PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The Underestimated Significance of Practitioner Knowledge in the Scholarship on Student Success

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In June of 2006, along with several colleagues from the New England Resource Center for Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and at the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education (CUE), I presented findings from a study of the transfer of low-income students from community colleges to prestigious institutions (Dowd, Bensimon, et al., 2006). The venue was "A Fresh Look at Equity

at Selective Colleges and Universities: Expanding Access for Low-Income Community College Transfers," a national forum convened by The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

The component of the study that I directed consisted of the life histories of 10 students who had succeeded in crossing the invisible cultural and social border between the most selective institutions of higher education and open-admissions community colleges that serve as the entry point into higher education for the most economically disadvantaged students (Pak, Bensimon, Malcom, Marquez, & Park, 2006).

When we asked students to describe how they had managed to go, say, from a Hispanic-serving community college in California to an expensive private college in the East, they spoke eloquently and in detail about an individual—sometimes a teacher, at other times, a counselor or a dean—who had given them confidence and affirmation as well as the academic, cultural, and informational resources they needed to succeed. Julio Gauna (all participants are identified by pseudonyms) described Ms. Raritan, his first instructor at the community college, as being "inspirational" and said she was instrumental in improving his writing skills, which gave him the confidence to do college-level work. Anna Muskie praised a community college instructor who was quite challenging but sincerely interested in helping her prepare for a four-year institution:

> He brought the realization that it can be done … that you can bridge from a community college to a stellar four-year university. . . . I took three of his courses, because he did inspire me to be my best. And I did feel that he was critiquing me to improve me, and not critiquing me to disprove me. (Pak et al., 2006)

Lisbeth Gilroy told us that one day she dropped by the tutoring center, where she met Mr. Rollins, the director. It was he who first informed Gilroy about the transfer program and encouraged her to apply. Lisbeth Gilroy felt she was not "smart enough" or "rich enough" to transfer to a four-year institution, but Mr. Rollins would have none of it. He went "beyond encouraging" and coaxed her just to come along and see the campus when he took another student for her admissions interview. When they got there, she realized Mr. Rollins had arranged for her to meet an admissions officer at a private, very selective, eastern liberal arts college for women. In telling us her story, she described how Mr. Rollins worked with her, going online with her to research schools, helping her with her application, including editing her letter of interest, and taking her to interviews. Without his support and encouragement, Lisbeth Gilroy states, she would never have thought about applying to the elite women's college, where she was accepted into a special fellowship program for community college transfer students. According to Gilroy, what is most amazing about Mr. Rollins is that she is not the only student whose life he has changed.

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Transferring from a community college is typically understood in terms of articulation policies and information about requirements and procedures. However, the students we interviewed spoke about the relational aspects of the transfer process, bringing to light the influential role played by institutional agents. Ricardo Stanton-Salazar (1997) describes institutional agents as being significant in relation to minority and low-income students because these agents are in a position to transmit knowledge and resources that are particularly characteristic of the social networks and social ties of the middle and upper classes (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). These institutional agents, as the interviewees described them, seemed to have special predispositions that motivated their advocacy, even though many did not have formal roles or responsibilities related to transfer at either the two-year or four-year college. Instead, they seemed to be directed by an inner ethical compass to use their expertise for the good of promising students who otherwise might have been overlooked.

A few weeks after presenting the life histories of the successful transfers, I participated in an invitational conference on research and policy related to improving student success and retention in light of changing demographics, particularly the Latinization of higher education. Presentations were made on enrollment patterns, the economic consequences of the changing demographics in the West, the differential effects of types of financial aid, course-taking patterns, and other similar topics. The focus of attention was on the kind of policy tools that might impact student success and retention: Tuition policies? Incentive funding for institutions? What about incentive funding for students? Standards of accountability? New regulations? As I listened to the discussion on policy tools and levers and their pluses and minuses in increasing student success, I could not help wondering: Where do the institutional agents that the students talked about fit in this discussion?

It was the distinctive contrast between the students' and the policy analysts' construction of success that made me think about the invisibility of practitioners in the discourse on student success. In higher education, the dominant paradigm[1] of student success is based exclusively on personal characteristics of students that have been found to correlate with persistence and graduation. Essentially, practitioners are missing from the most

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[1]I use "dominant paradigm" as an umbrella term for the prevailing epistemology motivating quantitative studies of student success that include all or some of the following variables identified by Kuh et al. (2006b): (a) student background characteristics, (b) structural characteristics of institutions, (d) interactions with faculty, staff members, and peers, (e) student perceptions of the learning environment, and (f) the quality of effort that students "devote to educationally purposeful activities" (p. 4).

familiar way of conceptualizing empirical studies of student success; when scholars attempt to translate their findings into recommendations for actions, practitioners are rarely ever the target of change or intervention. Stage and Hubbard (2007) observe that "the faculty role in college students' experiences has not been closely examined, even though faculty are the most consistent point of contact with students" and that in surveys they are "typically asked only a few cursory questions regarding their relationships with faculty." Martínez Alemán (2005, 2007) makes a similar point. On the one hand, student success models and studies place a great deal of emphasis on the benefit of faculty and student interaction, yet there is practically no research on the value of "informal communication (born of relationship) between faculty and students" (2005, p. 3).

When I say that practitioners are missing, I am referring to the lack of scholarly and practical attention toward understanding how the practitioner—her knowledge, beliefs, experiences, education, sense of self-efficacy, etc.—affects how students experience their education.[2] The absence of practitioners in the scholarship on postsecondary student success is particularly noticeable in comparison to the scholarship on K-12 student achievement. In that field, an extensive body of work examines the characteristics of school leaders and teachers that impact student outcomes directly and indirectly. They include studies of efficacy and collective responsibility (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Lee & Smith, 1996) and policy reports that document the quality of teachers in schools with high concentrations of minority and low-income students (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Moreover, in

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[2]There are many studies on faculty development, motivation, compensation, leadership, etc., but they have not typically studied the knowledge that faculty have of their students nor the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Kuh, Laird, and Umbach (2004) have developed a Faculty Survey of Student Engagement as a companion to the National Survey of Student Engagement. The faculty survey consists of items to measure faculty use of effective educational practices, e.g., kinds of assignments given to students, active and collaborative learning, emphasis on higher order cognitive tasks, presentation of diverse perspectives. Based on their findings, they note that faculty of color and women "are more likely than their counterparts to value and use effective educational practices" (p. 29). They also found that the more years a faculty member has taught, the less likely he or she is to use "involving" pedagogical practices. Although this study does not report findings for marginalized minority groups, one might speculate that their findings for faculty of color and women may be tapping into "funds of knowledge" that are responsive to minority students. In "Faculty Do Matter: The Role of College Faculty in Student Learning and Engagement," Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) examined the relationship between faculty practices and student engagement and learning and concluded that "faculty members may play the single most important role in student learning" (p. 176). However, their study did not address minority students. Martínez Alemán (2005) has also observed that the nature of the faculty-student relationship "as relationship" is largely untheorized and underexplored (p. 2).

K-12, practitioners are central to equity-oriented policy and change efforts to improve the educational attainment of minority students (see, e.g., Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In contrast, in the scholarship on student success in higher education, faculty members, counselors, deans, and other staff members are relatively negligible. Instead, a voluminous literature correlates postsecondary education success with students' characteristics before they entered college and their self-reported experiences, behaviors, and accomplishments during the college years.

If, as scholars of higher education, we wish to produce knowledge to improve student success, we cannot ignore that practitioners play a significant role. More specifically, if our goal is to do scholarship that makes a difference in the lives of students whom higher education has been least successful in educating (e.g., racially marginalized groups and the poor), we have to expand the scholarship on student success and take into account the influence of practitioners—positively and negatively. If we continue to concentrate only on what students accomplished or failed to accomplish when they were in high school and what they do or fail to do once they enter college, our understanding of success will be flawed, as well as incomplete.

For those of us who are primarily concerned with the agenda of access and equity in higher education, attention to practitioners is imperative. I focus on the absence of practitioners specifically in relation to equity in access and outcomes because colleges have been least effective in producing successful outcomes for low-income, first-generation African American and Latino/a students. The inability to produce equitable outcomes for minority students is particularly marked in institutions that are open access, two- and four-year colleges that serve primarily minority students. These students come from low-performing high schools, commute, hold full-time jobs, and often need remedial education.

Thus, I am particularly concerned with the practitioners' role in producing student success in colleges that share characteristics with minority-serving institutions such as California State University-Los Angeles and Los Angeles City College, both of which are Hispanic-serving institutions; or Rutgers University and Essex County Community College, both in Newark, New Jersey, and both with a high concentration of African American students. Also of interest are independent colleges that, over time, have been transformed into minority-serving institutions—for example, Bloomfield College in New Jersey or Whittier College in California. Although much of what I will discuss is relevant to all colleges regardless of selectivity, I am primarily interested in how our scholarship can advance the mission of equity that has become the de facto responsibility of colleges in communities with large concentrations of minority, immigrant, and poor families.

Contrary to how "the dilemma of success" is discussed by policy analysts, scholars, and practitioners, I do not view it as a problem that impacts all undergraduates equally. Nor do I view it as a problem that can be solved by translating theory into "best practices." In this paper, I frame student success as a learning problem of practitioners and institutions. Specifically, I suggest that the dilemma is one of institutional capacity to effectively address racial patterns of inequality discernible in the educational outcomes of African Americans and Latinas/os in all institutions of higher education, from the most to the least selective.

I argue that practitioners in higher education, over time and through a variety of experiences, have developed implicit theories about students: why they succeed, why they fail, and, what, if anything, they can do to reverse failure. I say "implicit theories" because practitioners for the most part are likely not aware of what knowledge or experiences constitute their sense-making and how the judgments they make about a phenomenon such as student success or failure are shaped by that sense-making.

This paper is organized into three parts. First, I describe the dominant paradigm of student success in broad strokes. Next, I suggest that the student, in the dominant paradigm, is depicted as the author of his or her success, while the significance of the practitioner in facilitating (or impeding) the achievement of equitable educational outcomes is underestimated. I conclude by describing a project designed to produce funds of knowledge that place responsibility on the practitioner to become an institutional agent of minority student success. This is a characteristic I call equity-mindedness. Equity-minded individuals are more cognizant that exclusionary practices, institutional racism, and power asymmetries impact opportunities and outcomes for Black and Latina/o students. Equity-minded individuals attribute unequal outcomes among Black and Latina/o students to institution-based dysfunctions, while deficit-minded individuals construe unequal outcomes as originating from student characteristics. Thus, equity-minded individuals reflect on their own and their colleagues' role in and responsibility for student success.

In doing so, I draw heavily on the work of Donald Polkinghorne (2004) about the nature of practice in the human realm, which involves the one who performs the practice and "the one to whom practice is directed" (p. 89). Sometimes I use "practitioner" specifically in reference to instructors and, at other times, more generally to mean administrators, counselors, staff, tutors, and so on. I entertain the idea that institutions have difficulties in producing equitable educational outcomes partly because practitioners lack the specialized knowledge and expertise to recognize the racialized nature of the collegiate experience for African American and Latina/o students and adjust their practices accordingly. Most of all, lack of specialized knowledge about the conditions that structure the collegiate experience of minority

students[3] makes it difficult for practitioners to consider that their everyday actions and responses could be implicated in producing inequalities. I do not think it is possible to achieve the ideals of access and equity without examining the funds of knowledge that practitioners have internalized about teaching minority students, nor do I think generalized knowledge can improve access and equity at the institutional level. Thus, I conclude by suggesting that practitioners can develop the funds of knowledge for equity-minded practices by working collaboratively with researchers in contextualized problem-defining and solving.

THE DOMINANT PARADIGM:
THE STUDENT AS THE AUTHOR OF HIS OR HER SUCCESS

The Imagined Successful Student[4]

A distinguishing aspect of the dominant paradigm is the existential image of the student as an autonomous and self-motivated actor who exerts effort in behaviors that exemplify commitment, engagement, self-regulation, and goal-orientation (see, e.g., Astin, 1985; Kuh et al., 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). In addition to employing a shared research design where the student is the unit of analysis and the methods used are quantitative (Perna & Thomas, 2006), a distinctive feature of this scholarship is that success (defined as persistence after the first year and/or degree attainment) is understood as an outcome of individual efforts. The survey instruments commonly used in these studies consist of questions that assume all students are free to make independent choices about what college to attend, what goals to pursue, what activities to become involved in, and with whom to spend time.

After reviewing hundreds of studies on the impact of college on students, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) observe:

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[3]Pascarella and Terenzini (1998), reflecting on their *How College Impacts Students* (1991), observed that the studies they reviewed were on traditional White undergraduates and that they found very few studies on minorities.

[4]The notion of "imagined" successful students comes from Luis Moll's (2000) suggestion that most of us hold imagined concepts of culture, community, etc., based on what we have heard, read, or experienced. In higher education the "imagined" successful student is based on concepts that characterize the dominant paradigm of college-going. The student is "imagined" because he or she is made known to us by variables rather than personal relationships or personal knowledge of successful students. Relatedly, Long (2006), in a commentary on student success models and research, recommends sharing such models with practitioners to check their validity. Her observation that "the models represent the understanding of the academic community" alludes to their being "imagined" by a community of practice (p. 11).

> One of the most unequivocal conclusions . . . is that the impact of college is largely determined by individual effort and involvement in the academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings on a campus. Students are not passive recipients of institutional efforts to "educate" or "change" them, but rather bear a major responsibility for any gains derived from their postsecondary experience. (p. 602)

The underlying explanation of student success is that the greater the academic effort[5] a student makes, the greater the likelihood of his or her academic success (Dowd & Korn, 2005). The common thread running through hundreds of quantitative studies that posit the student as the agent of success are the questions: Did the student exert the effort to participate in educationally purposeful activities? (Kuh et al., 2006a). Did the student engage in behaviors that represent commitment, self-discipline, and the integration of desirable academic values and norms? Findings from these studies reaffirm the positive effects of engagement in academic and social activities on students' persistence and degree attainment.

The Prevalence of Quantitative Methods and Correlational Research Designs

Based on their multidisciplinary review of the literature on student success for the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC), Perna and Thomas (2006) concluded: "Regardless of discipline, the most common methodological approach in articles examining student success is quantitative rather than qualitative" (p. A-13). Of the 192 articles they reviewed, 175 used quantitative methodologies. The overwhelming majority, consisting of correctional studies (N = 149), involved such analytic techniques as regression analyses, path analyses, and structural equation modeling.

A recurring criticism of quantitative studies of student success is the representation of human beings and their experiences independent of context. In "Does Higher Education Research Need Revisions?" George Keller (1998) harshly critiqued the research preference for "numbers-rich microstudies" (p. 267), saying that what "has become a catechism for many higher education scholars today, is now seen by a growing number of critics as crippling needed efforts at institutional change . . . because it assumes that persons are independent, unsocialized actors and not shaped, conditioned creatures as well" (p. 269). Clif Conrad (1988), coincidentally in his ASHE presidential address about 20 years ago, also expressed concern that overreliance on quantitative methods has led higher education researchers

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[5]According to Robert Pace (1999), "All learning requires time and effort by the learner. What students learn in college will depend to a considerable degree on the quality of effort they invest in the college experience. This is measured by how much they do with respect to capitalizing on what the college offers" (pp. 1-2, cited in Dowd and Korn, 2005, pp. 6-7).

"to focus on justifying and explaining the status quo in higher education" (cited in Keller, 1998, p. 272).

Reflecting on his own educational trajectory, Michael Olivas wrote, "The accidental, idiosyncratic, and unlikely" characteristics of "our own path up the mountain trails" defy description or prediction (Olivas, 2007). Notably, Frances Stage (2000) who has conducted many quantitative studies, in her AERA-J Vice Presidential address cautioned us that "quantitative analysis is a probability game where . . . we learn about the majority, but little about students on the margins" (p. 12).

I share Fran Stage's concern. The reality is that underperformance, dropping out, and low degree-attainment is a problem that affects the "marginal" student disproportionately, yet student success, with few exceptions, is treated as a generic phenomenon and many of the measurement instruments and analytical models do not account for the unique circumstances of "students at the margins."

A Shared Understanding of Student Success

The dominant paradigm emerged in 1975 with the publication of Vincent Tinto's sociological model of the college departure process. Cited in more than 700 studies, the Tinto model (updated in 1993) has earned the distinction of being the "most studied, tested, revised, and critiqued in the literature" (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). Even though scholars may use different variables to measure the model's main constructs (academic and social integration), its core concept is widely accepted—that academic success is a process in which the individual takes on the identity of student and becomes integrated into the collegiate environment. In a critical examination of the dominant paradigm, Laura Rendón, Romero Jalomo, and Amaury Nora (2000) observe:

> Researchers and practitioners alike tend to view issues related to the retention of minority students as *similar, if not identical* [emphasis mine], to those of majority students. What transpires is an almost universally entrenched view that Tinto's departure model, with all of its assumptions, is complete, appropriate, and valid for all students regardless of their varied ethnic, racial, economic, and social backgrounds. (p. 130)

Possibly the lack of variability in the conceptualization of student success results from a small scholarly community's close social ties, with the entry of new ideas blocked by the high incidence of inter-citation (Weick, 1983). Indications of this effect are evidenced in the underutilization of racially conscious constructs introduced by minority scholars, among them "sense of belonging" (Hurtado & Carter, 1996), "validation" (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005; Rendón, 1994), and stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). What is interesting about these three constructs is that they all point to the significance of practitioners in the educational outcomes of minority students.

For example, the stories I related above, told by Julio Gauna, Anna Muskie, and Lisbeth Gilroy, were about institutional agents who gave them a sense of belonging, validated their knowledge, experience, and hopes, and helped them muster the confidence and courage to transfer successfully to America's most elite colleges and universities. Similarly, empirical studies of minority students in K-12 have suggested that teacher-student relationships and teacher encouragement are critical "resources" for motivating African American and Latina/o students (Valenzuela, 1999). A recent survey of 7th–11th graders in 95 schools revealed that minority students, especially African Americans, identified teacher encouragement more frequently than did Whites as a very important reason for working "really hard" in school (Ferguson, 2002, p. 5). Minority students' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with faculty—remote, discouraging, unsympathetic, approachable, helpful, understanding, encouraging—was a strong predictor of learning for Asian/Pacific Islanders, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other Hispanic groups (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). African American students have been found to perceive the college environment and their relationships with faculty more negatively than other groups (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; cited in Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004) and to believe that faculty do not take their academic ability seriously, even when they are high achieving (Fries-Britt, 1998, cited in Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001).

An obvious drawback of a closed community of scholars is that the findings of racially conscious studies have not resulted in revisions to the dominant paradigm. Although most studies nowadays include race and ethnicity as an independent variable, there continues to be little recognition of the racialized existence of minority students, even on campuses that are considered minority-serving (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, forthcoming).

The appropriateness of existing models has been questioned by scholars who are struggling with the need for new approaches in view of demographic changes in the student population and the large concentration of undergraduates in community colleges. Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) in a reflective essay on the state of scholarship on college students noted:

> Scholars concerned with the impact of college on students (ourselves included) have perhaps taken an overly narrow view of what constitutes desirable outcomes or effects. Our research questions and the outcomes we consider have frequently been shaped by our own college experience as well as by the ethos of the research-oriented and often residential institutions where we work and where students to study are abundant and easily reachable. (p. 154)

In the next section I turn to the work of sociocultural theorists and offer emerging ideas on how we might go beyond our own experience.

FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

"Funds of knowledge" is a concept found in sociocultural studies of teaching and learning to signify the intellectual and social knowledge of an individual or community (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, 2000). Other labels for "funds of knowledge" include shared mental schema or understandings of how students learn or ought to learn (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001); cognitive frames (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993); theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1996), "tools of the mind" (Cole, 1985, cited in Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001, p. 47); "shared ways of perceiving, thinking, and storing possible responses to adaptive challenges and changing conditions" (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001, p. 47); and background understanding (Polkinghorne, 2004). The "funds of knowledge" concept incorporates both behavior (activity) and cognitive and affective components (based on Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). Funds of knowledge are reflected in how practitioners define problems, situations, and make sense of phenomena. They are the "know-how" that individuals call on (mostly unconsciously) to accomplish their work.

The best-known application of "funds of knowledge" is in a project that engaged school teachers in home visits to document the "productive activities" that went on in the households of non-English-speaking families (Moll, 2000). The intent behind this project was for teachers to acquire new "funds of knowledge" that would let them see students and their families in terms of possibility. It was a strategy to counter the negative representations of minority students communicated by the "at risk" or "disadvantaged" labels commonly used in educational research.

We know very little about the funds of knowledge that shape faculty practices because we do not assess faculty involvement in activities that reflect commitment, effort, and engagement. Practitioners in higher education develop funds of knowledge by formal and informal means, including such everyday experiences as talking with colleagues, observing students, or reading journals and reports; through formal education such as advanced coursework or professional development activities; and by being socialized into the norms of professional practice and the culture of their own institutions and departments.

This brings me to the following important questions: When practitioners have been socialized to view student success from the perspective of the dominant paradigm, what do they notice? What might they fail to notice? What do they expect to see and what happens when their expectations are not met? Might the know-how derived from the dominant paradigm be inimical to the needs of minority students? Might it lead to misconceptions?

Interpreting Students from the Perspective of the Dominant Paradigm

The relationship between student engagement (Kuh et al., 2005) or involvement (Astin, 1985) and measures of academic success has been well established in various studies based on surveys of students (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE]). Engagement and involvement are extremely appealing concepts. They conjure images of connectedness with a community, purposeful activity, meaningful relationships, commitment, and so on. However, what seems to be missing from the prevailing views of engagement and involvement is that some forms of engagement have greater social and economic value.

A recent experience helped me see more concretely the class differences in forms of engagement. Looking over the resumés of four undergraduates who volunteered for a project, I was struck by the differences in their collegiate experiences. The resumé for a first-generation Latina who was a community college transfer indicated that she always worked while in college; she listed "caregiving" to an older relative as an extracurricular activity. In contrast, the other three students listed a variety of service experiences that took place exclusively on campus (e.g., tour guide for prospective students) and internships in Fortune 500 companies in the United States and abroad. These four students had the same major and were taking the same classes, but their resumés revealed nuances underlying the core concepts in theories of student success, e.g., engagement, involvement, and social integration. Quality of engagement may also vary based on social class, race, and (probably) gender.

Racialized practices and the unconscious dynamics of White privilege play an important role in who has access to forms of engagement that have greater exchange value. In *Manufacturing Hope and Despair,* Ricardo Stanton-Salazar (2001) observes that practitioners as well as researchers assume that institutional support systems are already in place and that motivated students will take advantage of them. However, some students may not know how to become engaged, or they may not feel entitled to being engaged,[6] particularly if it involves requests for help, or they may avoid the activities that signify engagement to avoid failure or the risk of rejection. In predominantly White campuses, minority students may consciously decide to not speak out in class or to attempt a conversation with a faculty member outside of class for fear of being stereotyped (Peña, Bensimon, & Colyar, 2006; Steele, 1997). In community colleges, students who hold full-

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[6]Lareau (2003) uses "concerted cultivation" to signify the conversations middle-class parents have with their children that enable them to navigate institutional settings and interact comfortably with adult authority figures. Lareau suggests that concerted cultivation creates a sense of entitlement.

time jobs are far less likely to have the flexibility for out-of-class activities. Moreover, the prevalence of part-time instructors in community colleges drastically reduces the likelihood of establishing meaningful relationships outside of class.

Most significantly, forms of engagement that provide opportunities for leadership development and connections to social networks of influential faculty, administrators, and trustees are likely to be less accessible to minority students. Data on specific kinds of engagement activities (e.g., being a student ambassador, studying abroad, becoming a research intern in a science lab) are not typically reported by race or monitored for equitable participation.[7] A possible exception may be minority males who are "stars" in highly profiled and profitable college sports. They may have greater access to influential social networks such as wealthy donors, trustees, and high-ranking college administrators.

Greg Tanaka (2002) critiques student development theories for ignoring "the underlying cultures" of institutions and for adopting a perspective assuming that concepts such as involvement, integration, and effort are "culturally neutral" (p. 264). Alicia Dowd and Randi Korn (2005) point out that measures of student effort such as those included in the NSSE and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) reflect middle-class culture and values and that they fail to consider the "cultural effort" associated with being a minority student, such as coping with racial hostility (Hurtado & Carter, 1996), shouldering the responsibilities of work and family, worrying about being undocumented, or concerns about the unpredictability and insufficiency of financial aid.

Lack of specialized knowledge about racial and ethnic minorities may prevent practitioners from seeing that behavior patterns seeming to suggest low motivation or indifference are often learned coping strategies. Consequently, when minority students do not perform well academically and do not exhibit the behaviors and attitudes of the archetypical student, practitioners who lack knowledge of students' history and cultural lives are likely to attribute poor outcomes to lack of integration, involvement, engagement, and effort. When practitioners lack knowledge of their students' cultural lives, they are severely limited in their capacity to adapt their actions and be responsive to the particularities of the situation as these individual students experience it (Polkinghorne, 2004). For example, they may not realize that minority students sometimes may avoid desirable practices of academic engagement because of embarrassment, fear of being judged

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[7]The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* includes a section, "Vital Statistics That Measure the State of Racial Inequality," that reports statistical indicators of engagement that symbolize power and prestige—for example, the number of African American editors of selective college student newspapers.

incompetent, or concern about reinforcing negative stereotypes (Cox, 2004; Peña, Bensimon, & Colyar, 2006). Take Jasmine, an African American female in a predominantly White institution who shared with a faculty member her fears about being seen as "second best":

> If I want to speak and say something I am *scrutinized* [emphasis mine] by the type of language I use. If I'm in a classroom, of course I'm going to use my best—you know—polished English, but if I am in a setting where I am talking to you one on one, we're just chilling, I'm not going to want to sit there and—you know—be stuffy.[8]

Similarly, Kevin, an African American male at the same institution, mentioned his self-imposed silence: "Before I came here, I'm like a free-spoken person . . . but here it's kind of hard for me to just speak my mind . . . like I usually do." For Jasmine, Kevin, and many other first-generation, poor, and minority students, engagement activities, like raising one's hand in class to ask a question or making an appointment to get extra help from an instructor, can bring on what W.E.B. Dubois (1903/1993) so aptly described as the "peculiar sensation" of always seeing oneself through the normative gaze of Whites. These are the circumstances that can make minority students feel as if they are invisible and undeserving in their instructors' eyes. A bigger concern is that internalized bias against poor and minority students can develop into collective racial bias as a property of institutional culture (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 457). Racial bias, whether at the individual or collective levels, is hard to see and harder to talk about (see, e.g., Pollock, 2001).

In the next section I discuss political and cultural developments that suppress efforts to "bring equity back" (Petrovich & Wells, 2005) into the agenda of higher education.

EQUITY BLINDNESS: A POST-AFFIRMATIVE ACTION SYNDROME?

Several obstacles prevent higher education practitioners from recognizing the ubiquity of inequality in educational outcomes among minority students. First, the threat to affirmative action brought on by the legal challenge to the University of Michigan's consideration of race in admissions, along with Ward Connerly's successful anti-affirmative action campaign in California,

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[8]This example and the next data come from one of CUE's practitioner-as-research projects (Colyar, Peña, & Bensimon, 2005) by a team of faculty members at a predominantly White, independent, liberal arts college. They conducted ethnographic interviews with African American and Latina/o undergraduates during their first and second years at the college to understand how they experienced the campus. All except one of the faculty members were White and from various disciplines. For further information, see Peña, Bensimon, & Colyar (2006) and Peña (2007).

channeled intellectual and financial resources to social science projects that investigated the educational values of racial diversity and could provide a legal argument in defense of affirmative action in predominantly White and selective institutions.

Second, the emphasis on diversity in the 1990s, rather than on the more explicit racial justice aims of the civil rights era, created the false impression that the achievement of racial diversity in the student body signaled "mission accomplished." Institutions monitored the racial makeup of entering students, but they did not monitor their track record of minority student persistence, success, and excellence.

Third, paying attention to "outcome equity" (Dowd, 2003) is not so easy in higher education. Institutions of higher education do not produce annual reports on measures of equity, nor do they have equity-oriented benchmarks (Bensimon, Hao, & Bustillos, 2005). An institution's success (or failure) in reducing educational inequities is not used as a measure of effectiveness; and institutions are not ranked or graded on the basis of equity in educational outcomes. Yet with the exception of historically Black institutions, intra-institutional stratification based on race and ethnicity is a reality in the majority of institutions of higher education, regardless of whether they are highly selective and predominantly White, open-access, or classified as Hispanic-serving institutions. But the details of this intra-institutional stratification are largely invisible because equity in educational outcomes does not constitute a measurement of institutional performance that is continuously tracked (Bensimon, 2004).

Fourth, going to college is viewed as a voluntary activity; and practitioners, consistent with the dominant view that success is contingent on individual effort, approach teaching with the expectation that students should be prepared to take on the college student's identity and, as they say, "hit the ground running."

Fifth, conventional methods of providing information on student outcomes, including reports prepared by an office of institutional research or by external groups such as accreditation bodies and external program review committees, typically do not address issues of equity.

This post-Affirmative Action condition—equity-blindness—moved me six years ago to design a research project to call practitioners' attention to racial patterns of inequality in educational outcomes in the hopes that they might ask "Why is it that we are not producing equitable outcomes for minority students?" In the tradition of Dewey (1938), my motive for the project was to create an "indeterminate situation" that would make practitioners realize that their actions were not producing successful results with minority students. An indeterminate situation, writes Donald Polkinghorne, is one in which practitioners find that their practices fail them; and as a consequence,

they are moved to a mode of deliberation or reflection that prompts them to ask, "Why do unequal outcomes exist?" "What can we do?"

The persistence of unequal educational outcomes in higher education, despite a plethora of compensatory programs, alternative pedagogical approaches, and hundreds of correlational studies to identify which variables on average explain the college departure process, constitute an *unrecognized* indeterminate situation. I emphasize "unrecognized" because we have learned to view inequality in educational outcomes as a problem of student underpreparedness, not a problem of practitioner knowledge, pedagogical approaches, or "culturally held" ideas about minority students (Nasir & Hand, 2006). It is far more likely that practitioners will attribute inequality in educational outcomes to student deficiencies than question their own practices.

Accordingly, the challenge is how to change practitioners' ways of thinking and interpreting the problem of inequality. In particular, in what ways could research encourage practitioners to reflect on how practices—their own and the institution's—are implicated in producing unequal educational outcomes. The problem of inequality is typically construed as an impossible problem without a solution. By making practitioner knowledge and institutional practices the focal point of racial disparities in educational outcomes, there is a greater possibility for change. Framing the solution in terms of practitioner self-change creates a sense of empowerment and possibility for the practitioner and the researcher. While there is no question that minority students' chances for success are severely constrained by their K-12 educational experiences, socio-economic background, and the extent to which they and their families possess "college knowledge" (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002) the reality, frustrating as it may be, is that these conditions, once students are admitted, are beyond the control of college practitioners. Studies identifying the pre-college characteristics of students, families, and schools that influence minority student success are informative and can stimulate reform efforts at the K-12 levels. However, they are of little use to the basic skills math instructor who has to find the most effective ways of teaching beginning algebra to students who, in spite of their outward bravado, are filled with fears. Instead, we need a social science that assists practitioners in becoming equity-minded (Bensimon, 2005b).

The Practitioner-as-Researcher Model

In an effort to help practitioners see for themselves how unequal outcomes are manifested on their own campuses, in 2001 researchers at the Center for Urban Education (CUE) designed a project to engage practitioners in inquiry activities as a means of learning about racial patterns of inequality on their own campuses. We called it the "practitioner-as-researcher" model (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, et al., 2004) to differentiate it from the traditional

model of social science in which the individual identified as the researcher controls the production of knowledge.

Teams of five or seven practitioners engage in situated and collaborative inquiry into the educational outcomes of minority students on their own campuses.[9] The inquiry activities, structured and facilitated by CUE's researchers, extend twelve months or longer. The premise is that, when a small group of practitioners sit around a table and deliberate collaboratively about routine data (Bauman, 2005) that have been disaggregated by race and ethnicity, they are more likely to become aware of previously unrecognized inequalities. Essentially, the project provides the opportunity for practitioners to recognize that inequality is an indeterminate situation that needs to be defined more explicitly to be more successfully addressed.

The theoretical underpinnings of the practitioner-as-researcher model have been influenced by the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* and its application to the purposes and methods of doing social science in the human realm. Bent Flyvbjerg and Donald Polkinghorne in their respective books, *Making Social Science Matter* (2001) and *Practice and the Human Sciences* (2004) draw on phronesis as the necessary basis for doing social science that is praxis and action oriented. The practitioner-as-researcher model exhibits principles of phronetic social science because it:

1. Is value-oriented: the core inquiry activities are intentionally designed to advance an agenda of accountability based on educational equity and success for minority students.

2. Is guided by value-rational questions:[10]

How ought we to teach in order to be responsive to minority students? How do we think about our responsibility for minority student outcomes? How do we think about equity?

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[9]In California, the campuses are CSU-Los Angeles, CSU-Dominguez Hills, CSU-Fullerton, Occidental, Whittier, University of LaVerne, University of Redlands, Loyola-Marymount University, Mount St. Mary's College, Riverside Community College, Los Angeles City Community College, La Valley Community College, Cerritos Community College, Santa Monica Community College, Long Beach City College, Rio Hondo Community College, Mount San Antonio Community College, Los Angeles Southwest Community College, Hartnell College, San Joaquin Delta Community College, DeAnza Community College, Merritt Community College, and Alameda Community College. In other states, participating colleges include Metropolitan College and Fort Lewis College in Colorado, Washington State University, and six campuses of the University of Wisconsin: Parkside, Oshkosh, Milwaukee, Whitewater, LaCrosse, and the Colleges.

[10]Based on Weber (1968), Polkinghorne (2004) defines value-rational actions as "undertaken because they are in themselves an expression of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of value. They are done because they are the right thing to do, not because doing them is the way to achieve a predetermined end" (p. 37).

3. Raises questions based on an understanding of power: How do we know who benefits from the initiatives, innovations, and programs that we are so proud of? How do the assumptions we make about our students disadvantage them? How do best practices take race and equity into account? How can we eliminate inequalities in educational outcomes?

4. Is context-dependent and sensitive: The core inquiry activities are carried out locally by practitioners.

5. Aims to make inequality concrete and solvable: The emphasis is on unpacking inequity by posing simple questions that can be answered with existing microdata disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

6. Aims to foster equity-mindedness: Inquiry is a means of bringing into the open practitioners' sense-making about inequalities, increasing awareness of perspectives that make inequality appear natural, and taking responsibility for the educational outcomes of minority students.

7. Views change as multidimensional: The analysis focuses on individual practitioners; on the places where practitioners and students come together such as the classroom, the department, and committees; and on the internal and external structures, practices, and policies that shape individual and institutional responses (Rogoff et al., 1995; Rueda, 2006).

To put these principles into effect, we have taken two interrelated steps. First, we developed cultural artifacts to structure inquiry activities. Second, we adopted means of assisted performance to orient practitioners' sense-making based on equity as a value, goal, and practice.

In the next section I describe the "equity scorecard" as an inquiry artifact, followed by excerpts that depict practitioners' sense-making in response to quantitative data on educational outcomes disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

The "Equity Scorecard" as an Inquiry Artifact

The Equity Scorecard is both a tool and a process. It helps practitioners capture the image of their institution in a mirror that reflects clearly and unambiguously the status of African American and Latina/o students with respect to basic educational outcomes. The hope is that it will facilitate and encourage reflection about a deplorable situation. The primary activity of the project consists of practitioners working in teams to examine routine student data disaggregated by race and ethnicity. In doing so, practitioners identify equity gaps and create a "scorecard," or set of basic indicators, to monitor and evaluate institutional performance according to equity in outcomes, rather than only the diversity of admitted students. Practitioner teams examine data disaggregated by race and ethnicity; and through a series of questions that become gradually more specific, they arrive at a practical understanding of the problem.

For example, a team may start out with data that answer questions such as: What percentage of the students who graduate with 3.5 GPA are African

American and Latina/o? How does this percentage compare with the percentage of enrolled students? Similarly, in comparison to enrollment shares, of the African American first-year students who declared a major in science, mathematics, engineering, or technology, what proportion actually stayed and graduated from that major? What percentage of the Latina/o students who start out in ESL non-credit courses earn an A.A. degree within three years? Five years? What percentage of the students who are in the Honors Program are African American and Latina/o? What percentage qualify for the Honors Program? How many of those who qualify actually participate?

Through the process of constructing the scorecard, patterns of inequality previously unnoticed are suddenly revealed with startling clarity. In essence, this process compels a recognition of Dewey's "indeterminate situation" because it is constructed with local knowledge by local practitioners. The conversations elicited by the data reveal the funds of knowledge (beliefs, attitudes, understanding, and practices) implicit in how practitioners explain to themselves and others why the success rates of African American and Latina/o students almost always fall below those of their White and Asian peers. Just as important, the conversations reveal beliefs about the obstacles to resolving the situation. Identifying practitioners' perceptions of these obstacles is the beginning of resolving them.

The practitioner-as-researcher approach that is distinctive to the Equity Scorecard provides the advantage of observing, up close and in detail, the unrehearsed and unselfconscious "race talk" (Pollock, 2001) of the team members as they try to make sense of data that show differences in educational outcomes that often on the whole separate African Americans and Latinas/os from Asian Americans and Whites.

The comments that I share below were made by individuals from various Equity Scorecard team members in reaction to data demonstrating disparities in the outcomes of African Americans and Latinas/os and their White and Asian American counterparts. I selected excerpts that reflect internalized racial bias and culturally held ideas about minority students (Nasir & Hand, 2006), dysconscious racism (King, 1991), and cultural determinism in order to make two points. First, practitioners' sense-making in viewing educational outcome data provides insight into how they construe their role in relation to improving the outcomes of minority students. Second, practitioners' sense-making provides a view into how their assumptions about students may perpetuate inequalities because these inequalities are accepted.

1. It's the characteristic of the community. "Yeah, I think that the cultural expectations in those groups. . . . [stammering] . . . I don't know whether this is something we can use or discuss. . . . Well, my point is that this is a given. It's out there. It's the characteristic of the community."

2. They are driven by dishonest motives rather than authentic goals. "Half of those students are coming here just for reimbursements. They have no desire to transfer or get a degree."

3. Culture determines success and failure. "What I think . . . is that there might be some cultural differences in the goals of students. It is possible that some students have different goals based on their culture. For example, we might assume that Latino and African American students come here, perhaps, to improve their academic skills but not to get a degree, whereas there is a cultural bias in Asians to get a degree. Four out of 10 Asians are behaving as if they want a degree and transfer, where only one out of four African Americans are behaving in that way."

4. Students lack motivation. "It is not that we as an institution are failing them. We have so many support systems around here. I just wonder how many don't pay attention . . . because at orientation they hear all about the resources we offer."

5. Students are lazy. "We have fantastic programs, we have supplemental instruction, we have tutoring, we have learning communities. But I think that if you tell the average student, 'Here is something else you need to do,' they don't want to have to do something else that sounds like more work. That is the mindset a lot of students have. That is the attitude I have to battle when I say we have all this great stuff."

Like racial profiling, the negative characterizations expressed by these practitioners are generalized to the entire racial or ethnic group, creating the impression that African American and Latina/o students, as a group, experience unequal educational outcomes, justifiably, because they do not measure up to the normative image of the "good" student or because these qualities stem from immutable characteristics. The deficit perspectives (Bensimon, 2005a, 2005b) expressed by these practitioners are not uncommon, and they may be as much a basis for the persistence of inequality as students' literacy and mathematical skills. Thus, the improvement of student outcomes seems to depend as much on student motivation to learn as on the motivation of practitioners to become aware of their racially biased understandings of inequality and unlearn them (King, 1991; Valencia, 1997).

However, entrenched knowledge and beliefs are hard to notice, and they are not likely to be changed by attending a short-term workshop or by participating in professional development activities on such topics as intercultural communication or culturally responsive teaching. Nor is entrenched knowledge likely to be given up by reading the results reported in research reports. Moreover, entrenched knowledge that predisposes practitioners to judge unequal outcomes as student deficiencies is resistant to change because it is reinforced by academic norms, the culture of individualism and self-determination, and discipline-based conceptions about teaching and learning. To put it simply, deficit interpretations of unequal outcomes resist change because they represent the internalization of the view that academic success is determined by individual effort.

Consequently, the recognition of racial bias in one's own funds of knowledge or in others requires expert assistance. However, in the practitioner-as-researcher model, the delivery of expert assistance is based on a different understanding of the relationship between research and practice and of how change happens. In the traditional model of doing social science, the researcher controls the production of knowledge, and practitioners implement the received knowledge (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, et al., 2004). In this traditional view, expert assistance involves writing in a more user-friendly style, publishing research results in outlets that are practitioner-oriented, presenting research results at practitioner-oriented meetings, and studying problems that are high on policymakers' and practitioners' lists of priorities. The prevailing view is that research knowledge, before it can be a catalyst for change, must be translated by researchers into specific guidelines for practice, programs, best practices, procedures, and policies (Tinto, 2005, p. 320). For example, Vincent Tinto rightly points out that the practical meaning of such theoretical concepts as academic integration is not self-evident. A faculty member may understand academic integration abstractly but still not know what he or she can do to help students achieve it. Similarly, journal articles on the topic can help practitioners learn new techniques and even inspire them to think differently and try out new approaches.

But new techniques, programs, procedures, or policies are shaped by their context; and their effect is mediated by the knowledge, values, and practices of the individuals who implement them. While I agree that the practical meaning of theoretical concepts such as Tinto's academic integration, Stanton-Salazar's (1997, 2001) institutional agents, Rendón's validation, Hurtado and Carter's sense of belonging, Steele's stereotype threat, or King's dysconscious racism are not obvious, I do not think that expert assistance carried out in the traditional mode as translation from research to practice is sufficient to make change happen locally. This is so, primarily because the kind of change that needs to happen is less about how to implement new techniques or best practices than about how to recognize the inadequacy of one's experience and knowledge. Accordingly, in the practitioner-as-researcher model, rather than asking, How can we make our research more relevant? or How can we write in a friendlier manner and reach thousands of practitioners?, our aim is to assist practitioners in becoming equity-minded. To accomplish this, we employ means of "assisted performance" drawn from sociocultural theories of teaching (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

The Researcher as Facilitator

Practitioners' reactions that attribute disparities in the outcomes for minority students to "cultural expectations in those groups" or "cultural differences" that predispose Asians, but not African Americans, toward degree aspirations seem to reflect racially and culturally biased views of

inequalities. The interpretation of inequality as culturally determined can persuade practitioners that it is natural, unavoidable, and unsolvable—and therefore a condition that is beyond their capacity to change. Needless to say, accepting inequality as a permanent condition can affect how practitioners and minority students respond to each other, and it can create a dispiriting organizational culture.

In our projects, when we work with campuses and hear comments like those quoted above, it is hard not to react. In the same manner that students may appear deficient in practitioners' eyes, so practitioners may appear deficient in researchers' eyes. Not unlike students who camouflage their feelings of inadequacy and lack of know-how by feigning indifference, practitioners may blame students for unequal outcomes to rationalize their inability to reach them and help them be successful. In view of this scenario, researchers at CUE have been moved to ask: How can research help practitioners reflect on their racially biased views of students? How can research help them to learn and change? How can research foster a culture of equity?

In the practitioner-as-researcher model, when practitioners respond to inequality like those I described above, the researcher's role is to reorient practitioners' sense-making toward an understanding of the problem based on evidence rather than assumptions. The researcher employs the means of assisted performance—modeling, reinforcing, providing feedback, instructing, questioning, and reframing—to challenge entrenched deficit perspectives, thus encouraging practitioners to define the problem more concretely. The aim of assisted performance is to bring practitioners to the point where they ask such questions as: What are we doing that is not working with minority students? How can we be more successful with minority students?

To illustrate, I reintroduce one of the deficit-oriented statements from above. This excerpt demonstrates how, by using questioning and instructing means of assisted performance, the researcher can encourage reflection in ways that raise "indeterminate situations" amenable to problem-solving.

> Practitioner: We have fantastic programs, we have supplemental instruction, we have tutoring, we have learning communities. But I think that if you tell the average student, "Here is something else you need to do," they don't want to have to do something else that sounds like more work. That is the mindset a lot of students have. That is the attitude I have to battle when I say we have all this great stuff.
>
> Researcher-Facilitator: Could there be any other reasons why students may not make use of the services available to them? [questioning]
>
> What kind of evidence is available about the use of the services? [questioning]
>
> I recently read an article that students who fear they will fail are less likely to seek help. Could this be going on here? [instructing]

On my way here I happened to go by the tutoring center and noticed that all the tutors are from [particular country of origin, ethnicity, etc.]. Could this be one of the reasons why [minority] students don't go? [modeling race consciousness]

The researcher, by virtue of being an outsider, has more leeway to raise questions that challenge shared knowledge about minority students and to problematize taken-for-granted structures and practices (e.g., the racial/ethnic composition of the tutors). The kinds of questions and the manner in which they are asked provide a model for others on the team about how to challenge assumptions and accepted practices. The researcher draws on his or her knowledge of theories, studies, and personal experiences that are relevant in understanding minority student success in order to help practitioners develop new awareness and ways of seeing in the moment, within their own context, and according to their willingness to examine their own assumptions and practices. Rather than publish an article that tells an unknown audience of practitioners how to apply generalized knowledge and improve the success of minority students, the researcher creates an opportunity that enables practitioners to construct their own knowledge while taking into account particular needs and circumstances—their own as well as their students.

Conclusion

To sum up, I began this paper with the life histories of students and their accounts of how they achieved academic success despite adverse circumstances. The students' stories highlighted the significance of practitioners who had the power to influence success or failure. These individuals fit Ricardo Stanton-Salazar's description of "institutional agents" and Rebecca Cox's (2004) description of "relational instructors." Whether called institutional agents or relational instructors, what these individuals possess is an expertise that enables them to be responsive to marginal and marginalized students. These individuals are not only knowledgeable in their subject matter or areas of specialty, but they also have the capacity to respond to students in ways that make them feel valued, worthy, and respected.

In contrast, I pointed out that, in the dominant scholarship on student success, practitioners are only present indirectly and that we lack a theory of student success based on the characteristics of practitioners. I drew on practice and sociocultural theories to describe a praxis approach to doing social science research in which the practitioner becomes the researcher and the researcher becomes a facilitator. I emphasized several key points:

1. Students with a history of social and educational marginalization attribute successful outcomes to the formation of supportive relationships

with practitioners; however, the dominant scholarship attributes success to individual effort.

2. From the perspective of traditional social science, the researcher and research results are the catalyst of change. The role of the researcher is to translate generalized results into guidelines, procedures, programs, and policies to facilitate student success.

3. From the perspective of practice theory, practitioners are the catalyst of change. The practitioner develops context-dependent knowledge and experience about how to facilitate student success.

I realize that how I have described the dominant scholarship on student success could be interpreted as a denigration of the research produced by leading scholars in the field of higher education. The core concepts of the dominant paradigm (academic/social integration, engagement, and involvement) are critically important for all students. Indeed, studies reporting on these concepts can provide practitioners with a repertoire of actions and techniques (Polkinghorne, 2004) that demonstrate authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999). Faculty members on campuses that administer surveys such as the NSSE may become more conscious about their interactions with students or may go out of their way to establish relationships with students who appear vulnerable. The caveat is that the application of generalized knowledge to particular individuals cannot be done mechanically; the individual's response to particular activities or interventions must be monitored and practitioners need to engage in "situational improvisation" and make adjustments in their practices (Polkinghorne, 2004). The concern I have is that well-meaning practitioners may not notice the need for such adjustments if they lack the cultural knowledge to understand why minority students might not respond or behave in expected ways—for example, not seeking help when they find themselves in academic trouble.

To conclude, there are different ways of doing social science and the appropriate methods depend on what we are trying to accomplish (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The methods I have been describing begin to characterize a phronetic social science for higher education. Although this characterization is admittedly partial, I believe it has the potential to move us forward in developing much-needed theories of change based on "practice" and the central role of higher education practitioners. Much work remains, which many others will hopefully take up, to extend and expand on these ideas.

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