**Fostering Academic Success for First-Generation & Racially Minoritized Students - Part One: Inspired Teaching Day Spring 2023 Episode 177**

00:00:00 **Dr. Laura**

You have got to want this - this unshakeable drive and determination to achieve educational and career goals. And these students really wanted this. Just like I wanted to be a teacher, I had that ganas. No matter what that instructor told me that I could never do this, I kept on going, I persevered. I had that determination.

00:00:21 **Dr. Laura**

Without these assets, it's going to be very difficult for students to succeed. So, we've got to think about assets, not just in terms of academics, but in terms of going to personal assets that help students keep going.

00:00:39 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:41 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:45 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:01:02 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

00:01:05 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:01:11 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pomona! Psychology major, English major ...

00:01:17 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time.

00:01:19 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:26 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:29 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:32 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

00:01:43 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:48 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:49 **Christina**

If you missed Inspired Teaching Day this spring 2023 or are ready for a recap, this episode features an abridged version of Part one of Dr. Laura Rendon's workshop called Fostering Academic Success for First Generation and Racially Minoritized students. Enjoy!

00:02:18 **Sun**

Well, I'm so honored to welcome and introduce Dr. Rendon for our conference today. Dr. Rendon is a nationally recognized student advocate, scholar, and contemplative educator. Dr. Rendon is Professor Emerita at the University of Texas, San Antonio, and has held faculty and administrative appointments at several universities.

00:02:37 **Sun**

She earned a doctorate in higher education administration at the University of Michigan. Dr. Rendon grew up in a low-income single-parent household along the U . S. Mexico border in Laredo, Texas. Dr. Rendon is a passionate advocate for low-income first generation students who she feels have hopes and dreams, but often do not know how to realize them without proper resources.

00:02:59 **Sun**

She's also a teaching and learning thought leader and is the author of Sentipensante Pedagogy, educating for wholeness, social justice and liberation, along with nine other books and monographs, and an extensive list of scholarly publications focused on fostering success for underserved student populations.

00:03:16 **Sun**

Currently, Dr. Rendon is involved in several leadership and advisory roles. Among these include board of directors, John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence and Undergraduate Education and Equity Advisory Council for the Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin Madison.

00:03:33 **Sun**

Dr. Rendon is the 2021 recipient of the Howard Bowen Distinguished Career Award issued by the Association for the Study of Higher Education. In 2023, Dr. Rendon received the Distinguished Alumni Award for post-secondary education at the University of Michigan. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Rendon. Thank you so much for being here today.

00:03:56 **Dr. Laura**

Thank you so much. It's a real pleasure to be with all of you, and thank you Sun, for that great introduction.

00:04:03 **Dr. Laura**

So, I'm doing two talks today, and the first one has to do with really understanding the students that you work with. In order to work with teaching and learning, you've got to also understand the students; who they are, what they go through, and how we can best help them.

00:04:22 **Dr. Laura**

So, this first presentation is about fostering success for first generation and racially minoritized students. And then in the second presentation, I'm going to get into more detailed information about a teaching and learning approach that I call Sentipensante Pedagogy.

00:04:39 **Dr. Laura**

And I want to begin with just a little bit about how I step into this inquiry, this work about student success. This is not just an academic exercise for me. I am one of these students who grew up in poverty. I grew up along the U . S. Mexico border in Laredo, Texas.

00:04:57 **Dr. Laura**

In the black and white photo, that is my sixth birthday. And I wanted nothing more than a pair moccasins for my birthday. And my mom, who was struggling to help the family survive (my parents separated when I was about four-years-old) somehow found the money to buy me those moccasins.

00:05:15 **Dr. Laura**

My sister Iliana, who went on to be a high school English teacher, and my cousin Elma, who went on to be a social worker. But you can see in the background the house where we used to live, not a very nice house. And growing up in poverty does something to you.

00:05:33 **Dr. Laura**

It means you don't have health insurance, it means you're not getting the best nutrition, the best foods. It means that you're growing up not knowing anyone close to you that has gone to college. It means not knowing anything about the world of higher education.

00:05:47 **Dr. Laura**

Later on, we moved to that 517 Galveston, that's still there. And every time that I go to Laredo, I drive by there just to remember where I come from.

00:05:59 **Dr. Laura**

So, I want to take you through a number of equity points that I hope will be helpful to you as you begin to wrap your minds around how can we best help our students? What do I need to know about them so that I can be more attuned to who they are and how I can be helpful?

00:06:15 **Dr. Laura**

So, the first equity point is about we're going to work with underserved racially minoritized students. We need a new equity and justice mindset. We need to work with them with a new mindset. We need to understand and transform cultural narratives that have worked against equity injustice. We need to understand why are these things occurring? Why are these students not doing well? Why do these students remain in poverty? You know, why is it that educators can't really understand these students?

00:06:44 **Dr. Laura**

There's some entrenched narratives. These are narratives that are in place, they're not written down anywhere, but we follow them almost robotically because they've been in our minds, in our heads. And we haven't really taken the time to interrogate them and illuminate these narratives.

00:07:03 **Dr. Laura**

I have two quotes here. They have to do with the entrenched narrative of victim blame. The first is over 50 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King said, "When white Americans tell the negro to lift himself up by his own bootstraps, they don't look over the legacy of slavery and segregation. Many negroes have been left footless 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."

00:07:36 **Dr. Laura**

What Dr. King is talking about here is that when we as educators believe that students, no matter what their backgrounds ought to succeed by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, we're not looking about why this is happening. We're not looking at how so many systemic issues have worked against them.

00:07:58 **Dr. Laura**

So, yeah, we all would like to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, but what if you have no boots? What if you've been bootless as a result of years of oppression? What if there are no resources? What if nobody really cares about you?

00:08:13 **Dr. Laura**

Nearly 50 years later, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, the author of a beautiful book called What the Eyes Don't See - Dr. Attisha was working with families in Flint, Michigan in poverty areas who were impacted by the horrendous water quality in those communities.

00:08:32 **Dr. Laura**

These communities were told that the water was okay to drink. It was not, many children got sick. They're still recovering from this. It became national news. I'm sure many of you have heard of this, but Dr. Attisha worked with these families and she said something similar to what Dr. King had said 50 years ago.

00:08:51 **Dr. Laura**

She writes, "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."

00:09:10 **Dr. Laura**

So, what Dr. Hanna-Attisha is saying is we celebrate all of these people, look at these 10 people who succeeded or graduated or went into STEM, but they don't realize that behind them are hundreds that did not make it. And to expect that all of them become resilient despite the fact that they don't have resources, it's not the right way to proceed. And sometimes, we say, well, if you don't pull yourself up, then you're to blame for that.

00:09:39 **Dr. Laura**

Students are not to blame for that. The students that have been in poverty have been the victims quite a bit of oppression. They need reparations, they need resources. So, there are a number of factors that are working against the success of underserved racially minoritized students.

00:09:56 **Dr. Laura**

Some of them are societal factors and some of them are institutional factors. With societal factors, we're talking about attending schools with funding inequalities. Not all schools are funded in the same way. Low-income schools do not get the same resources as high-income schools.

00:10:15 **Dr. Laura**

There's still a lot of school and college segregation with black and Latino students going to schools that are segregated. Even in higher ed, there's a segregated system of education where most students of color are in community colleges and some in state colleges, and very few in the elite sector of higher education. These students are struggling to survive.

00:10:40 **Dr. Laura**

They have housing insecurities, they have a lack of healthcare, they have food insecurities. During the pandemic, we saw all of this illuminated, remember the long lines of the food banks that these families have been struggling to survive for a long time. And all of this became exacerbated during the pandemic.

00:11:00 **Dr. Laura**

And then there's tremendous wealth inequality in this nation with the top 1% having more money than so, so many of us. And they can't understand the experience of low-income people anymore than we can understand how to live with the wealth of, for example, Bill Gates or Jeff Bezos. I mean, I have no idea how that is. I can imagine how it is, but they can't imagine how it is for low-income people either.

00:11:28 **Dr. Laura**

In terms of institutional factors, there's still a lack of faculty and staff of color, these deficit-based views about students that families don't care, that in low-income communities, people have no aspirations, that all students are marginal learners.

00:11:47 **Dr. Laura**

All of those are deficit views about students that many educators still harbor. A lack of understanding of the low-income first gen student experience, and the fact that we need a new relational humanized approach to work with these students.

00:12:01 **Dr. Laura**

So, we need to transform the narrative that students, regardless of circumstances, should be able to rise above their conditions and take total blame if they aren't able to do so. We've got to transform that narrative to look something like this: 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.

00:12:30 **Dr. Laura**

So, we have to provide those resources. We have to make sure that there are real opportunities for these students to succeed. We should not blame the victim.

00:12:39 **Dr. Laura**

The second equity point is to understand the challenges that these low-income first gen students face as they attend college. Nearly one third of undergraduates are first generation students. I was one of those students way back in the sixties when I started going to college. I didn't even know I was first generation. I didn't know the word. And I think that is still the same case with many of our students today.

00:13:03 **Dr. Laura**

But to give you a sense of that experience, I want to refer to a study that we did here at the University of Texas San Antonio. And we interviewed Latinx students and we wanted to find the positive and negative aspects of the college experience.

00:13:18 **Dr. Laura**

We all tend to think that everything about going to college is positive, but there's a downside to going to college for underserved students. So, let me share a little bit about what the experience is like for these students.

00:13:32 **Dr. Laura**

As we listen to students speak about their experiences, it seemed to us that they were really coming from multiple worlds, their own personal worlds, the world of the family, the world of their peers, their friends, the world of work, their spiritual work, their community, and their native country.

00:13:52 **Dr. Laura**

For example, some students were coming from Puerto Rico, from Bolivia, from Mexico. Those are the worlds that they know. Now, they're moving into the world of college. And as they are moving, they experience what [inaudible] would call "unchoke", a cultural coalition, which involves dislocation from their familiar worlds and relocation into a new world of college that is very different from their familiar realities.

00:14:23 **Dr. Laura**

In that world of college, students experience different things that are not well understood by many educators. One of their experiences is separation anxiety. They were leaving their brothers and sisters behind. They were leaving their families behind.

00:14:38 **Dr. Laura**

Sometimes, the young man was the man of the house when the father had left and felt guilty about leaving his mother. Same thing with some of the young ladies who were used to taking care of their brothers and sisters and were not at home anymore.

00:14:54 **Dr. Laura**

Some of them experience what are known in the literature as microaggressions. These are jabs, they're hurtful jabs that are thrown at students. For example, being told, "What is that food you're eating? Why are you speaking Spanish? What is that music that you're listening to?" College readiness.

00:15:12 **Dr. Laura**

Some of these students had done well in high school, but coming to college, they felt unprepared. Some of them were placed in the wrong track in college. So, they had these advising issues. College affordability, always a big issue for low-income students. It was a big issue for me.

00:15:29 **Dr. Laura**

When I went to college, I always sent money home. I never kept all of my financial aid award for myself. To this day, I send money home. You know, students are very committed to their families. So, college affordability is always a key issue for students.

00:15:46 **Dr. Laura**

Liminality, a fancy word for being in an in-between space. One foot in their familiar world, and another foot in the unfamiliar world of college. So, this is what the experience is like. And so, we need to consider that affluent students don't really go through this.

00:16:05 **Dr. Laura**

Everything in college is pretty much set up for affluent students. They have the money, they don't have to worry about money. They're expected to go to college. The tradition of going to college is there pretty much everybody looks like them. They don't get a lot of these microaggressions. They've gone to some of the best schools with the best resources, so they're college ready, so to speak.

00:16:28 **Dr. Laura**

So, we cannot say that every student starts out at the same starting line. Unfortunately, they do not. And so, we need to understand that those students that do not start out at the same starting line need special resources and special attention. And that's where we need to step in to assist these students to succeed.

00:16:49 **Dr. Laura**

The second equity point is about the importance of humanizing education through what I call validating relationships. There's a new book that came out, it's called The Good Life, and it's the longest in-depth longitudinal study of human life ever done.

00:17:05 **Dr. Laura**

They followed these individuals for a long time. It started during the depression and continues today, so that's how long this study has been going on. And they followed these individuals from different , diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Their main main finding was that the single most important thing we can do to ensure health and happiness is to cultivate warm relationships.

00:17:30 **Dr. Laura**

That's the single most important thing, had to do with cultivating relationships. So, what does this mean for colleges and universities? I want to introduce you to what I call validation theory. It's about affirming students. Validation theory is something I developed in the mid-nineties when I was a professor at Arizona State University.

00:17:53 **Dr. Laura**

Basically, what we're talking about here is simple, yet powerful. It's about when we take the initiative - we take the initiative, not the student. We as educators take the initiative to reach out to them and to let them know that they can do this work, that they have potential, that they have the ability to do college level work, and that we are here to help them.

00:18:19 **Dr. Laura**

This outreach to students is very, very powerful because when students begin to feel that they are cared for, that we're there for them, that we believe in them, this can help them continue to move forward. It even helps them to think, "I don't want to let this person down. He or she believes so much in me that I can't let him or her down."

00:18:43 **Dr. Laura**

So, basically, validation is similar to what my friend Deana Lozano and his colleagues out out of UCLA call micro-affirmations. These are small everyday ways that we can affirm the dignity and humanity of those around us.

00:19:02 **Dr. Laura**

It goes back to a book that Danielle read, it was the memoir of Henry Louis Gates, who you may know from the PBS series, Finding Your Roots. So, Henry Louis Gates is writing this memoir, and there's a passage where he's talking about being in Italy and he's at a cafe.

00:19:22 **Dr. Laura**

And when he sees other African Americans walk by, he always takes time to nod, to smile, to wave a hand. And his daughter says, "Dad, why are you doing this? You don't even know these individuals." And he said, "You don't understand. It's good to be seen when you feel nobody sees you. It's good to be seen when you feel nobody sees you."

00:19:45 **Dr. Laura**

So these are micro-affirmations, what I would also call interpersonal validation. Meeting with students outside of class, helping them understand something better maybe at the cafeteria. You know, having coffee, asking how are you doing? A smile, a nod, a wave of a hand, a hug, a compliment, a note, or a letter. All of these are ways that we can affirm their dignity and their humanity.

00:20:10 **Dr. Laura**

If we learned anything during the pandemic, it's how much we needed each other. I mean, when we could not go out to our friends' homes, when we couldn't even go to the supermarket, we found ways - very creatively, we found ways of communicating with each other.

00:20:31 **Dr. Laura**

Remember the drive-by birthday parties, the online weddings, some of you did happy hours. I mean, we found ways to connect because you know what? We're human beings. We need each other. We need those relationships. They're what matter the most.

00:20:52 **Dr. Laura**

And so, we need a relationship-centered based approach to working with students. So, here are some examples of what I would call validation; validating statements, telling students, for example, "You have what it takes to do science."

00:21:09 **Dr. Laura**

I mean, to hear that from a scientist, to hear that from a biology instructor, from an engineering instructor can mean a great deal to students who believe that they can't do science. Rafael Alvarez out of San Diego City College, he's the Head of MESA Program there.

00:21:25 **Dr. Laura**

He tells his students when he first meets with them, "Do you know it makes my day to see you?" English instructors can say to students, "Your writing has definitely improved, you're going to be a great writer." Counselors can say, "Tell me a little bit about you. Will you be the first in your family to go to college? Your family must be so proud, your brothers and sisters are going to be so proud. They're going to follow in your footsteps."

00:21:49 **Dr. Laura**

So, I'm not going to read through all of this, but you can see these simple yet powerful statements that we can share with our students that when they're received, they're very validating and affirming in nature.

00:22:02 **Dr. Laura**

Within the school and college culture, we can have a validating climate, a validating culture, ensuring that the cultures of the students are represented in the curriculum and institutional policies and communications. That student cultures are represented in the composition of faculty, counselors and administrators, a climate that fosters a sense of belonging and on and on.

00:22:25 **Dr. Laura**

So, these are examples of validating actions, statements, culture that we can institute to affirm students as human beings.

00:22:35 **Dr. Laura**

During the pandemic, I attended a very interesting webinar hosted by a scholar from Duke University, and he studies Rumi. Some of you know Rumi's work, which is very beautiful.

00:22:47 **Dr. Laura**

He read a poem that made me begin to think for the first time, that validation has healing aspects as well. This is the poem, it's called Cry Out in Your Weakness.

00:22:59 **Dr. Laura**

"A dragon was pulling a bear into its terrible mouth and a courageous man went and rescued the bear. And there are such helpers in the world who rush to save anyone who cries out. Like mercy itself, they run toward the screaming, and they can't be brought off. And if you were to ask one of those, why did you come so quickly? He or she would say, "Because I heard your helplessness. Because I heard your helplessness."

00:23:31 **Dr. Laura**

And so, there are many of us who are helpers who rush out to help anyone who cries out. The physicians and the nurses who risk their lives during the pandemic to help the helpless, the firefighters who get into the woods in a raging fire and risk their lives so that others can survive.

00:23:56 **Dr. Laura**

Those are examples of helpers, people who believe in our humanity, people who know that part of our role is to be of service to the world. And so, there is a need for us to be these helpers, these validating agents who work with students as human beings to hear their helplessness, to reach out with an open heart, to offer mercy, compassion, and care to those who are broken. This is all part of the healing aspects of what I call validation.

00:24:34 **Dr. Laura**

I want to now share with you a study that we did of Latinx STEM students. There's a book, it's called The Latino Students Guide to STEM Careers. And it's a book that Vijay Kanagala and I put together. It's an edited volume, and it has all the information that students and families would need beginning in middle school if they're thinking about getting into a STEM career.

00:24:57 **Dr. Laura**

The last part of that book includes essays that were written by Latinx scientists. They actually earned a STEM degree. And we examined those essays that these Latinx scientists wrote, and we tried to figure out their experience. And here's some of the challenges that they experienced. And I think other students you don't have to be in STEM, can also relate to these kinds of challenges.

00:25:24 **Dr. Laura**

Health-related issues, some of them even having life-threatening illnesses; leaving their native country to come here and learning a whole new culture, a whole new language, a whole new way of being; being undocumented, experiencing racism such as not being treated as equal or perceived as less smart and unworthy. Those are invalidating experiences.

00:25:48 **Dr. Laura**

A lack of information; didn't know about financial aid opportunities, didn't know what it took to become a scientist. Didn't know about college and about the STEM programs. Language issues; some of them having difficulty reading, writing, and thinking in English. They have difficulties reading, publishing and presenting. They experience that academic shock that I talked about earlier.

00:26:12 **Dr. Laura**

They were living with limited resources, some of them in single-parent households. They had family-related issues, sometimes they had to care for their brothers and sisters. They were expected to make a financial contribution to the family. They were balancing academics while caring for the family.

00:26:30 **Dr. Laura**

And then gender-related issues, the lack of women in STEM, and the experience of being the only person of color or the only woman in that STEM class. These were some of the challenges.

00:26:43 **Dr. Laura**

So, another equity point is that we need to work with students with an asset-based framework. You know, oftentimes when we begin to talk about student success and what we can do to help more students stay in college, the default conversation has to do with something that goes like this: "Oh, it's really overwhelming. These students, families don't care, they don't want to work. College is not for everyone."

00:27:12 **Dr. Laura**

As opposed to viewing these students with potential, with the ability to do the work, with the strengths that they bring to the institution. Here are some of the strengths that we've discovered in terms of the students that are underserved and that many feel, "Hey, these students can't learn," that's part of the entrenched deficit-based narrative that many believe that low-income first generation students have too many adversities that cannot be overcome and that they're not college material. And so, we need to believe that our students definitely, definitely have strengths.

00:27:53 **Dr. Laura**

So, here's some of the strengths that came out in our interviews with students. Aspirational: the ability to set goals and to remain hopeful about the future. It's something that, for example, I had when I was one of these students, I wanted to be a teacher. That was my goal ever since I was a kid.

00:28:11 **Dr. Laura**

And I can tell you that I wouldn't be here today had I not kept on going because when I was in high school, I got kicked out of the Future Teachers of America Club. I don't know if they still have those organizations. But the reason I got kicked out is because I had made an F in chemistry, and the sponsor of the Future Teachers of America called me into her office (I'll never forget this) and she said, "Laura, you can't be in Future Teachers anymore because you made an F in chemistry."

00:28:43 **Dr. Laura**

So, of course, that's not the message I wanted to hear, and I was very sad. But as I think about that experience today, she never asked why I had made the F. I had made the F because I had gone to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico with my mother. There was a thunderstorm, we were running, I fell and I could feel my knee just snap. It was very painful.

00:29:05 **Dr. Laura**

We did not have money to see the doctor, the knee swelled up. To this day, I have problems with this knee, and I couldn't walk to school for weeks. So, of course, when I showed up to the chemistry class, there was a test, I failed it. I got F that six weeks.

00:29:22 **Dr. Laura**

Had that teacher taken the time to really learn about what happened to me, perhaps she would not have kicked me out of Future Teachers, but I wish she were alive today so that she could see that not only did I become a teacher, I became a university professor.

00:29:42 **Dr. Laura**

There's another beautiful lesson called giving back. These students want to earn their college credentials or college degree, but it's not just to hang it on the wall. They want to use their education in a very noble way. They want to put their expertise back to make their communities better, to be role models for their brothers and sisters, to address issues like declining infrastructures and climate change and disease outbreaks.

00:30:13 **Dr. Laura**

They want, in other words, to make this world a better place to live. And doing this work personally, myself, this is my way of giving back. Yes, I am hyper-documented now, so to speak, but it's not just for me to get these awards. I mean, that's nice. It's about giving back this knowledge so that whatever I can share can make an impact on students that are coming behind me.

00:30:38 **Dr. Laura**

Resistant, they overcame poverty. They resisted and confronted racism, sexism, homophobia. They had navigational competence. These are students remember that are coming from context that the college world is unfamiliar. They're coming from their familiar worlds into an unfamiliar culture of college. Some of them are coming from one nation to another nation, and they've, through twists and turns and stalls, they figure things out.

00:31:08 **Dr. Laura**

They figure things out when they're changing majors or programs to study, when they're transitioning from another nation, when they're learning a new academic culture that is different from their home realities. Another big strength is what Jaime Escalante, who was featured in the film Stand and Deliver calls ganas, perseverance, determination.

00:31:28 **Dr. Laura**

You have got to want this - this unshakeable drive and determination to achieve educational and career goals. And these students really wanted this. Just like I wanted to be a teacher, I had that ganas. No matter what that instructor told me that I could never do this, I kept on going, I persevered, I had that determination.

00:31:51 **Dr. Laura**

Without these assets, it's going to be very difficult for students to succeed. So, we've got to think about assets, not just in terms of academics, but in terms of personal assets that help students keep going, keep going until they get to that finish line. It's not just me anymore.

00:32:11 **Dr. Laura**

Now , this is a spiritual nobility, I would call it, that students are thinking beyond themselves to the larger community, to the world. It's phenomenal how these students operate and think.

00:32:23 **Dr. Laura**

The next equity point is about creating supportive learning culture, what Rafael Alvarez, who I just mentioned out at San Diego City College would call turning on the lights for students who are in the dark about how to succeed in college. So, many of these students are coming to higher education, to college, and they don't really understand college.

00:32:45 **Dr. Laura**

Nobody in their family has been to college. They can't go to anybody for information. And so, they're in the dark about all of this. So, we are charged with turning on the lights, as Rafael would say for these students.

00:32:59 **Dr. Laura**

So, he's written a book called Turning on the Lights, and there's a website turningonthelights.com. And he talks about the learning culture that is needed to increase student success. And these are the important factors for college readiness, that they have to have an identity as a college student. They need emotional intelligence. They need to learn how to fight for themselves.

00:33:21 **Dr. Laura**

We need to teach them study skills, we need to teach them the importance of mental toughness, goal focus, time management, and of course, the academic skills. Rafael has done wonders, wonders with his STEM students in San Diego and he tells his students, all of you have potential.

00:33:42 **Dr. Laura**

Potential is not questioned here. All of you have potential to be a scientist. What is questioned is how much do you want this? How much do you really want to be a scientist? Because it's going to be a tough road down the line. How much do you want to do this? And he tells his students, you've got to want this as much as you want to breathe. You've got to want this as much as you want to breathe.

00:34:05 **Dr. Laura**

And he's given a lot of talks across the nation doing very well with Turning on the Lights. Here's one of his star students (he has many), her name is Katia Echazarita, dhe's an astronaut. She has a phenomenal story. She's an electrical engineer. She's recently made history just a few months ago, at 26-years-old, she made history as the first Mexican born American woman and one of the youngest women to go to space.

00:34:37 **Dr. Laura**

It's a phenomenal story that made me think of my own story with my parents separating when I was just a child and moving from house to house. My mother taking odd jobs from cleaning hotel rooms to working at a restaurant from 10 o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning for $15 plus tips. And I can tell you that they didn't leave a lot of tips those days in Laredo, Texas.

00:35:03 **Dr. Laura**

And really starting from nothing and just having this dream that this is what I wanted to do and I needed to find out how to get there, how to fulfill my dream. To see Katya's story is so inspirational. And to see how her mother became such a validating, supportive agent for her, never letting her down, always being there for her.

00:35:27 **Dr. Laura**

We have to remember that not every student has parents that can be that validating because they might not be present in the home or they have to work or they're too tired. So, that's where we step in. When they don't have anybody at home, we have to be those validating agents. We have to reach out, we have to offer care. We have to work with them as not only students, but as human beings.

00:35:54 **Dr. Laura**

So, what we're talking about here is that we've got to change some of the narratives that are in place, that work against the education of low-income racially minoritized students. We've got to create a humanized, relationship-centered, validating approach to working with students.

00:36:15 **Dr. Laura**

We have to make sure that we think about these students as having assets, as having potential, as having the determination that they need to have to succeed in college. And we need to think of ourselves as validating agents who work with students, not just as students, but as real human beings. And we have to understand that these students, you can't compare them to affluent students that have all the resources and support. These students are not starting at the same starting line.

00:36:48 **Dr. Laura**

So, all of these are considerations to take as we develop an approach to work with our students in a way that can help all of them be successful and to be who they want to be to reach those goals like I did such a long time ago that I had a dream, I had a goal, I didn't know how to do it, but I did it.

00:37:16 **Christina**

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