**Diego Navarro Interview Transcript**

**Improving Disproportionately Impacted Student Success**

**AS** [00:00:47] For today's podcast, it's a pleasure to have Diego Navarro, professor emeritus at Cabrillo College and founder of the Academy for College Excellence. His work has been featured on PBS. His research has been funded by the National Science Foundation, Gates Foundation and other nationally known foundations. In addition, the Community College Research Center conducted a comprehensive research study on his evidence-based practices to improve student success and equity. Welcome to the Student Success podcast, Diego.

**Diego Navarro** [00:01:20] Thank you, Al. Good to see you. It's great to be with you.

**AS** [00:01:23] I'm so excited to have you. One of the things that I like to ask guests, can you tell us something about yourself beyond your work, anything, any hobbies that you have, anything that you like to share?

**Diego Navarro** [00:01:37] Well, I don't know if this is a hobby, but back when I was in college in the 70s, I didn't have a car, so I used to hitchhike. And in two things would happen when I would hitchhike. One would be I'd have to have a change in direction. I think a lot of this plays itself out in development of the work I've been doing. But you have to change direction at times. I was hitchhiking north at one point and cars were going up Highway One up in Marin. So I turned around and went south and ended up and had a great time. But I had to go to a different direction. And the other thing is you get frustrated at times. You're wondering if things are going to work out and some sign comes to you that, oh, things are moving forward. I remember this one time in Ohio. I was hitchhiking to Indiana on my way back home to California. And I was underneath this bridge and I was like, am I ever going to get picked up? These trucks are driving by and then this butterfly sort of flies across and I see it and it's like, oh, yeah, things are OK, you know? And then I got picked up and made it all the way back to California. So, you know, these signs and changing direction is just part of some of the things you need to do when you're trying to innovate.

**AS** [00:02:39] So you hitchhiked the 70s--the time when kids can go in cars without seatbelts. Parents told you just go outside and play very, very different time. So you hitchhiked. How far did you hitchhike?

**Diego Navarro** [00:02:53] A number of times. I went from L.A. to British Columbia and then back down to San Francisco, hitchhiked from Ohio all the way out. Well, actually, from different parts of the Midwest to Ohio than out to Colorado and then back California. Just there are local things. You hitchhike all the time from Marin County to to Berkeley over to the Richmond Bridge. So that was a regular thing. I'd hitchhike from northern Marin County to southern Marin County to San Francisco, where I was working for the American Friends Service Committee, doing community organizing on stop banking on apartheid back in seventy eight. So hitchhiking was just a part of getting around.

**AS** [00:03:35] That's fascinating. Obviously, we we can't be recommending that these days. So it's just fascinating that I'm going to find a way to fold that into our conversation about your good work, Diego. So tell us a little bit about your background, because I know that had such a significant impact on your approach and how you help disproportionately impacted students.

**Diego Navarro** [00:04:00] I guess it started with, I was born in East L.A. General Hospital. And the reason for that was my mother spoke Spanish as well as English, but she wanted a doctor that spoke Spanish. So I was born in that hospital and I grew up in a place called Pomona, and most college bound people know Pomona College. But that's actually from the Claremont Colleges. I was, we lived on the other side of the tracks in Pomona. My grandparents came to this country in nineteen nineteen after World War One, and they only spoke Spanish and they lived in this country until they died in the 1960s and 1970s, only. Speaking Spanish. My parents grew up Spanish being the first language, but then they were discriminated against in school. So they had, there was a cycle and we grew up in Southern Cal, I grew up in Southern California. So there was talk that the family would give you, about you're going to be perceived as someone that isn't competent. Working with your hands. And indeed, I was put into wood shop and metal shop and electric shop when I went from elementary school, where I did fine in math and English. But they put me in a metal shop and these shop classes because my name preceded me. And then I went through my mother dying when I was in ninth grade before I went into high school and it was bone cancer back in seventy two. So there was no pain control. You know, there wasn't hospice services. So that was an absolute trauma having feeling like you can do anything when she was in so much pain in the middle of the night. So that for me, I just spun out in high school, and I didn't really track high school much at all, but I graduated from high school, did sports. That kind of kept me out of trouble. Well, but I was in trouble, too, you know. So it's like being raised in Pomona, which is a pretty violent place. And we had the Crips and Bloods who was like South Central L.A. And I was out on the streets a lot after my mom died because my father wasn't around a lot. So I knew what it was like to graduate from high school, not be prepared for college. And I couldn't read and write at college level. But luckily, my father moved to Pasadena, my senior year of high school. I stayed in Pomona with a family and then I went to Pasadena City College because my father I moved out to Pasadena and luckily there wasn't developmental education in the seventies. I just signed up for English 1A, you know, and I had to really study a lot and make it happen, which they're now finding, you don't put these students that are not prepared for college into developmental English. But that was that was after my time, thank God. So I pulled myself through. And so I find that one of the big tragedies we have right now, it's just a waste of human resources, a waste. Of human resources and also that we need different perspectives. Finally, when I went to graduate school, I went to one of the best ones in the country, an Ivy League College. And I was in a section with all these students for the whole year. And it was like these people had silver spoons in their mouth and they lived a totally different life than me. And I came from community college. They came from the best schools in the East Coast, both prep schools as well as Ivy League schools. So they had a whole nother perspective. And when they would share their values in class, like I was at Harvard Business School, so they were asking us. We went took a course on human resource management and they're showing us the first movie was the mining movie that showed the coal mines in Virginia. And and I just, the things that the students would say in the class about these workers. And I know my family was union workers. You know, my grandfather worked in the mines and worked in the steel mills in Gary, Indiana. My other grandfather worked with steel mills in Fontana. You know, my dad was in union area. So it was like a totally different perspective. And I feel like, you know, we need students that come from backgrounds that are not from the elite, you know, that come from real experience of suffering in their neighborhoods that have been having to deal with adversity and so many different levels of financial constraints that create, you know, anxiety in the family through walking to school and having violence around you. This perspective needs to be involved in our policymaking and in the management of our country. And so the hope I have is that the work we do has these students transition. And I have students that have gone to law school, have students that are the president of the student government at the college for many years. I have a number of students coming out of my program and all of them are underprepared for college and many came from very colorful backgrounds.

**AS** [00:08:31] So tell us about, given the experience that you've had, the trauma that so many people have lived through, and then there all of a sudden in an academic setting, can you unpack the work that you've done to help these students?

**Diego Navarro** [00:08:48] So let me tell you the story about this first student group I work with. So I'm used to doing action research, which means that you you pull together your best ideas, a pull together team, and you do something and then you study to see how it worked. And so our first pilot, I did five pilots in the development of the program. This is back in 2002. And Sue Norton, who is my buddy, she's really great, computer science teacher, career college. And she and I just went off and pulled together, started doing tutoring at the Youth Build program in Watsonville. So lots of hills, 80 percent Latino. And that's where I started the program. And we were doing math tutoring because I wanted to see how these students react, how they were dealing with math and youth. Build took X gang members and students that dropped out of high school students that were on the edge, welfare to work in other areas.

**Diego Navarro** [00:09:43] And they gave every other week they would be working on a job site, learning construction skills to become an apprentice carpenter in a union. And then the other week they were getting their GEDs. So we would meet with them and do math tutoring with them. And so we I asked the program director, Tamara, she's really great. And Tamara said, yeah, you could have these students for a week. So I had them for a week. And the first day they came to the campus. This is Watsonville campus. Brand new campus was built like a year before. So Sue and I, and our our other colleagues from the computer science department are sitting in the classroom waiting for the students. Come in this start at nine and nine. Fifteen after nine. Only one student was in the class. He was an ex boxer. He was actually a student, was learning how to box, and he was very disciplined. But none of the other students showed up. And then about 20 minutes after they started coming in as a group, when I was going, what's going on here? And and then later that morning, a cop looked in the window. So there's like windows on the doors. And I thought, what's happening here? And so then during a break, I asked the students what went on this morning. They said, well, you know, we were sitting in the parking lot. This is between the spring semester and the summer session. So there was nobody on campus. So it was at that time we were doing the pilot and they were sitting in their car. And and I didn't know it at the time. But our campus was in the the North Surenos district. Surenos and Nortenos are the two gangs in California or two of the Latino gangs. And so there are two in their car. A guy came by, kick the car. They got out and got in a scuffle because they were from the Surenos neighborhood. But they're in a car now parked in our neighborhood and they get out of the car. There's a scuffle. The students are like the guy runs. And so they're now, they're heading up to the class this day in the life of students, you know. He puts his hand in a side and pulls it out, has blood on his hand, got sliced in the altercation. And so he went off and got eight stitches and came back to class. So one thing that I started to notice from the very beginning is that our students are dealing with the reality that many of us don't even know about and that are not aware of that affects their lives. That what I found is that we have to learn how to create gravity because our students have life before they make the transition, that centrifugal force. It's pulling them away from college and their responsibilities to their family. They have patterns of how they socialize and want to have fun with their friends. They they don't do homework a lot of the times because they didn't have to do it in high school. You know, there's these other things, responsibilities of the family. There's other things that pull them away. So how do you create gravity so that the students stick to your program? And that's like one of the key things I found. The second key thing I found, which I think is the root issue besides the centrifugal force, is that these students have a strength in persistence and the strength in survival. And I remember my first few pilots, I did five of them. These are five, 40. Our pilots did them over a year and a half before I started the program. But I look at thirty six different curriculum and narrowed it down to nine and a pilot of these nine to see what would actually work to help create the sense of belonging and a sense of psychological safety. Now these terms are being used today. Back in 2002, there was no one talking about this. All I was looking at was self efficacy, because that's the only thing that was really talked about for adults at that time. So what we did was I just found that focusing on these students well-being and their connection to each other and to to you that you were able to really help them adapt to the academic environment. What I mean by that is that I feel that our key role is to help these students take their strengths in persistence and survival because they've gone through stuff that you wouldn't want your children to go through. They've gone through all kinds of things in their lives. And they're still they're there at your college. They're wanting to do something different in their life. Some of them are changing a trajectory of generational movement, and their family is huge stuff they're carrying on their shoulders. Well, our role is to help these students that have a strength and persistence and survival, you know, because they've made it through all kinds of stuff and they're in your classroom. But we have to do is help them take that strength and apply it to the academic environment. And it's not a reading issue. It's not a writing issue. It's not a math issue. It's an issue about how do you help them have a sense of dignity and how do you create a space that's safe for them so they can let their hair down. And so the work that I've been doing recently is working with colleges to help them understand how do you create a culture of dignity, because dignity is the absolute key to all this. And what I found that the word dignity came to me a number of years ago as I was, it was when I was doing my work, was actually I was with my father. And it was right before, like two years before he had to move out of his house because he was having dementia problems. He was losing his memory. So he was like eighty eight years old at the time. And he started losing his memory. And I would notice that he would he would get flustered and also he would get embarrassed and felt shame, and I realized at that point that for me to be with my father, I had to create dignity in my relationship with him at any point, because for him to feel shame was the wrong thing to happen with me and our relationship. And he was a wonderful person. He went through a lot in his life and he helped me and I needed to create dignity for him. And that's when I started to realize that was the word that I'd been searching for. That I've been doing from the beginning of the program is how do you create a culture of dignity? Because these students have a stress response system. And I was a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching when I was doing my sabbatical. And I was doing a lot of research when I was there. And there are several findings. But one of the key findings that students have a stress response system that gets triggered and it gets triggered in an environment where they don't feel safe. And what happens is that faculty don't even know that they're doing something that's actually causing that stress response system to kick in, and the real issue is, is that we don't understand learning and physiology because in the brain there's an amygdala and that amygdala is very sensitive, was developed over evolutionary time to to to see threat and then to respond. And when it threatened, it's in 15 milliseconds, it kicks in and it goes into a fight, flight, freeze, or appease pattern inside of your body and you can't control it absolutely happens. Now, if you have a window of tolerance that's not too broad and that's a whole other concept that comes out of research out of UCLA and work that Daniel Siegel does. He's a researcher at the UCLA Medical School. They do frontal lobe research, which is the key frontal lobe, is where agency and and executive function happens. Well, they found that there's this window of tolerance that you have. And if you get kicked out of it, you go into hypo arousal or hyper or hyperarousal. And faculty don't even know this. And so we're doing stuff in the classroom, joking around, being sarcastic or know, having fun. And certain students are being triggered by that. And when they get triggered, the unfortunate thing is when the amygdala kicks in, they go into this fight, flight, freeze, and appease in their cortex automatically shuts down because you can't be thinking to to survive, you have to react, OK? And so they're in this reaction mode. Their cortex is shut down and you're graded in terms of outcomes by retention and success of your students. So if you're counteracting. How the brain is functioning because of its physiology, then you're at a deficit. So a lot of my work is training faculty in understanding what they do so they can do what they want. So how do you how do you become embodied in your teaching? Because you're embodied teaching is critical because students have mirror neurons and mirror neurons is a neurological thing. It's a reality. It's a real thing. It's been measured. It's compound and mirror neurons are really important for relations, relationships, connecting with other people. It's for sensing if you're sensing a threat, you can sense feelings of other people and faculty can move out of their brain, find way of delivering information, but to a point where they're establishing a relationship and a connection, what I call embodied teaching, you'll lose that strength of the mirror neuron connection with these students. And that's what they need to feel safe, is that they start to let their hair down, they start to connect. And what's interesting is it's not just faculty, you know, it's the college. So when a student comes to admissions and records, you know, and you're helping somebody with the form and you see the lines really long and the student has their face looks flustered or something, instead of saying, you know, what's going on, there are something, you connect with the student, you want to brush them out and get to the next person. Well, they don't get a sense of dignity when that happens. And sometimes they get triggered. So it's in all the relationships in the college, we have to learn to move from a culture of threat, to a culture of dignity.

**AS** [00:18:57] So much to unpack there. All this is good stuff. Wow. A lot of my work is around transformational change. I've written extensively on kindness, why kindness is so important, because I really like what you said about the gravity, then you have the other forces, centrifugal forces going against you. And I think even educators can get triggered. And as we're going through a transformational change, which is could be scary for some, if we are not kind to our core. I like dignity, too. I think they go hand in hand. That people get triggered. And that's why often change is difficult. Culture change is difficult. What I want to do is unpack then for students this gravity right now, what are some strategies, some nuts and bolts strategies, if you don't mind sharing of how you help faculty create that gravity?

**Diego Navarro** [00:20:02] Well. So there's two things. One is creating psychological safety. In the other, one is embodied. Interactions are embodied teaching. And so in terms of psychological safety, what I tend to do is I focus on inquiry for the student. So how do you create a pedagogy where the student is in inquiry or exploration? And so it has to do with a number of pieces to it. So, for example, during the semester, at the beginning of class, I'll students. I'll ask a question at the very beginning for students to think about. And a lot of times they're questions not only about how you're doing, but about their behavior. Were there any classes that you didn't turn in your papers last week or you didn't meet the deadline for the assignment? Why did why did that happen? What could you do differently? And I find that reflection is a really, really critical thing to help students feel safe because they start to feel like you care and then you have students share and they can go into pairs or they can share with the larger group. I like doing pairs or smaller groups because they tend to share more of them. So I think reflections are really critical and reflections critical also at the end of any lesson that you're doing. I mean, if you want to consolidate learning, you've got to ask them questions about what they just learned so that they're putting into their words the experience. And sometimes the student will share something. And another student had the same experience, but they didn't have words for it or they didn't even notice that it happened. But when the student says it, they now get it. And so getting the word from their perspective of what they're learning is critical. So part of what I find to create psychological safety is a reflection in the class. It's a pedagogy of mindfulness. And mindfulness is not just doing meditation type activities or breathing activities which are critical. I mean, you look at Daniel Siegel's work and a lot of the work on the frontal lobe that they're doing, it's a lot of it's based on mindfulness techniques are very effective and rewiring the prefrontal lobes. So I don't I think that's critical and we do focusing exercises. But I think reflection is also another mindfulness capability. One of the early things that I do is I help the students recognize the behaviors that supported them in learning. So I ask them a question. You know what? What did you have that helped you learn? What were the behaviors of your teacher, the behaviors of other students? What were the types of supplies and resources you had and have them brainstorm because you've got to get the stuff down on paper for them or they're thinking about it and then brainstorm onto the board what they're saying, a chart so you can put it up somewhere so they get all that out. And then I ask, well, what are the behaviorr that kept you from learning of other students, the behavior of teachers, the resources you didn't have and have them think about that and brainstorm that and then you get that out and then students start to see, oh, I see, when I do this type of thing, that's not going to help. But this really helps. Well, that creates safety in the classroom. And then you can show your syllabus or you can show whatever your rules are because they will tie to what the students have. They're most likely because they're pretty smart. Students are very smart. Obviously, they've always been. What's interesting is that when I first started, my pilots and I was doing it with pretty high risk students, you know, students that came from these colorful backgrounds, I was told that probably twenty five percent of my students are going have learning disabilities, of which, you know, we've had thousands of students and it's a handful. It's not very many. I mean, there's certain types of learning disabilities. But what they were thinking I was going to face these students are really smart. I mean, I found students if you'd create a pedagogy of inquiry. So they're brainstorming what they think the behaviors are. They get them out rather than you telling them on your syllabus what it is, what you need to do anyway, but have them engaged in the way that we were having them learn math and statistics was that I taught them how to do research. So my students actually have PhDs and their PhDs are in social injustice. They really understand it because they come from tough neighborhoods and tough lives. And so what I did was I taught them how to do research questions. Well, so what was a social justice issue in your life? Where were you felt in dignity? Where did your community feel in dignity? What are the issues? You know, the students came up with racism and discrimination and why money goes to the military rather than education, environmental justice, STDs, drugs, gangs, you all every semester to come up with different ones, you know, and and so I taught. So I put them in their groupings that they decided to go into. I told them I do research questions because, you know, if you have a experiential Ph.D. and a topic, you know a lot about it. You know the subtleties, the insights now. So if you teach how to do research questions and you help them with it, they can come up with really good research questions. And then from there, I taught them how to do quantitative and qualitative questions that would answer their research questions and develop a survey. And then you have them in teams of five or so go out and survey 150 people. So they're having fun getting out there. Some of them are scared, know they're more analytical and they don't want to go out, but they're with their buddies. They're actually doing the work. But the ones that were more analytical helped develop the survey. So they're like they see each other and these different strengths that they have. And then now you've got a data set that has meaning to them. They want to understand this phenomena that affected their family, their community, and now they want to learn statistics. And so if you look at the work, the working of Myra Snell and the California Acceleration Project, the first kit they put together for our social justice program. So we'd have statistics because Los Medanos College did our program there and we were doing math acceleration and English acceleration at the same time before acceleration became something to talk about. And and so these students do have a data set. So the inquiry. So get them into inquiry. We've got to move out of filling the pail. We have to get through these topics. We've got to give them these things. The key is to give them frameworks and then have them work on projects and teams to work together. But what we found was you had to teach them how to work in teams that was like absolutely critical. And so we focused on twenty first century professional competencies so that they could do inquiry together, that they could develop a project management plan, that they could get to the end of the semester and have a complex project done where five students are contributing to it and laying all that information out. So we had to teach them how to do those types of skills, which became the skill set they needed. And by the way, what we found out later, so we started replicating this. So we replicated it at Hartnell College in Salinas, another 90 percent Latino community. And we brought into the nursing program there. They were doing some retention stuff. So they asked us to bring this one week, twenty first century professional competencies program. It's an immersion one week before they start the semester. So they did this and they found the faculty started talking about the second year. Clinical has changed dramatically. The doctors and the nurses were saying these students are phenomenal. They really know how to work together. They also found that that student success and student satisfaction went up. So they had less of both legal issues that come up when students feel like they're not being treated right, that diminished considerably. And then later on, the Joyce Foundation funded us and they gave us funding and the RP group did a longitudinal study, six years. So it's a six year outcome study, not only of academics, but of salaries. And with these nursing students and they compared the nursing students because once they put that one week intervention in that one week course, the whole program changed over. So from that point on, every nursing student went through that one week. But before that, no students went through it. So they compared the students that went through it to the students that didn't. And they found a huge salary impact, you know, six years later. And it's kind of hard to believe, but it was over forty thousand dollar median difference between the students that went through that one week and those that didn't. And talking with the faculty there, the only thing that really changed was the immersion program. And so you can have an impact on these students, not only in the class in terms of safety, but by an inquiry based pedagogy where they learn to work in teams. You teach them those skills. So they're very effective. It changes their career outcomes. We have the same for salaries for the students in our regular program, for students who are underprepared for college.

**AS** [00:28:39] How does this look like at a campus? I heard you say immersion. I heard a week immersion. I heard you say that you train faculty. So what's the ideal program look like to a certain cohort of students? Go through a one week immersion, and then also whether you teach English or biology, it doesn't matter, if you participate, if you're trained in this, you can fold in these these aspects into your course? How does it look like for a college that that wants to implement this this program, Diego?

**Diego Navarro** [00:29:15] There's the approach. So how do you create a culture of dignity? And then there's more programmatic parts of it like this course, this immersion one week immersion course. So there's different pieces to it. So the one week immersion requires we have curriculum kits. You have all these activities laid out, you know, hundreds of activities for the faculty to learn and their sequence so they can understand how to make it happen. And of course, they can improve on it completely. We want them to do that. But they first need to learn how to do this. And one thing we learn at the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching with their Stateway way and Quant way, especially with their productive persistence, they found the same thing that I found over the years, and that is you have to take faculty through the experience of experiential learning. You have to take them through the experience of these things because what was modeled for them in their PhD programs and their master's programs wasn't this. They were what was modeled for them with cognitive learning. And that's not what our students need. They need something deeper. So you have to take the faculty through and experience so they have a barometer and understanding of what what it is that they're trying to bring across. Now, another aspect to this, and I'm going to go off on a tangent for a second, so you know that I know that I'm going off on a tangent. Is that part of the culture that we're in and higher education, especially in graduate school, getting a master's and a PhD. It's a culture of subjugation that that you have to jump through these hoops and you're being, the wheat from the chaff, is being separated. And where I went to graduate school, they cold called you. I mean, all this horrible stuff, you know, and what happens is we get trained in that environment. We come to community college thinking, oh, we can do that with our students. And lo and behold, it doesn't work. You know, they leave because they have very sensitive stress response systems. Also, a punitive discipline doesn't work for them. We have to develop empathic discipline. And there's work at Stanford that shows if you do use empathic discipline in one class with students, it actually inoculates them for the other classes where they may be doing punitive discipline. So there's a healing thing that you can do as faculty. So one of the core things is how do you learn to be different? How do you learn the skills and the techniques to become embodied, to listen differently, to interact differently, to have these types of connections. And so what we do so there's several levels of training. We do one. So I'm working with a sixty thousand student college right now, and I've been training their staff, faculty and administrators on how to listen at this deeper level, because when you have a deep conversation with somebody, you feel it. You know, you have people walk away changed and they walk away having their hearts connected and some feeling inside of them. Well, how do you have those conversations and how do you develop that? And so we take them through four types of conversations, two based on the amygdala. So fight flight, fight, freeze, and appease, and two, based on another way of listening so that they can start to experience themselves this different way of listening. We do it in pairs. But what happened is that the executive vice chancellor, who's responsible for this team and she handles like eight teams right now, she said I said how to have that workshop work for your team six months later. And she goes, that team is a dream. I mean, they really know how to work together, these other teams. Fighting, there's all kinds of problems, and, yeah, if you learn to listen, because you don't learn this in graduate school, a lot of us don't even learn it in our families and we just don't learn these types of things. So you have to go fundamentally. How do we start to shift the culture of the colleges by the behaviors? And effective organizations have good relationships, quality of relationships as a barometer or thermometer of how well an organization will do. So what we do is we work with teams to help them work effectively because you've got to change the college culture, not just the faculty. And then we work with faculty because with faculty, I have all kinds of activities we do and we teach them the pedagogy of inquiry. We teach. How do you set up so the students feel safe? And that has to do with some of the things I talked about, having to get the right behaviors in the class, getting the right introductions done in the class with the faculty and the students. How do you create an environment where you're vulnerable but you're not doing therapy, you're just being connected with someone because you're sharing at a deeper level that creates the ability for other students to feel that's modeled for me. And so there's all these different techniques that we have and curriculum that faculty can take in their classes. So, for example, Craig Hayward, I don't know if you know Craig at all, but he's with the RP Group. He's done a lot of research and he studied actually, he and and a colleague, Willets, did this study on the California Acceleration Project, the initial one. And he also studied my trainings, our faculty Experiential Learning Institute. And he found that two years or three years later that faculty and all all the discipline we had faculty from computer science and math to physics and chemistry and biology to English, to history, to philosophy, just art teachers, teachers, nursing taught radiologic technology mean we have all kinds of faculty come into the training that their success rates, when they compared their success rates before they had that training to afterwards looking at longitudinally was statistically significant in terms of retention rates and the success rates. And Craig's hypothesis was that the marginalized students, the students that are on the edge of your class, like you're teaching to the core of your class, but they're students that are on the edge. His hypothesis was that the way that we taught them to connect with students and create that safe environment was that they actually captured those students that were on the margins and that's what changed their statistically, their outcomes in terms of student success. So we work with faculty and we give them specific types of things they can do in their curriculum, but we model it so we have them go through the experience of it. And then the third way we do it is we have this one week immersion. And I'm working right now with Rob Johnstone. So he's working with the Aspen Institute, NCII, his organization. And we have a project with Bank of America Foundation where they funded a million dollars to twenty one colleges, 11 community colleges, five historically black colleges and five four year Hispanic serving institutions. And so I'm on the team working in that environment and with the different colleges and I'm doing a webinar. And how do you teach twenty first century professional competencies and meet the needs of marginalized students and students of color, because this is a jobs program for students of color, how do you so we have this one week immersion and it's one week we've trained faculty to do it in many different places to do it. But that's the one that has huge salary impact six years later or change as well as changing like the clinic in the second year. The students, they learn the stuff and start using it in class immediately. They start using it in their lives with their families. And that's like very dense learning, very deep and dense learning. So those are the ways that we work. We work with teams on the on the campus to change the culture, work with faculty so they can bring curriculum and make the community college without curriculum. You know, these outlines this is not curriculum. This is activities, detailed activities on how to do this kind of thing. And then we have a one week immersion where you put these activities together to create an environment where they learn these twenty first century professional competencies, and then we'll take them for the rest of their lives into careers where their leadership skills, collaborative leadership skills is primarily what we teach. So I hope I answered your question. I might have missed a piece of that.

**AS** [00:37:13] No, no, thank you. When I learned about your work, that's why I was excited to invite you to be part of the podcast, because I know you're a little bit familiar with my work. I've helped colleges plan and implement a variety of what I like to call home grown practices, because, as you know, there's no such thing as a best practice.

**Diego Navarro** [00:37:33] Right.

**AS** [00:37:33] A best practice at one college may not translate to another. So I try to do my best to help them plan and implement through coaching and through kindness. When I learned about your work, because so many colleges are struggling with, you're familiar with guided pathways and it has this fourth pillar, ensure learning. I tell you, your work just fits in there so nicely. I do a lot of work there. But you know what? The world's a big place. And I just want people to know about you and your great work. I love students stories and I know that everywhere from the Community College Research Center to the RP Group. I love the RP Group, by the way. I've collaborated with them a lot there. I love that organization and their people. And yes, I know I know Craig Hayward. Really cool guy. We we see the evidence in your work. It's been researched. Can you share a story or two of students who went through this, who experienced this and what they've told you, how it's changed their lives?

**Diego Navarro** [00:38:39] Sure. I could show you some very short videos, too. So there's this one student. I'll call her Ana. And so, Ana, in my first semester, I was out recruiting for the second semester, and this is back in the fall of 2003. And I would recruit at the adult school because I found the adult school was like a really great place, because students that have a strength and persistence, survival are there. They're trying to make make make it get a GED. And so I was I was giving a talk and this one class about our program. And there is a teacher there and she said, you need to talk to this student that I'm calling Ana. So I invited Ana to come to Cabrillo and have and I was going to go to this orientation where I was going to talk about the program. And so the next week she comes and she brings Amelda with her, a friend of hers, because she was afraid to come by herself and do the talk and stuff. And so when she came up to me afterwards. What do you think? She goes, I can't be in this program. When I said why, she goes, well, you know, when I was 13 years old, you see what I'm asking students questions that usually goes back to 13 or eight years old or something when I was 13 years old. So the second one will be about the student that has 13 year old thing to me, that she she crossed the border with her sister and her mother in Arizona when she was 13 and. It was older sister and they made it across the border and they ended up in Southern California and she was living in Southern California and after a year, they felt the immgro was was getting close, the immigration control, they call it ICE now, and so they moved to Watsonville. And so she ends up in Watsonville and she graduate from eighth grade and they have a celebration, first person or family ever graduated 8th grade or older sister, never graduate from eighth grade and her mother. So then they have her quinceañera turns 15. She figures out sometime around that that she's pregnant. So she drops out of school at the ninth grade before she goes to high school. And by the time I meet her, she's twenty six. She's been working two jobs for all those years, had four children and she said, Diego, after telling me to start Diego, how can I go to college? I never went to high school. Luckily I was in my in the middle or towards the end of my first semester and I had seen what it was happening to these students in the classroom. When you create an environment that's psychologically safe and in a culture of dignity and a sense of belonging, they can do all kinds of things. You know, I said, don't worry about it. You know, I've got these other students and you'll do fine. So she comes next semester, brings her friend and they both go on the program. And it turns out, you know, she was on the honor roll. Did the prereques for the nursing program, we went to the nursing program, so for nursing are pretty tough stuff, science, you know, and we're only in one semester intervention, you know, so people would say, oh, of course, you'd be on the dean's list in your program. Well, actually, she was on the dean's list throughout her her time doing the prereques to go to nursing program and to graduate from the nursing program. So that's a story of a student that never went to high school. So whenever I hear you need a GED or high school diploma, it's like, oh, give me a break. You know, they're 18 years old. They're thinking they've got enough experience in their life. You just need a pedagogy of inquiry and experience so that they can bring all the knowledge they have into the classroom and apply it. So there's a relevance to the education. You contextualize your pedagogy for what's going on in their lives, their families, work life and what's going on in their in their neighborhood. How do you tie your curriculum? That's the work we have to do as faculty is make it relevant to what they're experiencing in their lives rather than sticking to our discipline, look, facing our discipline and really being oriented towards that and all of our workshops, we need to be facing what's going on in our students lives and how do we contextualize our work. So that was one story. I don't know if you want the second one, it'll be shorter.

**AS** [00:42:57] Absolutely.

**Diego Navarro** [00:42:58] So the second story was it was my first pilot, the group that where the guy that got sliced. And so one of the things we did after lunch was to build robots out of Legos. Now, they're not kids. So why would you build robots out of Legos? Well, I came from a high tech industry and the last company I had, we built what's called embedded systems. So it's embedded software. And embedded software is as a field that you can make a lot of money in and you can have a career in it. So one thing I wanted was to have some kind of activity that would keep the students awake after lunch because, you know, you get the the food coma, you know, so they were working with their hands, building Legos. And so the first three days they build the robot. And then on that third day, they put the motors in it and the sensors in it and then they have to program it. So they spend the next two days programing it and then getting the bugs out of the program. And then they demonstrated on Friday. So that's what they did with that. Just that to our part, it was we did a whole thing with them that during that time, but just the two hours after lunch. So this student comes in, he misses the first two days and he comes in on Wednesday. He builds the robot, puts the sensors and motors in, and he starts programing it and he's showing me. And I'm going, oh, man, this one has aptitude. He's going to be amazing in computer science. So after class, I'm leaving and I'm walking down the stairs because I was up on the second floor and he's sitting down. There's a there's a job fair outside stairs and there's a job fair going on. And he's sitting on the stairway filling out an application for Safeway or something like that for a job. And I sit down next to him. I said, how are you doing? Because what do you think of today's is I really enjoyed it. I said, yeah, you've got an aptitude here. You you may be really great. And our computer science program would be wonderful to have you. He said I can't I can't be in the computer science program. I can't go to college. Then I noticed his wife was standing in front of him and she was holding your child and there was a stroller down below. And I go, OK, he's got to get a job and he has to work. And of course, that's going to be the difficulty. The centrifugal force thing. Well, he turns to me, he goes, Diego, I can't go to college because, you know, when I was in second grade. So it always goes back to this kind of age. When I was in second grade, my teacher told me that I had dyslexia. I can't I've got dyslexia. And I said, have you ever been tested for it? He goes, no. And then, mind you, I've never I wasn't a teacher. I had been teaching. I just was doing these pilots. So I had this paragraph, you know, piece of paper I handed to us. So could you read this to me? He read the paragraph to me and I and, you know, that's not a test or anything. But I thought, hmm, I realized he didn't know who he was. He was told he was something and he was actually something else, and what I found over time is that you have to create an environment where they really figure out who they are. And the way to do that is by creating a culture of dignity, where there's kindness, there's compassion, there's room and celebration for mistakes because you can't learn without making mistakes. I mean, I don't know how many of you, when you were born, walked out of the room you were born in. And I have scars on my face from hitting tables and stuff, learning to walk. And when you are learning, you make mistakes. And what I loved about the high tech industry is that innovation is made. It is based on making mistakes. Our philosophy is make mistakes as fast as you can, but don't make the same mistake twice. OK, that's innovation. And so how do we create an environment where the students embrace making mistakes, that they'll raise their hand and take the risk of saying giving an answer maybe. And it might be wrong where before in their life other students would laugh at them if they made the wrong mistake or the teacher would kind of snicker, wouldn't call on them in the future because they want to embarrass them all the shaming that happens, which I see as educational trauma. For those of you that are aware of the ACES survey, the Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey developed by the CDC, the Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente to look at childhood experiences and its affect on long term diseases like heart disease and diabetes and others. They found a direct correlation towards these 10 experiences they looked at well, they didn't have in their survey, a question about educational trauma. And I think what's happening is our students are coming to our classroom. They're being triggered into educational trauma and the amygdala kicks in and they their cortex is turned off. And so they can't learn. They don't feel safe enough. And so what I find and I help faculty start to understand is that you may be kidding or may intervene with one student thinking, oh, I'm just impacting that student because they're not doing something right. But you know what? All those students that have those sensitive stress response systems, they're watching because they're hyper vigilant and they're watching to see what you're doing to other students because you don't have to do it to them, but you do it to somebody else and they know this is not a safe environment. And so what I want us all to know is that you can do what you want, but you have to know what you do. So in my latest workshop I did last week with faculty at a college here in the Salinas Valley was I've been working with this racial justice group, national group and people of color, a group that I'm involved in. And we started developing this process because how do you help people understand their implicit biases and understand their micro aggressions. And we're finding and are people of color group that we're having microaggression happen where so people are getting triggered in those groups and you think everything is fine, but it's not. So it's a bigger problem. And then you have issues of gender fluidity and there's some people that will do micro aggressions against that. You have issues around same sex marriage and there's all kinds of areas where people can have biases. So what we did, we were developing this process called the ouch process. So if you can create a safe environment and you want to learn, so teach about learning, the learning ladder is like you go from arrogance, like you know everything to insight. And that's step from arrogance to insight is a big step. So if you want to learn about biases, your own biases, your micro aggressions, I'm going to give you this exercise. So in your classroom and in this workshop, I did the counseling director at the college said, I'm going to use this with my staff meetings. But what you do is this. If you create a safe environment, that's really the key, is that you say, OK, if I do anything that triggers your fight, flight, freeze or appease to get you out of your window of tolerance. I want you to say ouch, and you have to say it loud enough so I can hear it.

**Diego Navarro** [00:49:57] OK, we're not going to process it. We're not going to talk about it or anything. But I know something happened and then I can inquire and try to figure out what happened. OK, I can start think about something just happened. What did I just do? At least will give me a feedback loop. Something happened or if somebody says something and they catch it. Oh shit. I just did. Microaggression go they go oops. You know, you hear. Oops. You got somebody just they just created a microaggression or some bias or something or if somebody witnesses when you go whoa, so what. You now has to have a language to see what's not being talked about, you know, and what's not being experienced. Or if you're brave enough and this is the kind of professional development work I do is to help create the environments so we can start to learn these things is ouch. Oops. I mean, that's those are just simple words. There's just just one syllable. It's pretty simple, but there's a whole lot to unpack in there. And so we're creating this process now called safe space to brave space. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that poem on Brave Space, a beautiful poem of how do you create the space so we can start to uncover these things that are actually happening. So that because one of the things I'm learning all my years with people of color in my life is that people of color lives long live lives that are very uncomfortable. You go in a store and somebody's following you. You know, the police pull you over and something's going to happen. You know, it's uncomfortable. You're interacting with people of different, you know, the dominant culture and something's going to not feel good. And you have to watch what you're doing. So you're uncomfortable all the time. But when I'm in other environments that are dominant culture environments, everybody wants it to be safe because they don't want to be uncomfortable, you know? And so why is it that we have environments that are safe for those but everybody else is uncomfortable that have this other thing? So we all have to become uncomfortable because learning is by making mistakes. So what we're doing is we're saying how do you move from a safe space to a brave space? And the ouch process is part of the creating the brave space. We're letting people know something just happened. We got to look at what's happening here. But then when something happens, we can't go into the amygdala response. We can't go in to fight flight, freeze, and appease and start disagreeing and arguing, go to the cognitive level, which we've learned very well in graduate school. We teach critical thinking how to argue, you don't go there, you have to go to a deeper space, a connected space. And so this third step is how do you create that connected space? How do you create that space where healing happens, where repair happens, where you have the hurt is addressed? You know that learning takes place, but the learning we're talking about here is the learning of how to create a culture of dignity, and it's not by reading a book you can read a lot of books. Books are going to give you a cognitive learning. This is experiential learning. It takes you to a deeper level, which will actually affect your whole life, not just where you're learning it. And so that's the beauty of this type of learning is. And that's what this kind of professional development, the kind of work we do with students activities and and students come alive. We all come alive when we start to learn in this way, because we reality that we know and we feel when we experience becomes known, it's not hidden in me and that I'm festering and getting pissed off by what's happening.

**AS** [00:53:14] I want to go back to your hitchhiking because when you think about hitchhiking, you have a destination and you're really relying on the kindness of people and your destiny to help you to your destination. I don't know what it was about the 70s, but you can do that relatively safely, maybe over time. The sociopaths saw a pattern, and that's why it ruined it for everybody. But my point is, students in many ways, they kind of hitchhike through college. They already come with the trauma that you explained and our work really is to make sure that we don't contribute to that trauma as they, quote unquote hitchhike through through the institution, and so that culture of dignity is really key. I want to thank you so much for unpacking that. I really appreciate it. I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am for all your wonderful work and all of the just the positive impact you made on students and people. I went to an Ivy. And I and I was I was lucky. I went to community college, ended up at an Ivy, too. But we kind of have things backwards in society. We we put these Ivies in these high pedestals because they actually accept the least amount of students. But yet, community colleges accept the most. We accept everything from students with disabilities to veterans with all sorts of issues, foster youth, students of color, you name it. And and as I told so many people, it's actually a privilege to teach these people. Just an absolute privilege that we have, but we can get better, we can get better. And I think the work that you do and so many other others that I've collaborated with is that there's good news, right, Diego? That there is good news that there is a way to help these students and ourselves. We just got to be willing to be learners ourselves. Right.

**Diego Navarro** [00:55:19] That that's the key. That's the key. And. Yeah, and you were saying, you know, one of our goals is to take. Students, they're hitchhiking through college. They don't have these types of bad experiences, and the thing that I'm seeing is the goal is that a window of tolerance. That's when you go out of learning, you go into hyper reactionary or hyper reaction that the window of tolerance shrinks and it gets larger. More trauma you have, the more it shrinks. OK, and I think what the goal is for us in community college is to create an environment and a culture and pedagogy that allows the window of tolerance to increase so they have more and more bandwidth in the window of tolerance. And that means that we need a pedagogy that's trauma informed, that has activities that allow for that depth to occur in all the courses that we teach them. It's not just in some counseling course. It's in all the courses good teachers can. They can bring these activities into their classes in this way of thinking and changing their their pedagogy. I've worked with the science college at Cal State University, East Bay and teaching the science faculty how to do this. The other thing is we've been doing this online. We're very effective in creating online environments where students have these experiences as well. And so we've had sixty thousand students go through that one week immersion course and we've now turned it into an online course. And the key to my work is I've gone through some special colleges after Pasadena City College. And what I realized from going to these special colleges and the way they did pedagogy was that why couldn't we do that at Pasadena City College? And passing the city college was great, but was very industrialized. And what I'm finding is that for us to do the pedagogy that a lot of students that come from privileged backgrounds get, we need to change somewhat to create the context for our students to grow in that in that deeper part of themselves. And we need to move from the industrial model and to really open up to providing these experiences for students, project based, experiential inquiry based approaches and give them a framework and then now work the framework and let's give them the degrees of freedom. I think we've taken scaffolding to the nth degree, trying to make it so easy to learn something that we we stopped the learning and that we have to give them degrees of freedom in the scaffolding so that students can make mistakes because they need to do that to learn. So how do we put that in place? And I think those are pedagogical questions. You know, teaching in the classroom for 16 years, learned a lot and learned a lot from my students and my faculty about some of the greatest faculty that I've worked with over the years at Cabrillo was wonderful faculty. So I feel privileged to be here with you and and to have time to talk about this.

**AS** [00:58:11] Thank you, Diego. The devil is, and forever will be, in the details. And so it's wonderful that there's a resource in you and for colleges to seek and be able to learn. Well, how do you actually do this? Well, as you know, I'm an implementer. I'm all about, it's all about the implementation. It's nice to have discussions and to have our Why, but at some point we just got to do the work. And so thank you for having a framework for tools and resources and the kind of PD that you provide. I want to thank you so much for participating in the Student Success podcast and wish you nothing but the best in your continued metaphorical hitchhiking journey. Thank you.

**Diego Navarro** [00:58:53] Well, thank you very much. And I wish you the best in this podcast universe that you're in now. And it's really wonderful the work that you've been doing too well over the years. Thank you for your contribution.