

WASHINGTON STATE GEAR UP:  
PATHWAYS TO STUDENT SUCCESS  
WESTSIDE WORKSHOP



*Engaging in  
Conversations of Difference*

Gino Aisenberg, PhD, MSW  
University of Washington

March 10, 2014



# Introductions and Small Group Discussion

*One success that I appreciate in  
my present work is...*



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# Persistent Reality

*“The amount of failure the students have already experienced prior to high school is pretty high. A lot of them have been retained. A lot of them have been significantly disengaged from school for years but never received any services.”*

*Nothing good comes out of.....*



## In 2003...

- US Census Bureau lists Latinos (of both sexes) as having the highest high school dropout rate at 21%
- Twice as many White high school graduates finished their bachelor's degree compared to Latinos (36% to 18%)



# RECENT TRENDS in 2012

High School graduates enrollment in college—nationally

- Hispanics 69% -- a record high
- Whites 67%
- Blacks 58.2%

Despite some progress regarding long-standing educational attainment gaps, others persist for American Indian, Black and Hispanic students compared to White students. These minority populations are:

- less likely to enroll in a four-year college
- less likely to be enrolled in college full time, and
- less likely to complete a bachelor's degree.



# Washington State Data

## Cohort of class of 2013 4 year drop out rates

<i>Native Americans</i>	25.5%
<i>Black</i>	18.2%
<i>Hispanic</i>	18.8%
<i>Low income</i>	19.3%
<i>Bilingual</i>	50.4%
<i>Foster Care</i>	41.6%
<i>Homeless</i>	31.2%
<i>White</i>	11.3%



# Some Effective Practices

Several effective strategies to improve school commitment in low SES and disadvantaged areas:

- 1) focused attention on teaching and learning;
- 2) strong school leadership;
- 3) creation of an information rich environment (i.e., using data to track progress and identify problems);
- 4) creation of a positive school culture;
- 5) creation of a learning community where staff & faculty are actively involved in improvement efforts;
- 6) on-going professional development for staff & faculty;
- 7) Strong engagement with and involvement of parents;
- 8) external support from the community; and
- 9) access to necessary resources

( Muijs et al., 2004)



*What's the CRY?*



# What Students Say...

- Schools are too big
- School starts too early
- Classes are boring and topics are not relevant
- Teachers or school staff are disrespectful and poor role models
- No one seems to care
- Negative peer influences
- Bullying or fear for safety--Bullying is often based on identity characteristics – race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, ability, national origin, language, physical attributes...
- Family issues or concerns



## **Protective Factor**

Youth who come from communities that have historically been targets of violence may be less likely to be involved in violence as perpetrators or victims when these youth are supported in understanding and taking pride in their own cultural histories (Mahiri and Conner, 2003; Potts, 2003).



Valuing the language, histories,  
wisdom, spirituality, and  
experiences of others



Diversity is...



# Seeing Difference

- Diversity is an inescapable reality of life—from the myriad of plants and species of trees to the genres of music that we like and prefer to the different identities we hold and prioritize.
- We live in difference but we do not necessarily “see difference”, understand it, or welcome difference in similar fashion or with similar ability and commitment.

# Negative Responses to Difference

Diversity is inherent in schools —different perspectives, experiences, ideas, identities and assumptions come together in a learning space—sometimes cohesive, sometimes colliding and marginalizing. YET, Diversity is crucial to our excellence!

Likely, we have experienced ways in which difference has not been engaged well in the learning environment:

- Silencing
- Argument, conflict unresolved or unaddressed
- Not being heard or seen; labeled
- Fear—I am afraid to say something that reveals my bias or makes me look foolish and not politically correct. I am afraid of more pain, further marginalization and can be internalized.
- All this fosters and perpetuates distance.





What are some effects resulting from not engaging difference well?



## Circle Exercise



# Our practice must be different

- Stand in contrast to the tendency to publicly identify/categorize students based on intellectual capabilities and labelling groups of students
- Individual students in these groups are defined by others – peers, adults, educators—they are judged. They feel excluded.
- *Story of Knifeman*



# Our Role

- We are responsible to seeing the other, valuing and listening to the other.
  - We are responsible to welcome and respect the various identities each student has—gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, abilities. Holding difference--
  - We are responsible to be mentors, role models, who walk with the students.
- 
- Dispel the dominant narrative, “What good comes out of South Central?”
  - Present a new narrative on **INCLUSION**.
  - Promoting access, excellence and leadership of students
  - Provide leadership within our school, district, community



# Phases of Engaging Difference

- ◆ We often fall into routines, habits—the path we take to come to work, the foods we eat, the place we choose to sit in the classroom. We create our comfort zones.
- ◆ Engaging difference is hard—it requires us to be mindful of and critically reflect upon our assumptions, biases, and to move outside of our comfort zones.

**Swimming pool**—To engage difference well requires that we not be timid.

## Developmental Phases:

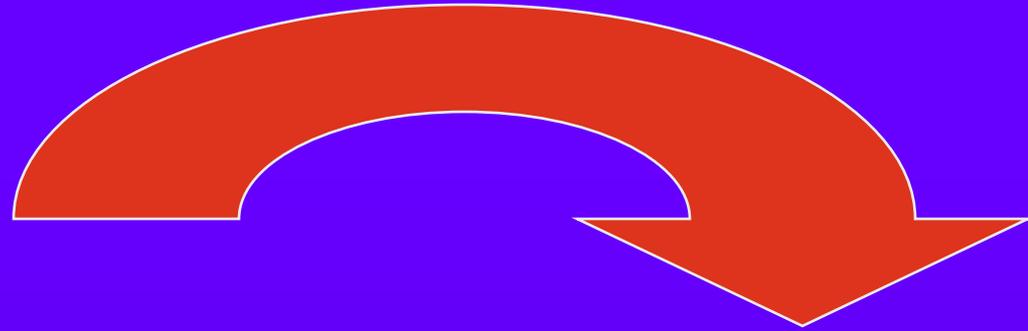
- 1) unknowing, unrecognizing
- 2) tolerating and valuing
- 3) engaging and transforming

**NOT YET**



# Risk Factors

- Poverty
- Community Violence Exposure
- Mental Health Issues
- Lack of Inclusion
- Bullying



- Truancy
- Suspension
- Crime
- Incarceration
- Suicide

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- African-American & Latino youth are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system

## DISPROPORTIONATE OUTCOMES

- Youth of color are overrepresented in decline laws
  - Black youth 9x more likely to receive adult sentence than White youth
  - Latino youth 43% more likely to be declined than White youth and more likely to receive life without parole



# Contextual Realities

- Studies report that 25-96% of urban youth have been exposed to at least one act of community violence in their lifetime.
- Research documents the association of psychological and behavioral outcomes such as depression, PTSD, and behavioral problems with children's exposure to CV (Aisenberg, 2001).
- Adolescents are unlikely to thrive when they face difficult experiences across multiple settings of their lives, even if they possess the personal resources, or resilience, to deal with a challenging environment.
- *UCLA*

# Multiple Stressors

- *WATER BOTTLE*
- Under the weight of multiple & chronic stressors, including poverty, racism, maternal depression and low social cohesion within neighborhoods, healthy parenting norms and parent-child bonds may become less protective when considering both the immediate and long-term outcomes of stressors such as community violence exposure.





# Bullying

- Almost 30% of students from grades six through 10 have either been a bully or the victim of bullying, and about half of high school students acknowledge having bullied other students in the past year.
- Cyber-bullying-- 75 – 80% of 12 – 14 year olds have been cyber-bullied.



# Findings—What we know

In a recent analysis of the Monitoring the Future data, Henry (2007) examined risk factors and found:

--school disengagement variables to be among the most robust predictors of truancy:

- 1) poor academic grades,*
- 2) low commitment to a rigorous academic program, and*
- 3) low aspirations to both graduate from high school and go to college*



# DISPROPORTIONATE OUTCOME

- Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for AI/AN people aged 10-24; this rate is 2.5 times higher than the national average for that age group (EchoHawk, 2006).
- Latino adolescents are more likely to have reported a suicide attempt than white youth (11.3% vs 7.5%).
- Latino adolescents are more likely than African American and White youth to make a suicide plan
- .WHO ARE YOUTH LIKELY TO TELL?



# Truancy

- Truancy predicted 97% of first time drug use
- Research suggests that the greater # of days a student is truant, the greater the use of alcohol & drugs (Henry, Thornberry & Huizinga, 2009)
- Truancy leads to dropout and to crime and to being a citizen of our criminal justice system
- Only a small fraction of even the most serious truants (4% of elementary, 16% of middle and 6% of high school students) received any type of intervention beyond a phone call or letter. (Denver Public Schools --National Center for School Engagement, 2006)



**What does engaging difference well look like?**

**What are signs by which we will know we are successful?**



# Five Keys to Relationship and Engaging Difference Well

**#1 *RELATIONSHIPS DON'T WORK!***

**#2 *YOU CAN'T CHANGE YOUR PEER or PARTNER!***

**#3 *YOU ARE NOT THE PROBLEM. I AM NOT THE PROBLEM. HOWEVER, THERE IS A PROBLEM.***

**#4 *THE WORST ENEMY OF ANY RELATIONSHIP IS APATHY.***

**#5 *ONE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT FOR LIFE-GIVING RELATIONSHIPS IS GRATITUDE.***



# Experiences

- Multicultural Mental Health course---students from different years in our MSW program, from different concentrations and with different agendas and experiences and identities.
- Moved away from dominant paradigm. This effort to shift the paradigm and discourse was intentional. Our starting point was not to teach about the Other or to allow ourselves to be comfortable with our privilege.



# Values

- I hold high expectations of my students and believe in them.
- As instructor, I seek to model that I seek to empower them to be their best selves and equip them with skills to be leaders in their fields of practice.
- I seek to co-create a learning environment with the students that is welcoming, respectful, challenging, and becoming community. Safe space.
- I seek to welcome students' experiences and voices.
- I seek to instill in my students the need to “be different, be better and do it better”. The current status quo is not working well.



# Pathways

- Co-create a learning environment that listens well, that holds each person accountable to be present, to show up with each other, that makes heard and visible assumptions I make and hold as well as the assumptions made and held by the teachers, staff, others students, administrators and my peers.
- Learn to hold difference reverently, without squelching-- We can call out others but not with the aim to put down but to connect with, to build community.
- Our policies, necessary, but at times we are far too ready to send out of the room, suspend from school, rather than engaging in the hard work of practicing listening well. Less practiced is being in relationship and building community that respects, welcomes and is strengthened by difference.

# Transformation

- In our work and in our learning we must support and challenge one another--not in judgment against one other or to merely point out biases but rather to form Community with our students, their parents, and school administrators and staff to foster ties that promote mutual growth and transformation.
- We start from a different starting point. The expectation is that we can grow and seek to grow, not apart from each other, but with other, to invest in ourselves and in the Other.
- I expect to be transformed by our experience and I hope you will be too.





Circle of  
Inclusion and Empowerment