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An Alternative Approach to Standardized Testing: A Model That Promotes Racial Equity and College Access

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Abstract

Since its inception, standardized testing has long been considered an illustration of the endemic nature of racism in America and a barrier to college access for racially minoritized students. This paper explores how standardized testing affects racial equity and college access of racially minoritized students. Critical race theory (CRT) and access provide frameworks to understand how standardized testing impacts racially minoritized students as members of the college-going community. Thereafter, we problematize the use of color-blind and meritocratic practices in order to propose a comprehensive critical education model for the assessment of racially minoritized students' scholastic aptitude. Our analysis found that standardized testing encourages curricular alignment to the tests themselves, which take the form of curricular content-narrowing to tested subjects, to the detriment or exclusion of nontested subjects. Higher education's dependence on standardized testing as the primary indicator of college preparedness narrows the scope of racial equity that could be achieved on college campuses while barely facilitating threshold access among racially minoritized students. As an alternative, we present the principles of critical race assessment, critical multicultural education, and critical pedagogies as a more comprehensive education model that recognizes and addresses the racial inequities that exist in education.

Keywords

standardized testing, college access, critical race theory, critical education model

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Since its inception, standardized testing has long been considered an illustration of the endemic nature of racism in America and a barrier to college access for racially minoritized students (McConkie, 1998; Sackett, Schmitt, Ellingson, & Kabin, 2001; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2006). A crossfire debate among standardized testing proponents and opponents stems from the historical underpinnings of testing. Modeled from White cultural norms, standardized testing was considered a fair and accurate assessment of intelligence (Linn, 1982; Sacks, 1997; Williams, 1983). However, Guinier (2015) found that standardized tests such as the SAT Reasoning Test are a reliable proxy for wealth and “normed to white, upper-middle class performance” (p. 20). With criticism and controversy brewing over the existence and perpetuation of racial bias in standardized testing, industry advocates attempted to resolve concerns by asserting that the test actually measures aptitude, thereby presenting no racial bias (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Williams, 1983). Given the six-fold increase in sales and profitable returns that commercialized testing has seen in the last decade (Clarke, Madaus, Horn, & Ramos, 2000), it isn’t surprising that industry advocates encourage the use and validity of standardized testing. However, continued inaccuracies in reporting (Altshuler & Schmutz, 2006; Gándara & López, 1998) and disproportions in college access among racially minoritized students (McConkie, 1998; Renner & Moore, 2004) suggest that little has been done to equalize testing outcomes (Guinier, 2015).

A review of the literature on this topic led us to conclude that standardized tests are racially biased (Akom, 2004; Banks, 2000; Barro, 2001; Chang, 2003; Espinoza, 1993; Gamoran, 2001; Guinier, 2015; Haney & Hurtado, 1994; Helms, 2002; Horn, 2005; Issacharoff, 1998; Jencks & Phillips,

1998; Linn, 2001; Linn, 1982; Marlaire & Maynard, 1990; Rizga, 2015; Selmi, 1994; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Suzuki & Aronson, 2005; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2006). As such, continued investigation led us to question why standardized tests remain so entrenched in American life despite what we know about its validity. Believing, therefore, that the complete abandonment of such a widely accepted practice like standardized testing is unrealistic, we have chosen to explore how standardized testing affects the racial equity and college access of racially minoritized students. Standardized testing’s effects on these two factors became important when we considered higher education’s reliance on test scores in making admissions decisions. Such dependence not only jeopardizes the college access of racially minoritized students but also has the potential to turn the fear of an overall decline in campus diversity from a theory to a reality (Guinier, 2015; Selmi, 1994).

A comprehensive examination of the effects of standardized testing on the racial equity and college access of racially minoritized students required that we explore meritocracy and color-blind ideologies. Meritocracy is an elusive process in which individuals are rewarded based on achievement, namely in the areas of intelligence, credentialing, and education. Advocates of meritocracy use the term to present the illusion of a “level playing field,” thereby “arguing that racism no longer remains a factor to one’s social position” (Williams & Land, 2006, p. 580). Meritocracy, a seemingly race-neutral concept, is the foundation for color-blind ideologies. Guinier (2015) explained that the distorted use of meritocracy in admissions decisions continues to privilege the few that already benefit from and are advantaged from standardized tests. Color-blind educational practices, like standardized testing, facilitate “obvious

and repetitive” acts of racism that are often overlooked (Williams & Land, 2006, p. 579). The effects of which can be far-reaching and irreversible.

Towards this end, we will use the following frameworks of critical race theory (CRT) and access to understand how racially minoritized students are impacted by standardized testing as members of the college-going community. Next, we will problematize the use of color-blind and meritocratic practices, like standardized testing, through an analysis of the literature. Finally, this paper will conclude with an alternative model for the assessment of racially minoritized students’ scholastic aptitude.

Building the Framework

CRT and Adelman’s (2007) definitions of access provide the undergirding frameworks in which to comprehensively examine and understand how standardized testing perpetuates a racialized and unfair system of meritocratic practices. Thereafter, CRT is used to affirm and build a comprehensive model that centers race as a conduit for access by presenting race-conscious and affirming practices for students of color preparing to enter higher education.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) Theoretical Framework

CRT emerged from critical legal studies as a means to problematize and theorize the role that race and racism plays in education, politics, the economy, legal matters, and everyday life (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). CRT, on the whole, has several aims that evolved around two major principles: (a) to understand how White supremacy and the subordination of

people of color have been created (historically) and maintained (contemporarily) in the United States (Crenshaw et al., 2000); and (b) to not only understand how racialized structures are organized but also to change and disrupt them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). To that end, CRT is categorized as an emancipatory epistemology in that the effects of racism are no longer ignored, and the development of agency and resistance of people of color are central to the ideology.

For the purpose of this analysis, further exploration of two central tenets of CRT are discussed in accordance with Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) four frames of color-blind racism: (a) racism is normative behavior in American culture and thus in education; and (b) CRT rejects dominant narratives, processes, or systems that claim race neutrality, colorblindness, and meritocracy. Williams and Land (2006) argued that color-blind or race-neutral approaches further sustain White dominance and legitimize minority group subordination. Bonilla-Silva (2003) posited that color-blind racism has emerged as a new and overt form of racial ideology to defend the contemporary racial order and protect White supremacy. Ideologies of the powerful capitalize on blaming the victim and survive on the production and reinforcement of the status quo, with color-blind racism being no exception (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2003) identified four central frames that are used to categorize contemporary forms of color-blind racism: (a) abstract liberalism, which “allows Whites to appear reasonable or moral when using liberal language to oppose practical approaches to dealing with de facto racial inequality” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 28); (b) naturalization, which describes the natural gravitation of same-race people; (c) cultural racism, or stereotyping, which generalizes the collective standing of people of color; and (d) minimization

of racism, which “asserts that racism is no longer a central factor affecting minorities’ life chances by disregarding the bulk of racially motivated actions by individuals or institutions” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 28). These frames provide an explanation in which to understand issues of access faced by racially minoritized students seeking to enter higher education.

Access

The disproportions in postsecondary participation in higher education across income and racial lines suggest that access to higher education is unequal and inequitable (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Renner & Moore, 2004). Color-blind approaches, like standardized testing, that influence, determine, and undermine college access require racially minoritized students to be held to a “normalized White standard” (Williams & Land, 2006). Further investigation of this issue begs for more understanding and clarification on how standardized testing influences college access (e.g., entry is based on assessment of college preparedness) and, moreover, impacts college choice (e.g., enables students to attend their first choice school) of racially minoritized students. Adelman (2007) identified four definitions of access to delineate the nature of this complex problem. The first definition is threshold access also known as “walking through the door” (Adelman, 2007, p. 1). Despite not being able to distinguish between a student’s entry to vocational school, community college, or a four-year university, this mode of access is employed once the first grade is recorded on a student’s transcript at any postsecondary institution. Adelman (2007) stated, “It does not take into account whether a student enrolled for three or 23 credits or if they walked out of the institution a month after having entered” (p. 2). It simply measures enrollment, not persistence. The second

definition, recurrent access, describes a student’s ability to regain entry after deciding, regardless of reason or duration, to discontinue their postsecondary education. This definition also includes students who reenter after completion of one degree to pursue another degree or graduate school. Convenient access as defined by Adelman (2007) is when a student, for the first time or as a returner, enters “at a season and location of their preference” (p. 2). The last definition, distributional access, occurs when students are attending college for the first time at schools they wanted to attend or at schools someone told them they were qualified to attend. The following analysis of the literature, presentation of the findings, and discussion of the implications are situated in these two frameworks.

Understanding Standardized Testing as a Color-Blind and Meritocratic Practice

The literature on standardized testing illuminates a tension over whether or not teachers are merely teaching to the test (Darling-Hammond, 1991; Phelps, 2006; Wolf, 2007). Because standardized tests in secondary education are used to measure a student’s capacity for learning and evaluate teachers’ effectiveness, there are suspicions about whether teachers are more invested in protecting their jobs rather than facilitating student success. Cementing these suspicions are presidential initiatives such as Race to the Top that “promote using test scores to fire, hire and compensate teachers” (Rizga, 2015, para. 27). As such, teachers feel pressured to teach to the test, which leads to a narrowing of curriculum to include only content that will be tested (Hursh, 2005; McGuinn, 2012). Barrer-Ferreira (2008) argued that the stakes in standardized testing have reached a level of seriousness that, consequently, have resulted in teachers losing sight of educating the

whole student in the prioritization of test scores. The teachers are not solely to blame because the issue is systemic and purported by education reform initiatives such as the former No Child Left Behind and most recent Race to the Top. Standardized testing, as a requirement and widely accepted practice, suggests that there is a one-size-fits-all approach to measuring scholastic aptitude.

Meritocracy and Standardized Testing

Although supporters of standardized testing may argue that all students are subject to the same test, rewards, and sanctions, it is still discriminatory to racially minoritized students. Akom (2008) critiqued traditional notions of meritocracy, such as standardized testing, through a race lens and argued that it is merely a mask used by people of privilege to conceal and protect their self-interest, privilege, and power. Similarly, Guinier (2015) explained that the “rise of the testocratic meritocracy has enabled those already at the top of the heap” (p. xii). Moreover, meritocracy, as defined during the civil rights movement, was used to justify a system where individuals were rewarded or punished based on individual achievement (Williams & Land, 2006).

Preparation for standardized tests differs by school and teacher. Tracking, which is also referred to as ability grouping, is a term used to describe a sorting system for students based on their presumed ability or proficiency in subjects (Burriss & Garrity, 2008). Tracking (often via screening, IQ, or standardized testing) typically results in students of color being placed in lower tracks, special education, or remedial education with a less challenging curriculum (Beratan, 2008; Blanchett, 2006; Jordan, 2005; McConkie, 1998). Rather than challenging students of color with high expectations, they languish in the remedial classrooms with no hope of being prepared for

college access tests and, therefore, college (Darling-Hammond, 1991). Standardized tests have become an underestimated and unsuspecting form of color-blind racism by lending credibility to “policies that have denied, and are continuing to deny, persons of color equal access to educational and job opportunities” (Williams & Land, 2006, p. 584).

Furthermore, Sacks (1997) argued that standardized testing is a rigged game favoring Americans privileged by social class who tend also to be White. This notion is a reflection of the color-blind racist frame, abstract liberalism in which Whites justify meritocracy by stating, “The cream rises to the top; unconcerned that the cream rising is usually white” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 32). In identifying the meritocratic system’s flaws, Sacks (1997) also pointed out that cisgender women and minorities earned better grades their first year of college than their SAT scores would predict. Proponents of normed ideologies describe “merit, in large part, as the potential to achieve according to test results” (Sacks, 1997, p. 31). Many standardized tests communicate to students their national rankings in comparison to their peers but lack a comparable assessment of what they are capable of learning (Sacks, 1997). As such, standardized tests are not used to assess or facilitate student development in the collegiate setting.

Using a CRT lens, we have observed that test measurements reflect educational disparities (Zwick, 2001). There is a disparate impact when test data is used to make decisions without taking into consideration that the test scores (and other measures) are reflective of inequities in the K–12 educational system that affects, disproportionately, a large population of minorities. In light of this, it is evident that there are significant implications for racial inequity in college

access. Color-blind, neoliberal rhetoric like that used to justify the use of standardized testing illustrates a minimization of racism by disregarding the pervasiveness of racial inequities in our education system.

Color-Blind Ideologies and Standardized Testing

Neoliberalism initiatives such as the former No Child Left Behind and the more recent Race to the Top place new emphasis on accountability and standardized testing. Proponents began to frame their arguments in gains of economic productivity and reduced social service costs rather than on racial equity in schooling (Anyon & Greene, 2007). Closing the achievement gap became about educating poor Black students as a means of fostering economic development, reflecting a culturally racist and color-blind approach (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) as opposed to improving educational outcomes for the betterment of all students. Rather than acknowledging that inequitable educational barriers exist, Roberts and Mahtani (2010) have argued that neoliberalism attributes poor educational outcomes to individual students. In neoliberal societies, success is determined by how hard you work (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). This perspective of success further illustrates an exercise in meritocracy and color-blind racism through an abstract liberalism frame (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

By equating low test performance among racially minoritized students with a lack of college preparedness or low-rung employment with underachievement, there is justification for the racialized hierarchies of privilege in society. Neoliberal ideology, therefore, becomes a means to justify White privileges (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Failing to excel on standardized testing, which leads to college access, becomes an early step in socioeconomic tracking where people of

color are excluded from the social mobility available to their White counterparts. The social replication of privilege reinforces color-blind ideologies because people with economic and social capital believe that racist practices, like standardized testing, work (for them); thus blaming poor performance on the victim.

Racial Equity and College Access Implications of Standardized Testing

Standardized tests are not a valid predictor of student success but more so a predictor or indicator of wealth or the affluence of students' parents (Bell, 2003; Guinier, 2015). Believing admissions officers are too reliant on standardized tests, Bell (2003) argued that there wouldn't be a need for special race-based practices, like affirmative action, to promote college access and campus diversity among racially minoritized students if standardized tests were not weighted so heavily in the admissions process. Both Bell (2003) and Guinier (2015) argued that there is an unfair overreliance of standardized tests in the higher education admissions process because it more accurately correlates to household incomes, ethnicity, and parental education. As a result, higher education's reliance on standardized tests as a means of predicting college success has had an adverse effect on the way admissions decisions are made and threaten racially minoritized students' chances at even threshold access (Adelman, 2007).

Hoffman and Lowitzki (2005) posited that "those wishing to diversify a campus may not want to rely on standardized tests" (p. 468). While acknowledging that the SAT is a weak predictor of future performance for nonmajority students, Hoffman and Lowitzki (2005) did not recommend that standardized tests be eliminated altogether. Rather, they suggested that test adminis-

trators and institutions need to be better trained on the many factors that influence test performance, such as stereotype threat and meritocracy. Moreover, despite proclamations supporting diversity, Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn, and Arrona (2006) argued that colleges and universities were only making token efforts to increase enrollments of students of color. In light of the Grutter and Gratz decisions, institutions are being permitted to engage in symbolic measures to increase access and advance racial diversity (Morfin et al., 2006). Sadly, those narrowly defined efforts, when closely examined, explain the overall declines of students of color at many institutions. In considering the elimination of standardized tests, there is an underlying capitalist hold and profit-driven market to contend with, which will be difficult to do. However, there are pockets of opt-out movements resulting in students, parents, and teachers refusing to take part in standardized test throughout the United States (Rizga, 2015).

Comprehensive Critical Education Model: A Counterdiscourse

After an analysis of the literature, we have concluded that higher education's dependence on standardized testing as the primary indicator of college preparedness and scholastic aptitude narrows the scope of racial equity that could be achieved on college campuses while barely facilitating threshold access among racially minoritized students. The remainder of this section uses a CRT framework to present a comprehensive education model as an alternative to assessing college preparedness and scholastic aptitude among racially minoritized students, thereby exploring alternative ways to increase racial equity and college access. Whereas we recognize the pervasiveness of the business practice and popularity of standardized testing, we also acknowledge the need for a more comprehensive

critical education model that incorporates critical multicultural education, antiracist pedagogies, and critical race assessments (CRA). In an educational culture where standardized testing reinforces stereotypes of students of color and creates barriers to college access (Musoba, 2011), implementing a comprehensive critical education model reduces the prevalence of stereotype threat among racially minoritized students. An educational system that acknowledges, responds to, and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, distributional access to education for students from all cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In looking at access, the model focuses on the K–12 pipeline, specifically targeting students, teaching practices, the curriculum, and the policy makers' outlook on alternative modes of assessing college admissions.

Critical Race Assessment (CRA)

Within the last two decades, standardized tests such as SATs and American Colleges Tests (ACTs) have been heavily scrutinized for their racial inequities in admissions decisions. As such, the use of SATs in admissions decisions has been questioned, and there is a movement towards removing it as an admission's requirement altogether (Long, 2003). Towards this end, Long (2003) stated that "any test designed to measure college preparation will expose the inequities highlighted by SAT" (p. 33).

As an alternative measure to standardized testing, states such as California, Florida, and Texas have adopted percentage admissions plans that "guarantee college acceptance to a top segment of the graduating high school classes within the state" (Long, 2003, p. 31). The logic and essentially the criticism with using percentage plans such as Florida's Talented 20 Program as an alternative to standardized testing is that it is dependent on minority-based second-

ary institutions. In a minority-based high school, the top segment of the graduating class will be students of color; however, in a predominantly White high school, the top segment will be majority White. As such, reports on the Talented 20 Program showed that “only 9.4% and 9.6% of Black and Hispanic students, respectively, would have met the Talented 20 Program eligibility” (Kim, 2005, p. 16). Unfortunately, this plan has not proven effective or viable to replicate the increase of racially minoritized students in higher education.

Another alternative approach mentioned in Long (2003) was that of changing admissions standards and tests. With regards to admissions standards, Long proposed, “Colleges could discount factors that are negatively related to race while elevating activities positively correlated with race” (Long, 2003, p. 33). In other words, additional credit or weight could be given to particular applicant activities that fill a need for the institution. Guinier (2015) provided similar alternatives in examples of democratic merit, in which education access is granted to those who work collaboratively for the benefit of the society. In this regard, Guinier described a “thinking curriculum” in which there are no placement tests and tracking is not used (p. 43). She also explained the replacement of standardized tests with portfolio assessments as alternatives to test-based merit.

Further to the points discussed above, we propose changes to the assessments used to measure student success and readiness for college. Using assessments in which race is prioritized complements critical multicultural education as well as other critical educational frameworks such as critical race curriculum and pedagogy (discussed below) and better positions students of color to succeed in standardized tests such as SATs and ACTs. Using the principles of a

critical race curriculum and pedagogy, we propose the use of a CRA and discuss the implications for measuring the validity of this assessment to evaluate the achievement and success of racially minoritized students (Yosso, 2002).

Our proposed assessment solution, CRA, would essentially be used in the college admissions process in lieu of standardized tests. It would be a series of school-based assessments including student portfolios (as explained in Guinier, 2015) stemming from critical multicultural education and critical pedagogies that are respectful to students’ learning and inclusive of racialized experiences. CRA draws on the principles of CRT, thereby foregrounding race as a grounding principle in which to construct the school-based assessments. The school-based assessments would be codeveloped by the teachers and students and integrated into the curriculum. Students would have opportunities to work collaboratively with other students simulating sociocultural contexts of learning. Although assessment is viewed as a normative testing practice and contrary to the ideals of CRT, it should be viewed as a formative tool, in which educators can assess students’ performance, that is both culturally and racially responsive. Assessment in this light is dialogical and dialectical, and there starts the shift in the ideology of admissions practices. Furthermore, CRA would sustain distributive access, thereby providing a continued solution to threshold access (Adelman, 2007).

The outcomes of CRA would derive from Yosso’s (2002) approaches to a critical race curriculum: (a) recognize the central and interconnectedness role of racism in assessing students of color; (b) problematize normed ideologies of traditional Eurocentric and Western civilization curriculum, and introduce culturally responsive and

race-informed content; (c) test critical content with breadth and depth to awareness and meaningfulness of application; (d) foreground experiential knowledge and use of narratives in writing assessments; and (e) utilize interdisciplinary approaches through a wide content coverage and assessment strategy.

To validate the assessment, we would use Linn, Baker, and Dunbar's (1991) eight criteria for evaluating alternative assessments: (a) consequences are the basis in which the use and interpretation of the test are validated; (b) the degree of fairness as defined by equitable access between the "difference in familiarity, exposure, and motivation on the tasks of interests" (p. 18) amongst groups of students; (c) the transfer and generalizability criterion refers to the degree in which standardized test scores can be inflated across states and racial groups of students to further define achievement and success; (d) assessment should include a cognitive complexity criterion that evaluates students' critical thinking skills; (e) the content quality criterion should be relevant to the field of inquiry, however, foregrounding the fairness criterion as it relates to varying ethnic groups of students; (f) content coverage criterion suggests that standardized tests need to cover a breadth of subject-matter curriculum items; (g) the meaningfulness criterion indicates that items on standardized tests need to be relevant to the students' educational experiences; and (h) cost and efficiency criterion relates to the value-added measures that assessment outcomes have on student achievement, performance, and forecasted success in schools. When deconstructing each of the eight criteria through a CRT lens, CRA foregrounds the pivotal steps towards increased access and racial equity for racially minoritized students.

Critical Multicultural Education

Through a CRT lens, the current high school curriculum is seen as maintaining social order by omitting, muting, and silencing minority voices subtly yet effectively (Ladson-Billings, 2004; King, 1992). To counteract these problems, we propose the inclusion of critical multicultural education to expand the curriculum to integrate interdisciplinary subjects, learning in larger social, political, and historical context, and student/learner-centered learning. The inclusion of "critical multicultural education" rather than just "multicultural education" is important because the current form of multicultural education exists in the periphery and dominant ideologies still appropriate for multicultural discourse (Ladson-Billings, 2004). This form of curriculum transformation can include selected multicultural curriculum content that simultaneously distorts both the historical and the social reality that people experience, thereby disrupting "marginalizing knowledge" (King, 2001). Therefore, with our proposal of the inclusion of critical multicultural education, the curriculum and instructional practices will be transformed to reflect changes in the sociopolitical landscape that align school curricula with emerging scholarly evidence about histories, cultures, lives, and experiences of various people that challenges Eurocentric and Western civilization curricula (Ladson-Billings, 2004). The curricular changes would be systemic in nature in hopes of reducing effects of stereotype threat that Guinier (2015) argued depresses test scores of racially minoritized students.

The curricular changes that we are proposing through inclusion of critical multicultural education support several tenets of CRT and seek to reveal, identify, and dismantle color-blind and meritocratic ideologies that are perpetuated in standardized curriculums. Critical multicultural

education posits that racism is pervasive and systemic to American life (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). A critical multicultural curriculum seeks to identify the pervasive nature of racism as it exists at the systemic level and disrupts the myth of racism as individual pathology. Moreover, students of color are often subjugated to a deficit view of their intellectual and academic abilities through the justification of meritocracy (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003, p. 647). However, when pervasive acts of racism are identified through the teaching of critical multicultural education, students will be able to identify and understand the disparities, barriers, and inequities that exist at the systemic level. It is our hope that by enacting critical multicultural education that there will be increased levels of awareness of racial inequities to dispute beliefs and assumptions about race perpetuated by color-blind and meritocratic practices, like standardized testing.

The other tenets of CRT that are reflected in critical multicultural curriculum are the rejection of dominant narratives that claim race neutrality, colorblindness, and meritocracy and recognize and include lived experiences of people of color through counterstorytelling (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Without the inclusion of counterstorytelling and rejection of dominant narratives in school curriculum, marginalized voices will continue to be silenced and/or included in ways that distort their significance and truth (King, 1992). Therefore, through the inclusion of critical multicultural education, we propose to transform standardized curriculum to include the counterstories of people of color in ways that empower and enlighten. As such, we propose the deliberate inclusion of culturally responsive instructional content as well as a diverse range of gendered and racialized texts. Through such transformation, students are able to read multiple perspec-

tives, especially from the voices that have been silenced and erased from standardized curriculum.

By employing a critical multicultural education, students are able to have access to an enriched and rigorous curriculum (which is usually only reserved for children from dominant groups) that emphasizes critical thinking, reasoning, and logic (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Critical multicultural education also counteracts the narrowing effect of standardized testing on curriculum and moves away from what McNeil (2000) explained as a phony curriculum that tries to conform to the forms of knowledge students would encounter on a centralized test (p. 5). Overall, critical multicultural education would create a holistic curriculum that develops the whole child by emphasizing critical thinking, reasoning, and logic.

Critical Pedagogies

To implement critical multicultural education, teachers' critical pedagogical approaches must also be employed. Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education designed to help students develop critical thinking by recognizing authoritarian tendencies and by connecting knowledge to power (Ellsworth, 1989). Critical pedagogies are part of a tradition of progressive education that connects social or political change directly to education. It is a reciprocal process by both the teacher and the student to empower and encourage learning. These approaches to pedagogy rest on the idea of teaching for change. Critical pedagogy in its various forms offers a general means of understanding teaching practices in the context of broad social goals and provides specific pedagogical approaches for fostering critical awareness in both students and teachers so that social goals can be achieved (Ellsworth, 1989). Critical pedagogy is heavily influenced by the works

of Paulo Freire (1993, 1996) who believed that students' ability to think critically about their education would allow them to gain the power and know-how to take action against oppression. It is through the use of critical pedagogies that critical multicultural education can be fully realized and college access among racially minoritized students increased.

With standardized testing playing a large role in the widening achievement gaps and narrowed access to higher education among racially minoritized students, the implementation of critical pedagogies, especially an antiracist one, would provide teachers with effective tools for lessening the effects of color-blind racism on students of color in the classroom (Wagner, 2005). Antiracist pedagogy requires a commitment to educate students in ways that make racialized power relations explicit, thereby deconstructing the social construction of race and analyzing interlocking systems of oppression that serve to marginalize and exclude some groups while privileging others (Wagner, 2005). During the pedagogical process, antiracist pedagogy attends to the experiences of marginalized populations in ways that guard against reinscribing patterns of domination, ensuring that marginalized peoples are not objectified, appropriated, interpreted, or taken over by those who dominate (hooks, 1994; Tatum, 1994). Rather than viewing diverse students as "other," an antiracist pedagogy is designed to "problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask questions about the nature of the student–teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). This prioritizes educating the whole student as opposed to teaching to the test.

The assumption underlying antiracist pedagogy for teachers is that it is necessary for them to confront racism in their personal

backgrounds and biases in order to become conscious of how it is expressed in their teaching practice (Kailin, 2002). Antiracist pedagogy also implores teachers to reconsider ideas of color-blind and race-neutral policies. Many teachers have been taught to ignore race and avoid racism; but in reality, this colorblindness also makes them blind to teaching practices that disadvantage students of color. Before an antiracist pedagogy, or any critical pedagogy, can be used, teachers first need to engage in a process of self-reflection and exploration (Howard, 2003). Self-reflection is essential in order for teachers to examine their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others and understand why they are who they are, with the ultimate goal of confronting biases influencing their value system. This will help teachers reconcile negative feelings towards any cultural, language, or ethnic group and diminish the likelihood of reflecting prejudice or racism towards certain groups (Howard, 2003). Once teachers have lessened their biases, they will be able to create a more welcoming and safe environment for their students.

Self-exploration allows teachers the opportunity to explore their personal histories and experiences as well as the history and current experiences of their students and families (Howard, 2003). Teachers who have knowledge and understanding about themselves and others are better able to appreciate differences and deliver culturally sensitive instruction, which ultimately will prepare them to address the needs of all their students.

To begin to implement antiracist or other critical pedagogies in the classroom, teachers should consider the tips provided by the Education Alliance (2006) on Culturally Responsive Teaching, a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of

learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Some of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are

- positive perspectives on parents and families,
- communication of high expectations,
- learning within the context of culture,
- student-centered instruction,
- culturally mediated instruction,
- curriculum reshaping, and
- teacher as facilitator.

Creating a more authentic, culturally responsive, antiracist pedagogy supports student achievement, enhances the benefits of critical multicultural education, and better prepares students of color for college success.

Conclusion

We know that using standardized testing, a color-blind and meritocratic practice, as the de facto model of assessing scholastic aptitude and college preparedness has not benefited racially minoritized students. When used to assess accountability and college readiness, standardized testing undermines high-quality education, genuine student–teacher motivation, and the benefits of racial diversity, resulting in substantial inequities in college access among racially minoritized students (Diamond, 2007; Musoba, 2011; Urrieta, 2004). Standardized testing models are aligned to a set of academic standards that meet the needs of White, middle-class students and work against students that are not proponents of normative standards (Urrieta, 2004). Moreover, these tests do not effectively measure achievement or aptitude for students of color but instead track and present false and detrimental implications for college access and success.

To that end, higher education’s dependence on standardized testing as the primary indicator of college preparedness narrows

the scope of racial equity that could be achieved on college campuses while barely facilitating threshold access among racially minoritized students. As an alternative, we propose a more holistic and comprehensive critical education model that recognizes and addresses the racial inequities that exist in education that must be rectified in order for racially minoritized students to acquire fully distributional access in search of racial equity. The model promotes the use of CRA, critical multicultural education, and critical pedagogies.

Our analysis uncovered that threshold access was the dominant discourse, leading us to conclude that other modes of access affected by standardized testing have not been researched thoroughly. Future research of this topic should examine these other modes of access affected by standardized testing in order to fully assess the impacts on racially minoritized students. Lastly, we acknowledge that our proposed alternative dares to hope audaciously in pursuit of a radical transformation of the United States’ curriculum, teaching, and higher education admissions processes – what Duncan-Andrade (2009) refers to as critical hope. However, as Guinier (2015) explained, the shift may seem revolutionary, but there are pockets of excellence making shifts in the opting out of standardized testing and shifts in replacing standardized tests with portfolio assessments. As such, we as educational scholars and agents of social change will continue to hope and labor for a more just and equitable education climate for racially minoritized students.

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