

2018

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Recommended Citation

Hernandez, Jose A., "Standardized Test and The Impact on Latino Students" (2018). *2018 Symposium*. 9.
https://dc.ewu.edu/scrw_2018/9

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Standardized Test and The Impact on Latino Students

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Author's Note

Jose A. Hernandez is an Eastern Washington University Student. This paper was submitted for consideration to the 21st Annual EWU Research and Creative Works Symposium on March, 2018 in Cheney, Wa and submitted as an assignment for introduction to Chicano Culture.

(CHST 101/ANTH 161)

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Abstract

This research reports on what Standardized Test are telling us about the type of education students of color are receiving and how it impacts them and the schools they attend. The method of analysis for this research relies on multiple peer reviewed articles and journals to draw conclusions on the impact of standardized testing. Upon examining the data, it has become clear that standardized testing indicate students of color are not getting the quality of education that their white counter parts are receiving. Standardized testing has clearly shown the education gap which has minimized future educational opportunities due to the reduction of federal funds to schools with predominantly minority population.

According to the National Educational Association standardized test have been around since 1838 and students have been taking some form of standardized tests since the early 1800s, but did anyone ever bother to ask why they have to take those test, or what they are used for? Standardized Test were initially supposed to be used to see how well students are doing but over time Standardized test have been used as multiple tools to rank, make decisions on funding, or target certain groups of students. There are many reasons why standardized test exists; this research will focus on why and how standardized test are used as well as how we can use them for good.

In *Using Standardized Test Results as an Instructional Guide* the authors Bruce Whitehead and Philip Santee (2014) talk about what standardized test are actually intended to do. Whitehead and Santee discuss their thoughts on standardized tests being the most widely used vehicle for assessing student achievement in the United States, and the US having an investment in the test themselves but question if the schools are receiving maximum return in the investment. The authors talk about how to use the test scores effectively as a guide for instructing a class. Whitehead and Santee say that testing has little to nothing to do with what happens inside the school, agreeing with Brandy J. Ellison, author of *Does getting A's Really Matter?* (2004) An interesting viewpoint made by the authors was their four features of a classroom test, these are four things test result should be used for, matching content, providing feedback, flagging deficiencies, and grading. Although it just seems like the students are just taking a test to measure what they have learned, there is in fact many reasons for administering the standardized test some good and some are bad.

For example, in the article *Turning Standardized Test Scores Into A Tool For Improving Teaching and Learning: An Assessment-based Approach* (2009), author Chan Jie-Qi talks a little bit about the start of standardized test and how the use of them dramatically increased with over 100 million administered every year. Jie-Qi discusses how the test scores are also being used to evaluate schools, but also about a way to use the test scores as a tool to improve teaching and learning by looking at the connection between test scores and day-to-day classroom practices. Throughout the article Jie-Qi describes a way to use test scores for examination and improvement of curriculum content by analyzing the test scores. Jie-Qi's main viewpoint was that many school districts have standardized test but don't do anything to help the students or help improve the school's curriculum using the information retrieved from the test. In this case Jie-Qi gave an example of how the test scores could be used to help improve school's curriculums.

Crain William, author of *Biased Tests* (2004), shows evidence of how Standardized Test are being put to bad use when he talks about our society and what students Standardized test scores have to do with it. William talks about how the test are bias because he discovered that test makers retained all pretest items that white students outperformed the African American and Latino students. William has a section of his paper titled High School "Push Out" in this section he discusses high school students and dropout rates. Due to Standardized test students have to spend hours preparing for test then during the test William claims it gives students considerable anxiety causing them to skip school. In the end William talks about students of color getting nagged to drop out by school officials. Interestingly William pointed out that school officials are "nudging" students of color to drop out based on their Standardized test scores. Something new William brings to the topic is that standardized test scores have enormous power since they can

determine what happens to a student's educational future. Also stating that standardized test create special roadblocks for low-income students and students of color because they are being compared to white middle class students.

Not only are they being used to compare students of color to white students, according to Brandy J. Ellison author of *Does getting A's Really Matter?* test scores are being used to determine if students are meeting adequate yearly progress. Ellison claims that not only are they used to determine students' progress but also to make decisions on how much funding the schools get. The author also discusses how standardized test scores are being used as a baseline for performance and to rank students. Also, stating that the standardized test scores are not accurate because they are missing a crucial part of education that is not tested in the yearly tests. An interesting point Ellison brings up is that standardized test are impersonal, meaning they do not account for the social framework in which learning takes place. Ellison also claims that the standardized test only measure academic performance from a certain point in time and doesn't reflect on the fact that learning takes place across time and the social context and place is constantly changing.

Adding on to what Ellison said the author of *Testing: How should the evidence be used?* (2010) Joyce J. Fitzpatrick is saying that test scores like those of an English or Math test are being used to evaluate teachers in a school. Throughout the article, Fitzpatrick explains how standardized test have nothing to do with teacher evaluations, and if they continue to use them as an evaluation for teachers it will soon be used to evaluate faculty performance. Fitzpatrick then goes on to talk about how other levels of education, teacher evaluations should be linked to student and teacher improvement not teacher to test scores, and many of the best teacher

evaluation models involve in class observation not looking at a student's test score. Fitzpatrick's main opinion was that there is a need for more research on how to use the test scores in a correct way, and that teacher evaluation should be linked to student and teacher.

In addition to Fitzpatrick's main idea, Julie Woestehoff author of *What's Wrong with Standardized Test?* (2014), explains that standardized test are designed to rank and sort students. Throughout the article Woestehoff talks about how these standardized tests are aggravating the gap between the test scores of white students and students of color. Woestehoff goes into how the test scores can lead into a dumbed down curriculum because of the way they are made. Overall Woestehoff is saying there are many flaws with the standardized test that have been left alone and are making the achievement gap widen. An interesting point made by Woestehoff was that standardized test are "outright racist", towards the end of the article she gives credible evidence of racism in a standardized test by explaining that A series of questions on the 2006 global history New York State Regents exam asked students to describe how Africa "benefited" from imperialism. Using this 150-year-old quote: "We are endeavoring ... to teach the native races to conduct their own affairs with justice and humanity, and to educate them alike in letters and in industry," students were asked to name "two ways the British improved the lives of Africans" (Woestehoff, pg1. 2011). Woestehoff agrees with other sources when she said that the test were designed to rank and sort students based on scores. One of Woestehoff's main viewpoints was that test always contain errors, and she claims that the test being kept secret makes it even more likely to have errors and we just never find out.

Agreeing with the previous sources about test being used to rank students, W. James Popham author of *Why Standardized Test Don't Measure Educational Quality* (2013), talks about the scores of standardized tests and how people interpret them. Popham claims that the test

scores are interpreted as rankings, high scores meaning the school is very effective and low scores meaning they are ineffective in their teachings. Throughout the article Popham says that standardized test should not be used to evaluate educational quality because some of the test items are bias. Another reason he pointed out was that standardized test have a different measurement mission than indicating how good or bad a school is, instead they should be used to make comparative interpretations that they were intended to provide. An interesting point made in this source was that standardized test scores are used to compare students' knowledge and skills in relationship to other students nationally. Like the other sources researched above, this source also agrees with the point that standardized test should not be used to evaluate the quality of education. One of Popham's interesting opinions or example was his tablespoon analogy. Popham said "tablespoons have a different measurement mission than indicating hot or cold" (pg 12). He uses the tablespoon to represent the standardized test being used to measure something other than what it was intended for.

According to The Glossary of Education Reform website, standardized test are a form of test that have all the same questions for every test taker and is scored in a standard way to make it possible to compare students' scores. This shows one of the many ways that standardized test are being used, in this case they are being used to compare students from different backgrounds to rank them by test scores. In The increasing impact of socioeconomics and race on standardized academic test scores across elementary, middle, and high school, the author Gwyne W. White states "that poor and minority children have not and will not be able to meaningfully experience equity as defined by the current conceptualization of standardized test scores"(2004). In other words, White believes that students of color or minority students take the test and don't have the same advantage as white students have over them. Advantages as in white students are

getting better schools with a more intense or strict curriculum with better teachers. White also points out that poor or minority students won't experience test equity, this can be translated to say that the standardized tests are biased, which brings me to my next point.

Standardized tests are made in a specific way, every question in the test itself is handpicked and specifically put on the test. Since they are handpicked there are ways to target a specific group of students based on previous test scores. In the article *Biased tests*, the author William Crain claims that standardized tests are indeed biased because of the way they are constructed. Crain writes that the standardized pretest are examined and then questions are retained, those questions that are retained are the ones that have a consistency with the overall score (Crain, pg. 2004). The way that Crain claims the standardized tests are biased is by giving evidence found by *Chronicle of Higher Education* saying, "that the test makers retained all the pretest items on which the white students outperformed the African Americans and Latino students, but they discarded all the pretest items on which the African American and Latinos outperformed the whites" (Crain, pg. 2004). In making this comment, Crain is agreeing with Gwyne W. White when he says that the poor and minority students will not experience test equity. This is because of how the standardized tests are constructed, anything students of color outperform white students is disregarded and therefore they will never experience test equity.

Another way standardized tests are being used for other than checking on how students are doing is using the scores to categorize students or worse rating teachers and the schools they teach in. Students are being separated into different groups based on their test scores. Some of the different categories they are being separated into are AP, remedial, gifted and talented, and AP courses. For example, Christopher H. Tienken, author of *Test Use and Abuse* (2012) discusses that "various school districts use their standardized test scores to make decisions on

where to place students” (Tienken, pg 1. 2012). Not only are the students being rated and put into separate classes but teachers and schools are also being rated by the standardized test scores. According to Tienken the test scores are also being used “as part of school district quality ratings, and used to make multiple determinations and interpretations about teachers, school administrators, and school quality” (Tienken, pg . 2012). This shows how standardized test scores are being used to make determinations about a school’s quality and how they are being used to determine some teachers teaching ability. Standardized test are not supposed to be used to determine the quality of a school or if a teacher is a good teacher or not but that is what they are being used for.

On the other hand, Standardized test scores can be used for something more than just looking at how well students are doing. For example, the test scores can be used to determine what the students aren’t understanding and helping them learn it or try a different way of teaching it. Bruce Whitehead, author of Using Standardized Test Results as an Instructional Guide (2014) talks about something called The Hellgate Plan, according to Whitehead this program uses the test scores to improve the instructions of teachers in class. Whitehead states that the program targets students to provide “potential curriculum areas to be strengthened in relation to outcome, policy, and practice” (Whitehead, pg 2). With this statement, Whitehead is making the point in which standardized test scores can be put to better use other than just using them to rank students and rate schools and their faculty.

Overall standardized test are not being used for they are meant to be used for. Instead they are being used to rate students based on their test scores, and separating them into different groups because of their test scores. The worst thing is that the test scores are being used to rate teachers and the schools they work in giving the school a bad reputation. Although there are

ways to use the tests scores in a good way like the example of the Hellgate Plan, which is using the scores to help students out and trying new ways of teaching.

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