

Community-Rooted Assessments and Measurements: Exploring the Relationships Between  
Community Knowledge, Intelligence, and Standardized Testing

by

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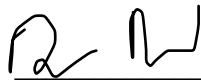
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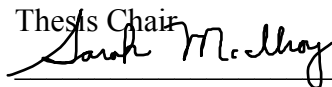
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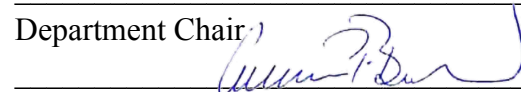
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### **Dedication**

To my mothers' giving heart, to my fathers' fighting spirit, to my three sisters' beauty and brilliance. To my elders and my ancestors. To my descendants. To my closest friends for cheering me on. To all the people who inspired me. To the CDA community. To God and my spirit guides. To everyone who has ever been ostracized, marginalized, made invisible, or looked down upon.

### **Abstract**

Eugenicists' ideology still impacts the way that we construct, validate, and disseminate educational assessments. As the U.S. education system continues to grow more ethnically and racially diverse, cultural relevance and ethical practices in the assessment space become increasingly more important. Scholars have highlighted the ways in which our students deserve more from assessments, bringing justice orientations, culturally relevant content matter, multimodal test formats, and pushing back on white universality. I offer community-rooted assessments and measurements (CRAM) as a practice that creates pathways to implementing this new wave of assessments. By considering research approaches and tools to engage community more effectively, CRAM considers the actions that should be taken to create a new just system. It incorporates three tenants; justice orientation, de-hierarchization, and localization and two pathways which I refer to as transformative reformation and systemic overhaul.

***Key terms: Community-rooted assessments and measurements, DisCrit, QuantCrit, Intelligence, Standardized testing, community knowledge, cultural wealth, justice.***

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“I mean, it’s evident that I’m irrelevant to society.

That’s what you’re tellin’ me, penitentiary would only hire me

Curse me ‘till I’m dead, church me with your fake prophesizing

That I’ma be just another slave in my head.

Institutionalized manipulation and lies.

Reciprocation of freedom only live in your eyes.”

- Kendrick Lamar

### **Introduction**

Our society has not tried to hide its preference for whiteness. White, middle- and upper-class ways of being, doing, and knowing have ravished and impregnated the system of education, simultaneously smothering any semblance of cultures of “Other” (Wynter, 2003; Smith, 1999). It is not a mere inconvenience to under-represented populations, neither is it “progress” when students of colors’ sole representation of themselves in schools, or in assessments, is through deficit-centered narratives (Tuck & Yang, 2014; Randall, 2023; Cunningham, 2019) - it is an act of violence. It is the dampening of young spirits and the denial of joy (hooks, 1994). It is the constant blame placed on the backs of students of color for the failure of a system, being the only time students of color are at the center of assessment conversations (Au, 2016; Cunningham, 2019; Randall et.al., 2020).

“At the time, I did not understand the size or seriousness of the school system’s assault on Black people. I knew only that I constantly felt uncomfortable and ashamed of being Black. This feeling followed me everywhere, without letup. It was a result of the implicit understanding in the system that whites were “smart”, and Blacks were “stupid.”

Anything presented as “good” was always white, even the stories teachers gave us to read in early grades... We not only accepted ourselves as inferior; we accepted the inferiority as inevitable and inescapable.”

(Newton, pp. 17-18, 1973)

In part one of his book *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973) Dr. Huey P. Newton draws a picture of education as it has been experienced by many Black children in the U.S. especially in the late 1940’s and 50’s. He reminisces on the years from primary school to high school, recalling those halls as vampires drying up joy. It was his neighborhood, Oakland, all of the places outside the school, that he remembers educating him. W.E.B Dubois gave a speech called *Caste in America* (1904) discussing racial caste in the U.S. and calling caste in education “a new slavery” that closes the door of educational opportunity for Black children. In her book *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) bell hooks’ details her experience of schooling as a Black child in a Black school. Her teachers were her neighbors. They knew her, cared for her, and cultivated joyful learning experiences. When she was bussed to an integrated district, joy was no longer a part of the curriculum. Her white teachers ranked information acquisition as the top and only priority of learning. It was a place that ignored Black ways of living and championed “...obedience, and not a zealous will to learn...” (p. 12). Jennifer Randall details her own educational experience and the feelings of dehumanization subjected upon her saying “...growing up, I felt like a monster in

some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all. I was like 'yo, is something wrong with me?'" (Randall, p. 204, 2024). Even my own education was fraught with interrogation of ability as a child that eventually grew into a strong distaste for schooling. I'd often wonder, if I had my own children, would I have to choose between their racial and cultural degradation in a white district or their constant surveillance and punishment in the halls of an inner-city school. It is as if Black people are in a constant battle and the education system is the training ground for a perpetual war. Sylvia Wynter (2003) reminds us of the battle for personhood when she proposes, "Man" is an "overrepresentation" of human. "Man" is White, male, heteronormative, able bodied, therefore "Man" is what we ought to be and what we'll never achieve. Equally, standardized tests and their designers are "Man". Upholding standards dipped in puritanical broth and demanding children be commoved by the likes of an answer sheet that gloves their hands to box with their counterparts, to compete to be clothed in the validation of "Man".

Many aspects of the education system embody the racist beginnings of our country, but no other part of education so blatantly maintains the racist, white supremacist beliefs of our founders as one that was created with the desire to discredit the intellectual abilities of poor, immigrant, and non-white people. It is that same part of education that we refer to as standardized testing, that tells our schools, teachers, and students if they are good enough, that tells their parents and communities if they've tried hard enough. There is no other part that can determine if a school is competent enough to stay open, that dictates its worthiness of funding, that measures a community's knowledge of white centrality. Education standards are based upon the achievement of standardized tests, so no matter the reform of the classroom to attempt to include the faces of the earth, education cannot see her true fecundity until we address the ills of

the assessment industry. Assessments must be reoriented for there to be justice in the education system. Construction, score interpretation, validity practices, and dissemination practices all need to be reevaluated utilizing antiracist frameworks (Randall et. al., 2023) that critically and actively address institutionalized and systematized racist, white supremacist structures in educational measurements (Randall et. al., 2023; Au, 2016; Poe et. al., 2023).

We are not without hope for a system of assessments that support the cultural identities and personhoods of minoritized student populations. New researchers, scholars, and designers in the field of psychometrics and test development have made great strides toward justice. Scholars such as Wayne Au, Jennifer Randall, Jahnielle Cunningham, and Randy Bennett, are pushing back on deficit narratives and creating frameworks that are actively anti-racist and justice oriented. In this paper I aim not to create a new format for testing or theory for justice, but to uplift the brilliance of developing tools and create a bridge between existing frameworks. Therefore, I propose Community-Rooted Assessments and Measurements (CRAM) as a practice that creates pathways for the implementation of culturally relevant and justice-oriented assessments. I will highlight the three tenets for practice; justice orientation, de-hierarchization, and localization and two pathways; transformative reformation and systemic overhaul. Before further detailing CRAM and its use, I will outline a brief history of standardized testing and a review of the literature. My main questions for this paper are in what ways might the assessment field transform to combat historically racist, white-centric design and dissemination processes? In what ways can assessments and measurements be designed to include more diversity in cultural relevance, learning style, and different presentations of intelligence?

## **History**



Standardized testing in the United States has quite controversial beginnings. Wayne Au (2016) follows the history of standardized testing as a racial project in the United States. He starts the history in 1904 when French psychologist Alfred Binet, created the Intelligence quotient, infamously known as the IQ test, with the purpose of assessing young children to uncover developmental disabilities. The assessment was done by dividing the mental age, the test score, by the chronological age. This test was still in its infancy when cognitive psychologists in the United States re-interpreted its use as an objective measure of human ability. By 1917, Robert Yerkes had created the Alpha and Beta tests to assess 1.75 million army recruits on their “mental fitness”. At the height of eugenics, race and class permeated the findings of this test. In collaboration with Lewis Terman and Henry Goddard, they found the whiteness and wealth of a man is what determined his intelligence. Thusly, Black people were deemed the least intelligent of all groups. In 1919, Terman was under the sponsorship of the National Academy of Sciences and was integral to getting the Alpha and Beta tests adapted into the National Intelligence Tests for School Children. By 1932, 112 out of 150 large city school systems in the United States were utilizing these intelligence tests to sort their students by ability. During the same time Universities had also adapted intelligence tests into their admissions process.

Jimenez and Modaffari (2021), highlight multiple assessments administered both in and outside of the academic space such as oral qualifying exams administered by higher education institutions, Horace Mann’s 1845 development of common exams in Boston Public Schools, and literacy tests that were utilized as a tool of voter suppression for Black people who were historically restricted from learning how to read and write. In 1969, with the introduction and adaptation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), testing changed from an

assessment of intelligence into an assessment of academic achievement. The Improving America's schools Act in 1994 which required states to assess students' math and reading progress under identical standards across the board, doubled down on NAEP. Jahneille Cunningham (2019), poignantly expresses the accountability era of testing we live in today. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), fully instated in 2002, developed a high-stake standardized testing model. Cunningham details how these tests required a shift in schools focus in order to survive, which in turn created teaching-to-the-test structured classrooms. In 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB, but high stakes testing, and standards had already permeated the education system. In their evolution from intelligence tests to accountability systems, standardized tests have been consistent in their use as a tool that feeds a social stratification system that allows white, upper, and middle-class narratives to remain the dominant knowledge, culture, and ideologies toward which the remainder of the education system should stride.

### *The Literature in Conversation*

The eugenicist origins of standardized testing in the U.S. education system have generated dialogue about the validity, equity, and ethical use of such measurements. Its original application as intelligence testing, which deemed Black students and communities intellectually inferior (Au, 2016; Croizet, 2012; Aston & Brown, 2020), still reverberate in measurement construction and dissemination today, with Black, Brown, and Indigenous students least likely to do well on statewide achievement assessments (Cunningham, 2019; Harris & Harrington, 2006). Throughout the literature many authors illustrate the ways that the assessment system has maintained racist, white supremacist orientations of defining and measuring knowledge and

performance. Simultaneously, students of color are labeled failures (Cunningham, 2019; Randall, 2020; Randall et. al., 2023; Au, 2016; Poe et. al., 2023; Williams, Coles, Reynolds, 2020). These scholars advocate for the humanity of students and designers, highlighting the issues that need to be addressed and offering new construction models for assessments.

Wayne Au (2016) provides us with a critical viewpoint of standardized testing in the modern day. Posing it as “neoliberal multiculturalism”. A racism that hides behind the guise of equality:

“I further argue that, given their presumed objectivity, such standardized testing fundamentally masks the structural nature of racial inequality within an ideology of individual meritocracy, an ideology that advances a racialized neo liberal project that reconstitutes “anti-racism” as being against the very act of naming race itself. That is to say, as I argue here, the neoliberal project has reconstructed “anti-racist” as being against any identification around race (and any itinerant signification) in favor of a post-racial identification constructed around freely acting and competing individuals.” (p. 40)

Meritocracy is underpinned by marketplace ideology that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed as long as they work hard. Au (2016) analyzes anti-racism when framed within neoliberalism as being “post-racial”. In the white, patriarchal, capitalist imagination, by erasing and silencing conversations around difference, namely race, it will be a non-factor and the only thing that will matter is hard work. When beginning this paper, I named several Black scholars, activists, and artists who have struggled through education. All of their experiences were shaped by their Blackness and disobedience to whiteness. Standardized tests uphold and perpetuate the neoliberal fantasy of a race-neutral society whose only purpose is to outwork the

person next to him. Similar sentiments were written by Martin Luther King Jr. in his *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963) where he expresses his dismay at “the white moderate” who is “devoted to order rather than justice and prefers a negative peace, the absence of tension, to a positive peace, the presence of justice.” (p. 80). Similarly, the neoliberal chooses peace via refusing to acknowledge race rather than choosing justice by undoing the system of white supremacy. Au (2016) draws clear threads between the ideologies of early hereditarians and today’s neoliberals. Standardized tests are seen as objective measures and if that is true then it is also true that equity is achieved through this measurement system as it neutralizes all outside factors that might otherwise affect the achievement of an individual in the education system. Under this neoliberal ideology, this means that consistently failing students and schools are deficient. Au (2016) calls this “test-based structural denial” (p. 46) which never questions the structure of the testing system and labels knowledges outside the lines of its system inferior.

Under similar sentiments, Jahneille Cunningham (2019), discusses race-neutrality as epistemological erasure, which silences and demonizes the overt mention of BBI, low-income, and other marginalized groups’ stories, truths, and knowledges. Cunningham states that “the utilization of standardized testing systematically erases the knowledge of communities of color, preserving achievement for those who can master liberal-capitalist knowledge formations” (p.112) Further, she goes on to highlight the failure of the system to critically analyze where the problems lie, always defaulting to deficiency in BBI students. There is never a moment where designers attempt to include the cultural wealth of students of color (Yosso, 2005), question the objectivity of tests or numbers (Au, 2016; Randall et. al., 2023), or confront the overtly racist structures that have created and upheld their relevance (Au, 2016; Randall et. al., 2023; Randall,

2020; Cunningham, 2019). Collaborative working processes often found in communities of color are frowned upon under an education system embedded in testing culture. Cunningham emphasizes how standardized tests are imbued in capitalistic tenets that champion individuality over community and meritocratic narratives of progress and white scientific rationality. This fixation on capitalism, which hierarchizes knowledges, erases other epistemological intelligence and knowledge by deeming it a non-knowledge. Cunningham uses the Funds of Knowledge theory (FOK) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) to address the use of standardized testing as a tool of epistemological erasure, rooting her theory in a foundation that acknowledges the inherency of racism in American society and the subverted knowledges, skills, and cultural assets that students of color bring into the education system. Many schools with high BBI student populations cannot afford to do poorly on these tests as the life of the school often depends on their success (Cunningham, 2019). So, not only are the test designs and contents lending themselves to erasure, but the assessments' status as the holy grail of education discourages extensive study on off-test topics and ideologies.

The most obvious issue with race neutral policies and practices in standardized testing is visibility, as race-neutrality does not allow for the visibility of marginalized student populations. It also fails to take accountability for the harms that happen to students of color in the process of trying to “neutralize” them. Williams, Coles, and Reynolds (2020) propose the Aftermath Model Framework (AM) which is an accountability system that should be implemented to counter dehumanizing and deficit orientations of Black students and concurrently recognize the harms that have been done to Black students in education. AM includes four tenets rooted in Black Student Agency, breaking down top-down, white saviorism approaches to racial justice in the

education system. The four tenets are Eurocentric education, the silencing of voices that do not uphold white, upper-class, patriarchal norms; or the “Mythical norm” (Lorde, 1992), Deficit orientation and Stereotype, both of which perpetuate negative images and labels of Black students, and Blame, which finds a way to hold the most marginalized groups at fault for the failure of a system. AM counters what Williams, et. al., (2020) call “business as usual” tactics used in p-20 education. These tactics are practices like constructing test items with white centric content, that can be easily overlooked. To those who are privileged with aligning with hegemonic culture it is easy to think this is just “normal” language”, but for marginalized groups it is evident that the language, culture, and structure of these tests are built in white centrality. Utilizing AM would call out the Eurocentric education that is foundational to the design of standardized tests. In other words, racism is inherent to the education system, and what educators and test developers look at as “standard” is dedicated to white-centric epistemologies, colonial modes of knowledge production, and anti-Blackness. It has been normalized so radically that it has become invisible to many.

As new test developers and scholars continue questioning standards and moving into anti-racist and justice-oriented assessment construction practices, it becomes more imperative that to counter deficit narratives we must uplift desire-based narratives. Tara Yosso (2005) reintroduces cultural capital as cultural wealth. Cultural capital is a form of social currency that rewards particular speech patterns and behaviors to those that possess it. For the assessment world, that cultural capital only exists in proximity to whiteness. In contrast, cultural wealth offers the opportunity to create counter-narratives from students of color in education. “Various forms of capital nurtured through cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social,

linguistic, familial and resistant capital.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). Naming the forms of capital offered by marginalized communities is important to bringing their voices from beyond the margins and countering Eurocentric education, deficit orientation, and stereotype as outlined by AM (Williams, et. al., 2020). These two frameworks, though not directly oriented toward assessments, arouse important problem areas in assessment design practices and offer pathways that can be integrated into the assessment system.

Assessment justice scholars and practitioners recognize the importance of community narratives, student voices, and agency and building dynamic assessments that are actively anti-racist. Randall et al. (2023) intertwine cultural wealth with the assessment field by uplifting the linguistic and other forms of cultural wealth held by students of color. They create new frames for assessments that do not accommodate Black, Brown, and Indigenous and other marginalized students, but are constructed with them at the center. They don’t stop with JAV but continue to counter the idea that, ultimately, standards have a purpose and must be adhered to (Jimenez and Modaffari, 2021). QuantCrit (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), a quantitative methodology rooted in CRT is introduced as necessary to the space of educational measurement and psychometrics. They refute the notion that numbers are objective and always accurate, saying:

“Data do not speak for themselves. Researchers speak on top of them with all of the values, biases, and assumptions that we carry with us. QuantCrit approaches acknowledge that numbers do not have more inherent value (in that they are more objective, factual, or real) than qualitative data detailing the stories and experiences of populations of people” (Randall et. al., 2023, p.3)

They highlight that numbers can bury the racisms and inequities written in the calculations. This is not an opposition of quantitative methods, but rather a challenge against the use of numbers as inarguably objective. They question an assumption that negatively impacts students of color. Randall, et. al., reject “accommodating” policy and design changes that aim to “fix” Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other marginalized students and shove them into the white supremacist structures not created for them. They illustrate the need for uprooting, not only in the way we design test items, but in the whole measurement instrument system, building their foundation from QuantCrit and other critical methodologies. Justice-oriented, antiracist validity (JAV) framework is offered by this team as a critical approach to constructing socially just assessments. JAV recognizes the need for culturally relevant assessments that also acknowledge the racist logics in the validity process. JAV would, for example, challenge linguistic hierarchies that would analyze a student’s essay response under standard American English and discount their use of AAVE as a “broken English”. This validation system challenges the very way that we look at students of color, their intellectual base, and the cultural knowledges they hold. It challenges white centric notions of what intelligence can sound and look like.

At the intersection of race and ability is where we question what intelligence should look and sound like. Our assessment construction and validity systems have institutionalized stigmas around the ability of students of color, and most prominently Black students, to be able to achieve academically. So much so that Black students are still overrepresented in special education (Aston and Brown, 2020). Black psychologists based in California challenged the use of IQ tests for sorting Black children because of the continued overrepresentation of Black children in special education, and in 1971 they took their concerns to court and won in a case



now called *Larry P. v Riles*. California remains the only state in which IQ testing is banned for use with Black children even though conversations of its expansion are still discussed amongst psychologists and test developers. Annamma, Ferri, and Connor (2012) highlight the importance of the ability/race intersection in education by building a bridge between disability studies and critical race theory to create disability critical race theory (DisCrit). Under the guise of science, many hereditarians have tried to prove the connection between race and ability. Systems like neoliberal meritocracy uphold racist, ableist, and sexist stratification systems. Dis/ability is an underrepresented topic of conversation especially in the world of assessments. It goes uncriticized and unaccounted for, rendering those who live with real or perceived dis/abilities as, subhuman, invisible, and permanently infantilized. DisCrit recognizes the overrepresentation of Black students that have been sorted into special education under the racist institution of IQ testing. “Throughout history, attempts to link disability, in the form of lower intelligence, to Black and Brown bodies has resurfaced in countless ways. Most recently, this thinking would have us believe that achievement gaps in test scores signify the intelligence is fixed and intrinsic.” (p. 56). They follow by detailing the linkage of “smartness” to “goodness” with goodness being linked to racial, ableist, capitalist notions of normality – Sylvia Wynter’s “Man” (2003). Otherwise, the narrative of intellectuality could not be controlled and continually reward whiteness.

Dis/ability is dehumanized and those who have been labeled are ignored, othered, and ostracized. We must recognize the ways in which people and communities labeled with disabilities continually resist and advocate for themselves. Similarly to Yosso’s (2005) tenet of cultural wealth that recognized resistance in communities of color, DisCrit “requires activism and

supports all forms of resistance” (p. 61). They display this resistance by highlighting a Black mother and Black disabled student as knowledge generators. After suffering brain trauma, teachers no longer viewed him as the “academically gifted” student he still was. The parent and student had to become self-advocators. They also highlight a Black male student with ADHD who had to prove both his ability to achieve academically as a person labeled as dis/abled and that he is a non-threat as a Black man. As test developers tell half-truths or false narratives, it is the students, parents, and communities that are forced to resist.

Bennett (2023) highlights the need for assessments to work for student populations and not the other way around. Socioculturally Responsive Assessment Design (SRAD) follows a tradition of other culturally responsive, sustaining, and relevant pedagogies that have been developed in the education space (Ladson-billings, 1995; Love, 2019; Django, 2012). To create SRAD, Bennett outlined “five provisional principles”; in short, SRAD requires a design process that includes student voices, cultures, and identities, and opportunities for multimodal engagement and presentation of assessments as well as fostering more expansive instructional practices. He breaks down the connection between culture and standardized tests as “...cultural artifacts. That is, they are products of our nation’s dominant common culture, shaped by it, and used for its benefit” (p.83). They uphold and display our most valued skills, topics, and ideologies, those things we deem worthy of study and compensation. Thinking about a test as a “cultural artifact” rather than a mere objective measurement tool frames a different picture of assessments in the measurement field. If it is a cultural artifact, it must embody a particular cultures’ practice or symbolism. He recognizes and highlights the “institutionalization” of white culture as a “common culture” and recognizing the achievement gap as another iteration of

perpetuating the myth of Black intellectual inferiority (Kendi, 2023; Au, 2015; Croizet, 2012; Aston & Brown, 2020) similar to the sentiments made by DisCrit scholars (Annamma, et. al., 2018). SRAD, DisCrit, QuantCrit, JAV, Cultural Wealth, and the other theories discussed in this section, are necessary for the educational transformation that should take place in the assessment system.

### **Community-Rooted Assessments and Measurements**

As I continue my work building upon existing theories and studies, I want to also contribute new perspectives to the field of educational measurement and psychometrics. In this section I introduce Community-Rooted Assessment and Measurement (CRAM) as a practice that creates pathways to the implementation of culturally relevant and justice-oriented assessments by building bridges between developing and existing frameworks. It draws on previously outlined concepts of community wealth (Yosso, 2005) QuantCrit (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), JAV (Randall, Poe, Oliveri, and Slomp, 2023), DisCrit (Annamma, Connor, Ferri, 2012), AM (Williams, et. al, 2020), and SRAD (Bennett, 2023). In addition, I introduce Paulo Freire’s concept of a “problem-posing” model of education (Bybee, 2020) and the eight dimensions of wellness, a model developed by mental health and substance abuse researcher Margaret “Peggy” Swarbrick (2006) (see table 1). CRAM utilizes three tenants; justice orientation, de-hierarchization, and localization, to then build two pathways for implementation which I refer to as transformative reformation and systemic overhaul.

Table 1.1

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Physical Wellness	Maintaining a healthy body by keeping a balanced diet, regular exercise, sleep routine, etc.

Intellectual Wellness	Knowledge and information acquisition and application. Continued learning throughout one's life.
Environmental Wellness	Inhabiting healthy spaces that are safe. The spaces may include work, school, home, outdoor spaces, etc..
Spiritual Wellness	Purpose or meaning that supports one's self-identity. This may be a connection to religious or spiritual practices, cultural practices, or other things that support a healthy sense of self.
Social Wellness	Building and maintaining healthy family, friend, romantic, and community relationships.
Emotional Wellness	Emotional intelligence. Emotional communication skills, coping mechanisms, conflict resolution, maintains a healthy sense of self-worth.
Financial Wellness	Financial literacy, the ability to gain economic resources and maintain them.
Occupational Wellness	Purposeful and engaging work and activities. Works closely with financial wellness.

Definitions provided by Peggy Swarbrick (2012)

Peggy Swarbrick (2012) recognizes the multiplicities of wellness and what it takes for us as human beings to be wholly well. Throughout the literature there was a common need expressed by scholars to uplift humanity in marginalized students that, specifically through assessments, has been denied to them. So, then I thought the only thing missing from their frameworks was a way to make assessments more caring. How do we invite wellness into the standardized assessment process? The eight dimensions of wellness asks us to check in on each of these areas of our lives. And so, when test designers are in the process of development, they too can look for opportunities to care for the student populations they are designing for. One might ask, "am I promoting physical wellness through my assessment design? Or does it require students to become imbued with anxiety and lose sleep every night for a week?" When looking at the list of wellness items a test developer might think that the intellectual category is already covered, but I interject and ask if true learning is being cultivated through standardized exams? Are students holding on to what they learn? Another aspect of wellness that could be evaluated

by assessment designers is social wellness. SRAD offers space for multimodal assessments, is there space for collaborative assessments, similar to coauthored theses or dissertations?

Thus far, standardized tests have operated strictly under what Paulo Freire calls “the banking model of education” under which students are empty vessels to be “deposited” into (Bybee, 2020). Under the frameworks proposed by the scholars throughout this paper, they have called for student voice and more collaborative efforts to bring justice in the assessment space. The counter to the banking model of education, problem-posing education, then invites the critical engagement that is called for to create more anti-racist and justice-oriented assessments. Problem posing asks that students be active participants in their education, to be critical, creative thinkers. Assessment developers do not have to subject students to assessments, but rather they can partner with them in their creation. These two concepts then bring depth into the development of CRAM by creating a foundation for this wholistic assessment practice.

The tenets of CRAM serve as a road map to this practice that led us to two pathways for implementing it. First, *justice orientation* means building tests that center justice. We recognize that racism is inherent to the assessment system and all assessment and measurement tools must be built off this knowledge with aim to repair damage. Second, *de-hierarchization* aims to de-hierarchize knowledge and power in the assessment space by acknowledging the diverse ways that intelligence and knowledge can present themselves. Intellectuals and knowledge holders exist in spaces inside and outside of academia and one should not subvert another. Third, *localization* refutes universalizing learning and assessment practices that subvert the plurality of student and teacher populations and encourages uplifting local lifeways. Localization

understands that all communities are unique and offer their own unique set of knowledges and challenges and should be honored as such.

Transformative reformation is the first pathway for implementing culturally relevant and justice oriented standardized assessments. Along this pathway test designers create an iterative design process amongst themselves, researchers, and communities. Communities here are defined as students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community organizations such as youth centers. Utilizing critical, participatory, action research (Brydon-Miller et. al, 2003), communities are actively involved in developing assessments that fit their needs and goals and test designers are able to engage with social issues affecting these communities more effectively. Similar to the structure of an action research course, designers and researchers would be able to learn more about effective assessment design with communities while also offering resources to make solution building easier for their communities. Active community engagement efforts on the part of psychometricians uphold social justice aims and tear down the hierarchized knowledge system that has been championed by the assessment community through hereditarian rhetoric. This pathway allows for multimodal presentations of knowledge that may be curated for student need. In order to ensure authentic community engagement, testing design companies would implement community representatives. These representatives would be hired from the community they would then be working in or otherwise required to live in the community they are working in, with the ability to be able to relate to the respective community (being from a similar community or cultural background). Literacy, mathematics, and other testing standards would remain consistent across schools and districts regardless of mode of assessment or content.

Systemic overhaul is the second pathway. While transformative reformation may be more immediately accessible, systemic overhaul addresses issues connected to large testing companies. Policies in testing companies that are driven by large scale funding processes are difficult to reform. It seemingly becomes an issue of the small guy vs. the big corporation and can feel like a losing battle. Systemic overhaul means that efforts would be made to de-centralize, or de-standardize assessments altogether by making strides toward, or succeeding in, de-funding big testing companies. Instead of community representatives, this pathway would open the door for districts or schools to facilitate their own test designing hubs. Researchers may still be a part of this process but would no longer be disseminated through or by big testing companies. This pathway still allows for multimodal presentations of knowledge and also opens the door for communities to create their own standards for measuring student achievement. This allows for more dynamic and critical methods of examining students' skill sets and may encourage or strengthen values of community and interdisciplinary learning.

### **Limitations and Considerations**

I do not claim that CRAM is an objective answer to the issues we face in the assessment and other educational spaces, only that it offers an expanded option for engaging with measurement tools. However, it comes with limitations that must be acknowledged before attempting to implement its tenets.

First, CRAM is an assessment practice that requires localized, de-standardized construction, interpretation, and validation methods which may limit its possibility for application. De-standardized, localized assessments may be limited in their ability for comparability. Though it may be possible, more research needs to be conducted before any

general conclusions can be drawn. Localization and de-standardization of assessments also run the risk of increasing inequity in educational outcomes if done without careful consideration and evaluation before implementing. For example, if one school has more community resources, economic or linguistic resources, that support their ability to achieve in a white-centric society, some educators may not find this method to be as effective for their goals. Secondly, CRAM is radically inclusive challenging the way we look at quantitative methods, ability measures, and methods of design. While this may offer a challenge to normative, neoliberal, and meritocratic structures, it is broad and significantly less structured than our current assessment system which may pose challenges to academic achievement measures and standards that some communities deem necessary. Lastly, CRAM requires a definition of community that is also radically inclusive and may require partnerships with people and entities beyond the school halls. It invites its developers to address social justice issues within their design practices and often on the ground community work. This is an ask that can be time and resource consuming and asks for authentic relationship building to be sustained.

It should be fully understood that CRAM is a practice that requires community organizing efforts to achieve, especially when following the pathway of systemic overhaul. This means work that requires collaborating with people in other fields of justice work. Ultimately, assessments do not operate in a silo, and neither does the education system. Overhauling the system of assessments will affect other aspects of education and should be approached with that in consideration. Justice orientations in conversation with this idea means that justice efforts go beyond written work and require true dedication to social issues.

### **Recommendations**



Future research should be wide in scope, being as geographically inclusive as possible, all regions should be considered, and implementation should happen in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Research under transformative reformation may look like designing culturally responsive, justice-oriented assessments by utilizing participatory, action research to partner with communities. Under this pathway, research should also be conducted around the comparability of outcomes. How easy or difficult might it be to compare assessments that are multimodal with community specific content?

Under the pathway of systemic overhaul, research might be conducted using a comparative analysis of community designed assessments and big test company designed assessments to look for differences in learning outcomes and the overall well-being of the student population. I recommend research that looks at cross sectional effects of changing assessment practices for schools such as assessments and discipline, assessments and school violence, or assessments and teacher satisfaction. This would create a more detailed picture of how important cultural relevance and justice are to students and communities of color specifically.

### **Conclusion**

Community-rooted assessments and measurements offer an approach to the social injustices embedded in our assessment system that go beyond representation. It addresses isms in a manner that is blatant and rooted in radical tradition. It challenges a system that tells students that in order to succeed they need to submit to a system that belittles and shames them. CRAM rejects the idea that information only modes of educating are preferable and just. Joy is essential to learning. That cold, emotionless, consuming knowledge validated by our institutions does not

appear in CRAM. It centers relationship building and questions white-centric ideas of what knowledge is and how it should look.

The “Man” white, can create for himself worlds. Allowed to imagine himself into existence again and again. Allowed to enact his deepest ego, casting his shadow on the world and we must move as he does. Why can’t we birth new worlds daily? Why can’t we untether ourselves from this shadow and dance in the sun? Why can’t we write a new story? Why can’t ours go from imagination to creation? The “Man” white can birth thousands of worlds with the labor pains of his surrogates, and we must watch as our babies grow up struggling to get free from his loveless arms. But no longer. This world is ours, our bodies marked with pain cannot be ogled at unless we choose to display them<sup>1</sup>, we won’t be surrogates for the ego of the “Man” white any longer, birthing his hate. We are liberated, free to give birth to the love that Minnie<sup>2</sup> whistled, that Al<sup>3</sup> bellowed, that Arthea<sup>4</sup> sang. We laugh when they say “neutral” because Noname said “Anti-political mythical in the picture, yo’ nigga just moved to Wicker, yo’ mammy stay on the southside.” (Noname, 2018). How might we abstain from politics? You cannot neutralize bullets breaking Black skin, you cannot neutralize my tongue when it says, “I be” “I ain’t” “she do.” You cannot neutralize the branches of a poplar tree<sup>5</sup>. I was born a politician. A Black representative in an all-white class as the teacher looked at me “can we say it?” with her book cracked open. No way to neutralize. When the Indigenous woman speaks and they say, “speak English, we’re in America.” There is no way to neutralize. And so, we must

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<sup>1</sup> Tuck & Yang (2014)

<sup>2</sup> Minnie Riperton’s (1974) Lovin’ You

<sup>3</sup> Al Green’s (1972) Love and Happiness

<sup>4</sup> Arthea Franklin’s (1972) Young, Gifted, and Black

<sup>5</sup> Billie Holiday’s (1939) Strange Fruit

keep moving forward letting justice fly off our lips dressed in street clothes and our loudest regalia, saying things only our grandmamas understand. And I might say I can spell “Independent”<sup>6</sup> not because you told me I had to work alone, but because we bumped Webbie on the TV and the Radio. Give me a test on that and I’ll sing it back. Why can’t Lorde, Phylis, Morrison, or Sanchez assess my comprehension? Better yet let it be Lamar, Cole, Warner, or Latifa. Assess the way I am made dynamic. Doing eight subjects at once with a smile on my face.

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<sup>6</sup> Webbie’s (2008) Independent

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