Assistencialism and the Politics of High-Stakes Testing

Luis Urrieta, Jr.

In this article I argue that the current high-stakes testing accountability model is an assistencialist model, derived from deficit thinking paradigms. Such models, like the No Child Left Behind Act, sanction low performance with serious consequences for students and educators. Drawing from Freire, I propose an anti-assistencialist accountability model based on local community culture and needs that would include critical, problem-posing education, dialogue as a means toward raising social consciousness, and appropriate assessments according to local community needs. I further argue that such an accountability model can be implemented through cultural immersion programs that include three levels of immersion, (1) classroom culture, (2) local community culture, and (3) trans/cultural, or transnational exposure.

KEY WORDS: assistencialism; anti-assistencialism; high-stakes testing; accountability; conscientization; cultural relevance.

Sometimes people come into your life and you know right away that they were meant to be there...to serve some sort of purpose, teach you a lesson or help figure out who you are or who you want to become. You never know who these people may be but when your eyes first meet, you know that very moment that they will affect your life in some profound way.

LIFE

INTRODUCTION

I recently came across a flyer that read, Hear Our Cries: Community Speak Out on Education and was instantly transported back to my years as an eighth grade teacher. The flyer read, “Did you know that your 3rd, 5th, or 8th Grader could be HELD BACK by not passing the End of

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Grade (EOG) Test?" The anxiety of my last year as a teacher swept over me. I thought about the questions I asked as a teacher after Proposition 227, which eliminated bilingual education programs in California, required that all students be tested in English, regardless of their second language skills. How would some of my students, who were recent arrivals to the US, do on the test? How would the test scores show what my students actually knew? How would my work as a teacher be reflected by the compiled test scores?

The issue of high-stakes standardized testing is an important issue. For the purposes of this article, "high-stakes" testing denotes a standardized test that carries serious consequences for students and, or for educators, including school districts. As members of the educational community, it is our responsibility to think critically about high-stakes testing and the policies shaping educational practice in our society and world. This is especially true when despite being the richest nation in the world a small amount of our national budget is spent on meeting the educational needs of the poorest students (Kozol, 1991).

Educational issues are not new to national agendas worldwide. Brazilian educator and social reform activist Paulo Freire (1978), discussed assistencialism in Education for Critical Consciousness, as "a term used...to describe policies of financial or social assistance which attack symptoms, but not causes of social ills" (p. 15). Deficit thinking models are usually at the root of assistance reform models such as high-stakes testing. A deficit thinking model "posits that the student (or subaltern group) who fails in school (or performs poorly on a standardized test) does so because of internal deficits or deficiencies" (Valencia, 1997, p. 2), either genetic or cultural (Valdés, 1996), and is therefore "at-risk" and in need of change, "fixing," through assistance (Grady Johnson, 2003).

This article presents an anti-assistencialist view on high-stakes testing accountability. Using Freire’s (1970) concept of conscientización (social consciousness), I put forth an alternative view of accountability that rehumanizes the concept and allows local communities the opportunity to see themselves as active participants in society, committed to social change. I advocate for a Freirian accountability model enabling students access to problem-posing education and the use of their knowledge and reality in a dialogue that reflects on their social location and ability to transform their world (Gottlieb and La Belle, 1990). By looking at accountability through an anti-assistencialist lens, and by implementing programs of cultural immersion for educators at the (1) classroom, (2) local community, and (3) trans/cultural or transnational community level, the current oppressive understanding of high-stakes testing accountability can change to become transformative.
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ASSISTENCIALISM AND HIGH-STAKES TESTING

Historically, in societies where inequality existed and, or exists, assistencialism has been practiced by the oppressors on the oppressed (Freire, 1970, 1978). In the oppressor's view (those with privileges to make decisions over others), certain countries (like Iraq), certain groups of people, certain communities, etc., lack the rationality, or understanding to know what is in their “best” interests, assuming that a more “advanced” culture, group of people, race, gender, etc., knows what they really need. Assistencialism, according to Freire (1978) is “precisely one of those forms of colonial domination,” that “…offers no responsibility, no opportunity to make decisions, but only gestures and attitudes which encourage passivity” (p. 16).

At the international level, US programs and agendas such as the Peace Corps, missionary work, corporatization, the Monroe Doctrine, and other forms of colonialist and imperialist projects are examples of assistencialism. Such programs and agendas assume that certain people need the assistance, and or “protection” of their agency, country, religion, race, gender, etc. to live “better” lives. Internally, US Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools (Philips, 1983), Americanization and “subtractive” education programs (Garcia, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999), and attacks on African-American education (Cecelski, 1994) are all examples of assistencialist policies. Assistencialism assumes that subaltern people occupy an infantile-like cultural, social, economic, etc., state and it is up to the more “evolved” group, race, gender, class, etc., to “help” those they deem inferior to “rise” to a “higher” level.

High-stakes testing, like whitestream schooling, when imposed on poor and non-white communities, is also a form of assistencialism that,

...treat the recipient as a passive object, incapable of participating in the process of his [or her] own recuperation. The greatest danger of assistencialism is the violence of its anti-dialogue, which by imposing silence and passivity denies men [and women] conditions likely to develop or to 'open' their consciousness (Freire 1978, p. 16).

Through an assistencialist lens, high-stakes testing, like other educational policies, are propagandized as the “equalizers” that will level the playing field and assist children, regardless of their color or socioeconomic condition, to attain or achieve according to a white, middle class standard.

An example of this rhetoric is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The NCLB Act requires states and school districts to test more, with more serious consequences for low test performance (Goertz and Duffy,
Sanctions against low performing schools and districts may include state take-over, or conversion into charter schools. For teachers, low test scores can mean losing their job, while for students there may be many consequences beyond overrepresentation in special education or placement into lower tracks (Shepard, 1990). Most importantly, the NCLB Act imposes on all people a high-stakes testing model that would be ideally aligned to a set of academic standards that are most likely to meet the social, economic, and cultural needs of white middle class students and work against those that do not fit this pre-scribed model.

The controversy over high-stakes testing policies like NCLB is the violence behind the policy itself because it is not open to dialogue as it was imposed by federal law with little, if any, teacher, student, or local community input. Issues of equity, equality, and civil rights come into question as NCLB is imposed as an accountability model, enforcing silence and passivity on entire communities. By promoting claims of equity, excellence, and equal opportunity, supporters of NCLB fail to recognize the importance of power inequalities having an impact on educational policy (Kahne, 1994).

Advocates of NCLB also deny that tests are instruments of a quantifiable accountability that is market driven, modeled to meet the “needs” of the global economy (Spring, 1998), and not necessarily to meet the needs of students and their communities. The rapid changes and dislocation of post-industrial capitalism are fueling high-stakes testing accountability in an effort to change schools into market-driven agencies. Most schools, however, continue to function in a linear-time model, making high-stakes testing accountability qualitatively inefficient and often unpopular, especially amongst teachers (Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus, 2003) and members of subaltern communities (Valenzuela, 2003). The contradiction lies in the false notion that increased testing promotes stability, when in reality high-stakes testing further disrupts traditional notions of time and schooling. High stakes-testing attempts to increase the velocity of time, compress learning, promote a market-like competitiveness, and implement a consumerist approach to learning (for further discussion see Urrieta, 2000).

Despite challenges to the testing craze, the general media assert that there is alleged public support in favor of NCLB and such accountability models (see ACCESS, 2001), even though research indicates that high-stakes testing is not the best way to measure student achievement in an accountability system (Shepard, 1990; Kohn, 1999; McNeil, 2000; Valenzuela, 2003). An analysis of specific tests like the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) exam conducted by McNeil and Valenzuela (2001) shows that high-stakes testing does not present a full picture of student learning and does not work in the best interests of teachers or students, especially the poor, students of color, and English Language Learners. Public media also reveal
that the effects of tests like the TAAS show a dramatic growth in dropout and student retention rates, especially in the ninth grade (Guerra, 2000). Politicians, however, exploit the issue of high-stakes testing to gain political and/or economic power. George W. Bush is an example of a politician using high-stakes testing policy to promote an agenda that does not get at the root of the social issues faced by the poor and people of color. His current push for full enforcement of NCLB and even more testing in schools is ironic, when according to Rethinking Schools, US students are already tested more than any other children in the industrialized world (Spring Issue, 1999).

Overall, the assistencialist notion behind high-stakes testing is a contradiction that continues to fuel policies and politics that further control and disenfranchise all students and teachers (Abrams et al., 2003), but especially those from poor and communities of color. High-stakes testing accountability assumes that a test score can tell us all there is to know about what needs to be done to “help” the assisted “recuperate” from their low-level, high-risk communities and lives. Yet, it is a dangerous assumption to make at the expense of children and communities already historically, economically, and socially subordinated by assistencialist discourses of white racial and middle class intellectual superiority. The following example is offered to show why standardized tests cannot always measure student learning, especially for students of subordinate groups, and that what is valuable in education for dominant society is not always what counts or is valuable for other groups.

WHAT STANDARDIZED TESTS CANNOT TELL US

Hear Our Cries: Community Speak Out On Education, as a flyer headline, had a profound effect on me. It made me remember the outrage I felt as a teacher when I was quietly reprimanded by an administrator for being “political” when I talked about the possible consequences of Proposition 227 with my Spanish-speaking students and their parents. Proposition 227 enabled mainstream voters (mostly white) in California, because of their voting capacity, to decide the fate of the primarily non-white students enrolled in bilingual education programs (Orfield 1999). In the eyes of the administrator, the proposition and the school’s general silence about it did not have political implications. In the larger state context, the fact that a small number of mostly white voters had the privilege of deciding the fate of the majority of students of color was also detached from its political significance.

One of the consequences of Proposition 227 was state mandated testing in English according to grade-level expectations, regardless of second language
acquisition levels. Would not the scores permanently label English Language Learners, their families, their teachers, and their schools? Most certainly they did and do, and is that not political?

I remember the day I administered “the test” (SAT-9) and the blank looks in the students’ eyes as I read the instructions to them in English, when only a handful were even conversant enough in English to have a simple conversation in a non-Standard dialect. When I collected the test 45 minutes later, most were as blank as the looks in the students’ eyes. I wondered how easy it would be for an outsider to judge a student who did not answer a single question on a standardized test as “deficient,” “lacking,” or “at-risk.”

After contemplating the flyer headline once more, Hear Our Cries: Community Speak Out on Education as it lay on my kitchen table, I recalled the alternative forms of assessment that I used in my classroom and the personal satisfaction I felt as I read what my students considered valuable education. What they wrote sometimes amazed me because it was not what I had expected. It seems that it was the little things, and not necessarily “academic” themes that mattered most. For some it was being treated with respect, greeted with a smile, asking about their lives, their families, and their friends.

From my years of teaching I collected a cardboard box filled with special memoirs. After looking through this box for something to inspire me, I found “Oscar’s” letter. It is an example of an assessment I used in my classroom. As part of their end-of-the-year evaluations of me, their teacher, and of themselves, they were required to write a letter about the lesson they considered the most important learning experience for that year. Oscar’s letter read:

This essay is going to cover the most important lesson I participated in this year. The lesson I learned the most from this year was the one about “Life.” That poem made me see life differently. Before, I didn’t even know what road to take or what things to do. Now, I picture myself being someone in life. Someone who will make a difference, like my teacher has made in my life. Now I know that things happen for a reason and that no one but ourselves has the power to change things and redo them well.

One of the many reasons why I like that poem is because it made me see myself as a better person. I learned that no one has the right to treat us unequally. That we can do things like anyone else can, we just have to work harder because the world doesn’t see us in the same way. I also learned that things are not going to happen by themselves and that we have to commit ourselves to a struggle for things to happen. I’m not going to let opportunities go by anymore. This lesson changed my way of thinking. It made me be sensitive and caring and to love people, especially my family.
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To understand the context of Oscar's community and to give this example the importance it deserves, it is imperative to know that Oscar was a teenager influenced by his environment. Having arrived from Mexico at an impressionable age, he entered a primarily first-generation immigrant community with low economic resources, high gang activity, drug use, and high rates of teenage pregnancy. Oscar's parents worked double shifts to make ends meet and were rarely home. As the oldest son, Oscar took his parents' absence rather personally as a sign that they did not care about him and his siblings anymore. Oscar was a student who did not believe he was capable of reading, much less of writing. He had been told he was stupid by another teacher in his past, and he believed it. I tried to advise Oscar in many ways and at different times, but it was not until the end of the year that I realized I had made an impact through this letter. Judging from his standardized test scores, which were amongst the lowest in his cohort, no one would ever have known that.

As is clear from this assessment, not all lessons which students learn can be effectively measured by a standardized test. Others might criticize the language use and grammatical errors. Perhaps this student is not up to par with what some would consider the ideal, but he taught me a lot about what mattered to my students and to me as a teacher. Perhaps, as is evident from Oscar's letter some of the most important lessons students learn cannot be quantified by a test score or a percentage ranking. My self-worth, effectiveness, caring and compassion as a teacher would not be given a numerical value, even if it were a high score.

As assistencialist accountability becomes more centralized through NCLB, it becomes increasingly important to reflect on the possibility of hope for a more democratic anti-assistencialist accountability model. It should be emphasized that as a global economy expands in the world context, local identity formation and activism are increasingly resistant to it (Castells, 1997). Given the cultural, racial, and ethnic make up of the US and the wide socioeconomic differences and regional disparities, a single test measure for an entire student population is a manifestation of an oppressive attempt to dislocate and further disenfranchise subaltern communities.

A FREIRIAN ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

Having looked at some of the problems with assistencialist high-stakes testing accountability models, let us consider the possibility of a transformative accountability founded on Freire's (1970; 1978) concepts of conscientization (social consciousness), dialogue, and praxis. Praxis is the implementation of action or a plan of action derived from theoretical understanding (Darder, 1991). It is important to reiterate that whether there
should or should not be an accountability system is not the question. If anything, accountability is central to the discourse of democracy, especially when responsibility is given to local communities and solutions are found with the people, not for them (Freire, 1978). Instead, the question is focused on the possibility of there being an alternative way to hold teachers, students, and communities accountable in a more stable, less oppressive manner that does not focus on punishment and the objectification of people as do the current high-stakes models. To do this, let us consider the anti-assistencialist position proposed in this article.

Anti-assistencialism, as opposed to assistencialism, celebrates all humans' capacity to reason by respecting different epistemological foundations. Anti-assistencialism specifically counters the colonial enterprise by rehumanizing local and subordinate communities with the respect to make decisions about themselves as active agents. And as autonomous, self-determined actors outside the realm of objectification and by use of dialogue, opens the consciousness of individuals that in turn enables the capacity for the practical transformation of their world. A Freirian accountability model could be called an accountability of autonomy and self-determination, embedded in local communities, and based on the above principles of anti-assistencialism.

The possibility of a more democratic Freirian accountability model is based on assessing student learning and achievement on individual quality assessments and even in conjunction with low-stakes standardized tests. Research has shown that proper use of standardized tests with low-stakes can enhance and further develop teaching and learning practices (Shepard, 2000). To envision this Freirian possibility, it is imperative to consider the following: First and foremost, accountability should be localized to meet the needs of the learning community. Second, accountability should be based on critical, problem-posing education. Third, accountability should be articulated by all members of local communities through dialogue. Finally, accountability should be used as a means of social consciousness implemented through praxis.

The basis, and emancipatory aspect, of Freirian pedagogy is its emphasis on the local community and its distinctive needs (Freire, 1978). Freire believed the educator should be humble and draw his/her curriculum from the students' experiences and allow them to direct their learning endeavors based on their own lives. In a critical learning environment, the teacher, the administrators, the parents, and the students function as co-learners (Wallerstein, 1987). Therefore, it is logical to think of an alternative anti-assistencialist, Freirian accountability model and critical accountability measures as being locally generated to meet local community needs.
The different local entities involved can become researchers in their own communities through the use of anthropological methods such as ethnographic observations, interviews, and document analysis (Wallerstein, 1987) to determine what accountability measures will best meet the needs of the community, again, involving parents, students, teachers, and administrators. Such training in anthropological research methods should be an integral part of teacher training programs, teacher professional development sessions, and parent and community education programs as well, including students. Freirian scholars have referred to this type of research as participatory investigation (Gottlieb and La Belle, 1990). Such training would be made in conjunction with educational anthropologists and educational researchers trained in anthropological research methods, who would treat community members as consultants and experts in community knowledge (Hinson, 2000; Lassiter, 1998).

As presented earlier, accountability measures when superimposed by a centralized entity such as the State become another manifestation of deficit-thinking or assistencialism, which “offers no (real) responsibility and no opportunity to make decisions” (Freire, 1978, p. 16). By allowing the local community to determine their own needs, goals, and how they plan to measure their achievements, we engage in community self-determination. The community assumes responsibility, has the opportunity to make decisions, and is not passive. Accountability is thus transformed into a discourse of autonomy and rehumanization.

Second, a Freirian accountability model must be based on a problem-posing, democratic teaching foundation.

Democracy and democratic education are founded in faith in men [and women], on the belief that they not only can but should discuss the problems of their country, of their continent, their world, their work, the problems of democracy itself. Education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage. It cannot fear the analysis of reality or, under pain of revealing itself as a farce, avoid creative discussion (Freire, 1978, p. 38).

A localized Freirian accountability model would hold teachers responsible for engaging their students in thinking critically about the world and their surroundings. Critical problem-posing education is not only important for students of subordinate groups, but perhaps most importantly for students of privileged groups as well. It is painful but essential for upper middle class white students to recognize their privilege as a precursor to their joining the struggle for equality and a true democracy. It is a big goal to undertake, but one that is necessary for creating the impetus for social change. Once education is seen as an act of love, and is based on a locally defined ethics of
caring, then accountability can also be an act of love and authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999). Quality-based assessment can be transformative and liberatory if our perceptions and the students’ perceptions of it evolve. Students and teachers can enjoy performance-based, alternative and enriched assessments they can work on cooperatively with the community and which allow greater access for student accomplishment and success.

Third, accountability should be based on sincere dialogue. According to Wallerstein’s analysis of Freire (1987), dialogue is based on three basic premises: (1) listening or research, (2) the actual dialogue, and (3) action or praxis. The first involves the elaboration of issues and themes of importance in the community (this can be done through participatory investigation as previously mentioned). Listening to community members for input is crucial, especially when educators, party to the high-stakes accountability process, are not “native” to the community. By native I refer specifically to the anthropological literature on Native Anthropology (see NAPA Bulletin XVI, 1995). For practical purposes, however, this would include white teachers, administrators, or others (not necessarily white) who by virtue of their presence in school settings in poor and/or communities of color are “insiders,” but not necessarily native to the community.

Once the issues and themes are voiced they can be codified into issues for discussion. This takes us to step two, the actual dialogue. Dialogue involves respect and listening to all participants’ experiences and contributions. Strategizing is imperative in bringing about changes the community envisions. Local control is essential in determining the community’s needs, in voicing these needs into goals through dialogue, and in strategizing for change or outcomes—localized critical accountability measures.

Finally, accountability can be used as a means of imparting social consciousness through instruction. The themes and topics for instruction are drawn from students themselves and later connected to greater social, political, historical, economic, and dialectical issues based on critical analyses of power dynamics and inequality. Once students inscribe themselves in the world as active agents, with privileges or without, there is the possibility of equitable transformation through action for social change. The choice to participate and commit to a struggle is part of that praxis and conscientization. In terms of a Freirian accountability model, the strategizing for change, the actions taken, and the outcomes arrived at by the community constitute autonomy or self-determination. The community is in control of its goals and desired outcomes. Accountability is the way in which outcomes will be met and measured, and that responsibility rests with the parties involved.

In terms of alternative/authentic/enriched assessment and accountability it is important to understand that these can be oppressive as well due to their
highly subjective nature. However, these may be emancipatory if used critically, arrived at through dialogue after a thoughtful process to determine the community's needs (Ferrera and McTighe, 1992). For conservative educators still debating validity, under the present discussion a question of universal validity is an assistencialist notion. Students, teachers, parents, and administrators can use dialogue to determine validity and to arrive at the most suitable assessment measures for their community. When dialogue, conscientization, and commitment to social change exist, this is possible even in heterogeneous communities, where previous inter-group oppression existed. It is important to mention that there is no set way to develop alternative assessments. This is their strength. Community members can decide what will be "generated" by the students and teachers and how these are to be measured through dialogical deliberation, not a coercive consensus imposed by the more powerful stakeholders of the community.

IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH PROGRAMS OF CULTURAL IMMERSION

The implementation of this proposed anti-assistencialist Freirian accountability model is based on three levels of cultural immersion (1) the classroom, (2) the local community, and (3) at the trans-cultural or trans-national level. Each level will be discussed using established and emerging research as a foundation. The goal is that through cultural respect and understanding, appropriate curriculum and pedagogy will be implemented in conjunction with proper assessment goals and measures.

The first level involves understanding the classroom culture. Using cultural-historical activity theory, Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López and Tejeda (1999a), Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez and Chiu (1999b), and Gutiérrez (2002) have conducted extensive and longitudinal research documenting the importance of understanding classroom culture and practice. Gutiérrez (2002) argues that the concept of culture is a powerful analytic tool for studying the cultural practices of learning communities, but cautions that culture is both stable and improvisational. Thus, classrooms where power inequalities exist often involve counter-cultural practices, hybrid cultures, or counter-scripts (1995), that when understood as such can be used as "third spaces" that can enhance teaching and learning (1999a). Understanding each classroom culture is indeed the first level of cultural immersion for educators, students, and community members.

The second level of cultural immersion involves the immediate local community through the "funds of knowledge" approach (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González, 1992). Based on sociocultural theory, this approach advocates that educators in conjunction with anthropologists use quali-
tative research methods to study local community household knowledge, not for deficits, but for the accumulated bodies of knowledge of the households (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1989). Community members in this paradigm are the “experts” from whom educators seek to learn valuable knowledge they will later implement into their classroom in practice (Moll et al., 1992). This level of cultural immersion is valuable in understanding how the local community culture can influence classroom culture.

The third level of cultural immersion is the trans/cultural or transnational approach to further develop educators' understanding of the local community and their classroom students by immersing themselves in their communities of origin. One such project is currently operating in Alaska through a program for teacher professional development in an Alaska native village (Hochstrasser Fickel, 2003). Through a collaborative instruction model, native and non-native educators immerse teachers in village life. According to Hochstrasser Fickel (2003) the framework of the program is based on (1) oral histories by native elders, (2) experiential hands-on learning, (3) talking circles, and (4) curriculum development in collaboration with the natives and as a result of the experience.

A similar project of a more transnational scope is also currently being run in Chicago, a city that has seen a high influx of Mexican immigrants (Olmedo, 2004). This project encourages teachers to learn about the funds of knowledge of their students by doing ethnographic research during the summer in Mexico. Through this cultural experience teachers emerge transformed in their ideas and perceptions of their local communities and students, evidenced by moving beyond the “heroes-and-holidays” approach to ethnic and cultural diversity (Olmedo, 2004). Olmedo (2004) documents that after this cultural immersion experience educators were more likely to consider and contextualize issues of transnational migration, undocumented immigration, and racism in US society.

Overall, the implementation of this proposed anti-assitencialist model of accountability is based on the premise that through cultural immersion in the three levels, educators will effectively implement authentic, problemposing, and culturally relevant curricula, instruction, and assessments. Training in participatory investigation is key to gathering the knowledge necessary to assess what the local community learning and assessment goals should be. Through dialogue all parties involved can articulate their priorities as instructional and assessment goals, based on cultural respect and community native knowledge. Finally, the goal of this process is to set educational goals that will lead to social consciousness and ultimately to the practical transformation of the world.
CONCLUSION

It is highly unlikely that the emphasis on accountability will diminish any time soon, and it should not. However, it is important to reflect critically on high-stakes testing accountability from an anti-assistencialist perspective. When viewed through this lens, it is clear that high-stakes testing repeatedly reproduces inequality in schools, amongst schools, between communities, and even between states. In attempting to "better" educate, schools and children are being oppressively disoriented through high-stakes testing by not being, as the flyer demanded, "heard out" as communities. It is time to listen to communities and to let communities speak out and take control of their educational needs.

As I reflect on the issue, I remember "Oscar" and all of my other students and their impact on my life. I changed my view of education by listening to my students and their parents. I came to understand that education and that which we cherish most in our past experiences cannot be measured exclusively by test scores and the percentages assigned to those scores. I, as a learner and teacher, cherish Oscar's letter more than the numbers that attempted to assign value to my teaching practices. The letter is part of my special memories of teaching, and is one that will help me reflect on my experiences as an educator and researcher for years to come. The satisfaction that his letter and many other memoirs give me cannot be given a test score. And I hope the memories of their classroom experiences have a similar effect on my former students.

In this article I put forth a broad conceptual framework of what an anti-assistencialist Freirian accountability model might look like and the possible venues for implementing it. Such a Freirian model, further developed, can enable local communities to respond to assistencialist dislocation in appropriate ways. Accountability is essential, but high-stakes testing is not the best approach.

I attempted to re/define accountability to meet the needs of local communities and in resistance to high-stakes models. This is especially true for diverse communities, for it would allow all community members to voice particular interests and needs. In order to do that, however, accountability must be seen through a Freirian, anti-assistencialist lens and as a complement to problem-posing, democratic education. Local communities, especially those of subordinate groups, must not be labeled as deficient and in need of "assistance" that dehumanizes and objectifies them through an "equal opportunity" test or program (such as NCLB) because they are not equal, but rather must be allowed to create and implement culturally relevant curricula and assessment models that meet their local needs. The hope for a more democratic society is invested in this possibility.
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NOTES

1. This excerpt is from an anonymous e-mail message titled "Life" forwarded on May 5, 1999, to the listserv of the California Consortium of Critical Educators founded by Antonia Darder. This e-mail was later used by the author to teach a lesson about social relationships and individual goals, including the larger goals of social justice and equality to a group of predominantly Mexican American eighth grade bilingual social studies students in greater Los Angeles.

2. During fiscal year 2003, for example, a total of 382, 224 million dollars were devoted to national defense and military spending while only 34, 330 million were used for elementary, secondary and vocational education (http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbudget/fy04/sheets/fct_1.xls).

3. Grande (2000) refers to "whitestream" as the cultural capital of whites in almost every facet of US society. The term whitestream is used as opposed to mainstream in an effort to decenter whiteness as dominant. Schooling in this chapter include K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. Whitestream Schooling therefore refers to curricula and pedagogy founded on the principles, morals, values, and history of white culture, i.e., white cultural capital.

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