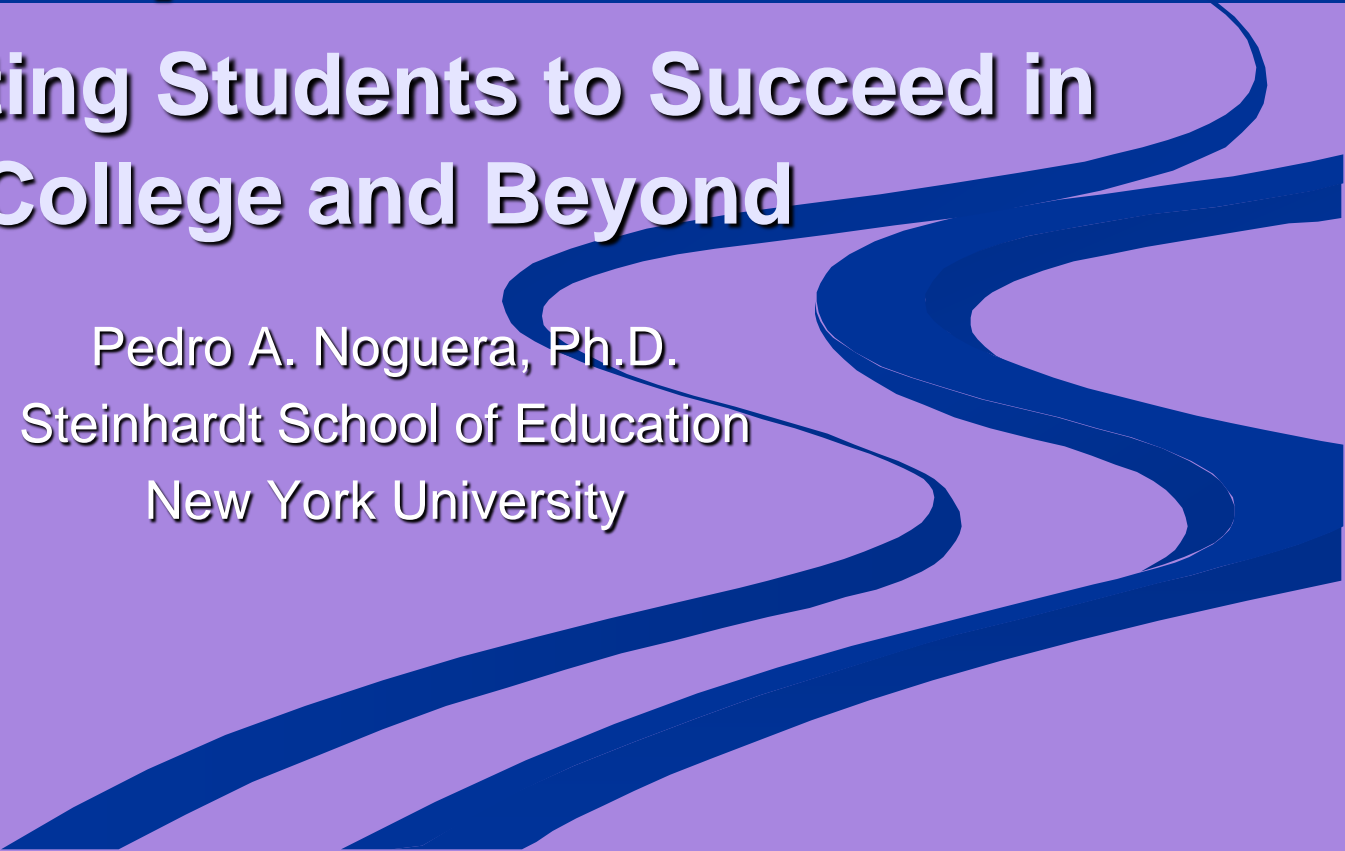# Education for Empowerment:

Motivating Students to Succeed in College and Beyond

Pedro A. Noguera, Ph.D.

Steinhardt School of Education

New York University

The Reproduction Dilemma

- Rather than breaking the cycle of poverty, education is implicated in the reproduction of inequality across generations
  - Inequality in society reinforces inequitable outcomes – achievement gap
  - Significant disparities remain between "visible minorities" and white middle class students
- Education policies have failed to disrupt these patterns- why?

The Failure of Policy

- Global education policy has focused on standards and accountability, but:
    - Ignored standards related to the conditions required for learning
    - Provided insufficient guidance on how to improve teaching and increase support for students
    - Excluded the culture of non-dominant groups from curriculum
    - Relied on *pressure* and threat of failure as strategy to motivate students and improve schools
    - Largely ignored the social context and the non-academic needs of students

Not everything that can be measured counts.
Not everything that counts can be measured.

William Bruce Cameron, 1963

Policy based on misunderstanding of causes of educational disparities

- The achievement gap is framed in terms of deficits
- It is an educational manifestation of social inequality
  - Influenced by conditions outside of school
    - Intergenerational poverty, unmet social needs
  - Influenced by history – colonized and oppressed groups consistently do less well
  - Influenced by contemporary relationships between faculty and students
    - Expectations and learning opportunities
  - May also be influenced by the normalization of failure
    - **"Soft bigotry of low expectations"**

Narrow vs. Broad Approach to Policy

Narrow

- Use pressure to foster accountability
- Focus exclusively on achievement
- Use test scores to rank
- Blame faculty
- Ignore inequality in resources
- Treat students as consumers
- Encourage competition among students and tertiary institutions – market model

Broad

Focus on learning conditions

- Use assessment to diagnose
- Develop faculty skills based on student needs
- Focus on "whole student" – health, nutrition, safety, jobs
- Hold all stake holders accountable
- Treat community as partners
- Use culture as a resource
- Promote cooperation among students and between institutions

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs

Trauma exposure in military vs. urban Detroit

Type	Ohio National Guard	DETROIT
Combat	46.5% (n = 1151)	10.9% (n = 146)
Fire/explosion	31.9% (n = 790)	--
Rape/sexual assault	10.1% (n = 251)	19.1% (n = 256)
Shot or stabbed	8.3% (n = 205)	15.7% (n = 210)
Held captive	0.6% (n = 15)	6.1% (n = 82)
Mugged/badly beaten/ threatened w/ a weapon	38.2% (n = 946)	38.4% (n = 515)
Transportation accident	30.1% (n = 744)	31.0% (n = 416)
Other accident	18.4% (n = 456)	17.1% (n = 229)
Natural disaster	17.5% (n = 433)	21.5% (n = 288)
Sudden unexpected death	70.6% (n = 1747)	79.5% (n = 1068)
Caused injury/death	12.4% (n = 307)	--
Witnessed death/human suffering	54.0% (n = 1337)	36.2% (n = 486)
Learned of other's illness/injury	76.3% (n = 1889)	73.6% (n = 988)

Karestan Koenen in collaboration with Kate Walsh

The Biggest Obstacle: Normalization of Failure

- Tendency for staff to treat patterns of achievement as "normal"
    - Complacency - Staff has grown accustomed to the predictability of academic outcomes
    - Rationalization - Faculty and administrators explain low achievement by blaming students and their culture
    - Beliefs - Staff believes that culture and biology determine intelligence rather than access to resources and educational opportunity

Poverty is not a learning disability

but …

Poverty ignored can be disabling
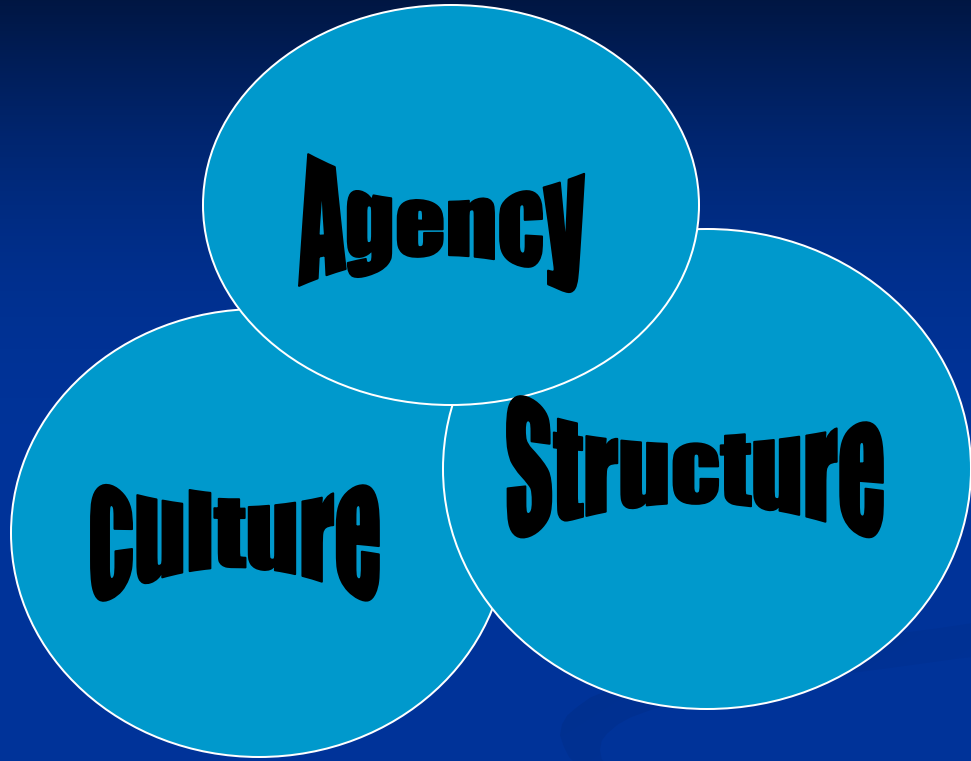
We develop agency by focusing on motivating students to learn

- Jaime Escalante vs. Roland Fryer: Incentives vs. "ganas"
- Students learn through relationships
- Higher goals: hope vs. fear
- Listening to students

Empowered Students at Hollenbeck Middle School, LA

Agency vs. Grit

Grit

- Individual attribute
- Ignores contextual barriers
- Hard to measure except after outcomes are achieved

Agency

- Can be individual or collective in form
- Recognizes barriers and strategizes to confront
- Measureable through observation of actions and attitudes

Effective Colleges for Non-Dominant Students Treat Culture as a Resource

- They utilize rituals, norms and practices that reinforce core values and affirm identity
  - Counter narratives to disrupt stereotypes – Xavier University
  - Cabral – Return to the Source, a critical stance toward culture
- They understand and attempt to mitigate the obstacles students face
- They understand how students learn and utilize their interests, dreams and aspirations to motivate and engage
- They understand the need for students to obtain meaningful employment and assist them in acquiring it
- **They understand that fear of failure is not enough**

Brockton scholarship winners 2015

Bronx Academy of Language and Technology

Build strong partnerships with community

- Develop partnerships based on respect and shared interests
- Focus on student economic needs – Year Up, Career Tech
  - Students need well rounded education and practical skills
- Utilize sports and cultural activities to build relationships
- Hire personnel who have empathy and respect for the community and backgrounds that are similar to the students

MISSION STATEMENT OF SAPPHIRE Rd- OPEN DOOR OF HOPE COMMUNITY CLINIC

To uplift and empower learners and communities by providing a holistic health service.

Focus on excellence in teaching and learning

- Provide clear examples of highly effective teaching
    - Give instructors a chance to observe each other
    - Learn from student work, share effective practices
- Explain standards to students, show them high quality work
- Evaluate interventions and support programs
- Focus on mastery in learning
    - Require students to **revise and resubmit** their work

Empower your students

- Freire: Teach the world not the word, problematize obstacles
- Use real challenges in the community, society and the world as a basis for the curriculum
    - Lead poisoning in Oakland - Teaching the Bronx River
    - YPAR, YPLAN
- Challenge the imagination: encourage students to think critically and creatively about how to solve and respond to problems
- Prepare students to lead New Zealand and for global leadership – particular vs. universal

Need for a Paradigm Shift

- Old Paradigm
  - Intelligence is innate
  - Non-dominant cultures viewed as deficit
  - Cultural assimilation is path to mobility
  - Students are blamed for their failure
  - Inequity in resource allocation: give the most/best resources to elite institutions
  - Leadership seen as an entitlement of the "best" (privileged)

- New Paradigm
  - Intelligence and ability are influenced by opportunity
  - It is the job of college to cultivate talent and confidence among students
  - Resources allocated based on student need
  - Provide assistance in planning for life after college
  - Cultural identity is path to confidence and competence
  - Leadership is a byproduct of agency, accessible to all

We need a new vision to create colleges that can counter the effects of colonialism and inequality by promoting agency
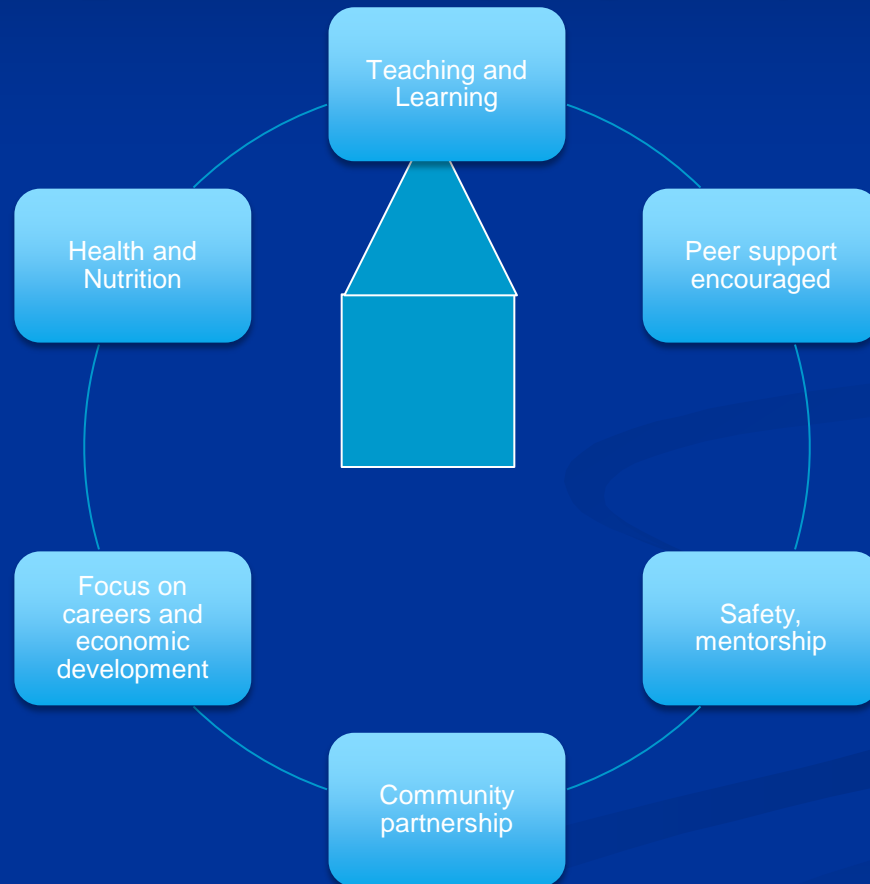
Start asking different questions:

- Instead of "How do we raise achievement?"
  - How do we get students *excited about learning*?
- Instead of "How do we hold teachers and students accountable?" How will we hold *all stakeholders accountable* – Politicians, Prime Ministers, college administrators, teachers, and students?
- Instead of "How do we close the achievement gap?"
  - How do we create colleges where a student's *background does not predict likelihood of success*?