



She started at a school where no one wanted to work

Education leader Antoinette Miranda built a career of advocacy by making her own challenges, and others', her personal mission. She's not about to stop now.

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Robin Chenoweth: P.S. 73 in the Bronx. It's the New York City public school Jackie Gleason attended as a child, and one of two schools where Antoinette Miranda got her first job out of her PhD program as a school psychologist. P.S. 73, in district 23, had a reputation in the 1980s.

Antoinette Miranda: I got hired with like 250 other school psychologists. It was just crazy.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: Was that considered, like, not a choice assignment?

Antoinette Miranda: I said to the guy ... I said, tell me something about District 23. I remember the three people looked at each other and changed the subject. ... It was the exact kind of district I wanted to be in.

Robin Chenoweth: Miranda — set to retire in July — helped build Ohio State's highly ranked school psychology program and is now chair of the college's Department of Teaching and Learning. She has stories. Maybe you've watched the scene in the Netflix series *Adolescence*, where the therapist watches a middle schooler toss a chair across the room? One of Miranda's stories goes something like that, but with a much softer ending.

Antoinette Miranda: I still remember this kid's name. ... His first name was Fitzroy and ... really smart, really smart. ... I was doing some counseling, and he tore the whole room up. ... You're kind of this new school psychologist, and I remember thinking, what am I

going to do? And I just really sat there, let him tear the room up. And then he calmed down, and I said, “Now you put everything back where you found it.” He put everything back where he found it. As he was leaving, he said, “So, am I going to see you next week?” ... Those three years were just extremely impactful. And I just really took away a lot of lessons that really have carried me throughout my career.

Robin Chenoweth: Miranda would land at Ohio State as a new faculty member, help elevate school psychology to a nationally ranked and accredited program, lifting school districts and children as she went. She would go to extraordinary lengths to mentor students and colleagues in Ohio and across the country — especially women — who then made great strides in their fields. And, she would suffer a crushing personal loss that she would use to uplift countless lives of women at The Ohio State University, most of whom would never meet her. This is the Ohio State University Inspire Podcast. I’m Robin Chenoweth. Maya Stepnick and Jason Amo Mensah are our student interns. Inspire is a production of the College of Education and Human Ecology.

Robin Chenoweth: Antoinette Miranda grew up in the Columbus Hilltop, one of five children. Her mother studied to be a nurse. Her father had a ninth-grade education.

Antoinette Mirada: He built manholes. People called him the best manhole builder in Columbus.

Robin Chenoweth: Before she started school, her three-year-old brother died from complications associated with Downs Syndrome.

Antoinette Miranda: In some ways, it was my kind of first introduction to disability. But I was pretty young, you know, so didn't know as much. I sort of reflect on it as I've gotten older. ... I feel like I have the oldest child syndrome, so I always knew I was going to go to college, and so my parents are extremely supportive of that.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: And you studied psychology?

Antoinette Miranda: Yeah, I did.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: At University of Cincinnati?

Antoinette Miranda: University of Cincinnati. That was not my initial major. Like many psychology majors, we all think we're going to med school. ... I took a psychology course my sophomore year, and I was like, I love this. And I really found my niche.

Robin Chenoweth: Undergrad led to grad school, then a doctoral degree. If you look at Antoinette Miranda’s career — because so much research was being done and so many policy changes were happening — you can follow the arc of school psychology and disabilities education.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: Was it a practicum that you did in Kentucky?

Antoinette Miranda: We had a practicum. It was in a school for severely ... moderately and severely disabled. ... I actually didn't realize till much later that IDEA, the special ed law, was really new.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: IDEA...

Antoinette Miranda: The first special ed law, Public Law 94-142, that went into effect in 1977. I entered the school psych program in 1980. But it wasn't really till much later in my career that I realized that I was really at the beginning of that law, which really helped explode school psychology, because school psychologists are written into the law to do the cognitive assessment.

Robin Chenoweth: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandated that all school-aged children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education, regardless of the severity of their disability. The law emphasizes that students with disabilities should be educated alongside non-disabled peers as much as possible.

Antoinette Miranda: Kentucky segregated their students with disability, so they were in the process of bringing them back into regular education. ... They did a lot of behavioral interventions, because a lot of students with severe disabilities have a lot of behavioral issues. This was fairly new in school psychology. Consultation, to me, is really the framework for doing behavioral and academic interventions. You're working with teachers.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: When you say consultation, you're not talking about actually consulting with the child or the family.

Antoinette Miranda: No, no. Consulting with the teacher. ... Not a lot of school psychologists were doing this. So it was my first lesson in, if you train teachers to do interventions, they will do it. ... It was amazing. I would go meet with the teachers, help them identify the problem. They would go away and get baseline data. Imagine that! Come back with baseline data; we would develop the intervention; and then they would go back and implement the intervention and take data on it; and we could see if it worked. And so for me, that was a profound experience, because I ended up doing a lot of consultation with school districts around response to intervention, PBIS — positive behavior intervention support — that required this ... what they call this consultation framework. ... I was able to see in my first job that, it works. It became a staple in the school psychology curriculum.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: From there, did you end up going to New York?

Antoinette Miranda: Yeah. So, my fiancé, who became my husband, was a die-hard New Yorker. I knew I was going to New York, and so I moved there. I hadn't finished my dissertation, but I moved there and got a job.

Robin Chenoweth: The District 23 job.

Antoinette Miranda: I wanted to be in a district where I was going to work with kids that may be in poverty, that were culturally diverse. Little did I know the whole district was in poverty. ... We were doing socially just work before we knew that's what it was called. And it was interesting, because all of my workers were minoritized. So I worked with a Puerto Rican education evaluator, an African American social worker, an African American — actually, she's originally from Jamaica — speech therapist. And we really looked at the whole child. And we looked at, if we're going to identify them in special ed, where can we put them that they will grow the most? ... When I reflect on it, I was just really lucky that I had folks that didn't want to just test in place, but looking at, okay, we're going to test them, but we're going to look at what's really the issue. Let's look at their family life. Let's look at where they can be most supported. And I think that was also a foundation that really also helped me as I start thinking about education and what is best for children, because I was blessed to be able to work with an amazing team at both schools.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: You also wrote, though, that a lot of children would be being put into special education who shouldn't have been in special education.

Antoinette Miranda: Yeah, and I can kind of understand that. You remember, this is at the height of Public Law 94-142, and I think this is true, regardless of whether it was in New York or anywhere. People believed that only way I can get a kid help is to put them in special ed. The problem is kids never got out of special ed. ... The case that stands out to me was a kid that got into special ed because of speech language when he was three or four and he stayed in special ed. And the speech therapist started giving him spelling tests, like 10 words, and he was able to spell them. /// We were like, we don't think he has an intellectual disability, and we weren't really certain he had a special, specific learning disability. And, so, this is what I talk about, our socially just practice. So we found a teacher... We said, we want you to take this kid and we want you to mainstream him for the whole day. ... She goes, Yeah, I'll take him. She goes, "And I am going to make him the top kid." He mainstreamed all year, and we would check in with her. He was actually doing better than some of her kids in her classroom. ... Because here's what we recognized: He will never get out of special ed if he doesn't have access to the regular ed curriculum. Now, when I think about that, that became something years later, 20-some years later, where we started to recognize that. ... And this is where I really learned the interplay of poverty, low socioeconomic status, maybe parents that don't have education. Many kids got identified as specific learning disability that really were not. It was just the socioeconomic status that really influenced it greatly.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: What year was this?

Antoinette Miranda: That was 1985 to 1988.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: A lot of changes were happening.

Antoinette Miranda: Oh, yeah, a lot of changes. They were still talking about Child Find. That was a part of the first law that said that many of these kids stayed home. Nope, they didn't come. So now you're trying to find kids that may be severely disabled or disruptive, and now we want to put them in school. In many respects, I realized we were still trying to figure out special ed. Special ed had only been in existence about eight years, and so we were still trying to figure out, how do we do this?

Antoinette Miranda: I tested three kids, and they all went into special ed. ... Their mom, who had had a stroke ... I remember her sister came to the conference because we could not understand her. So I was thinking, how do these kids understand? Single mom... And so I was trying to imagine what that must be like...

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: Did you assess that it was probably because of...

Antoinette Miranda: Oh, I'm absolutely certain.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: ... what was going on at home?

Antoinette Miranda: Yes, absolutely. ... Two of the kids had already been retained. ... There's several cases where I often think about, what happened to those kids?

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: And these were things you were learning on the job.

Antoinette Miranda: I was learning on a job. That wasn't in a training program. Nobody told me about this, but, but lessons I was able to take away, and that I was always able to remember, here's the things we need to be cautious of, here's what we need to be aware of.

Robin Chenoweth: These experiences left a deep mark on Miranda. The faces, the names, the stories, figuring out best practices before they had even been researched. And then came the nudge to take her skills to a new level—to teach others to become school psychologists. A flyer from Columbia University encouraged Miranda to apply for a teaching position. She did. But at a National Association of School Psychologists conference, someone from Ohio State said a position was opening in the university's school psychology program. Miranda was offered the Columbia job ... but turned it down. Then, she got the position at Ohio State.

Antoinette Miranda: It was kind of surreal, because there was no plan to move to Ohio, and within two months, my husband and I were moving to Ohio.

Robin Chenoweth: And then, her world shifted. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, academia was very male-centric. Miranda—30 years old, a woman of color with a Latina

last name — was plunged into a system with no guideposts and no roadmap, especially for a woman like her.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: So, this was your first foray into academia. Was it what you expected?

Antoinette Miranda: The reality that I realized is I didn't know the difference between a Research One and a teaching university. Obviously, Ohio State's a Research One, and there was no mentoring, and so I literally was spending my time trying to figure out how to develop a research agenda.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: Back then were there that many women, even in Ohio State, in the College of Education? And then also that you're Black... right?

Antoinette Miranda: Yeah.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: Right?

Antoinette Miranda: Yeah. ... Being African American, here was the impact: Is that you were on every single committee, every minority student wanted to have a talk with you. "Can you mentor me?" And I was really big on mentoring, especially after my own experience. But I think gender, in terms of having children, had the greater impact on my career than being African American.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: In what way?

Antoinette Miranda: There weren't very many women. So, I was really the first woman in my department to get pregnant and to have children. And you did not talk about it. You did not bring them to campus. It was almost like they existed in the background. ... When I was going up for promotion and tenure, a faculty member that I had tremendous respect for, and I thought had empathy, and was kind, said to me, not that I would ever do this, but said, make sure you don't talk about having children in your promotion and tenure document, because people will see that as an excuse. ... And I was so shocked. ... I realized that that was really the culture of the department, and really, I'm going to say, the college and the university.

Penny Pasque: I think it's called the dance of identities.

Robin Chenoweth: Professor Penny Pasque researches women in higher education in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program. She is director of the QualLab Research Center.

Penny Pasque: One of our alums talks about the dance of identities for women in higher education, and you have all these multiple identities. Antoinette Miranda is a woman, person of color, mother, faculty member tenure track, doing this dance of identities, where

you have all these multiple pressures on you, and it is very different than it, than it really should be. ... I think about the research that I have done, and the women who have talked about feeling like they're, they're fighting, that it's life or death, in the sense of academia, to make that change. That it was dangerous to be a woman in the field. That it was dangerous to speak up about things like maternity leave in a space where then you could get relegated to the margins. That it definitely had an impact then. And as we take a look at some of the research about women in national policy conversations and in higher education institutions, women's ideas still get reframed, redefined and also silenced.

Robin Chenoweth: Antoinette Miranda did have children while she was working toward tenure. Her daughter was born early, in 1990. There was no maternity leave at Ohio State or really, any university. The Family Medical Leave Act had yet to be enacted. But her career was advancing well. As an assistant professor, she received a major federal grant to train graduate students to work with children with developmental and learning disabilities. She started a longstanding partnership with the federal Head Start program and received a teaching award. She was applying the lessons she learned in New York to impact urban schools in central Ohio. And then, in 1993, she was pregnant with twins and found herself in an impossible situation. She went into preterm labor at 27 weeks.

Antoinette Miranda: I was in the hospital and they said, "You're here for the long term."

Robin Chenoweth: Her graduate students scrambled to do the year-end update for her grant. But her babies were born anyway.

Antoinette Miranda: They came November 19, and my, the one twin, passed away within 24 hours...

Robin Chenoweth: Her newborn daughter was dead. Her baby son was struggling to survive.

Antoinette Miranda: I came back winter quarter with that child in the NICU.

Robin Chenoweth with Antoinette Miranda: So, you were working...

Antoinette Miranda: Yes, while he was in the NICU. And I could not drive, so I actually had students taking me to the NICU to visit him. And they released him on January 15. It was the coldest day of the year, and my in-laws were not coming till February 1 to help me take care of him. So, what's really crazy is I held school psych classes at my house. ... The chair never asked me about, "Why don't you take some time off?" And I simply did not talk about it and figured it out by myself. ... So, I think the point is that there was no infrastructure in the university. I didn't even know who to go to, so I just kind of figured it out.

Robin Chenoweth: She kept working, doing that dance of identities. Researcher. Advisor to growing numbers of students working with children who have mental health concerns and

learning-disabilities. Mother of two, including, now, a child of her own with disabilities. I asked Penny Pasque about being a woman in academia then and now.

Robin Chenoweth with Penny Pasque: Antoinette told me that most people didn't even know she had a child who died. To me, I can't even imagine that happening now, and I wonder if it's because we have a lot of women in leadership roles here, and we have a lot of women as faculty here.

Penny Pasque: I turn to the literature that says we're not in as good of a space as we would all hope to be. There is more work to be done. And yes, about having more women in leadership roles, I think the college is wonderful in that way. We do have a lot of women in leadership roles. I also think about the women in the work that they're carrying, or any leader on campus. When you're carrying the workload that you have, doing 2, 3, 4 jobs, how healthy is that for you as a person? ... If you indicate a weakness or you're not up to do the job, or you have to get home early ... then you're making up for it later at night; you're making up for it earlier in the morning. You're trying to make sure that nobody sees that crack, because if they do, might that then bite you when you're going up for a tenure and promotion or in the next department chair decision?

Robin Chenoweth: But eventually Miranda did show her vulnerability at a gathering at the house of then-Dean Nancy Zimpher. Her infant son was there.

Antoinette Miranda: He was just a year old, had had some major surgery, and he was with me, and some people were talking about, I don't know, going to a play or something. They asked me about going, and I said, I can't go because I don't have anybody to really take care ... but I said, to be honest, I am on the verge, if you keep talking to me, I said, I might start crying.

Robin Chenoweth: Zimpher and other college leaders quickly arranged a special research assignment that allowed others to teach her classes while Miranda continued her research. It was a game changer. Miranda later got tenure and continued to push for education advances for differently abled children, eventually consulting with 19 central Ohio districts. Also, she joined a committee to bring maternity leave to the university. Penny Pasque.

Penny Pasque: Ohio State was not alone. Every institution was pushing for change at different points in time. ... Policies are done on an institutional level, institutional basis. And you also had women from across the country in higher ed banding together, organizations, people talking together. But you also have to do the work at your individual institution. ... I definitely see that in Dr. Miranda, where she has touched a lot of lives. ... She's there as somebody who has worked through it, knows the policies, has also changed the policies. To your point, Robin, I think about the, how many people at this university have taken advantage of the maternity leave? Well, it's there because she worked on that committee, because she pushed for that to happen.

Robin Chenoweth: Here's the other thing Antoinette Miranda did: While she continued to build Ohio State's school psychology program with a focus on urban education and social justice, she helped reshape the culture of her field. Women were pouring into school psychology. She mentored them in ways that she wasn't mentored.

Kisha Radliff: She's someone that just really draws you in.

Robin Chenoweth: Kisha Radliff, now associate professor of school psychology at Ohio State, was interviewed by Miranda in 2007.

Kisha Radliff: She's such a giving person, kind, caring. She drove me around, showed me places, and talked with me and hosted me. And I also was like, wow, she's a Black woman, and she's a professor at OSU, and it was huge to me. ... Her continual focus, to integrate it in whatever she's doing, is really in relation to diversity, cultural diversity Whether that's students of color, students who identify with the LGBTQ plus community, students who are first generation. She's an advocate and supports and lifts those individuals up, and she mentors those individuals. ... We see all the things she's doing, and those are all things that she's passionate about, which is why she continues to do it.

Desiree Vega: I took a Greyhound bus from Binghamton to Ohio State to Columbus.

Robin Chenoweth: PhD graduate Desiree Vega, now associate professor at University of Arizona.

Desiree Vega: Dr. Miranda really took me under her wing, as if, like I was her kid. ... I felt like she felt like some personal responsibility to make sure that I felt like Columbus would be home, that the program would be home, that I would stay. I would be successful in the program. She would invite us to her house to do her research team meetings. She very much like, integrated us into her family, with her kids. You know, her husband coached, and so we would go to games. And so, she made it super intentional to be part of, you know, her world outside of the academic space as well. It's been almost 20 years and that impact, like, has stayed with me for so long.

Jina Yoon: She didn't think twice about mentoring me.

Robin Chenoweth: Jina Yoon — Vega's department head at University of Arizona — sought Miranda's advice when she took the administrative role.

Jina Yoon: She was very generous with her time. And she was already busy, you know, with her responsibility at the department. I remember one of our meetings that we were doing on Zoom. She had a lot of things, and she was coming from other meetings. She just sat down in the backyard. ... She was just right there, focusing on what we are talking about.

Robin Chenoweth: Kelly Capatosto was Miranda's advisee when she decided school psychology was not for her.

Kelly Capatosto: I remember feeling like, “Oh, I'm so nervous to tell my advisor about this.” But she had, you know, just held herself out as such an open person. I just was so nervous, and she's like, “Okay, great. Let's do what we can to make you happy and feel fulfilled in your career.” ... I always talk about that moment, actually, every time I mentor other students, or talk about my career path, just being such a pivotal moment. And she was there, you know, talking with me and kind of brainstorming the whole time.

Robin Chenoweth: Capatosto graduated with a law degree from Harvard in 2024. So, you might see the through-line here. Antoinette Miranda has always looked for the person whom others might overlook. The child who needed to be mainstreamed so he could advance. The far-from-home master's student who needed to find her bearings. The woman who needed her confidence bolstered so that she could make a career move. And she didn't stop at academia. From 2016 to 2024, she served on the Ohio Board of Education, representing all Ohio school children. There, she fiercely advocated for the rights of trans students when almost no one else stood up for them. This was just another facet of the advocacy she always has staked her passions upon.

Antoinette Miranda: Boy, did I find the discipline and career that has been so rewarding and that I've continued to be very passionate about. ... I just feel blessed that I, that I chose it. It's been a great ride.

Robin Chenoweth: And for Miranda, there is no retirement. Not really. She's running again for public office and has plans to volunteer at her neighborhood school. To read more about the extraordinary career of Antoinette Miranda, use the link in our episode notes.

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