STRONG OPPORTUNITIES, REAL SUCCESS: ADDRESSING EQUITY AND JUSTICE FOR RACIALLY MINORITIZED STUDENTS

Laura I. Rendón
Equity Coach, Solution Network: Strong Start to Finish
Keynote Presentation

Strong Start to Finish Learning Network Convening
May 3, 2022
RESEARCH—INEQUITABLE PLACEMENT, POLICY & PRACTICE

• Placement policy and practice—most significant contributors to inequitable student outcomes (Brathwaite & Edgecombe, 2018).

• More than half of the degree completion gap between white students and black & Latino students in a California community college districts is explained by differences in level of placement (i.e., number of levels below college level of the first remedial math and English course in which student enrolled (Stoup, 2015).

• Traditional placement test-cut score policies can misassign students in math and English (Scott-Clayton, Costa & Belfield, 2014).

• Counselors without racial mindfulness can reinforce stereotypes about white students as intelligent and deserving of higher placements and Latinx students as lower in ability and requiring remediation (Maldonado, 2019).
• Equity reforms often benefit more advantaged student groups (Raftery & Hout, 1996).

• Students enrolled in Texas Dana Center Math Pathways courses—more likely to be White and female than students in non-DCMP courses signaling inequality in terms of subgroup access to reformed developmental math pathways (Schudde & Meiselman, 2019).

• After a state-wide developmental reform effort, black students earned about 9 fewer college credits after 5 terms compared to white students. Lowest placed math students earned an average of 18 fewer college credits than the highest-placed students. Females and non-Pell recipients more likely to transfer within six terms (Brathwaite & Edgecombe, 2018).

• National Trend: Degree completion highest among white, female, non-Pell, and highly-placed students (Brathwaite & Edgecombe, 2018).
Structural Changes

- Originally, developmental English and reading each consisted of two semester courses, for a total of four developmental courses. The reform process integrated developmental English and reading for a maximum of two developmental semester courses.
- Students with the most significant developmental English needs would be placed into an eight-credit hour course.
- Students with less significant needs would be placed into a four-credit hour course.
- Students just short of readiness for college English would be placed into a corequisite course model consisting of college English and a two-credit hour companion course.
- In developmental math, a three-course sequence was replaced with nine one-credit modules. Module requirements vary depending on students’ program of study, with each module designed to take about 4 weeks to complete (p.22).

Promising Results: Influence of A Statewide Developmental Education Reform On Equity (Brathwaite & Edgecombe, 2018)
Promising Results: Influence of A Statewide Developmental Education Reform On Equity (Brathwaite & Edgecombe, 2018)

Changes to Assessment & Placement

- The percent of college English eligible students increased 53% (from 53% to 81%).
- College math placements more than doubled (from 18% to 44%)—p. 23

Gateway Course Completion

- The percentage of students completing introductory college ("gateway") English and math courses in 1 year (as measured by three terms) increased after the developmental education reform was implemented.
- Overall, 1-year gateway English completion rates increased from 45% pre-reform to 56% postreform—p. 24
Equity Point: Developmental Education Reform Requires A New Equity & Justice Mindset.

Understand and transform entrenched cultural narratives that have worked against equity and justice.
The Entrenched Narrative of Victim Blame

And when white Americans tell the Negro to lift himself by his own bootstraps, they don't look over the legacy of slavery and segregation...

Many Negroes...have been left bootless as a result of all of these years of oppression and as a result of a society that deliberately made his color a stigma and something worthless and degrading.

Dr. Martin Luther King (1967)

Surviving life’s hardest blows should not be celebrated – or expected.

Recovery and reconciliation require reparations and resources. To expect resilience without justice is simply to indifferently accept the status quo.

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha—author of What the Eyes Don’t See (2020)
THE ENTRENCHED NARRATIVE OF VICTIM BLAME

Entrenched cultural narrative: “Pull yourself up by the bootstraps.”

How about changing the odds so that all succeed?

Let’s celebrate when the odds/barriers have been removed and every student has an equal and fair chance to succeed!
Examples of Odds Working Against Student Success

**SOCIETAL FACTORS**
- School Funding Inequalities
- School & College Segregation
- Students Struggling to Survive—lack of health care, housing crisis, food insecurity, ill family members, etc.
- Wealth Inequality—few assets, financial problems

**INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS**
- Lack of Faculty and Staff of Color
- Deficit-Based Views About Students
- Lack of Understanding of Low-Income, First-Gen Student Experience
- Need for Contemporary Pedagogies
- Need for Faculty and Staff Development
- Need Relational, Humanized Approach to Work With Racially Minoritized Students
Transforming Outdated, Often Harmful Narratives

We need to transform the narrative that students, regardless of circumstances, should be able to rise above their conditions and take the total blame if they unable able to do so.

Example of transformed narrative.

The narrative to create an equity- and justice-based educational system that provides resources and opportunities for the nation’s most vulnerable students to succeed.
Low-income, first-gen students have too many adversities that cannot be overcome.

Low-income communities do not care about education.

Low-income students are not “college material.”
Assets of Racially Minoritized Students

- **Aspirational.** Ability to set goals and remain hopeful about the future.

- **Giving Back.** Ability to look beyond personal gain to consider how students might put their gained academic tools back into their communities.

- **Resistant.** Ability to overcome poverty and to resist, confront and challenge racism, sexism and homophobia.

- **Navigational Competence.** Ability to navigate diverse social contexts which are typically alien to low-income, minoritized students. For example, through twists, turns and stalls students figure out what to do when changing majors or programs of study, transitioning to the U.S. from another nation and learning a new academic culture that is very different from their home realities.

- **Ganas/Perseverance.** Unshakeable drive and determination to achieve educational and career goals popularized by math instructor, Jaime Escalante, who was featured in the film, *Stand and Deliver*—Rendón, Nora & Kanagala, 2014
Transforming Outdated, Often Harmful Narratives

We need to transform the narrative that all low-income, first-gen students are incapable of doing college-level work.

Example of transformed narrative.

The narrative to dismantle deficit narratives, work with asset-based framework, and provide resources for students to succeed.
Equity Point: Understand The Challenges Faced by Low-Income, First-Generation Students

Nearly one-third of undergraduates are first-generation students (EAB, 2018)
RESEARCH PROJECT: THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE FOR LATINX STUDENTS AT UTSA

Rendón, Nora & Kanagala (2014)

PURPOSE

• To illuminate the positive and negative aspects of the college experience of Latinx students.
• To identify assets Latinxs employ to become survivors and move past obstacles.

METHOD

• Focus groups, N=47
• One-on-one videotaped interviews, N=6
Navigating the Transition to College

Challenges:
- Liminality
- Affordability
- Advising Issues
- College World Challenges
- Microaggressions
- College Readiness

Factors:
- Family
- Peers
- Native Country
- Barrio y Community
- Spiritual
- Work

Key Concepts:
- Choque
- Dislocation
- Relocation
WHAT RACIALLY MINORITIZED STUDENTS CAN EXPERIENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION REFORM PROGRAMS

- **Liminality.** Accepted, but not fully accepted
- **Stigma.** “Not good enough.” Invalidation
- **Fear of failure.** May come from issues such as dyslexia, previous invalidation, immigrant status, ELL, etc.
- **Faculty and staff.** May not understand the experiences of vulnerable students
- **Uninspiring pedagogy and curriculum.** Not connected to equity and justice, not reflective of student lives, not inclusive of inner-life skill development
- **Trauma.** Housing insecurities, pandemic-related issues, financial problems
Equity Point: Humanize Developmental Education Reform Through Culturally Validating Relationships

The Importance of Validation
Validation Theory

• **Validation** an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and personal development (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Munoz, 2011)

• Two forms of validation:
  
  • **Academic**—When in- and out-of-class agents take action to assist students to trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student
  
  • **Interpersonal**—When in- and out-of-class agents take action to foster students’ personal development and social adjustment
Examples of Validating Statements & Actions
It’s Good to Be Seen When You Feel Nobody Sees You

VALIDATING STATEMENTS

• I believe you can succeed, and I am going to find resources and support you need to succeed.
• You have what it takes to do science.
• Your writing has definitely improved. You are going to be a great writer.
• Tell me a little bit about you. Are you the first in your family to attend college? Your family must be so proud. Your brothers and sisters must be so proud.
• I know how difficult things are right now during the pandemic. Are you ok? How are you feeling? What are your key challenges? How can I help?
• What would you like to study? What has meaning for you? What is important for you?

VALIDATING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES

• Ensure student cultures are represented in curriculum & institutional policies and communications
• Ensure student cultures are represented in composition of faculty and staff
• Ensure the institutional climate fosters a sense of belonging for all students
• Speakers and events reflect student cultures
• Involve students in taking important academic roles such as serving as tutors or peer mentors
• Safe spaces for students to engage with each other
• Ground the culture in love, caring and compassion so that all students can rise and succeed
Equity Point: Work With Equity & Justice Minded Pedagogic Approaches In Developmental Education Reform Programs
CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGIES NEEDED TO FOSTER EQUITY, JUSTICE, INCLUSION & WELL BEING

• Anti-Racist Pedagogy. A pedagogical approach that reveals the structural inequalities within U.S. society, while fostering students’ critical analysis skills, as well as their critical self-reflection (Columbia Center for Teaching & Learning--https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/resources/anti-racist-pedagogy/)

• Culturally-Relevant Pedagogy. Focus on social, emotional & political empowerment (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

• Contemplative Pedagogy. Center for Contemplative Mind In Society--deep learning with contemplative tools

• Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy (Rendón, 2009). Deep learning experience that activates mind & senses. Fosters intellectual, social, emotional and inner-life skills, as well as critical consciousness. Employs practicas de conocimiento
Dr. Norma Cantú, English Class
Practicas de Conocimiento/Illuminative Knowledge Tools:
Guided Imagery with Photos
Autoethnography
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentary: <em>Louder Than a Bomb</em>—depicts world’s largest youth poetry slam held in Chicago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student’s father was an addict. Her younger brother suffered from diabetes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**STRUCTURAL CHANGES ARE GOOD, BUT STARTING STRONG REQUIRES DEEPER WORK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset-based Theory &amp; Equity-Based Consciousness</th>
<th>Humanized, Culturally Validating, Relationship-Centered Approach</th>
<th>Attention to Most Vulnerable Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Theory framing Dev Ed education practice</td>
<td>• Culturally validating relationships</td>
<td>• Racially minoritized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Race-conscious, non-discriminatory placement</td>
<td>• Culture of care &amp; compassion</td>
<td>• Low-income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure program’s cultural belief systems are equity and justice based</td>
<td></td>
<td>• First-generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong belief students can succeed with proper support &amp; resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**STRUCTURAL CHANGES ARE GOOD, BUT STARTING STRONG REQUIRES DEEPER WORK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equity &amp; Justice Pedagogy</th>
<th>Learning Culture</th>
<th>Continuous Assessment &amp; Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Deep learning &amp; holistic student development—attention to intellectual, social, emotional and inner-life skills</td>
<td>• Assist students to understand values, conventions &amp; language of college</td>
<td>• Imaginative, self-reflective, creative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relevance to student lives &amp; impact on student communities</td>
<td>• What it takes to be successful: Mental toughness, commitment, perseverance, academic &amp; social development, etc.</td>
<td>• Evidence about what is working. What needs to change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understand and leverage student assets</td>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the consequences of not doing much to change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional Development for faculty &amp; staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>• What is at stake?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Toward A New Vision of Developmental Education Reform

New Cultural Narratives
Justice & Equity Consciousness
How Students Can Thrive

Foster Real Opportunities
Shatter the Odds

Culturally Validating
Human Centered
Restorative Healing

Validating Human Centered Restorative Healing