Dr. Antonia C. Novello

Education and Opportunity

“I do believe that the spirit of entrepreneur[ship] and wanting to be something else every single day of my life, . . . comes from her [my mother]. Because I always remember a mother who always worked, who always studied, and who always tried to better herself. And she always said, ‘Education is the door of opportunity.’ . . . Believe me, she pushed.”

Life Lesson

“She became my seventh grade teacher for science and mathematics. And if you think life is hard, try [thinking of my] mother--as competitive as my mother is--[as] my teacher of science and mathematics . . . mak[ing] sure that her expectations of me were better and bigger than anybody else’s. She never put pressure, but I knew the pressure was there. Obviously she used to have a system that today you could not use . . . . She would have you by the A’s, the B’s, the C’s, the D’s, and the F’s. And I took pleasure in . . . [getting] A’s. But Mami always felt that you should not get too comfortable with what you think you are. So, she gave a quiz as an emergency and I got a C, and she sat me in the F wing for one week. I promised myself to never, ever again be at that level ever again. So, that experience never, never let me do less than A’s and B’s. I don’t ever want to go back to that line again. But more than anything, she used to make me always remember that what you learn today, you have to revise tomorrow.”

Competitive Spirit

“I do remember when I entered high school that I saw myself surrounded with many people that I had seen during the past three years of my junior high, sitting in the D’s, C’s, and the B’s rather than the A’s. And I said, ‘Something is happening here.’ So I went to the principal and said, ‘Mami says that you have to change me to the honor group.’ He said, ‘Why?’ I said, ‘Because Mami says that it would be best for me to be competitive rather than just to be status quo.’ So, unknown to Mami, and unknown to me, he changed me, with my first lie in high school, to the honor group. It was really interesting because in that group, competition and competitiveness has always been something that comes from my inside, and I think it came from my mother.”