**Michel Estefan Interview**

Learn equitable pedagogy practices to improve student success.

**AS** [00:00:46] For today's podcast, it's a pleasure to have Dr. Michel Estefan. Michek is an assistant teaching professor in the sociology department at the University of California, San Diego. His teaching and research focus on making classrooms more equitable for historically minoritized students. His published work has appeared in Teaching Sociology, Inside Higher Ed, and Teaching/Learning Matters, and has been covered various times in the Chronicle of Higher Education. In the course of his career, he has trained close to 2000 graduate students, faculty, lecturers and postdocs across the University of California and California State University systems on how to build more equitable classrooms, design integrated courses and promote student participation. His teaching has been recognized with awards from the University of California, San Diego, the University of California, Berkeley, Sage Publishing, and the Teaching and Learning Section of the American Sociological Association. Welcome to the Student Success Podcast, Michel.

**Michel Estefan** [00:01:48] Thank you, Al. Thank you for having me. And thank you to your audience. I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

**AS** [00:01:54] Sure. So I start all podcasts asking guests if they wouldn't mind sharing a story or a hobby or a superpower. So, love for you to share something.

**Michel Estefan** [00:02:04] You know, for me, parenting. I have a six and a half year old daughter and a three year old son, and particularly with my daughter, it's been a process of self-learning. It's been a process of trying to understand the immediate autonomy that she had as soon as she was born and respecting that, as I try to guide her. And I think there are many, many parallels between that and teaching and how you carry yourself as an instructor and respecting your students and being open to learning from them and and honoring their interests. And so, it's a relationship of kindness. I think it's a relationship of responsibility. And I see, I do see a lot of parallels between one and the other. I take an approach to my teaching that derives directly, I guess, from my experience as a parent. And the way this comes across concretely in my pedagogical practice is that I don't begin courses with the learning objectives, with what I'm hoping that we can achieve by the end of the academic term or by reviewing the list of authors or readings that we're going to cover. I actually begin courses with a set of values that motivate my pedagogy, literally the ethical values that motivate my pedagogy. And so they are things like kindness. They are things like community. And I explain to my students, you know what? I lay them out, what these values are, and then I explain the process whereby I try to translate them into concrete pedagogical practices. And I should say that most of those values for me have a deeply embodied and personal dimension because they come out of the process of learning how to be a better parent or trying to be a better parent. The other thing that is somewhat unrelated to this, but very much connected to this article that we're going to discuss today, where my coauthors and I focused on working class students and first generation students is that I was raised by a single mother who didn't go to college. I often felt it was very clear to me, you know, partway through graduate school that I didn't have the cultural capital that many of my peers did, who had parents who had gone to college, and many of them even graduate degrees. I grew up in a household where, I often had to have a meal alone because my mom was off working. And when we did have a family meal, the conversations around the table weren't about books or literature or politics. They were about family gossip. And I played an enormous number of video games growing up. And then well into my first couple of years in college. I basically spent the first summer after my first year in college playing video games. There was a part in my educational career where I sort of came to understand the implications of that and how that had forged my path. Among the many possible paths that my educational biography could have taken. But as things have come full circle, thanks to the support of many and luck, and hard work, I now see that experience. The conversations with my mom, the video games, the many things that I think are part and parcel of a working class culture. In some ways as one of my most distinct strengths in the classroom. And unbeknownst to me, they have a direct pedagogical effect. That is, I carry myself in the classroom with the vocabulary and language that I commonly speak, which is often not very scholarly. It involves a lot of slang. It involves a lot of colloquialisms. And as I've come to read some of the literature on pedagogy in particular, for instance, I remember an article that focused on the vocabulary and language of instructors and how it impacted students disposition toward a course. I can't recall the authors right now, so I apologize for that, but I am sure we could send it to you or we could attach it somewhere to your listeners if they're interested. But they basically said that, very scholarly vocabulary was somewhat alienating to first generation and working class students. It made the content of the course feel less familiar rather than more intuitive. And so I now see all that time play video games and actually open up channels of communications with many of my students who are doing the same thing now. The way I carry myself in the classroom, the way I've embraced kind of this working class part of my biography is one of the strings that allows me to build channels of communication and connection with my students that I find very valuable and that I think make my pedagogy more effective. So I guess if there's any practical take away from all this that I've learned and maybe some of your listeners who are further ahead in their careers know this already, but for those that are also junior faculty, it's it's worth figuring out what being authentic in the classroom means for you. What balance do you want to strike between the many things that you are, the many sides of your personality, such that you embrace them and understand that some of them may present pedagogical limitations and challenges, but some of them may actually involve pedagogical strengths in terms of connecting with students in the way you play in your classroom. And the goal is not to develop, I think, a teaching persona that abides by every best practice in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The goal is to be authentic and have clarity about how the personality that you bring to the classroom, the effects it has on your courses and your students, and for those aspects of your personality that may actually run contrary to some best practice or best of, you know, a principal. It's important to understand that and to be transparent with your students. So I'll give you one example of that and then I'll close this kind of anecdote to that. I move around a lot in the classroom, even when I teach small classes, which is now rarely the case. That was mostly only as a graduate student teaching assistant, you know, for best practice is to organize small classes in such a way that students sit in a circle and you reduce or ameliorate the type of hierarchies that exist between them and the instructor, or inclusive, you know, or between them. And I've always found that very constraining because I kind of want to get up and I move around. And then when I turn toward the board, my back is to some of my students. And it really complicates things. And I've come to understand that part of being authentic for me in the classroom is having that ability to move around. And the downside is how space is organized in my classroom as a result, because I do it in a more traditional way where I'm in front of the students moving everywhere around the board. But I essentially share this with my students. I practice pedagogical transparency and I say almost exactly what I've shared with you and your listeners, that this is kind of a part of the embodied side of my teaching and pedagogy. It's not a best practice, and it can have an impact on students disposition toward me as a result of how space and setting is organized. But in the end, I think we need to be authentic above all, and that goes a long way with students. So this is a bit of a ramble from different things from how parenting is influence. What I view not simply as a student centered approach, but also a value centered approach to teaching. So both combined and also the fact that it's important to over time become aware of your teaching style and being authentic in the classroom, I think is key to building, nurturing and productive relationship with students. And that often implies embracing certain things that might run contrary to best practice. This is, but that in the balance actually benefit your pedagogy overall and the students experience as well. The key is to just be transparent about them with yourself and with them. So I'm sorry for that bit of a rambling, but as, again, I was trying to figure out, you know, what could I say as an introductory note, and those are the things that stick out for me.

**AS** [00:10:46] Oh, thank you for sharing that. No, I think it's a wonderful story of how your parenting and then growing up in a single parent household has shaped you as a person, and then that shapes you as a teacher. Yeah, because we when we're born, right, human beings, we don't come with a handbook, right? So we gotta figure it out. And we're all so different and oh my gosh, our personalities are so different. And especially when you have more than one child in the in the house, it's how how am I going to meet their needs given how different they can they can be? And then taking that experience and translating that into the classroom. I really like your story because I grew up with a single parent. My mom didn't even go to high school and I was alone all the time in New York City. All the time. And I was in survival mode a lot. And I learned to survive. And to this day people say, Yeah, so where do you train to be a facilitator and coach and all that? I said, you know what? My doctoral program. No, master's, no. It was growing up in New York City, single parent situation and I just learned, it was seventies and eighties New York City so it was pretty dangerous. So I learned how to navigate a lot of difficult conversations and danger. So, and I also like what you said about being authentic and language is important. I often, in my brain, can turn on the scholarly, but I often don't because I grew up, every other word was an F-bomb.

**Michel Estefan** [00:12:27] Yep, that sounds very familiar to me.

**AS** [00:12:32] And I still do that. You know, once I get to know my colleges and I work with, I throw them there. And it's been interesting to me over the years is how some people use the word professional like professionalism, and it's so subjective, right? Like, for example, a Black woman wearing those really large earrings. Well, that's not professional. Well, who are you to say that's not professional, right? That's part of their culture. It's beautiful. Throwing a, you know, a "shit" out here or there. Big deal. You know, it's like, get over it. Sometimes there's nothing like that vernacular to really hit on the nail what you're trying to say. Right. So thank you for sharing that and how how it influences your practice. I learned about an article that you wrote with some colleagues on social media, and I read the title which was From Inclusive to Equitable Pedagogy, How to Design Course Assignments and Learning Activities that Address Structural Inequities. And at first, I got to tell you, I'll be honest with you, I'm skeptical of some of these articles because I'm a hard core practitioner. I get it. Researchers are trained a particular way and they write articles in a particular way, and their audience tends to be other researchers. So it makes total sense. Oh, check out how this reinforces our theory or check out this new paradigm. Look at this pretty chart I created and how I can now put policy or whatever into these pretty little grids. But then it does nothing for the practitioner. The practitioner reads that goes what are we going to do with this? And what I loved about your article was that it gave really concrete examples of how to do what you said in the classroom. And so that's what I would love to unpack today. Your article with your colleagues, you have three strategies cultural, psychological, cultural matching, and I love how the article is structured, where each of you unpack that and give an example. I love examples, people that can actually take some of these ideas and then kind of make them their own. Because I am not a fan of the term best practice. There actually isn't such a thing as that. What may be a best practice at some institution where what a faculty member does, it may not necessarily translate as a so-called best practice for another person, but you you learn, you take some of those elements and you make them your own for your authentic self. So I'd love to unpack this article. Can you give us the genesis of it and then kind of go through those three elements?

**Michel Estefan** [00:15:16] So I co-wrote this piece with my colleagues, Jesse Cordes Selbin from Gettysburg College and Sarah MacDonald from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. And the idea for the piece actually originated when all three of us were graduate students working as teaching consultants at UC Berkeley's GSA Teaching and Resource Center. The GSA Teaching and Resource Center is a campus institution that is focused on supporting graduate student teaching assistants and helping them develop the various skills required to teach effectively. And we were there at a time when what I would say the roughly, the first wave of diversity and inclusion initiatives were taking off in post-secondary institutions. I think this was a time when the increasing diversity of college and university classrooms was becoming more apparent and alongside that existed persistent inequities of various sorts. And I think what we were witnessing was a really thoughtful and honest effort on behalf of many instructors, faculty, staff members at post-secondary institutions, trying to figure out how to make these institutions more welcoming for students that they had not been historically designed for, that these institutions were not originally designed for working class students. They were not designed to help first generation students learn and develop knowledge and skills. They were not developed for students of color. And so the goal was to figure out how to make them more welcoming. How to make these students feel like they belonged in these classrooms. And as a result, a series of initiatives began to take off in the service of these goals. And when we surveyed the sort of practices that were either recommended in the scholarship of teaching and learning or coming out of teaching centers, we noticed that there was something really distinctive that characterized many of them. And this is that they consisted in messaging, essentially in sending students different types of message that messages that conveyed the fact that they were valued and that they were welcome, and that they added to the richness, the richness of the campus community. And this is why in the paper we essentially call these communicative strategies, and the first thing we do is we present a typology of the three main types of communicative strategies that we've been able to identify. So there are cultural communicative strategies, there are psychological communicative strategies, and there are communicate strategies that are focused on we referred to as cultural matching. And the key to understand these different types of strategies is that each one identifies a different factor as the source of the equity gap. That is, the equity gap between first generation students and continuing generation students, between working class students and students from more affluent backgrounds. And as a result of the type of source that they identify for the equity gap, they conclude with different sets of recommendations and interventions for how to close that equity gap. So, for example, cultural community strategies really grow out of the literature on stereotype threat, and they're essentially designed to address the type of symbolic discrimination that occurs from stereotype threat, that is from a student perceiving that their academic performance is going to be judged based on stereotypes about the groups that they identify with. So if that's the issue, if that's the source of the equity gap, then the intervention becomes to essentially convey to students, to communicate to them that their backgrounds are an asset, that their life experience is important and welcome in the campus community and valid, and that whatever differences may exist between them and other students are simply the result of socio historical cultural factors that shape our life trajectories. But essentially, it's messaging students with the idea that they're welcome in the class, their life experience is valuable and that we need to honor it. Then there are psychological communicative strategies, and these strategies grew out of a combination of the stereotype threat literature and the literature on growth mindset and what they identified as a source of the equity gap is a fixed mindset. And I find that often the sort of prototypical example given to illustrate this is a student that says something like, you know, I'm not going to major in psychology because there's a stats requirement and I'm not good at math. So if the source of the equity gap is a fixed mindset about the skills and knowledge that you need to succeed in a given educational path, whether it's a major, a class or just an institution, the solution becomes promoting a growth mindset, essentially sending the message to students that the knowledge and skills that you need to succeed are things that can be developed with time, that they are not inherent, that nobody is born with them. That often when you see someone with a sort of well-developed skill set, it's not that they are good at this thing that you might believe yourself not to be is simply they have invested time in developing those skills. If you invest time as well, you will develop them too. And finally, there's cultural matching strategies which are inspired by the work of a French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. And essentially the idea here is that when there is a mismatch between the culture and the values that students come to the classroom with and the values that are upheld in the classroom by the instructor, when those two are at odds with each other, then the classroom doesn't feel like a welcoming space. It's quite the contrary. It feels like an alienating space, a space that is just unfamiliar to you, where you feel like you don't fit in. And what a lot of the research shows is that when students have this experience, it has a direct impact on their academic performance because essentially one of the things that this means is that a student is in the classroom very self aware about the fact that they don't fit in with the rest of the students or with the classroom culture and all of that cognitive energy channeled to appeasing that anxiety or to appeasing that concern is sort of cognitive energy that is not being channeled to just do the work and do the tasks and participate actively in the learning process. So we think that these communicative strategies are absolutely crucial to transforming community colleges, liberal arts colleges, universities into welcoming places for these students. Full stop. They are a central part of our efforts to make these institutions more just and to provide students a fair opportunity at academic success. But we think it's also important to acknowledge their limitations because communicative strategies cannot address the type of structural barriers that first generation and working class students often face in their educational pursuits. And for this reason, the second part of this paper identifies what we believe to be are three central structural barriers that this population of students commonly face. And again, the key here is that a student may feel perfectly welcome in your classroom. They may feel like you respect them, like their peers value them, and the life experience and the viewpoints that they bring to the class and nevertheless struggle to succeed in your classroom as a result of structural barriers. So structural barriers are a distinct form of discrimination that exists alongside the type of symbolic discrimination that communicative strategies are trying to address. But structural barriers require specific pedagogical practices addressed to the character of the of the of the challenges that they raise for students. We identify three main types of structural barriers. We call the first academic inequities, the second resource disadvantages, and the third cultural discrimination. Now, we wanted to be very careful in how we defined academic inequities because we were adamant in not adopting a deficit mindset deficit framework for defining them. So we basically define academic inequities as differences in skills and knowledge that students have when they arrive to the classroom by virtue of their education or biographies. Now, by framing this as a structural barrier, what we want to bring attention to is the fact that it is often the case that first generation and working class students have been betrayed by the educational institutions that they have been a part of because these institutions haven't provided the resources, support and learning to help them develop what we would call broad educational goods, that is, skills and knowledge that are important not simply for succeeding in the classroom, but they're actually important for the workforce and for life. What do we mean, for instance, the ability to subject a claim to empirical scrutiny. If you hear a politician on television tell you something. If you read newspaper op ed or article trying to make an argument, having the ability to take that claim, to break it down into its component parts, to figure out if it's well-supported by evidence, what type of evidence is it based on? That is a skill set that we believe is a broad educational good that all institutions should be providing students the opportunity to develop. Resource disadvantages are essentially material and temporal hardships that make it difficult for first generation and working class students to fully engage and invest themselves in a course and take advantage of the very well-meaning opportunities that an instructor might be providing for them. What this looks like, in my case at UCSD, is every quarter I have students who, by virtue of the cost of living in San Diego, choose to live with their parents in Los Angeles, to remain at home and commute to campus. And if you are holding office hours on a day other than the day that you hold lecture for your class, those students might not be able to make it. Because they can only go to class or they're trying to go to campus only on the days that they have class. I have every quarter students who are caring for elderly family members and have partial or complete responsibility for their care. I've had students in the past who are financially responsible for their younger siblings. And what this means is that if you assign group projects that require that the group members meet outside of your class time, that can be complicated for them. It can be complicated for them to coordinate their schedules with students who are just full time students and don't have these responsibilities on their shoulders. These sorts of resource disadvantages in the form of time can make it very difficult for students to engage in the classroom and succeed, even if they feel welcome, even if they feel like you respect them, even if you if they feel like you care about them and who they are as individuals and with their specific life experiences. Finally, we have cultural discrimination, which is just what we believe is a more direct way of labeling this issue of cultural matching. Surveys show that students from working class backgrounds and historically minoritized backgrounds in general often have a collective orientation to their education. What this means concretely is that if you ask them questions like why are you going to college? Or what do you want to do with your degree? They'll say things like, I want to give back to my community. So for example, I had a student who was a major in sociology. She was doing the concentration in global health and was minoring in biology. And I said, you know, what's the goal here? What what motivated you to select this combination of major and minor? And she basically said, you know, I grew up in a Latinx neighborhood where there were no doctors. And so I want to go to med school and I want to give back to my community. And so this is what we mean by a collective orientation to education. That was the motivation to attend a post-secondary institution and the sort of ultimate goal that you're seeking to pursue with that degree has a collective character to it as you move up the income scale. What we notice in surveys is that students from more affluent backgrounds have a far more individualized orientation toward their education. So when you ask them, you know, why are you here? Why are you pursuing this degree? What they'll say is things like, I'm here to figure out what I like. I'm here to figure out what I want to do with my career. So the answers are about the self. They're about you as an individual, not about you and your connection to a broader community. Now, what we also know from research and some of this research we cite in the paper coming out of educational psychology is that often the American classroom upholds a culture of individualism. We can see that first and foremost in terms of how students are graded. They are, for the most part, graded individually on their individual academic performance. And sometimes, even though instructors well-intended might say things like knowledge is a collective process, I care about community. The fact is that the actual concrete learning process is organized in such a way that students are being thought of as individuals. The value that is being promoted is individual performance, and what is being graded is individual performance. And that is a form of discrimination because again, it makes a classroom feel alienating for those students who are seeking community. Those students who are seeking more of a spirit of teamwork, those students who are seeking a classroom that gives them the opportunity to learn from their peers and to have their peers hear their experiences and expose them to their own viewpoints. So these are the three structural barriers that we identify, and we basically come up with a framework for equitable design that focuses on addressing these structural forms of inequality in the classroom. It is an approach that is student centered. It does, of course, include as part of its principles, inclusive inclusivity and acknowledges the importance of communicative strategies. But it really wants to hone in on structural inequalities.

**AS** [00:31:04] I tell people outside of education because some of them don't really get it. This happens also in K-12. oh, they are so lucky, they get to work from 8 to 3 and they get their summers off. And I'm like, You have no idea. To teach well, to really care about your craft. Teaching human beings is one of the most challenging, difficult endeavors that anyone can ever undertake. And to do that as a career. Because when you care and you care about your craft, everything you said is just so many obstacles. You laid out three equity gaps, right? And you laid out those strategies to address the cultural, psychological and cultural matching. But then, as you noted, even when you do that, even when you do that, you have these three structural barriers. That's what makes it also very rewarding. When we can have that realization that I got to work to continually improve my craft. And so I love how it's laid out on the paper. And then this next part I'd love for you to then is to describe some of the actual examples, things that were done. And I have a follow up with that one as you explain that. So I work with a lot of faculty, Michel, and I think most are are in it for the right reasons. In the same way I don't have student deficit. I've learned not to have faculty minded deficits because it's not their fault, for the most part, why they do what they do. Some of the most shitty practices that they do is because they learned them when they were in graduate school. So they adopted, learn from these antiquated practices and they don't know any better than they do the same thing to them. And then the irony sometimes is that these are people of color who picked up that, well, you know, I grew up in a single parent home and or my dad was really super strict. And I, I was able to overcome, you know, I went through the registration process and I was able to do it. Why can't they do it? And so you have this wonderful framework, these ideas, and you're going to give examples, but I'd love to get your take on how do you help your colleagues who are still stuck in a fixed mindset, if you will, about their craft? How do you help them turn around when they still have that mindset that, you know what, the end of the day, students need to come prepared for me, and if they're not, that's not my problem. My problem is to deliver the content and to assess whether they're, well, assessing to another thing, right, Michel, because there are some really bad assessments out there. But anyway, I've always like to say that a formative assessments are checks on teaching effectiveness as much as they are checks on student learning.

**Michel Estefan** [00:34:01] Absolutely. Yeah.

**AS** [00:34:03] So if you can, yeah, give us some examples and let us know how you have dealt with faculty that really just don't want to change.

**Michel Estefan** [00:34:12] Absolutely. And you know, just to go back to this first point you made that I just want to echo about the challenge of teaching and how labor intensive it is to do it well. And I guess it's just a sort of an acknowledgment and shout out to my peers and colleagues at community colleges and large public universities because they are really in the front lines of the most consequential attempt at doing this right, because they are tasked to do it at scale for the populations for which it really matters. Because if you're at a small institution and you're teaching classes of ten, 12 students from relatively privileged backgrounds, you're not making a dent on social mobility, on social change, and the numbers just aren't there. Right? And the demographics aren't there. But it's the community college faculty, the faculty at large state schools that have large student populations that are more representative of the American public. They are the ones that can make a difference, and they are the ones that deserve acknowledgment and support for an incredibly challenging and labor intensive task. I think that the challenge of communicating with colleagues who, I really love, what you said about being sort of equity minded, not only about students but also about colleagues and the way in which they also face certain constraints, either by virtue of their educational biographies, the fact that maybe pedagogy wasn't given center stage in their graduate school training or the way in which we become sort of animals of habit. Right. I mean, I know that one of the big findings in some of the scholarship on teaching learning is this thing called the curse of expertise. And the curse of expertise is this idea that the more of a specialist you become in a given content area, you actually become worse at teaching it because you forget what it was like to learn it for the first time. And so one of the things that you just want to nurture in yourself is constant, critical self-reflection. You constantly have to put yourself or try to put yourself in the position of that student learning that material for the first time, that material that for you, now that you've taught at 30 years or ten years or eight years or six years is intuitive, it's familiar, it's easy to break down. You've got to kind of break that down and take a step back. But it's not just the process of self-reflection, because that's not enough. It's also key to have really caring and constant channels of communication with your students. You need to hear from them. You need to create a space of comfort with your students so that your students can feel safe in being vulnerable with you and coming up to you and saying, I don't get this. Like, I read it, I read Weber three times and I still don't get it. And remind yourself that you went through the same thing. You didn't get it either to you like 47 times before you had a glimpse of clarity. And so I guess one is to just in building relationships with other colleagues, I am inspired by the same principles that I use in the classroom. So when a student offers a view in class that is, let's say, quote unquote, you know, misses the mark in some way, it's not an accurate or a well-founded interpretation of the reading, just in one way or another misses the mark. It's really important to validate that view, not in the sense of saying it's correct, but in the sense of conveying to them that you understand how they came to have that view. To say that, Oh, I get why you're reading the author that way. I totally see it because this sentence is a little bit, it would totally lead you in that direction if you don't have this broader context about the French Revolution or this other thing or this or that. It's important to sort of convey to them the validity of their view in that sense that it is a reasonable view to arrive at given where they're coming from. You have to do the same thing with your colleagues and I think you just model that really well. Right. I understand that you might find this a bit unfamiliar because pedagogy wasn't given center stage or any amount of importance in your graduate training. And then you gradually, once you've established respect for them and have validated their view in terms of framing it as something reasonable, a reasonable interpretation or conclusion or view to have given your own experience and what you came to this material with in the first place. And then you gradually start to have a conversation that shifts that around. The specifics of that can vary. And I think it really matters to know your colleagues well, just as you should know your students well with some colleagues who maybe placed a lot of value on data, you bring up this scholarship of teaching and learning and you say, look, this is what the data shows on this. For other colleagues, it might be more compelling to share an anecdote with them about a student that they are likely to have had a similar experience with. You know, they have similar students or had some advances. And so I guess the key here is that the channel of communication should establish, as one of your previous guests on the podcast mentioned, a culture of dignity, not a culture of shaming. Right. And that matters with your colleagues as much as your students, because without that foundation, what you're going to get is resistance, but you're going to get is defensiveness. What you're going to get is, you know, I don't see why this matters. So if they don't feel like they are being taken as respected interlocutors in a process of mutual learning and conversation, then I think it's going to be very difficult to bring them around. But I guess that's maybe one way of thinking about this. If the person you are communicating with, whether it's a student or a colleague, doesn't feel like you care about them, doesn't feel like you have respect for their views, doesn't feel like there's some validity in the sense of understanding why they have these views to begin with, then it's going to be very difficult to take that next step to persuade them to think differently about an issue.

**AS** [00:40:57] That was beautiful. Yeah, validate where they're coming from, their argument. But then I like this idea. I do a lot of work with inquity and action teams that I developed. They're the coalition of the willing, mostly of faculty, and they come around, they're mostly discipline-alike. Sometimes I get all faculty who are math or faculty or English, but a lot of times they're across disciplines but within a theme like STEM, social behavioral sciences, business sciences. And I try to, as I take them through a journey of inquiry and action, which is to develop a data informed purpose statement, do a little bit of research on what it is that we want to do, create an action plan and actually do something, do one or two practices, try them out, come back. You have this safe space to talk to your colleagues to see how it went. Did it go well. No. Well, what do we tweak? And if it did go well, great, let's continue with that. But I try to frame a lot of this depending on their academic background. So if I work with a lot of business instructors, I frame what they're going to be doing in terms of a business plan. You're developing a business plan and you're going to deliver a product. If I'm with a group of scientists, I say we're going to do an experiment. And we actually do sometimes do a control group what they're going to try, or we do a pre and post. So, validate and then using their academic background to relate why it's important to make this shift, why it's important to and we see it in the numbers, especially at community colleges. We're doing a lot of work there, but it's still sobering. We lose about half of them after a year. And you noted Diego Navarro, in fact, this podcast and his complement each other really, really well because he talks about how do we create gravity?

**Michel Estefan** [00:42:54] Yeah.

**AS** [00:42:54] When there are centrifugal forces that pull our students away from the institution, especially our students of color, he breaks down all these ways to create gravity. So creating gravity, Michel. So can you give us some examples of creating that gravity, those strategies?

**Michel Estefan** [00:43:12] Yeah. You know, I love what you said in terms of framing things for faculty peers, in terms that are intuitive for them, because that's actually the crux of one of our practical pedagogical strategies for materializing equitable design. We call it transformative translation. This is one of the big three. We, the big three that we suggest are deliberative interdependence, transformative translation and proactive engagement. So these are three strategies for making concrete the principles of equitable design, which again are designed to address structural inequalities. And so I'll loop back around to this issue that you mentioned, because I think that what you were doing with your peers is a process in transforming translation that is connecting new information with what they know already in such a way that it nurtures a process of critical self-reflection and learning. And, but I'll start with deliberative interdependence, which is our first concrete strategy for equitable design. Deliberative interdependence is really an attempt to address in some way all three structural barriers that I mentioned. And it might sound a little abstract as I define its component parts, but I'll then give a concrete example of how I transform it into a formative assessment tool and variations of it in my classes delivered in interdependence, essentially promotes collaborative learning by introducing formal rules that make students accountable to each other in the development of assignments, in completing assignments. So I'll give you a concrete example of what this means. In my classes, I've done something that I call collected quizzes and collective exams where students during class time are put into small groups and are asked to answer. In my case, it's often been a series of multiple choice questions together, and the rule is that they have to identify the right answer to those questions by consensus. That's what I mean by there is a formal rule for completing the assignment that promotes collaboration, because what the consensus rule on the quiz does is that it forces the majority to bring in the voices of the minority rather than neglect them. So it essentially incentivizes. It's a process where the students are in their small groups of depending on your class size. I've done them in classes that are 60 students and groups of four, and I've done it in classes that are 140 students with groups of five or six. And students are having a conversation about each question to try to identify the answer. And the consensus rule kind of forces that into the process of completing the assignment. And so they go through questions one through eight in what is a very kind of vigorous conversation. And the conversational dynamic very much mirrors I think in some ways what happens in writing that is we learn when we write. So writing often is not just an assessment tool, but it's a learning tool is that our ideas develop and are defined and clarified. And what we don't know also becomes clearer to us as we're writing. There is, I would argue, a very similar process that happens in conversations because when you're forced to articulate your views, to try to put those feelings and thoughts that you have about this thing into concrete words, that pushes you to be clearer about what you know, what you don't know, and you think the author says or doesn't say. So there's a learning process that is happening to that conversational dynamic. Students have to answer each of the multiple choice questions together by consensus. And at the very end of the quiz, I have various kind of, I have had a couple of variants of this, but there's either a self-assessment question where the students have to grade themselves on three criteria. Did I come to this quiz or exam having done the readings, did I do them well? Did I do some of them? Did I not do any of them? Did I contribute my views throughout this quiz or exam, share my opinions about the answers and about the information on the text and that I do it consistently, sometimes, or rarely did I encourage my peers to share their views consistently, sometimes or rarely. So there's this three parts to this self-assessment tool where the students give themselves a grade based on these three criteria reading, sharing your views and encouraging others to share theirs. And so what that does at the very end of this very collaborative process, it's providing students with information about what it means to work as a team member. It's not just about sharing your views, it's also about listening carefully and encouraging others to share theirs. It's about coming prepared to class. I've had this as a self-assessment tool and I've had this as a peer evaluation as well. I've had both variants, the peer evaluation, it's the same questions, but you grade the rest of your group members. Did they, you know, did A) share their views did B) seem like they did the reading to be share their views and so on and so forth. And what I do in the peer assessment is that your individual grade on that final question is the average of what your peers gave you. And what you gave yourself. So you're still self assessing as well. What that does is it makes collaboration almost a technical requirement of completing the assignment. So you're not leaving it up to chance for students to gel well in terms of their conversational dynamic. You're actually introducing incentives to make sure that conversation is equitable because you're asking the more outspoken students to listen carefully and you're asking the students that might be a little bit less willing to share their views, that it's important that they share them because they're going to contribute to their team's success. But the collective quiz or collective exam is a form of deliberative interdependance, and the way it addresses the structural inequalities that I mentioned are the following first. Every student success, individual success depends on how their other peers do as well. So when you have students coming in from a privileged background and this might be structurally privileged instead of coming from an affluent family and having gone to very well resourced educational institutions, or it might be, you know, privilege with a lowercase p in the sense that they've already had some classes where they've done assignments like yours, and they just have that familiarity and that skill set already. But they may also may come from a working class background as well. Right. But what it does is it makes their success depend on everybody else's success as well. To the extent that everybody contributes everybody a raise, reading the whole team as a single unit will do better. So what you're doing is you're making the academic inequities between them work in the favor of helping everybody learn, because what you're doing is you're getting those students more privileged backgrounds to listen carefully, but also share what they know and in that sense participate in a peer to peer learning and conversational process. You're also making the value of community something more than words in the classroom, because this is literally community as we're working together to solve a task despite the different backgrounds of the students in the group. There may be affluent students, students from working class backgrounds may be continuing generation students, first gen students, may be Black students, Latin students, white students. Regardless of that background, you're all in it together in solving this task. And so that means that community means something concrete and specific. It's something that they are doing rather than simply a message that is being perhaps constantly in a very well-meaning effort upheld in in the classroom.

**AS** [00:51:28] I love this. Delivered interdependence. Again, this is why I enjoyed your article, because a lot of researchers, especially in education, and they'll do webinars and they're invited to speak at community colleges. And I hear back from my community college peeps and they're like, Al, they did it again, they came in here and basically yelled at us or lectured us to look at our data. Well, no shit. We're community college instructors. We know we need to do that. Most of us, anyway. Or, oh you better be more equitable. You better be an anti-racist. Well, no shit.

**Michel Estefan** [00:52:01] But yeah, exactly.

**AS** [00:52:03] Can you give us the how? I love this. Thank you for that. And that's one. You gave a really good example of kind of creating that gravity. Do you have another example or two?

**Michel Estefan** [00:52:14] Yeah. So, you know, in the era of ChatGPT, I recently translated delivered interdependence into oral exams, basically. And again, if you want to think of the term intuitively, it's about making students depend on each other, hence the interdependence for their success in completing assignments through a deliberative process, through a process whereby an inclusive conversation amongst them all is incentivized by virtue of how the assignment is put together by virtue of the rules that they have to follow to complete it. As many instructors are today trying to face the challenge of change, and I, I basically came to the conclusion, there was things in my class that it was immaterial whether I can do them or not. It's important that students be able to do them independently. It's important that they know the history of institutional racism in the United States. They have some content knowledge about them. It's important that they be able to think critically about these issues, and that requires practice and time. If you look at the literature on oral exams, there's a couple of findings that are not all that surprising. They're very stressful, I think promote very high levels of anxiety among students. They are very hard to cheat on and they're very good for learning. And so I was trying to think, how can I take the principles of deliberative interdependence, the inclusiveness, the equity that is a part of deliberate independence and translate it into an oral kind of formative assessment. And what I did is, you know, we have ten-week quarters. I put students in week three once enrollment had stabilized because there's a little moving around the first couple of weeks, students seeing if they want to take a course or if they're going to stick with it. Once enrollment stabilized in week three, I randomly put them into groups of six in week eight. I gave them three questions, one of which I would randomly pull for the final oral exam of the course. So they actually have the questions. They're not going to be a surprise. I'm trying to reduce anxiety by telling them. I'm going to ask you one of these three questions and you have three weeks to prepare. So what students did is they created shared Google sheets or forms docs, and they just put the questions up and they started to initially the first week it was, well, let's just put in bullet points. All of the ideas that we think are relevant for answering these questions. And there was a process of just kind of brainstorming through them. Now, the nice thing about that, it's inclusive because for my working class students from my student parents who may not have time to meet with the group at 3 p.m. because they have to go pick up their daughter from daycare, they can chime into the Google doc at any time, whenever it's convenient for them. So it's a digital space in that sense. As the time of the final exam comes closer, they start to kind of pare that brainstorming down to a coherent answer and then practice. And the rule for the oral exam is that they would come into the room. Not everybody has to speak. In fact, if you don't want to speak during the oral exam at all, you don't have to. One or two members of your group. Do you need to offer an answer to the question, but you are not penalized for not participating. So if you really have a lot of hesitations, a lot of anxiety about public speaking, you don't have to participate during the oral exam. But there is a way in which your contribution to your group's preparation through a peer evaluation at the end, kind of like in the collective quizzes, will give everybody a chance to say they contributed just as much as everybody else to our success, even though they didn't speak during the oral exam. So basically the students will come in and say, okay, here's the question that I pulled up randomly for you. They would answer, I have follow up questions in the form of, you know, you mentioned this, but can you unpack things more or you did mention this, can you tell me how it connects to what you were know what you mentioned. They're graded on the basis of a rubric that I shared with them as well at the time that I shared the questions with them. And then there's a peer evaluation at the end, which is grade your peers on the degree to which they contributed to your group's preparation and success. And students would say, you know, so-and-so didn't speak during the exam, but they contributed to the Google doc. They were fully present in our preparation. They really helped us come up with the answers. Again, students are depending on each other for their success by virtue of a formal rule, which is that they will grade each other on the degree to which they contributed to the group's success and that peer evaluations 25% of each student's final grade and then the other 75% is the actual answer to the question. And actually, students, they love the method, partly because the final exam is 10 minutes and they're done. So they're not spending several hours necessarily writing a long essay. I found it reduced grade contestation to practically zero because it becomes very apparent in the back and forth with the group. Exactly to what degree they know the answer. Right. You can really hone in on their level of understanding because of a student or a group is basically repeating something that you said in lecture. As soon as you say, okay, that is great. Totally accurate. Give me an example. If they can kind of, you know, kind of break through what you had just said and provide an example, you have a deeper level of understanding. So it was very apparent to everybody, the students and myself, where their level of understanding stood in a way that is sometimes ambiguous with written assignments. It's inclusive because not everybody has to speak because it's a group effort and it reduces anxiety because they are giving the questions three weeks ahead. So that's another example of deliberate interdependence that I've kind of been experimenting with.

**AS** [00:58:15] You know, I love this because I've become convinced that there's no such thing as normal. We all have a little something. I'd like to see more evidence of this, but I'm really, I think a term that I'm seeing a lot is neurodivergent. We, some people are on the spectrum. Who knows? Maybe we all are to some degree. And as someone who's worked in K-12 and who has kids who've gone through K-12, I know how it what it means, for example, how challenging and how hard it is to navigate, and you have to push so hard to get an IEP, an individual educational plan because many students have a little something. I think we all do, actually. And so what happens, Michel, is that a lot of these students are never diagnosed. They have something in the way that, it may fall under in your paper under psychological. Maybe not, because they don't have a choice. Whether they they have a fixed mindset or not. They don't have that choice. Their brain works that way where it is going to be fixed. So we have these students enter our open access institutions such as community colleges, and then they don't know to go to DSPS office to maybe be assessed or to come in and have some sort of accommodation. So not only do we have all these structural barriers that you discussed and the equity gaps, but we have this, the way that many of us learn is so, so different. And so why do I mention this? Because your strategies, the way you're doing it, not only has those structural barriers, but I think it really helps those students who just learn differently, who are somehow a little bit on that spectrum, or maybe they're deep into it. I think it works really well for them. I'd like to see this researched more to validate kind of my hypothesis here. But I really, really appreciate that. So as we wrap up, do you have any other words of wisdom or more example?

**Michel Estefan** [01:00:23] You know, I would just say that there are two other broad strategies transformative translation and productive engagement. And my colleagues, Jesse Cordes Selbin and Sarah MacDonald, I think do a really good job of providing concrete examples of what this means. I think what transformative translation means is that you make this message of belonging, this message of having students welcome them, welcoming them, of validating their personal experience, not just something that you say, but something that is part of the process of developing assignments. And Jesse has these really clever examples that she mentions. So, for example, one practice or one assignment that she's shared with me recently and has done so in some forms where we spoken about this article, is this assignment where you're connecting students dates of birth with historical events. So there's this, try to figure out what important historical events happened in October 20th year in a previous time, time period, right. What you're doing there is bringing in the students personal experience into the development of an assignment and connecting it to this new information and perspective. And she has many really clever examples of saying like, if you really want to bring in students perspective, there are ways of doing it that goes beyond just saying, I value your presence here, but that is actually part and parcel of the way they are completing assignments. Just to say that the impetus behind all of this and this is something that I think community college professors know well and perhaps, you know, instructors at other institutions would do well to sort of pay close attention to what they're modeling, is that we need to shift. We need a mindset shift in mindset from being from thinking about students being college ready to thinking about faculty being student ready. We need to be ready to effectively teach the specific student population at our institutions. That means understanding who these students are, what challenges they face, and then designing our pedagogy accordingly. It requires a shift to equity mindedness that includes but goes beyond inclusion. And like you said, the article is really designed to in a way that proposes this framework and offers concrete ways of materializing it in the service of creating a conversation around it. So we do hope that others take up this framework, test it out, modify it, think critically about it all in the spirit of of shifting, of shifting our mindset from having students be ready to learn our institutions to having us be instructors that are ready to effectively teaching those courses.

**AS** [01:03:22] I tell the colleges I work with all the time, I say, You are a place of learning. Not just for students, but for you. You should be allowed to learn to try things out. And there's no finger pointing. If it didn't, you know, I work with faculty, who say, Al, I tried it for a semester. It failed. I said, Did it really? Let's look at that. Exactly what could we tweak? Why stop doing that? That's only one point in the data. One semester. Tweak it. Try the next one. Right. So we often forget that these are places of learning for us, too. And so you gave us so much to think about, to learn about, which I'm so glad I stumbled on that article in social media. I want to thank you so much for participating in the Student Success podcast.

**Michel Estefan** [01:04:15] Thank you. I really appreciate it. I think the podcast is awesome. I've learned a great deal from hearing, listening to many episodes in the last couple of weeks, and and I really appreciate just more broadly the work you're doing in the service of improving the quality of instruction, not only at community colleges, but I think at many institutions of post-secondary education. It is really humbled by the invitation and delighted to engage with you and your audience.

**AS** [01:04:43] Thank you. Thank you so much for that. I really appreciate it.

**Michel Estefan** [01:04:46] Thank you.