I just can't keep on.

Fernanda: I always thought, well, they need me, they work. They work Monday through Friday. For them, it was actually the best time for them because they're working from home now and the ones that are not, they just found the way to get there and I didn't lose a single family.

Kate M.: You didn't lose a single family?

Fernanda: No.

Kate M.: That says so much, so much Fernanda.

Fernanda: Definitely. I told them - it's whatever. I gave up my license for Fridays. So I don't go back to work now on Friday.

Kate M.: You said you were feeling really tired. I don't think that people understand you're working at least 10 hours with or nine, ten hours with children. Then that doesn't count all the work before you open and after, when you're cleaning, and then the



weekends. Like you said, you were working every single day. Because you have to go food shopping and then think about your activities and everything. So, there was really not much time for you. So do you think in hindsight that it was probably the best thing ever?

Fernanda: It was the best thing ever! Child care providers should work only four days a week, or three. Some do three days a week. I'm ok with four for now. It's been great!

Kate M.: That was 40 hours a week just with kids when you're working four days a week at ten hours a day. So I mean, that's considered full time.

Fernanda: Yes, I still work on Fridays because I do my taxes and for the following week I go grocery shopping. For me, it's my basic week. I have the whole weekend for myself and I can play with those three days that I have for myself to do the business.

Kate M.: There's so much more flexibility and a little bit of downtime for yourself to recover and just get ready.

Fernanda: The other thing is, if you have an appointment, you want to have to go to the dentist, you have to go to the doctor. We don't have a substitute whenever we need that. There is this program, that has a substitute - that they provide substitutes, but you don't always know if it's going to be possible when you need it. Fridays off for me, I took all my appointments on Fridays and I don't have to ask parents to come later or pick up their children earlier.

Kate: I'm conscious of the fact that your kids are going to wake up soon and we've talked a little longer than I planned. But if there are any last things that you want to say about your work and just, we can also just close.

Fernanda: I think I will go and have a minute break time.

Kate M.: Maybe five minutes if you're lucky! Well Fernando, thank you so much again, and I will talk to you soon and take good care and thank you for your time.

Fernanda: Always, thank you!

\*\*\* end of transcript \*\*\*