

Something that has been an increasing passion of mine since moving to Worcester is the idea of equal educational opportunity. Growing up in a white, suburban school district allowed me to have ample educational opportunities. For me, going to college was assumed. People that weren't pursuing some sort of higher education after graduation were seen as outcasts. The PSAT and SAT's were funded by our schools and prep programs were at our disposal. My first day in a classroom in Worcester came as a sort of culture shock. I had never really thought much about the conditions of schools outside of mine and my surrounding towns, they were all like mine: good quality, updated classrooms, gyms, several athletic fields, libraries, and several computer labs.

When I got to Worcester it became apparent that these schools were the complete opposite of what I grew up with. Columbus Park, for example, doesn't even have a playground and has very little electronic resources for their students. Of all the classrooms I have spent time in, I noticed that each one only had two or three computers for all of the students. The building itself was constructed very, very long ago and the building has three floors, but no elevator (the trend with a lot of these buildings). The materials seemed outdated and it looked as though the teachers had bought most things themselves. These schools also are extremely low rated by the state because of poor testing results. My hometown was rated as one of the top ten school districts to live in because of our results. The students in Worcester schools also don't see college as an exceedable goal. The rates of students that make it through a higher educational program is extremely low, whether it be they don't think that they will get accepted or they can't afford it.

Since spending more time in classrooms and learning about the home lives and backgrounds of the children in the schools, I have felt very grateful for my own education, but also angered by the fact that these students don't have the resources they deserve. I have learned

through several courses at Clark that the educational system is failing our children and those who founded our system wanted more and envisioned more for the future generations. Writers and educational pioneers like Horace Mann and John Dewey laid out frameworks and wrote pages and pages of what *not* to do with our educational system, yet we are doing all the things they warned against.

I want to spend time in a classroom and get to know the ins and outs of teaching and educating young minds. I want to be able to have an impact on the lives of the students that walk through my classroom door, but I want to make an impact on a large scale as well. I want to get rid of standardized testing, I want to ensure that every student has the resources they need, and I want every school and every student to have a playground they can play on. I want educational justice for every student in America. I want college to not seem so far fetched, I want every student to be able to afford a higher education and not drown in debt once they graduate.

I have extremely high hopes for the things that I wish to accomplish in my life, but being painfully aware of my position in this world as just one person, it seems unlikely to achieve. Within the realm of positionality, I also have to recognize how I present myself and how I am perceived by others. Because of my background, race, and social status, I can be interpreted differently by the people around me. My childhood was privileged compared to many, many children across the country and that definitely affects the way I behave and react to my surroundings.

Through Clark, I have had the pleasure of meeting a lot of people who have shaped my way of thinking and have inspired me to shoot high and expect nothing less than what I, and all of my future students, deserve. Professor Ameer has become one of my favorite professors at Clark because of his passion for education and his strong, critical opinions of the system we

currently have. Eric DeMeulenaere has also challenged my way of thinking and has allowed me to think more critically about social justice and the impact that I have on the world around me. Eric has also shown me what can be done through all of his achievements, whether it be opening a school or publishing a book. He has shown me that social justice around the educational field can be done in all different ways.

One of my biggest inspirations, though, is my mother. My mom was a teacher all of my life and has shown me what it means to be an effective educator and how I have the ability to do whatever I set my mind to. Seeing the impact that she had on her students everyday and the love she has for the work that she does is truly inspiring. On top of it all, my mom received her Masters degree while having two small children, raised us on her own, received her administrative license, and is now one year away from finishing her Doctorate in Education Administration. She has shown me that we can do meaningful work and achieve high positions as powerful women. I want to be this inspiration for my students, I hope to empower them the way that my mom empowered her students and the way that she empowered me.

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Society is carved and molded by the people that are a part of it, but does every person count, do they all receive the same opportunities? We are told that, historically, those that are in the lower classes are there by their own devices, we are told that the only thing standing in their way of success is themselves. In Payne's chapter "Black Bastards and White Millionaires" our way of thinking is challenged. We are exposed to the idea that it is not the Have-nots that are keeping themselves in the lower class, rather it is a trend of power and action by the Haves that are (sub)consciously continuing the trend. Power and privilege play a dangerous role in the world that we are living in. In standardized testing within urban school districts such as

Worcester, it is apparent that most of the push to continue and improve comes from those who have wealth and power.

Going off of the RAP thesis that Payne lays out, it is the folks that Have and the people that hold power that create, maintain, and profit from the status-quo. Educationally speaking, large companies such as Pearson have the most to gain, financially, from standardized testing as they sponsor, create, and distribute both the tests but also many testing materials. In all of my experience in educational settings, I have yet to meet a teacher that is in support of standardized testing. Using the evidence and examples Payne used, we can apply the same concept to this example. Teachers in schools across the country are at a lower status level compared to those holding seats in governmental educational departments as well as those working for large testing empires such as Pearson. The people making decisions are removed from the classroom and don't have a full understanding of what it is like to teach students, yet they are the ones crafting the standards that students should meet and ways teachers should teach. The expectations of both standardized and high stakes standardized testing are unrealistic and cause a lot of stress on teachers, families, and causes harm to the students. Due to the pressure of covering all material needed for students to take standardized tests, they aren't able to spend the time or effort needed to efficiently teach every student in a way that appeals to every pupil. This has become a system set up for failure. High expectations mixed with lack of time and insufficient materials leads to students who don't score well on tests, which creates the illusion that we need these redundant tests to see if there is improvement.

Creating agency for this cause, and all causes, is a large task to attempt. For standardized testing, I believe that the agency and action that must be taken is to create a system that is focused on each student and their respective progression rather than seeing all students as

developmentally equal. Those creating the standardized tests are perpetuating the system because it is a money making monopoly. Wealth is being respected over the improvement and knowledge of our youth. Payne writes that in order to change the system of oppression, we must take the time to get to know each individual better and that we must change our attitudes towards one another. This concept applies greatly to education because of the fact that each student learns differently and has different processes of understanding that need to be taken into account when teaching.

Payne's views have opened my mind to these different ways of thinking. As he stated, I have always been groomed to think that people are in charge of their own improvement, but this is not the case. I hadn't thought of the issues of oppression and how people of the middle to upper class are perpetuating the issue, including myself, before reading this chapter. The RAP thesis has switched the way I am evaluating situations in my own life as well as the relationships in schools. While observing standardized tests and viewing the results, it makes sense that this concept has been brought on and supported by those with money and power higher up. Changing the system is a massive task, but by seeing each pupil as an individual and by not expecting our teachers to attempt to cram knowledge into our young students minds in order to prepare for a test, we can give our children a better chance at moving up in the world through successful education and individualized lessons. This could have the ability to liberate poor children, decrease oppression, and give the equal opportunity that all people deserve.

