

FOREWORD

NEARLY TWENTY YEARS AGO I served as the graduation speaker for a small nonprofit training program in the Virginia suburbs outside of Washington, DC. The Training Futures graduating class was made up primarily of New Americans, mostly immigrant women who had come to the United States in search of a better life for themselves and their families. Instead of my delivering the graduation message to them, they gave me a lesson I will never forget. During the ceremony, several described the journey that brought them to that day. Their stories were incredibly inspiring. These adult learners recounted how they had experienced tremendous suffering in their birth countries, faced persecution and discrimination on their journeys to becoming American residents, and often were exploited and abused once they arrived. Many had been beaten down and nearly defeated by these experiences. Then they recounted that through the Training Futures program their lives had been dramatically changed from being that of victims stuck in multiple low-wage, dead-end jobs to becoming competent, confident, and capable front-line office staff employed with company benefits for the first time in their lives! On a college campus, these learners would have been treated as “high risk” students who needed significant developmental education before starting college-level work. But in the Training Futures program, they spoke of how they worked their way through a very demanding and rigorous program while

developing job-related basic skills as they went along, how they were supported by a staff who had high expectations and gave high levels of support, and how they encouraged each other through setbacks and tears, learned by doing, and achieved incredible results. In the end, more than 80 percent of those who started the program finished and landed new career-track office administration jobs with higher wages. It was a transformation from poverty into self-sufficiency. Talk about student success! They were the most inspiring graduation speeches that I ever heard.

As president of Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), I wanted to know more. Were the Training Futures program and its students so exceptional that their results would be impossible to find elsewhere? Could the program's "secret sauce" be adapted and transferred to other settings, including community colleges? Bill Browning, who had been a program leader with Training Futures, joined NOVA with a mission to find out. He identified and defined Training Futures' key practices and documented the program's outcomes. We worked with other community-based organizations (CBOs) in our region and found that several of them, including those that were part of national organizations such as Goodwill Industries and Year Up, demonstrated similar practices and showed astonishing results like those of Training Futures. Bill and I were convinced that program designs and practices like those of Training Futures and others could be adapted and integrated within the community college. He helped to develop several partnerships that creatively combined the strengths of the college with CBO training programs targeted to historically underserved populations and created pathways out of poverty and into employment paying livable wages. The results were spectacular!

A few years later, after retiring from NOVA and joining the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program and the Belk Center

for Community College Leadership and Research at North Carolina State University, I learned that Chad Hoggan, my colleague as a professor at NC State, was one of the nation's leading researchers and writers on what was called "transformative learning"—learning experiences that dramatically change people and their lives. He described to me the theoretical underpinnings and research findings of his work, and that description explained exactly what I had observed in the Training Futures students. I asked, had he considered the potential application of this work to community colleges? Had he ever worked with anyone who had been part of a transformational learning program at a CBO integrated with a community college? He had to meet Bill Browning! I introduced the two to one another, and within a few months the idea of this book was born.

What Hoggan and Browning have produced is a first in community college literature. It is a practical guide to significantly improving learning success in community college programs that is anchored in adult learning theory and validated by research across a variety of fields. Hoggan provides the organizing conceptual framework around transformative learning and grounds the book in decades of research. Browning's years of frontline experience in both community colleges and high performing CBO training organizations brings practice to the forefront. Together they have created a blend of the best of theory, research, and practice to give community college educators a thoughtful and practical guide to transformational learning in community college programs.

Transformational Learning in Community Colleges differs from other contemporary works in how it deals with the subject of improving community college student success. The focus of this work is not on the typical topics of developmental education redesign, course and credential completion, or guided pathways,

though these are all critical aspects of any institution's student success strategy. Instead, this book is about significantly improving holistic supports for teaching and learning, a focus that far too often has been missing in national and institutional student success reform conversations. It is targeted to community college faculty and advisors with clear implications for program heads and department chairs. My sense is that much of what the book presents will resonate with faculty and others on the front lines of working with community college students, because it will be validated through their own experiences.

One big takeaway from the book for practitioners is that cohort learning is a powerful design for providing holistic student supports, especially when intentionally designed to create a sense of belonging and mutual accountability. Many of the students' stories and quotes within the book reference the transformative power of peer-to-peer support relationships, and several of the transformational learning methods described in the book are far more effective when used with cohorts of students who have begun to know and trust one another. And, in situations where a true cohort design may not be possible, it can be approximated in ways such as connecting classes into learning communities, as has been dramatically demonstrated at City University of New York's Kingsborough Community College through their Accelerated Study in Associate Programs. "Applied learning" proves to be another powerful and practical approach whether it's through work-based learning, contextualized learning, or simulation. Often learners overcome developmental education deficiencies when they can see how English or math can be applied to real-world situations or are needed in the workplace. Other recommended practices highlighted by Hoggan and Browning, which should be exceptionally valuable to practitioners, include partnering with

high performing CBOs and assigning advisors as case managers throughout students' programs, rather than assigning any available advisor, as is too often the practice.

I believe *Transformational Learning in Community Colleges* will provide faculty, program heads, and others who work directly with students with the tools they need to create and sustain transformational learning experiences inside and outside their classes and programs. With this book's recommendations, faculty, advisors, program heads, and department chairs can design and initiate efforts to improve teaching and learning success centered around sets of courses, programs, or clusters of programs without having to remake the entire college. These transformational learning practices, I believe, can be embedded within programs as part of college-wide strategies such as developmental education redesign and guided pathways.

These holistic supports for transformational learning could very well be some of the critically important missing pieces in understanding why so many community college students don't complete the programs they start. And adopting these supports could be the beginning of breaking a cycle of student failure that has plagued many families intergenerationally. I am reminded of a talk I had with some of these heroic graduates one year. I told them (as tears streamed down their faces): You are living proof that the American dream can work, not just for you, but for your children and others in your family and community. They are all watching you. Because if you can do it, so can they.

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