

The Wrong Answer Project Pilot

Examining Stakeholder Voices in High Stakes Testing

An NCME Mission Funded Project

2019 Implementation Final Report

By: Darius Taylor

Acknowledgments

This project was pursued with great honor and gratitude. My NCME Mission Fund Award of \$10,000 was well spent on a project that has an immense capacity to contribute to the methods of collecting validity evidence for the Social Consequences of Testing. Called “turn of the century” by the project’s advisor Prof. Judyie, it is my hope that this project provides a new lens to explore the impacts that testing has on society. I could not have completed this project successfully without my amazing production team. All served an important role, but most notable were: my Project Advisor Prof. Judyie Al-Bilali, Theater Director Jennifer Onopa, Production Assistant Afrikah Smith, Creative Director Shawn A. Gadley, and Stage Manager Tatiana Rodriguez.

Introduction

The United States’ education system has the responsibility of implementing an unbiased testing experience for our youth and equipping our youth with the tools that they need to perform to the best of their ability on educational assessments. This is evident within the expectations that the federal government has for state assessment systems (2018) and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (P.L. 114-95) signed into law on December 10, 2015 which focuses on increasing college and career readiness for our nation’s youth. As our nation works toward closing the achievement gap between marginalized students and the majority, decisions and efforts in this vein should identify and challenge the original values laden within our nations educational assessment system and its users (students, parents, teachers, administrators, etc).

Value within the educational assessment system is operationalized through instituted policies, procedures and norms. Educational assessment values of students, parents, teachers, administrators and everyone else who interacts at some level with the education system are reflected through their perceptions (attitudes, knowledge and behaviors) of testing. Thus, to shrink the achievement gap between marginalized groups and the majority, it is essential to influence conversations focused on policy and perceptions.

Methods

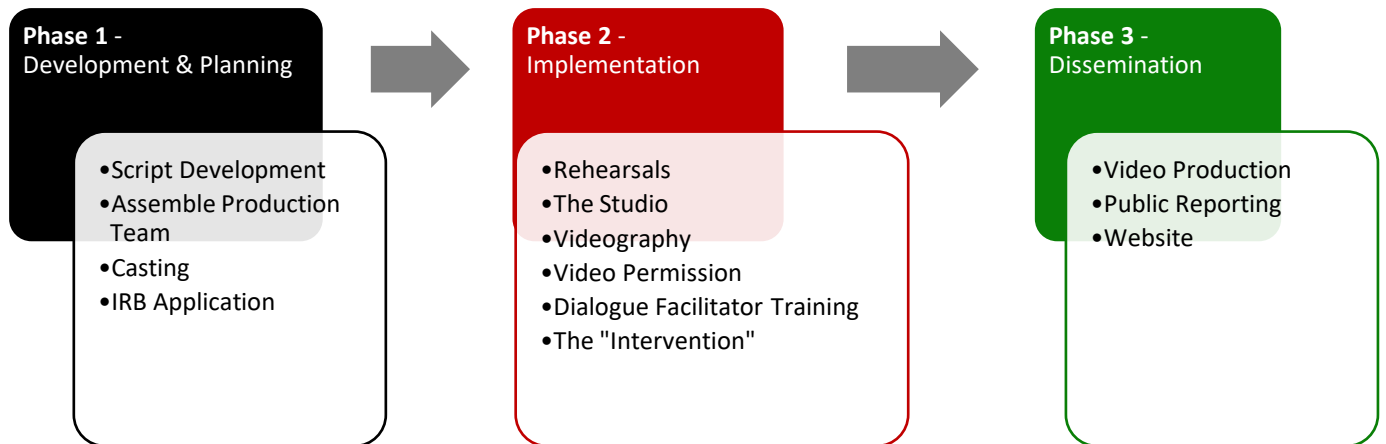
In explaining Aristotle's principal that "art imitates nature", Augusto Boal wrote that, "art re-creates the creative principal of created things" (Boal 1985, pg. 1). Thus, imitation in this sense is the action of taking matter (the components of a given substance) and manipulating it into a form with a purpose only as perfect as the matter manipulated and method of manipulation. For example, a dramatized stage play is only as true to nature as the words chosen to form the story and the way in which the words are formed. Art as a vehicle for social transformation invokes this principal of imitation to allow for art experiencers to re-live forms of reality that Boal mentions can intimidate and purify (1985). The art of theater can serve as a mechanism for examining a substance derived of matter based in current social realities. In re-living this substance through theater an audience can be implicated to realize the challenges facing society and desire better societal outcomes.

The NCME Mission Fund Project titled "Wrong Answer: Examining Stakeholder Experiences in High Stakes Testing" is a theater experience that embodies Boal's teachings dressed in approaches innovated from the project advisor, Theater for Social Transformation Prof. Judyie Al-Bilali. The community intervention, as it was often referenced, was a devised theater experience that incorporated elements of the U.S. patented applied theater approach of Brown Paper Studio to provide an introspective experience to explore how marginalized groups have been socialized to educational testing and its effects in the home, school, community, and work environment. The goal of the project was to implicate the theater audience with an experience that offers social transformation and healing in respect to testing and the negative connotation most examinees have with testing.

The specific objectives of this project were:

- 1) To develop an adaptable theater script that can be manipulated to represent any marginalized groups' perspectives and experiences in high stakes testing
- 2) To facilitate an interactive experience focused on the discourse of high stakes testing perceptions amongst marginalized groups
- 3) To develop replication materials that allows for public use of the project as a method for contributing more marginalized perspectives to this discourse

The project objectives were pursued across three different phases.



Phase 1: Development and Planning

Script Development

The script (**Appendix A**) was developed using a democratic process that ensured multiple voices contributed to the final product. The first draft of the theatrical experience was developed from rich conversations with a convenient sample of relatives, friends, students, and colleagues. From this point the goal for the pilot of the project was to represent the perspectives of both Black and Latinx students from low socio-economic communities within the script. My project advisor suggested that I represent the pilot from the perspective of my truest reality. *The Wrong Answer Project* would be released to the public for future iterations to represent other marginalized voices, so I used the pilot to represent the low socio-economic African-American experience.

After the second draft, the script was presented to an Honors Brown Paper Studio class of 8 students of various identities in the Spring of 2019. The class performed a cold read of the script then dialogued and offered suggestions for changes to the script. This same process was employed with 10 Upward Bound high school students and staff of various races at the University of Massachusetts -Amherst Summer 2019. After casting for the premier, the cast also dialogued and shared suggested edits for the script before it was finalized mid November 2019. Some manipulation to the script persisted even to the day of dress rehearsal which truly made this script development a devised experience.

Production Team Assembly

Majority of the budget was allocated to the team of designers and personnel that made the pilot a success. The team included: a production assistant, theatrical performance director, stage manager, project advisor, costume designer, lighting designer, scenic designer, sound designer, videographer, video editor, creative director, and dialogue facilitators. Each of these team members had contracts drawn for the commission of their service. My multifaceted role as the producer, playwright, music director and choreographer was not paid. The remainder of the grant funds were allocated to other production needs.

Casting

The production team hosted three official auditions between September 30th and October 15th. Some auditions were submitted virtually. The cast included four principal roles and eight ensemble members. Rehearsals were two times a week starting October 30th. The production dates were December 6th and 7th.

IRB Application

The project was submitted to IRB and determined not necessary for review due to the minimal risk and anonymous method of data collection.

Phase Two: Implementation

Rehearsals

Rehearsals continued for twice a week from October 30th until December 1st. The week leading up to production is called Tech Week. It occurred from December 1st to December 5th. Rehearsal was every evening for at least four hours during Tech Week. Activities included an intensive que to que mapping of all production elements (lights, sound, costume, props, scenic, acting, video). Tech week will often include full run throughs of the entire experience from open to close in preparation for the premier date which occurred on December 6th.

The Studio

The New Africa House Studio at The University of Massachusetts-Amherst was used to host rehearsals and premier the production. The studio space includes light installment options, a

full sound system, and projection capacities. There is a moveable stage with curtains. The studio seats 150 patrons. There was an array of installments within the studio. Each installation contributed to the overall intervention experience. These installations included scenic design elements, costumes, lighting, sound, and video. Throughout the rehearsal process commissioned designers visited the space to consult with the theatrical director and producer on the technical elements. The design team met at least monthly as a group and independently with the producer as necessary to make the studio space come alive.

Videography

There was photo and video documentation of some rehearsals and meetings, and the intervention experience. A photographer and videographer were commissioned for the work. The film and photo captured contributed to the end product video documentary.

Video Acquisition

The permission to use an excerpt from the short film by Firelight Media entitled “Children Left Behind” was acquired for use during part one the theatrical experience. Permission was granted by the advising producer Dr. Amy Stuart Wells of Teacher College in New York. The film is publicly available online through Vimeo.

Dialogue Facilitator Acquisition

There were three experienced Inner Group Dialogue facilitators acquired for the intervention. The facilitators were recruited from current graduate students and alumni of the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, College of Education and Amherst College. The dialogue facilitators were trained in the goals of the experience. During the training, the facilitators collectively developed a protocol focused on engaging the audience in a fruitful conversation on the hopes for a newly imagined high stakes testing system.

The Intervention

The intervention consisted of a multi-modal theatrical experience. Tickets were free and reserved online prior to the performance dates. The audience checked-in and gathered in the lobby of the New Africa House (situated on the first floor) awaiting the official descent into the

studio space (situated in the basement). Audience that wanted to join the experience but did not reserve tickets were placed on a waiting list. There were 60 seats, plus standing room.

At the appointed start time, from the lobby in a single file line audience descent took them down the stairwell passing actors as they sang the Negro Spiritual “This May Be the Last Time”. (An elevator was available for handicapped attendees.) Once the audience members reached the downstairs lobby, the single line was instructed to enter the studio space through a metal detector and guards (who served as front of house staff and ushers) directing them to find their seats. The scenic design of the space included elements suggesting an inner-city impoverished school setting and a sterilized testing environment.

Ms. Engel (the teacher) was center stage encouraging everyone to “Find your seat, your exam will begin shortly.” On every seat was a clipboard with a survey on test perceptions (**Appendix B**) attached and a sharpened number two pencil. Once all the audience members entered from the lobby, Ms. Engel gave the following instructions to the audience (reading from an instruction manual): “At this time please turn off or silence all cell phones. The purpose of the exam in front of you is to capture your perceptions on testing. You will have 5 minutes to read the instructions and complete the exam. Please read the instructions at the top of the page and begin.” Ms. Engel then left the stage and walked around the room militantly keeping an eye out for cheating and close watch on the clock. There was a clock ticking sound cue at the time of “testing”. At the 5-minute mark a classroom bell sounded, and Ms. Engel then said, “Time is up! Please place your exams under your seat as we prepare to watch a short video on the history of testing.” Two students wheeled out an old school TV cart that displayed a 7-minute excerpt of the short film by Firelight Media entitled “Children Left Behind”.

The end of the video showing led to a school bell with a transition into the 45-minute theatrical performance. After experiencing the theatrical performance, two of the principal actors asked all audience members to take the “test” that they filled out at the beginning of the experience and rip it to pieces. The audience was then thanked, and the cast invited the audience to participate in one of the key practices of Brown Paper Studio. Everyone was invited to reflect on the experience thus far by writing on the brown paper hanging from the walls with colored markers (sort of graffiti style). Some paper was used for free writing for reflection. Other paper had questions stems which included: What is assessment? What is high stakes testing? What is

equity? What does your racial/ethnic identity have to do with how you perform on high stakes tests? How could we consider equity in the design of high stakes tests?

The free writing reflections lasted for roughly 15 minutes. The remaining audience members were instructed to join 1 of 3 circles lead by a trained dialogue facilitator to have a conversation about the social issues that result from current testing practices and suggestions on how we can come to a democratic decision about best practices in testing that includes the voices of marginalized groups. (See **Appendix C** for the Dialogue Protocol). The dialogue lasted 30 minutes. Refreshments and fellowship commenced after the dialogue. ng:

Phase 3: Dissemination

The final phase of the Wrong Answer Project is dissemination. This phase focuses on making the project available for public use and disseminating the results of the pilot using a method accessible to everyone. A website has been developed as a platform for accessing all the materials for the Wrong Answer Project including the script, this formal report, and two video products amongst other resources. The goal is to ultimately replicate and expand this work including the voices of other marginalized groups and geographic locations. The website serves as a resource for spreading the word about the project to new potential implementation sites.

Additionally, there will be a conference presentation on the findings at the 2020 NCME annual conference which is currently being re-scheduled due to the Coronavirus outbreak. After piloting this work, I realized to effectively utilize this product as evidence for the social consequences of testing there should be an evaluability assessment. My current doctoral research work focuses on evaluating the use of the Wrong Answer Project as evidence for the social consequences of testing. My goal within my dissertation work will be to validate the Wrong Answer Project in terms of usefulness of the data collected to fulfill the purpose that is intended.

Methods of Analysis

Data was captured from the graffiti writings on the brown construction paper posted on the walls and notes were taken during the semi-structured dialogue circle discussions. The graffiti style writings and circle dialogue are methods used within the Brown Paper Studio

framework. The brown paper reflections were used to confirm that the audience was appropriately implicated. Themes from the audience responses on the brown paper were aggregated and mapped within the domains that relate to the root issues of this work. These domains included:

1. Defining Education
2. Defining Assessment
3. Defining High Stakes Testing
4. Defining Equity
5. Intersection of Race/Ethnicity and Test Performance
6. Societal Views of Equity in Testing

There was a note taker designated to each of the three dialogue circles for each night of the experience. Themes from the notes taken during the circles were used to explore two main domains related to the advancement of this work:

1. Current Societal Views of High Stakes Testing
2. Society's Re-imagination of High Stakes Testing

Results

The premier of the Wrong Answer Project occurred on the 6th and 7th of December 2019. There were 83 of 120 tickets reserved that were claimed and 42 walk-up attendees. This made for a total of 125 participants in the experience. No demographic information was captured from the audience members. From the eye of the observer there was an array of ages, race and ethnicities, genders and educational levels present for the experience.

Brown Paper Graffiti

There were 178 graffiti responses that were useable based on legibility. The responses ranged from a single word to full paragraphs. Some of the brown paper had pre-written questions for reflection which included: What is assessment? What is high stakes testing? What is equity? What does your racial/ethnic identity have to do with how you perform on high stakes tests? How could we consider equity in the design of high stakes tests? The remaining brown paper was left blank for free reflection. The themes drawn from the graffiti are presented in the Table 1

by domains used to confirm that the audience arrived at an appropriate mindset to enter meaningful dialogue focused on re-imagining high stakes testing for society.

Table 1. Brown Paper Graffiti Themes

Domain	Themes
Defining Education	
What does education mean to you?	Risking; Fighting; Growth; Learning; Discovery
Who is our education system supporting?	White; Upper class; Privileged; People with Access
Defining Assessment	
What is assessment?	Measurement; Evaluating Ability; Judgment; Comparing to Standard; Unfair; Biased; Subjective; White man's standard
Defining High Stakes Testing	
What is high stakes testing?	Determination; Progress towards Higher Education; Consequences; Pressure; Unfair; Oppressive
Defining Equity	
What is equity?	Acknowledging oppression; Systemic; Transforming
Intersection of Race/Ethnicity and Test Performance	
What does your race/ethnicity have to do with how you perform on high stakes tests?	Access to resources; High Pressure; Lack of Support; Undereducated parents
Societal Views of Equity in Testing	
What does equity in testing look like to you?	non-Eurocentric; Different subjects; Queer
How could we consider equity in the design of high stakes tests?	Include Student Voice; Acknowledge Inequalities; Start Over; Include Diverse Voices
Miscellaneous	
Free Reflection	Test disapproval; Defined by more than tests and tests scores; Reform the test; Remove the test

Dialogue Group Circles

There were three dialogue circles split into three different rooms based on a number allocated to the playbill audience members received at the beginning of the experience. One group stayed within the studio space to dialogue while the remaining two groups moved to classrooms located on the same floor of the studio. Almost 75% of audience members (n=93), stayed for the dialogue groups. The dialogue circles each began with gauging the audience's general reflection of the theatrical experience and brown paper graffiti writing. Themes drawn

from the dialogue group circles are presented in Table 2 by domains used to explore societal views on how we can advance this work.

Table 2. Dialogue Group Circles Themes

Domain	Themes
Current Societal Views of High Stakes Testing	
Semi-structured Open-Ended Reflection	Anxiety and Stress Inducing; Competitive; Forced Assimilation; Differences in Access to Resources; Assumed to Lead to Equal Opportunities
Society’s Re-imagination of High Stakes Testing	
What would re-imagining assessments look like?	Collaborative vs. Competitive; Integrate into curriculum; Non-privatized; Centered on Different Student Learning Styles; Embedded with Critical Thinking vs. Knowledge Regurgitation; Embedded with Career and College Standards; Project-based; Essay-based; Pre-Test/Screeners of Appropriate Testing Method for Examinee; Testing optional
What are next steps for change?	Boycotting; Test Prep for All; Capture Voices from Society; Run for Political Office; Push a change campaign;

Discussion/Conclusion

The final script (Appendix A) meets the first objective of this project. The pilot of the Wrong Answer Project focused on the experience of Black low socio-economic students. The themes and language present within the script has the capacity to be devised by any marginalized group to represent their cultural values. The overall arch of the script is to show a cross-section of a student’s experience on a high stakes test day, the identity-specific values laden in the challenges that persist during the test and implications of the test (which are addressed with the school counselor and soliloquies), and to close with a call to action from the community to engage and interrogate the topics that were presented during the experience. It is my hope to be on standby with anyone interested in implementing this project in their respective communities. This will allow for appropriate devising techniques and the proper replication of the project.

The second objective to facilitate an interactive experience focused on the discourse of high stakes testing perceptions amongst marginalized groups was accomplished with the use of Brown Paper Studio methods. Brown Paper Studio is an American patented theater practice for

social transformation founded by my project advisor Prof. Judyie Al-Bilali. As a teaching assistant and student Prof. Al-Bilali's, I have seen firsthand the benefits of employing these methods for invoking social transformation. It is my hope that the results from the Wrong Answer Project can be used to as a part of an empirical argument to validate the Brown Paper Studio practice as a tool for invoking social transformation.

The audience participation for this experience exceeded my expectations. Our ticket reservations sold out both nights and we had a decent sized waiting list even amongst challenges with the weather. Given the size of the studio (and some no shows for ticket reservations) we were able to accommodate our attendees. This is one indicator of the desire of the community to see real change happen in the realm of high stakes educational testing.

Though audience members participated in a survey on testing perceptions (Appendix B), no data was officially collected and analyzed from the survey. The perceptions survey was a way of preparing the minds of the audience. The items focused on themes that was addressed throughout the experience. In a way to insight liberation consciousness, the audience was instructed to rip their "tests" (perceptions surveys) to pieces right before the transition to brown paper graffiti writing. It was a pivotal moment and shift in energy to turn the experience to the community to engage with each other on thoughts and ideas that they had been dialoguing internally about for the first almost hour of the experience.

Brown Paper Graffiti

The goal of the brown paper graffiti writing was to serve as confirmation that the audience members were appropriately processing what the theatrical experience had been problematizing. It was a way to be sure that upon entering the 30-minute dialogue circles meaningful conversation would persist. Themes aggregated in Table 1 display the audience's aggregated understanding of the six overarching domains of this work. Below are some direct graffiti quotes from anonymous participants that really capture audience perceptions within the domains.

1. Defining Education: "*Education is about broadening horizons and growing as people.*"
2. Defining Assessment: "*Any systemic approach to gauging what students know...*"
3. Defining High Stakes Testing: "*A very simple 'solution' to a complex issue*"

4. Defining Equity: “*Equity is treating people differently to live the same quality of life*”
5. Intersection of Race/Ethnicity and Test Performance: “*High pressure little support*”
6. Societal Views of Equity in Testing: “*Throw it out altogether and start over*”

Dialogue Circles

The dialogue circle led to interesting feedback. The most important take-away from the discussion was that meaningful conversation led to real ideas and potential action steps. From Table 2 we see displayed themes across and within the dialogue circles related to how we can re-imagine assessment. A few of note were:

- *Collaboration vs. Competition*: the current state of the education and assessment system places students in competition with each other to prove who is the best. In the real world the ability to collaborate and be a team player is what often makes one competitive. We should build a testing model with the implications of building community versus separation.
- *Integrate into Curriculum*: often when examinees get to the test, they feel slighted because the content addressed is not what has been taught in class. We should work to make sure high stakes tests are aligned with curriculums.
- *Centered on Different Learning Styles*: is there a way for high stakes testing to address different learning styles of students?

Another take-away from the facilitators was that their time felt a bit restricted. Even though at that point in the experience the audience had been there for almost two hours, there was interest to keep talking about the issues at hand to dive deeper into re-imagination ideas and specific action steps. Future iterations of the Wrong Answer Project should address this time constraint to think of ways of manipulating the intervention so that it is not too long that it invokes fatigue, but long enough to meet the desired outcomes.

During the refreshments and fellowship after the experience there was a lot of gratitude expressed from students, parents, teachers, administrators, professors and community members. This conversation lives in most bodies of the American public who engages with the educational system. Most audience members were grateful to decompress about high stake testing. There were even students who had sat for a high stakes test the morning of the date they attended

Wrong Answer. The fellowship was a nice, validating close from the deep dive that we took from top of show to end of dialogue.

As mentioned in the methods section the third phase of this work is dissemination which meets the third objective of developing replication materials that allows for public use of the project as a method for contributing more marginalized perspectives to this discourse. This report will live on a website with other resources for any member of the public to replicate the Wrong Answer Project to expand on the insights gained from communities. Currently, my dissertation work relates to validating this project as a source of validity evidence for the social consequences of testing. Also, with the understanding that high stakes educational assessment does not live in a vacuum within the education system, it is my hope to continue to gain feedback on how to strengthen this project so that it fits in conversation with educational reform focused on curriculum and instruction.

References

- Boal, A. (1985). *Theater of the oppressed*. Theater Communications Group, Inc.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2018). *A state's guide to the U.S. department of education's assessment peer review process*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Appendix A – Final Script

Wrong Answer

FINAL DRAFT

Darius D. Taylor

PART ONE

Audience members will gather in the lobby awaiting the official descent into the space. From the lobby audience descension will take them down the stairwell of the actors singing the hymn *This May Be The Last Time*. Once the audience members reach the downstairs lobby, the line enters the space through a metal detector and guards/front of house/ushers directing them to find their seats, the exam will begin soon. There will be scenic design elements suggesting an inner city impoverished school setting and as the audience enters they will hear the sound of a ticking clock.

Ms. Engel will be stage center encouraging everyone to “Find your seat, your exam will begin shortly.” On every seat will be a clipboard with a survey on test perceptions attached and a sharpened number two pencil. Once the house is closed, Ms. Engel will give the following instructions to the audience (reading from an instruction manual): “At this time please turn off or silence all cell phones. The purpose of the exam in front of you is to capture your perceptions on testing. You will have 5 minutes to read the instructions and complete the exam. Please read the instructions on the first page, sign your name and begin.” Ms. Engel will then leave the stage and walk around the room militantly keeping an eye out for cheating and close watch on the clock. At the 5-minute mark a bell will sound, and Ms. Engel will then say, “Time is up! Please pass your exams to the front with the clipboard and number two pencil as it was received.” She will then collect the exams (maybe with help from a stage hand), then exit. The period bell will ring and all students from the cast will filter in and sit close to the tv screens for the filming.

A short film by Firelight Media entitled “Children Left Behind” will be shown. It highlights issues in assessment. The video will happen before the theatrical performance (PART TWO).

PART TWO

Characters

Danaijah (Nay Nay): Junior in high school. Very smart, type A, gets “the system” only enough to excel, but wants to burn it all down. Black female.

Micah (Mikey): Junior in high school. Also, very smart, doesn’t apply himself and knows that the system wasn’t built for him to succeed so there is no good in even trying. Black male.

Mothers voice: omnious mother voice frequently introduced into the space.

Ms. Engel: 11th grade English teacher and test proctor who has competing values about testing. White woman in her late 30s/early 40s.

Dr. Gray: School Psychologist, Black or brown person in late 30s/early 40s, acts as a voice of reason for testing.

Johnny & Jimmy: Danaijah’s Brothers: Fraternal twins who are 2 years younger than Danaijah. 9th graders.

Chorus: Ensemble of dancers for classroom scenes.

Scene 1

Lights come up on stage left to a single bed, night stand and alarm clock. Danaijah is sleeping, and her clock reads 6:29. It turns to 6:30 and the alarm sounds. She wakes up immediately, turns off her alarm. Gets out of bed and stretches.

Danaijah

Ahhh, this is it, this is the day that I prove my worth to this stupid system.

(As she leaves her room to head to the bathroom to brush her teeth)

Mother (voice over)

NAY-NAYYYYY!

Danaijah

HAHN?!

Mother's (voice over)

I KNOW THAS YOU! WAKE YO BROTHAS UP!

Danaijah

Okay, mama. *(under her voice: ..dang..)*

Stops at brothers' room on the way to the bathroom.

Wake ya'll ho asses up, its test day bitchesss!

The brothers moan roasting her under their breath (something like "if you don't get yo im ready for a test lookin ass") unexcited and get back under the covers when she leaves.

This is the day, this the day I'm gonna stick it to 'em...yeah...the man.. The system. Ge ready fa these hands!

Mother's voice

Naija! I'm off to work. Don't forget to fix you and yo brothers breakfast before ya'll set off to school.

Danaijah

Okay mommy - love you! Have a great day at work! *(Goes to kitchen to start wippin' up some bacon, eggs and grits with chocolate milk for breakfast for her and her brothers.)*

Mother's voice

Love you too baby! I'm sure you gonna ace that test.

Danaijah

(in a low voice) You can bet yo ass I will...Jimmy John come get yo breakfast made by Chef-Girl - D

Johnny

Aw man what you made for us today?

Jimmy

Momma said to make us breakfast, bro I'm 'bout make a fast break on this bowl of/

Danaijah

/ay ay ay that's enough. We got all the food groups here for a balanced breakfast to ace the test. Oranges gives you energy, grits stick to ya bones for longevity, eggs and bacon give you the protein to power the muscle *(pocks Jimmy in the head)*.

Johnny

ooooo balanced breakfast

Jimmy

maaaann, you too geeked fa this test. We jus goin today for practice anyway. ..bro who you takin to the dance tho?

Johnny

Oh I was thinkin bout takin Samantha...what about you?

Jimmy

What you think about Isabelle?

improv dialogue about the dance and the girls.

Danaijah

Who's Isabelle? Ya'll gotta get yo mind right and focus on this exam.

Johnny

...But I do hope we do good tho bro. You know we gotta secure that bag to play college ball.

Danaijah

Ya'll betta eat ya food.

brothers improv pocking fun again

Danaijah

Don't disrespect me.

Lights down on kitchen as Nay is giving Jimmy a look of disapproval. Lights up on bedroom stage right. Mikey is sleeping, and his clock read 6:37. He has overslept. And is still sleeping. Snoring even.

Mother's voice

MIKEY!

He is still sleeping and snoring.

Mother's voice

MIKEY.! *Still sleeping.*

Mother's voice

MICAH DERRICK JAMES ROBINSON, YOU BETTA GET YO ASS UP OUT THAT BED THIS INSTANT. DON'T YOU GOT THAT TEST TODAY! YOU GONE BE LATE. GET UP.

Mikey ruffles in bed.

Mikey

5 more minutes ma!

Mother's voice

BOI, DON'T MAKE ME COME UP THERE! AINT THIS TEST SUPPOSED TO GET YOU INTO COLLEGE. YOU WANNA END UP LOCKED UP LIKE YO BROTHA OR NO GOOD LIKE YA DADDY?! GET THAT TAIL UP AND GET YO MIND RIGHT AND READY!

Mikey

huhhhh...

Mother's voice:

WHAT WAS THAT?

Mikey

I said, I'm uuuuuup.

Mikey ruffles to get himself together mumbling under his voice...

damn, I hate this, I hate school, and HATE tests...testing just not the mood like this stupid test wasn't made for me no way. I've taken test after, test after, test and realize theyyyy (*rubs white side of his hand extended in the ai*) just don't want a nigga to succeed. They don't wanna see me out here shinin'. So let me just get ready to take this "L".

Lights down.

End scene.

The bell rings and there is an improved hall scene. The bell rings again, the cast sets up chairs in 5 by 2 rows for the classroom then lineup for march in, dance, then chat/scurry before class (Dr. Gray, Danaijah and Micah exit during this).

Sound: Play "All for us" (fade out start ~0:58) when cast is in lineup

Scene 2

Enter Ms. Engel.

Ms. Engel

Okay, okay. Find your seats and clear your desk. Remember only a number 2 pencil and a calculator can be used on this exam.

Danaijah enters looking pressed and prepped for the day.

Danaijah

Morning Ms. Engel.

Ms. Engel

Good morning, Danaijah. You look like a warrior ready for battle.

Danaijah

You got that right Ms. Engel. I've had a balanced breakfast. Not too heavy that I get the 'itis' but not too light that I can't think straight. I'm ready to grab this test by the balls and show it who's boss!

Ms. Engel

Well, I'm sure you will.

The last of the students filter in and Ms. Engel realizes Mikey is missing.

Ms. Engel (to the class)

has anyone seen...

Mikey storms in with a popart in his mouth.

Mikey

I'm here Ms. E, don't worry about me!

Mikey turns and notices everyone in rows, rather than the circle seating that he is used to.

Ms. Engel

Find your seat Micah.

Mikey walks to his seat which is upstage stage right. There is a sort of ominous walk that he has to his seat. As he looks around anxiety hits, you can see on his face that he is overwhelmed. When he has made it to his seat an ominous movement starts with the students.

Sound: Play “Anthem” -fade out start ~1:00

At the end of the movement Ms. Engel passes out sealed test booklets as she begins reading instructions for the test to the entire class.

As she finishes reading the instructions **Sound: Play “White Noise/clock ticking”**

Mikey

Tick tock

Sharpened # 2 pencil in hand

Startin’ to feel sweat from ma glands

“Is anybody else hot?!”

Tick tock

That look like my 11th grade Teacher Ms. E

But somethin don’t seem to line up for me

somethin is different

Maybe it could be that she hella scripted

“What’s that you readin?”

“What’s this, whatchu sayin?”

Ms. E is this another game we playin?

Tick Tock

Desks in parallel rows, facing the front.

“What happened to my spot in the group circle next to Johnny and that funk?”

Tick Tock

The energy in here is varied, this air is stale

My heart won’t slow down

I know I’m black, but I’m turnin pale!

Tick Tock

Block to block, bubble to bubble

Skip, erase, pick “C”, make a tree?

This test gonna be the death of me

Lights come back up and Mikey takes his seat.

Ms. Engel

Alright, now that you are finished filling in your personal information, if there are no more questions. Remember you will have 40 minutes to complete this section. Good luck! You may begin.

Choreographed movement of test performance begins lights fade to a spot light on Ms. Engel.

And it is in this moment that I am forced to push my chicks out of the nest and hope that their wings are strong enough to fly

But what if the air is not right...they all have different wings

And faced with foreign terrain ...they will all make different decisions

How do I know they are ready...what does ready even mean?

Readiness is relative.

But that's not what the numbers will say

The numbers will say X amount of students passed

The numbers will say X amount of students are not performing to "standard"

The numbers will say I'm not an effective teacher

The numbers will say that I failed and subsequently my school is underperforming

...I want to do right by my kids...let them achieve in their own lanes

...yet I am pressured by my superiors and my superiors' superiors to test well

...because testing well leads to funding decisions and a better reputation

Here on the ground the work is so.. heavy...

but up at the top they make it seem so ...light.

There are so many components that contribute to their weight, that I wrestle with

...but I'm forced to put a smile on, forget everything that makes my kids unique and

Standardize? This can't be the right answer.

(continues proctor movements)

Sound: Play "White Noise/clock ticking"

Danaijah is working on her exam in sequence with the movement of the classroom. She begins to veer off into her own distinct movement emotting various feelings come up but specifically dignified anger because maybe she is not as prepared as she thought she was. She stands up and walks down stage center.

Danaijah

Trying to put all of us into a test booklet
Is the wrong answer
It's the wrong task for assessing what we've mastered
If you took the time to look inside, you will find
That our mind processes information differently
That there are all these intricacies
That contribute to our views because of our history
Our ways of knowing and interpretations of reality differ
And it makes us bitter that you don't consider our values.
In a nation that claims
"Liberty for all"
"For the people by the people"
"Equality" and "Equity"
In an education system
Where multiple intelligences exist
Diverse learners in the classroom exist
And trends over the years prove
achievement gaps are real
We must believe that one test is best for all?
WRONG ANSWER
But I'm gonna act like its right
To win this fight
And hope I don't lose myself along the way.

Danaijah takes her seat. Spotlight shifts to lights up on the classroom.

Mikey yells, slams his test booklet down on his desk and runs out of class.

music transition with “role modelz” fade out start ~ (0:50)

Scene 3

Stage shifts to (down stage left or center stage) the school psychologist’s office. Mikey runs in, entering from stage left. Dr. Gray is typing on their computer.

Mikey

Man fuck this shit Dr. G! Fuck that test, fuck this school, fuck everything!

Dr. Gray

(sarcastically in response) Hello Micah.

Mikey

I told you to call me Mikey. Don’t nobody call me Micah, but my momma when I’m in trouble.

Dr. Gray

Micah is such a great name but hello Mikey. What’s the problem? Shouldn’t you be sitting for your exam right now?

Mikey

This aint cool, man. How the man gone try to judge me from a test booklet. How they gonna tell me to take 40 minutes to answer these math questions that I haven’t even talked about in class? These tests ain’t right. Somethins gotta give.

Dr. Gray

Micah... Mikey...in every aspect of your life you will be tested. In school, at home, on the streets. Will you always plan to run when it gets hard or when you don’t want to do it?

Mikey

I didn’t say it was hard Dr. G, it just doesn’t make any sense to me why they think that some of these irrelevant ass math questions determine whether or not I got the juice. I know and you know that I got the juice. I don’t need these whypipo’s test to tell me that.

Dr. Gray

You're right, but you seem real shaken up by a test that you don't care about.

Mikey

.....mannn Dr. G ...my momma countin' on me to do good on this exam. She think its my ticket to college.

Dr. Gray

Your mom is a wise woman. I understand your frustration, but the test determines your aptitude and potential performance in college. Don't you want to go to college?

Mikey

I mean I think so Dr. G. ..can I tell you somethin'?

Dr. Gray

yeah, anything you know that.

Mikey

...I think my brain is good Dr. G. Like really good, ..I get how these systems work and I'm smart, I consider myself socially and emotionally intelligent. I... I can talk to people.

Dr. Gray

mhnmmm, yeah

Mikey

...but I just don't get how this test measures those aspects within me. I feel like they are trying to measure me with the wrong tools. Like they are mismeasuring me...is that a thing Dr. G?

Dr. Gray

I mean there is certainly implications of using tests for a particular purpose. Testing companies they try to ask you questions on the exam that relate to what you will be tested on in college. But what I am hearing from you is that testing practices here (and maybe globally) don't recognize everyone's voices right now.

Mikey

hmmm, you think my voice matters? We watched this video in class, the history of assessment to get us kind of prepared for battle. Or what I thought. I got to that test and froze. I don't think I can make it in college. Nah, I wanna do something else that don't require those tests. Uhn unn...

Dr. Gray

Mikey, I think you should take a step back and think about the bigger picture here. In every aspect of your life you are going to have to show worth and merit. Show that you have the capacity to achieve and succeed. You will be judged and evaluated against some metric of predetermined existential worth, so you have to get used to it and show up when life calls for it.

Mikey

I feel trapped, like I'm in a jail cell when I am taking that test. I feel like a sacrifice being made to the gods of capitalism in society... (*Mikey stands and walks down stage center*)

My blood the sweat and tears of thousands

Maybe millions of people who look like me

My people.

Who perpetually endure the toxic education system

rooted in multiple oppressive values

related to Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Class.

These outcomes, success metrics that supposedly show your value, tell the story;

Developed by power launderers, who position themselves

Purposefully to permit power seekers potential power

Deeming them successful (or unsuccessful) in the launderer's field

Everybody has to prove themselves...."what's your worth?"

I know it sure as hell ain't related to no "systems of equations" or "geometric functions".

This test is telling me to perform my intelligence in a particular way

A way that makes me remove true aspects of myself and "play the game" to be successful

Will my sacrificial lamb be worthy enough Dr. G?

Dr. Gray

That's a choice you have to make for yourself Mikey. Trust and believe that I have had many frustrations and upsets due to feeling unworthy and misunderstood.. A word from the wise, it doesn't get any easier. Yes, we have to play a game that we had no say in the development of but push through. It will be worth it in the end.

Micah

I know my worth Dr. G. I know what I am capable of. These test people and the government think they got it all figured out. They can tell me who I am by putting me in a box based on how I score on some exam that doesn't measure my true worth. I'm sure based on what they are asking me in there on that test that I will be labelled in a score group that "needs improvement", not even make it to college and continue to struggle like all Black people do in America. (*He gets up to leave.*)

Dr. Gray

If you give up and believe that, you are letting them win you know. You can't let them win. Letting them win keeps you enslaved. So what your exam doesn't work out, there are other pathways to success. Choose the path of resilience, the path that Black people, our people, have walked on since we were dragged here against our will.

Micah

Aight, I hear you Dr. G. Imma head out. (*He exits.*)

insert music transition

Scene 4

By the time Micah makes it back to class time is almost up for the exam, some students are finished and ready to leave. Danaijah is still there working, there is 7 minutes left on the exam.

play “air freshener” stop by 0:30

Ms. Engel

Okay class, pencils down in 7 minutes. Try to start thinking about a powerful finish!

There are about two students still testing plus Danaijah. One of the students looks up at Micah as he walks back in. He can see the discontent on his/her face.

Ms. Engel

Micah where have you been you’ve missed your entire exam?

Micah

In Dr. Gray’s office Ms. E. You know this test wasn’t made for me.

Ms. Engel

Micah this test is important for your future. You can’t just leave when you feel like it.

Danaijah

DONE! *(She walks her test booklet to the front of class.)* With one minute to spare!

Ms. Engel

(Accepting Danaijah’s test booklet.) Thank you Danaijah. I’m sure you killed it.

Danaijah

I know I did Ms. E *(flips hair or pantomimes flipping hair. then she walks out.)*

Ms. Engel

(Turning back to Micah) Now, you, mister, will need to go straight to Dean Crogg's office. We need to figure out what to do with you.

*Micah hangs out irritated then when **bell rings** he is fumbling through his back pack. Danaijah returns, she has forgotten her backpack*

Micah

huhhhhhh *(He walks out.)*

Micah is met by Danaijah in the hallway.

Danaijah

You know the test wasn't that bad Mikey. If you just applied yourself.

Micah

Easy for you to say Nay, this shit is a cake walk in the park for you.

Danaijah

That metaphor doesn't make sense, but I see what you tried to do there.

Micah

Everybody can't perform for the whites like you can Nay. It's a real gift.

Danaijah

Boop, boop! Haters gone hate, have fun in the Dean's office.

They separate she heads to her locker and he heads to the Dean's office. She runs into the twins.

What up lil uglies *(She puts her arms on their shoulders)*, how'd ya'll do on the exam today?

Jimmy

That test was trash.

Johnny

Yeah, why you so happy Nay.

Danaijah

Cuz I know I KILLED IT baby bro. Like I can feel it in my bones. With these test scores, I can go to Yale, No Stanford, No HARVARD.

Jimmy/Johnny:

Yay, for you. (*sarcastically*)

Johnny

I mean you right it wasn't that bad.

Jimmy

but the whole experience was trash.

Johnny

yeah throw the whole test away.

Jimmy

like the anxiety in that room gave me anxiety

Johnny

and we don't get anxiety,

Jimmy

ever.

Danaijah

welp good thing you have two more years to get those emotions in check. Don't worry, big sis got you. It's handled. (*flips hair or pantomimes flipping hair.*) ***insert music transition "Diva"***

Jimmy/Johnny

Greeeat. (*sarcastically*)

improv about the girls they mentioned at breakfast this morning as they exit

Student (PJ)

Hey Danaijah you know we getting our test results today.

Danajah

What?! Let me get home!

reprise classroom dance of students getting test results

Scene 5

In Danaijah's room

Mother's voice

NAIJAH!

Danaijah

Yeah, mah!

Mother's voice

You got some mail, I think its yo test results, want me to bring it/

Danaijah

/comingggg...!!

Running out of her room the scene changes and she runs straight into Dr. Gray's office with test results in hand hysterical.

Danaijah

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, noooooooo....

Dr. Gray

Good morning Danaijah.

Danaijah

Dr. Gray something aint right! Something is not right. I just...look at this!

She passes Dr. Gray her score report, Dr. Gray understands her disappointment.

Dr. Gray

Ahh, I see. This must be hard to/

Danaijah

/Dr. Gray what did I do wrong? I studied, I pay attention in class, I ask questions. Where did I miss the mark? With this score, I will never get into Harvard.

Dr. Gray

Danaijah, please know that this test score does not define you and this is not the end for you.

Danaijah

How do you know that? All these systems do is fail people like me and this is evidence of that. This test was supposed to be my ticket to college. To a better life for me, and my family. This seems like the end. I should just get my drive thru voice ready.

Dr. Gray

Come on, there's nothing wrong with blue collar work, but do you really want to work in a drive thru for the rest of your life? Do you believe that's part of your destiny?

Danaijah

My destiny? I don't know where to start with a response for that, but I know where I've come from and I know that statistics show I should be pregnant now (or in the next few years), working at a drive through getting public aid.....until this morning I refused to be that statistic. I ain't nothing special with a score like that.

Dr. Gray

Throughout life it is important for us to have moments of clarity, milestones, they keep things in perspective for us. Think of this test and this score as a milestone, regardless of what it looks like you cannot give up on the race.

Danaijah

So, what I'm hearing is that this is not completely my fault? So maybe the test is crap, yeah that's what it is.

Dr. Gray

Well, testing companies do a lot of work to make sure tests are fair for everyone. So when you say the test is crap, I'm not completely sure that is a valid statement. The purpose of the test is to measure your readiness for college .

Danaijah

Dr. Gray, I am ready for college. This test got me fucked up. You know I think they got the purpose all wrong.... (*she steps down stage*)

Depression is what I feel after receiving my score

Oppression comes to mind as I think of the implications

Seems like dog whistle politics these tests

“To determine which student’s the best”

It aint me! rarely is it me or even people who look like me

Let’s put the whistle down

And call a spade, a spade

The way that these tests are made

Got my people feelin’ played

We been fighting since our ancestors stepped foot on this soil

Not just physically but against principalities

Engrained in systems, organizations and institutions

We fought for our freedom

We fought for our rights

We fought to integrate into THEIR systems

Because when we tried to thrive on our own they shut it down!

But they still want to keep us in chains (*pause.*)

The purpose of this test is subjective to the examinee

For the elite maybe it does measure your college readiness

But for black people it’s a shackle

Few can actually set themselves free and be liberated

But must take caution because with liberation comes separation from those who remain shackled

So we must continue to fight...for justice.

Dr. Gray

Well put Danaijah, but where do you see this going? Where do you see this fight taking place?

Danaijah

We need a new test Dr. Gray that measures ME. All of me and my melonated complicated self. There's just too many factors that contribute to who I am and how I make decisions in life that maybe this test is missing.

Dr. Gray

ha, you sound like Micah.

Danaijah

wow, Mikey, actually formed an intelligent argument?

(Micah enters Dr. Gray's office.)

Micah

I heard somebody say my name, ya'll session over Dr. G?

Dr. Gray

Mikey we were just talking about your love for the exam.

Micah

Mannn, I hate that test. It's stupid and does a poor job measuring me and all of my intelligences.

Danaijah

huh, I'm impressed, maybe you are right Dr. G.

Dr. Gray

It may be good for you all to share your experiences with each other. You never know what will come out of building community.

The look at each other, shake hands.

Danaijah

You right Dr. Gray cuz it takes a community! We need to change this test right Mikey? It needs to represent all of our voices. The voices of you, you, you and you! Its time for us to come together as democracy suggests and make a better test. We breakin down walls and breakin all the rules. In a minute we all are going to literally write our suggests on the walls and there's questions to ask for you too. But first...we rippin this test to shreds. Come on rip it with me!

Micah

Literally pick up that exam and rip it to pieces everyone!

play "Before I Let Go", lights down

End scene, End Part 2.

PART THREE

The theatrical experience will turn interactive as the cast then invites the audience to participate in one of the key practices of Brown Paper Studio. The audience will be encouraged to reflect on the experience thus far by writing on brown paper hanging from the walls with colored markers (sort of graffiti style). Some paper will be free writing for reflection. Other paper will have prompted questions for writing which will include:

- What is assessment?
- What is high stakes testing?
- What is equity?
- What does your racial/ethnic identity have to do with how you perform on high stakes tests?
- What does your economic status have to do with how you perform on high stakes tests?
- How could we consider equity in the design of high stakes tests?

After the free writing session, audience members will be instructed to do a quick gallery walk to explore what everyone wrote. Then remaining audience members will be instructed to join 1 of 3 circles that will dialogue on the social issues that result from current testing practices and suggestions on how we can come to a democratic decision about best practices in testing that includes the voices of marginalized groups. Leading questions for the dialogue circles will consist of the following:

- What resonated with you during this this experience?
- What does equity centered design look like in practice?

Appendix B – Testing Perceptions Survey



Perceptions Survey

The following survey questions ask your perceptions on specific aspects of current high stakes testing practices in the United States of America. The National Council on Measurement in Education defines a high stakes test as a test used to provide results that have important, direct consequences (or implications) for individuals, programs, or institutions involved in the testing.

Select one response to how much you agree with the following:

1.	High stakes tests measure all students equally.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree
2.	Students' race influences their performance on high stakes tests.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree
3.	High achieving students may perform poorly on high stakes tests.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree
4.	Economic status influences student performance on high stakes tests.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree
5.	Students with any learning style can excel on high stakes tests.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree
6.	Students' ethnicity influences their performance on high stakes tests.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree
7.	High stakes tests measure a teacher's ability to teach.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree
8.	Current high stakes testing policies are fair.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree
9.	High stakes tests take a certain level of preparedness.	(A) Strongly Disagree	(B) Disagree	(C) Agree	(D) Strongly Agree

Wrong Answer Project

Appendix C – Facilitation Protocol

- Introduce yourself: Name, pronouns (and why we use pronouns)
- Have audience members introduce themselves; name, pronouns

INTRO: Why are we having this conversation?

This performance is a theatrical intervention on high stakes testing. As you may have seen in the show, there is a history and presentation of who benefits and who is disadvantaged from high stakes testing, and how the outcome may affect students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. But how do we change that? We hope that in this conversation that not only do we delve into learning more, but to also create action steps on how current high stakes testing can be reimaged and incite equitable change for all.

Community Guidelines - Share with audience members:

1. **Use “I” Statements** as opposed to making generalized statements about experiences/perspectives. Example: “ In my experience...”
2. **Take Space/Make Space.** Be aware of how much you are or aren’t taking compared to others in the conversation.
3. **Assume Best Intentions.** Don’t assume malice, speak with respect.
4. **Ouch/Oops** = Intent vs Impact.
5. **Call In instead of Calling Out.** We all have different backgrounds talking through these topics, so we should be patient and learn from one another. Try “how did you come to understand this?”

Facilitation Questions to Consider:

- What were your immediate reactions to the play and/or responses on the Brown Paper?
 - What did you notice or see?
 - What patterns or themes did you observe?
- What is the point of assessment? What is being assessed and for what?
 - **Facilitators: Deficit lens** - addressing what students lack and the skills/tools that they don’t have vs **Asset lens** - addressing the tools and skills that students do have/ bring to the classroom
- How have you thought about or interacted with assessment before today?
- How do you see your own assessment experiences reflected in the issues brought up in the play?
- “This test was supposed to be my ticket to college. To a better life for me, and my family. This seems like the end. “ - Danajjah
 - What are some of the impacts of assessment of students? Schools? School districts?
 - How does assessment contribute to education inequity?
 - **Education inequity** - is the unequal distribution of academic resources, including but not limited to; school funding, qualified and experienced teachers, books, a x 2w2nd technologies to socially excluded communities.
 - What are the larger social impacts of education inequity?
- What would a reimaging of assessment look like?
 - What would it feel like for students?
 - What are some ways to make assessment more equitable?
 - What are other more inclusive ways to assess students with varying abilities and identities?

- Why are race and other identities emphasized/relevant to this discussion?
 - **Facilitators:** Think about the eugenics of IQ and who's good at testing, factors that make you good at testing, abilities, etc.
- How do we make sure to center factors, like race, when creating assessment tools?
- Next steps?
 - What will it take for you to implement some of these ideas/conversations in your spheres of influence ?
 - What will it take for equitable institutional changes to take place in standardized testing?
 - What are you willing to let go of to make this happen?