



First Thing's First: Privilege, Power, and Pedagogy the Antecedent of Assessment

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Montenegro and Jankowski's *Equity and Assessment: Moving Towards Culturally Responsive Assessment* (2017) launches a critical inquiry and reflection into the post-secondary environment's responsibility to actively shift its assessment approaches in the college classroom and context overall. The authors weave a cohesive and inclusive call for change in the role, place and ultimate goals of assessment in the 21st century academy – an academy that serves its most diverse, historically underrepresented student population ever. Why does Montenegro and Jankowski's work matter for those of us embedded in the academy as faculty, chairpersons, and senior leadership? What historical truths scaffold the authors' assertions? What concurrent variables must be addressed and aligned to the authors' assertions if culturally responsive assessment is to gain traction on our campuses?

The Urgency of the Call to Action

In their 2017 report on the six year completion rates disaggregated by race and ethnicity for students who began postsecondary education in fall 2010, Shapiro et al (2017) found the following:

- Among those who started at 4-year public institutions, Black students had the lowest 6-year completion rate (45.9%). Over two thirds of white and Asian students completed a degree within the same period (67.2% and 71.7% respectively) with an overall national average for that cohort of 62.4%.
- Among students who started in four-year public institutions, Black men had the lowest completion rate (40%).
- Among those who started at a community college, one in four Asian students, one in five white students, one in 10 Hispanic and one in 12 Black students completed four year institutions in the six year time period.

The report goes on to mention the '*consensus in the literature on attainment barriers for traditionally underrepresented minority groups*' with an ample list of supported studies, reports, and papers that outline various takes on the success (or perhaps threats to success) observed and/or experienced by these groups. Goal 2025 of the Lumina Foundation points to the need for America to have at least 60 percent of its adult workforce with a high-quality degree, certificate or post-secondary credential by the year 2025 if our nation is to meet its need for talent in the very near future (www.luminafoundation.org). Montenegro and Jankowski's (2017) work leverages the 'consensus in

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the literature' briefly highlighted by Shapiro et al (2017) by concretely opening the gate for necessary and critical discourse our campuses must address if we are to serve all who have come to our campuses and walk the hallowed halls of the academy.

Tacit Truths of a Distanced Discourse

Equity in our assessment practices is but the topsoil of a much deeper, honest conversation about all we value (and devalue) in higher education in general. Our postsecondary lineage in America is an inextricable subsystem or offshoot of our broader, historical social system of privilege and oppression. If we are to fully actualize our democracy's aims of liberty and justice for all, we must decide to practice a more deliberate, critical, contextualized and historical reflection in our attempt to be responsive. The late researcher, scholar, and educational psychologist, Asa G. Hilliard, (former Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Urban Education at Georgia State University), spent his career teaching, presenting, and publishing widely on the topic of African/African American socialization, testing, assessment and pluralistic curricula. Dr. Hilliard often addressed the necessity of looking at the whole of the system before addressing its challenges or issues. In his now seminal 1988 work, *Conceptual Confusion and the Persistence of Group Oppression through Education*, Hilliard mapped the history of colonization, overt and covert practices by groups in power and the constitutional legacy of Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education toward the continuing features of privilege and oppression we continue to grapple with in the 21st century. In that work, Hilliard asserted that our unwillingness to address the inherent infrastructure of privilege and oppression in our social systems (including education) will continue to lead us down paths that address remedying inequities in an adhoc approach as opposed to a 'conceptual and tactical' method (p. 38). Distancing our discourse away from these truths keeps us on the surface of real responses that may spell significant gains or growth for the very populations who have historically been oppressed in a broader social context.

Likewise, in her influential book *Other People's Children*, Delpit (1995) characterized our education system as one that manifests a 'culture of power.' In addressing the 'Silenced Dialogue' that many populations experience when attempting to address their lived realities in social systems (specifically educational settings) she identifies five aspects of power that are systemically embedded or enacted:

- Issues of power are enacted in classrooms
- There are codes/rules for participating (a culture of power)
- The rules are a reflection of those in power
- If you aren't a participant in the culture of power, you must be explicitly taught the codes, and
- Those in power are typically unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge its existence (p.24).

Delpit's work extends and builds upon the work of Hilliard and others who profess the necessity of those whose charge it is to lead in education systems to first acknowledge its historical and contemporary system of inequities before attempting solutions.

Veritable Variables for Systemic Success

Roughly twenty years ago, one of the original scholars of the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) movement, Geneva Gay (2000) addressed the privilege and oppression canon of Hilliard's work and the realities of Delpit's research in her CRP model by positing six critical components of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy or Teaching. Those six essential elements of CRP are as follows:

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- *Validating* – CRP uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning effective, appropriate and legitimate,
- *Empowering* – CRP enables students to be better human beings (self-efficacy, academic competence, initiative, perseverance) through ambitious and appropriate expectations and support,
- *Transformative* – CRP goes beyond traditional teaching methods to utilize culture/experiences as resources for teaching and learning,
- *Comprehensive* – CRP responds to the need for belonging, honors human dignity, and develops interpersonal relationships,
- *Multidimensional* – CRP involves curriculum, learning context, climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments; and
- *Emancipatory* – CRP is liberating in understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing.

A balanced address of Culturally Responsive Assessment must be woven along with an address of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. At the heart of CRP is the understanding that our Curriculum, Climate and Assessment must adopt this ethos of CRP to create and sustain authentic, systemic policy and methodologies that transform higher education settings for all populations.

Our success as post-secondary stewards is inseparably tied to our student outcomes or success. We are only as strong as our students and the students we serve currently need something different than we have done historically. In their widely accepted standards for assessment practice, Astin et al (1992) identified 9 principles of practice for assessment. Four of those practices are tethered to this philosophical stance of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:

- Assessment of student learning begins with education values
- Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes,
- Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change, and
- Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. There is a compelling public stake in education.

We must explicate and define our values as institutions to all of our stakeholders internally, externally, locally and globally. We are larger than our legacies. However, we cannot afford to ignore those legacies in defining or (where appropriate) redefining who we are currently and who we hope to become for the common good. The populations on our campuses and in our local, national, and global communities expect and require so much more than what was and what has been. The lived experiences of our students and the public must inform and shape our approaches if they are to be timely and truly responsive. Public or private, 2 year or 4 year, our settings have a collective responsibility to our democracy that necessitates the call issued by Montenegro and Jankowski. Our teaching, curricula, assessment, policy and overall practices on every single campus must summon the resolve to commit to pluralistic, democratic, and balanced approaches moving forward.

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