

Beyond a Test Score: Explaining Opportunity Gaps in Educational Practice

Journal of Black Studies

43(6) 693–718

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0021934712442539

<http://jbs.sagepub.com>



H. Richard Milner, IV¹

Abstract

The author shares an opportunity gap explanatory framework to assist educational researchers and theorists in analyzing, explaining, and naming educational practice, especially in highly diverse and urban social contexts. The author argues that too much attention is placed on achievement gaps and challenges researchers and theorists to expand their analyses to opportunity gaps. Focusing on opportunity allows researchers to examine the causes of disparities that exist between and among students in schools. Emerging from the author's own research and from an established body of theory and research, the framework encompasses five interrelated tenets essential to understanding and explaining educational practice related to opportunity: color blindness, cultural conflicts, meritocracy, deficit mindsets and low expectations, and context-neutral mindsets and practices. Implications of the framework point to potential synergy in language and research emphases that can shed light in the educational literature on deeply inequitable systems, processes, structures, policies, and practices that can prevent some students from reaching their full capacity.

Keywords

achievement gap, culture, diversity, race, teaching

¹Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA

Corresponding Author:

H. Richard Milner, IV, Vanderbilt University, GPC, Box 230 Appleton Place, Nashville, TN 37203

Email: rich.milner@vanderbilt.edu

Much is available in educational discourse and even in social media about achievement gaps between White students and students of color, namely, African American, Latino/Latina American, and Hispanic American students (Barton & Coley, 2010; Chubb & Loveless, 2002; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Jenkins, 2006; Pino & Smith, 2004).¹ These research reports span the educational landscape from prekindergarten to Grade 12 (P-12). While achievement gap discourse in education usually focuses on students' scores on standardized tests, it also concerns student graduation rates, patterns in gifted and advanced placement, and other measurable outcomes that allow for comparisons between groups of students. I argue that standardization of policies and practices is at the heart of many reform efforts aimed to decrease and eventually eliminate achievement gaps. However, in my analyses, standardization, in many ways, is antithetical to diversity because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogeneous environments with equality and equity of opportunity afforded to them (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Milner & Williams, 2008; Tate, 2008).² Standardization reform efforts advance a sameness agenda when the playing field for many students of color and other marginalized groups is anything but even or level (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

On the one hand, it is necessary to hold educators accountable for providing optimal learning opportunities for all students, and evidence is needed to gauge such learning; on the other hand, instructional practices and related educational experiences need to be constructed in ways that address and are responsive to students' varying needs because of the range of differences that students bring into the classroom and because of the social context in which students live and learn (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010). Moreover, I argue that results on outcomes such as standardized tests provide information about a particular, socially constructed way of thinking about what students know and need to know. However, these results report only one dimension of a much more complex and nuanced reality. Still, there is not much debate in U.S. society and in education that people are diverse and that their situations and experiences vary significantly (Banks, 2001; Irizarry, 2009). Students' outcomes on tests, then, will vary in part on the basis of the instruction and learning opportunities they experience. Thus, in an era of high-stakes standardized testing, I have wondered the following: *Are we focusing on too much testing and not enough teaching?*

In this article, I argue that educational researchers and theorists, sometimes referred to as "we" throughout this article, need to refocus attention away from achievement gap analyses and discourses, which inherently have a standardization emphasis. I argue that the emphasis should be expanded toward gaps in opportunity. Through this revised and reenvisioned analytic

emphasis, I share an explanatory opportunity gap framework to assist educational researchers in analyzing and explaining educational practices.³ I argue that researchers and theorists socially construct achievement as well as academic and social success. For instance, critical theorist Michael Apple (2006) stressed that those of us in education must persistently question what knowledge is, how it is constructed and validated, and who decides the worth, value, and meanings of knowledge. Similar questions should be posed, I argue, about achievement. As with knowledge, certain areas of achievement are privileged and valued over others, and there appears to be a socially constructed hierarchy of *which and what* achievements and knowledge matter more in comparison to others. In this sense, there are societal high and low cultural ways of conceptualizing achievement and knowledge (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005).⁴

Consider, for example, four important questions regarding such a paradigm and mindset expansion: (a) To what extent is achievement synonymous with learning? (b) What does it mean for one group of students to learn and achieve in one school community in comparison to another? (c) Who decides what it means to achieve, why, and how do we know? (d) How do we address the kind of learning and knowledge acquisition that never show up on achievement measures—including high-stakes tests?

I am suggesting that opportunity gaps, especially those related to diversity, exist at all levels in education and are present in the lives of both educators and students.⁵ To address, analyze, explain, and name some of these gaps in education, the framework presented in this article emerges from theory, research, and practice established in educational literature as well as from my own analyses of classroom practices. Referred to as an *opportunity gap explanatory framework*, it is meant to challenge researchers and theorists to deepen and expand their analyses about educational practices. A potential benefit for researchers and theorists to adopt the framework is that the field has the potential to build a common language and set of constructs to draw from to explain practice rather than the propensity to construct and draw conclusions from disconnected studies, constructs, and frameworks in the field. Such language and construct consistency could move the field forward in important and sustainable ways.

Understanding Opportunity Rather Than Achievement

As will be elaborated on later in this article, several interrelated problems exist with emphases on and extended analyses of achievement gaps. I argue the following:

- Achievement gap explanations of educational practices can force educational researchers to compare culturally diverse students with White students without compelling, nuanced, and illustrative pictures of the reasons undergirding and behind the causes of disparities and differences that exist between and among groups.⁶
- Achievement gap explanations can frame White students as the norm from which other racial and ethnic groups of students are to be compared (Foster, 1999).⁷ White students can be covertly and tacitly constructed as intellectually and academically superior to others.
- Achievement gap explanations can force us into studying and conceptualizing students of color from a deficit perspective (Howard, 2010). Researchers focus on the perceived shortcomings of students rather than the assets that students and their families possess.
- Achievement gap explanations can force us to focus on individual students as well as groups of students rather than inequitable, racist, and sexist structures, systems, contexts, policies, and practices that lead to perceived achievement gaps.⁸

Considering the issues outlined above, why do so many educational researchers focus on outcomes rather than on the processes that lead to the outcomes? Issues related to opportunity are complicatedly multifaceted, process oriented, and much more nuanced than what an achievement gap explanation can provide.

Educational researcher and teacher educator Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) concluded that in U.S. society, there is not as much of an achievement gap as there is an “education debt” that the educational system owes to so many students it has poorly served. This education debt carries several important features, according to Ladson-Billings: historical debt, economic debt, sociopolitical debt, and moral debt. Ladson-Billings challenged educational researchers to reconceptualize and move beyond the achievement discourse. Moreover, educational researcher and teacher educator Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2010) explained that a perceived achievement gap is the result of other gaps that seductively coerce people into believing that an achievement gap actually exists. Rather than focusing on a perceived achievement gap, from her analyses, Irvine recommended that attention should be placed on closing other gaps that exist in education that cause researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and administrators to believe there is an achievement gap. For Irvine, other gaps that shape our belief in an achievement gap include

the teacher quality gap; the teacher training gap; the challenging curriculum gap; the school funding gap; the digital divide gap; the wealth and income gap; the employment opportunity gap; the affordable housing gap; the health care gap; the nutrition gap; the school integration gap; and the quality childcare gap. (Irvine, 2010, p. xii)

From Irvine's perspective, when we address the many other gaps that structurally and systemically exist in educational practice, achievement results can improve. Thus, I cannot help but wonder if those of us in education are focusing on the most productive areas to understand, address, and explain problems of educational practices. That is, should we expand our emphases from an achievement gap problem to an opportunity gap problem that inherently places attention on educational practices and processes?

When we focus on achievement gaps, culturally diverse students can be positioned through conceptual deficits in the minds, practices, and designs of analysts such as researchers, theorists, and practitioners; consequently, consumers of these analyses may adopt deficit perceptions and transfer them into their practices with students. In this way, educational researchers can be complicit, albeit unknowingly, in the construction, enactment, and implementation of research designs and, consequently, practices that view particular groups of students through deficit lenses. From an ecological perspective, many teachers design the learning milieu believing that their culturally diverse students are behind (Foster, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Such a position can lead teachers into mindsets and practices that do not recognize and acknowledge the strengths, expertise, and assets that their students possess because teachers may focus on achievement gaps that are conflated with ideology related to normality (Foster, 1999; Howard, 2010).

Questioning what it means to experience and live in a world that does not necessarily find the views, preferences, and experiences among people of color to be "normal," "acceptable," or "valid" is a recurrent charge for some researchers (Dillard, 2000; Gordon, 1990; Stanfield, 1995). The dominant and oppressive perspective is that White people and their beliefs, experiences, and epistemologies (Sheurich & Young, 1997) are often viewed as "the norm" by which others are compared, measured, assessed, and evaluated. For instance, in terms of practice, students of color in schools on all levels (P-12) are often placed in remedial courses to reach a socially constructed norm, for which the model is their White classmates (Foster, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2006). People and communities of color from various walks of life can be and are successful (Morris, 2004; Tillman, 2002). In short, we

should value people who have had a range of experiences in life; *different*, in this sense, does and should not necessarily mean “deficit” or “deficient” (Ford, 2010).

Notions of normality, where racialized and cultural “others” are viewed as negative, can be results of ingrained systems of knowing. Ladson-Billings (2004) explained that epistemologies encompass not only ways of knowing and perceiving the world but also *systems* of knowing the world. The systems that guide educational inquiry may portray certain groups of people, particularly, people and communities of color, in deficit and deficient terms (Sheurich & Young, 1997). Ladson-Billings suggested that racialized systems of knowing can make it difficult for researchers and others to interpret or conceptualize a situation in a community of color as “normal,” particularly when researchers do not understand how systems of knowing can marginalize and objectify people of color (Tillman, 2002).

An Opportunity Gap Explanatory Framework

The framework that I propose as an analytic tool to explain gaps in opportunity covers five interconnected areas. I believe the various tenets of the framework can assist researchers and theorists in naming, capturing, and transforming their explanations of educational practices related to issues of opportunity. To be clear, the five tenets of the framework I introduce are grounded in my own research as well as an established body of research and theory. While the research literature has captured some constructs and issues embedded within this framework, as a collective, they have not been captured as I am describing them here. I argue that this framework can be used in explaining, problematizing, and perhaps more deeply understanding educational practices beyond an overreliance on an achievement gap: (a) color blindness, (b) cultural conflicts, (c) myth of meritocracy, (d) low expectations and deficit mindsets, and (e) context-neutral mindsets and practices.

The constructs or tenets embedded within the opportunity gap conceptual framework can be used as a heuristic to explain and shed light on situations in educational practices when teachers exhibit these behaviors, for instance, or when they do not. In this way, the framework can be used to illuminate the positive or negative aspects of the explanatory construct. For example, in the case of color blindness, researchers may determine that learning opportunities with students are stifled because teachers adopt a color-blind approach to their conceptions of their work and, consequently, their practices. Contrarily, researchers may determine that learning opportunities are

enabled and maximized because teachers reject color blindness in their work. Thus, the central constructs of the framework can serve as analytic tools to explain both positive and negative aspects and realities of people, places, and policies in educational practice. It is important to note that I am not suggesting that researchers necessarily enter research sites searching for particular qualities or characteristics of students, teachers, or places from a deductive perspective. Rather, I am providing a framework to help researchers, particularly, qualitative researchers, explain and systematically name what they observe and come to know inductively. Below, I elaborate on the interrelated tenets with the goal of providing a broad—yet transferable—context for why I argue for the necessity to focus on opportunity rather than solely achievement.

Color Blindness

In the research literature, color blindness consistently shows up as an explanatory area to describe and capture practices, especially as it relates to how educators may shape their curriculum and instructional practices with students. Research is clear that when educators adopt color-blind beliefs, ideologies, worldviews, and consequently, practices (Chapman, 2007; Howard, 2010; Johnson, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Milner, 2010), they can run the risk of consciously and subconsciously avoiding, missing, and overlooking an important identity characteristic of students: race. When educators pretend to be color-blind, they are, in effect, constructing and enacting curriculum and instructional practices for students they see as incomplete rather than the complete beings students are (Johnson, 2002). Students' racial identity, background, and experiences are critical components for educators to be aware of in thinking about and enacting practices (Noguera, 2003; Tatum, 1992). However, many teachers plan and teach through a color-blind paradigm. When teachers or other educators adopt color-blind approaches to their work, the social and academic performance of students—even young students—can suffer because teachers are not preparing and enacting lessons with the whole student in mind (Lewis, 2001; Milner, 2010).

Multicultural researcher James Banks (2001) explained that “a statement such as ‘I don’t see color’ reveals a privileged position that refuses to legitimize racial identifications that are very important to people of color and that are often used to justify inaction and perpetuation of the status quo” (p. 12). Furthermore, educators who adopt and enact color-blind practices can lack the racial knowledge necessary to achieve pedagogical success with racially diverse students, especially for those who are

relegated to the margins of teaching and learning in educational practices. I have learned from my research that educators who adopt color-blind approaches may not recognize how their own race and racialized experiences can shape what they teach, how they teach it, and how they assess what has been taught (Milner, 2010). For example, when educators do not include curriculum content related to Black people in a social studies class, students are actually learning something about Black people through the absence of the content in the curriculum.⁹ Perhaps unknowingly, educators who avoid infusing Black experiences into the curriculum because they claim to be color-blind can be denying Black students the right to recognize their contributions to societies. Students, very often, learn from a curriculum dominated by White contributions and White norms to the exclusion of curriculum contributions from other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2010).

At the heart of what is and is not emphasized in the curriculum of educational practices is both teacher and student identity—who teachers and students are and how they represent their worldview to others. The research literature suggests that a racial demographic divide between educators and students in P-12 classrooms—where teachers tend to be White and students are racially diverse—can be disadvantageous for educators and students alike (Gay & Howard, 2000; Howard, 2010; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005) if teachers are not race conscious in their planning and implementation of learning opportunities for students (Milner, 2010). Opportunity gaps exist and persist when teachers allow the demographic divide between themselves and their students to lead them into color-blind discourses, conceptions, and practices. White educators and students of color may have had different racialized experiences both inside and outside the classroom, which may create roadblocks to students' academic and social success in the classroom and beyond (Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 1994).

Thus, it is critical that educators recognize their own and their students' racial backgrounds in order to plan for, work with, and teach complete students rather than fragmented, disconnected students (Irvine, 2003; Obidah & Teel, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009). How do or might teachers unknowingly and inadvertently contribute to individual and structural forms of racism that can have influence on student opportunities through a color-blind orientation to their work? Clearly, the adoption of color-blind ideologies, positions, and practices can make it difficult—if not impossible—for educators and/or researchers to recognize broader, systemic disparities and dilemmas in educational policies and practices, such as

- an overrepresentation of students of color in special education (Artiles, Klingner, & Tate, 2006; Blanchett, 2006; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006);
- an underrepresentation of students of color in gifted education (Ford, 2010; Howard, 2010);
- an overreferral of African American students to the office for disciplinary actions and consequences (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Paterson, 2002);
- an overwhelming number of African American and Latino American students expelled or suspended (Monroe, 2006; Noguera, 2003); and
- an underrepresentation of students of color in schoolwide clubs, organizations, and other prestigious arenas, such as the school's homecoming court and student government (Milner, 2010).

Researchers and theorists are encouraged to examine possible influences of color blindness as explanations for opportunity gaps that show up in educational practices.

Cultural Conflicts

Like color blindness, cultural conflicts in classroom practice are also widespread.¹⁰ Researchers have found that conflicts, incongruence, and inconsistencies that educators and students encounter in the classroom can limit students' learning opportunities (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997; Howard, 2001; Irvine, 2003). When educators operate primarily from their own cultural ways of knowing, the learning milieu can seem foreign to students whose cultural experiences are different from their teacher (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 1994). Cultural conflicts can have negative consequences for students because there are few culturally consistent points of reference and convergence between educators and students. A student, for instance, may be immersed in hip-hop culture, and teachers may have no interest in the "culture" or any interest in learning about it in order to infuse aspects of hip-hop into curriculum and instructional practices.¹¹ These realities, the fact that teachers do not understand hip-hop or have very little or no interest in learning about it, can result in a cultural conflict. The idea is that

some groups of students—because their cultural characteristics are more consistent with the culture, norms, and expectations of the school than are those of other groups of students—have greater opportunities

for academic success than do students whose cultures are less consistent with the school culture. (Banks, 1998, pp. 22-23)

Educational researcher Lisa Delpit (1995) advanced the idea of a “culture of power” that can have lasting influence on the types of learning that can take place in a classroom. Cultural conflicts sometimes result in a resistant or oppositional environment, in which educators are fighting to control students, and students resist educators’ propensity to control them (Haberman, 1991). Students can similarly work to be heard, to have a voice, and to have some power in the classroom. Educators and students can *work against* each other, which may leave students feeling that their preferences, worldviews, belief systems, and actions are insignificant, disrespected, irrelevant, or subordinate to educators and to classroom and school life (Anyon, 1980; Milner, 2010). As a result, students may refuse to engage in a classroom culture and refuse to learn.

To illuminate, students’ home environments and the expectations and realities of their experiences outside of school can be significantly different from the ways they experience discipline in the classroom.¹² At the core of these cultural conflicts are definitions and expectations of what it means to behave in an acceptable or normal way. I have come to understand that acceptable and normal classroom behavior can be informed by different cultural frames, such as race, socioeconomics, or even geography (Milner, 2010). For example, students may be accustomed to joking around with family members when a conflict arises in order to deescalate or to avoid a confrontation (Obidah & Teel, 2001). Students may have found that using humor can help family members ease away from or work through confrontation and conflict (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). Teachers, on the other hand, when students invoke jokes and humor in the classroom to work through tension between themselves and classmates or between themselves and teachers, may consider it inappropriate to use joking behavior when a conflict develops, which can then escalate cultural conflict (Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Obidah & Teel, 2001).

Even while students are told explicitly about the culture of power and are learning to survive and thrive within it, they should be empowered to challenge and question oppressive structures rather than conform to systems that make them feel like what urban educational researcher Pedro Noguera (2003) called “prisoners.” In essence, Noguera found that some students in urban school contexts, particularly those living in poverty and in what urban educational researcher and teacher educator Martin Haberman (1991) called the “pedagogy of poverty,” are sometimes treated more like prisoners than learners in educational

institutions who are experiencing human child and adolescent development. An adult in Noguera's study identified a student he believed would eventually end up in jail. Having this mindset and making such predictions are grounded in a culture of conflict that surely has a bearing on opportunity (Milner, 2010). In essence, if teachers believe their students will fail and become incarcerated, they likely will treat them in ways that guarantee that their students will meet their low expectations (Noguera, 2003). Students typically meet the expectations established by educators (Ford, 2010; Milner, 2010). School can structurally produce and reproduce inequity, poverty, and injustice for students (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Kozol, 2005).

Critical theorist Paulo Freire (1998) stressed that although students should be empowered to counter oppressive practices that place them in situations of prisonlike subordination, they must also be able to operate within these systems in order to change them. Knowing *what* the culture of power actually is, *how* it works, and how power can be *achieved* are important aspects of consideration for student success. Thus, not only should students be taught explicitly about the culture of power, but I argue that their parents should also be informed about what expectations teachers have for their children (Milner, 2010). Again, educators cannot maintain tacit beliefs and expectations for students and assume that parents know what is expected of them or of their children. Being explicit is critical in building partnerships and solid relationships between and among teachers, students, and parents (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010). Thus, the assumption that students will be taught the culture of power outside the classroom can be considered irresponsible, because students' parents may not approach the teaching and learning or the discipline exchange in the same or a similar way as what is put forth in a classroom. This point can be substantiated particularly if the parents of these students do not fully understand or embrace how to negotiate and live in the dominant culture or if those parents do not possess those dominant cultural views and values about how to exist in the world or a school (Milner, 2010).

Myth of Meritocracy

A third area of this opportunity gap explanatory framework, myth of meritocracy, considers that while some educators have a difficult time confronting matters of race and accordingly adopt color blindness in their work, I have found that they readily identify disparities in students' socioeconomic status as causes of opportunity gaps and mostly as explanations for achievement gaps (Milner, 2006). Educators appear to be more at ease, confident, and comfortable reflecting about, reading, and discussing how socioeconomics,

particularly, resources related to wealth and poverty, influence educational disparities, inequities, outcomes, and opportunities (Milner, 2010). However, while educators appear more comfortable addressing socioeconomic status and class, they sometimes misunderstand the socioeconomic status–education nexus. Their conceptions of what class is and how it affects their students, their students’ parents, and their own families can be grossly inaccurate and inadequate.

In my research, I have learned that educators may embrace the idea that their own, their parents, and their students’ success and status have all been earned (see, e.g., Milner, 2010). They may believe that failure is solely a result of making bad choices and decisions—for example, an individual’s choice not to put forth effort in a class. Unearned opportunities are sometimes passed down from one generation to the next. Yet many educators believe that their own success is merited because they have worked hard, followed the law, had the ability and skill, and made the right choices and decisions. They have little or no conception of how class and socioeconomic privilege and opportunity manifest. For instance, wealthy or middle-class teachers of any racial background can fail to recognize their economic privilege and can fail to understand what opportunities this privilege affords them (Kozol, 2005). Teachers in general can fail to understand that they have gained their status through a wide range of unearned advantages, chances, circumstances, and consequences (Milner, 2010). People who grow up in poverty or those from lower socioeconomic statuses generally do not start their educational or life experiences in a fair or equitable position (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

At the center of the meritocracy argument for student success is opportunity. That is, U.S. society is philosophically and ideologically structured such that all people are supposedly created equally with the *same* opportunities for success. In reality, however, educational practices and opportunities are not equal or equitable. There is enormous variation in students’ social, economic, historic, political, and educational opportunities, which is in stark contrast to the “American dream”—one that adopts and supports meritocracy as its creed or philosophy. Still, many educators believe that if people—their students, in particular—just work hard enough, they will be rewarded and will achieve success. They can fail to recognize systemic barriers and institutional structures that prevent opportunity and success, even when students are hard-working. If the meritocracy argument were accurate, sociologist James Henslin (2004) wrote,

all positions would be awarded on the basis of merit. If so, ability should predict who goes to college. Instead, family income is the best

predictor—the more a family earns, the more likely their children are to go to college. . . . While some people do get ahead through ability and hard work, others simply inherit wealth and the opportunities that go with it. . . . In short, factors far beyond merit give people their positions in society. (p. 174)

Thus, meritocracy seems to be a myth because it maintains that any person living in U.S. society will achieve the “American dream,” as long as he or she has the ability, works hard, is effortful, follows the law, and makes good decisions. However, opportunity gaps can “undermine one of our most powerful and core beliefs that we as Americans cling to: that no matter what circumstances children are born into, all have the opportunity to become educated and, if they work hard, to pursue their dreams” (Randolph-McCree & Pristoop, 2005, p. 2).

This philosophy can reject institutionalized and systemic issues and barriers that permeate policies and practices such as racism, sexism, classism, and discrimination both in the classroom and in society. The meritocracy argument does not appropriately take into consideration social reproduction and property: Wealthier students often inherit—materially, physically, socially, and culturally—capital and property that have been and continues to be passed down from one generation to the next (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

A permeating theme of a meritocratic way of seeing the world centers around a we-they binary that some adopt as they position themselves and their “earned” success in opposition and relation to others. Apple (2006) maintained that

the binary opposition of we-they becomes important. . . . For dominant groups, “we” are law-abiding, hardworking, decent, and virtuous. “They”—usually poor people and immigrants—are very different. They are lazy, immoral, and permissive. These binary oppositions act to exclude indigenous people, women, the poor, and others from the community of worthy individuals. (p. 22)

These dichotomous, binary conceptions can allow people to rationalize their successes as those that have been earned through their being law-abiding, hardworking, and virtuous. An important question in this regard is the following: How can we expect students to have the same outcomes on achievement measures when structural inequities place some groups of students in poorly run schools with fewer resources and underqualified teachers while others receive the opposite?

Ethnographer Jay MacLeod (1995) explained that “schools actually reinforce social inequality while pretending to do the opposite” sometimes because educators refuse to see meritocracy for what it is and blame students for realities far beyond their control (p. 11). In addition, when educators do not understand how educational opportunity and economic realities are linked, they can avoid developing and constructing learning opportunities that help students understand inequity and also help students transform their lives to circumvent poverty and low-paying positions and careers in society.

Low Expectations and Deficit Mindsets

I have introduced three interrelated and central tenets of this analytic framework: color blindness, cultural conflicts, and myth of meritocracy. A fourth explanatory lens to consider when analyzing and addressing opportunity gaps in educational practices concerns low expectations and deficit mindsets that teachers and other educators sometimes have of students. Low expectations and deficit mindsets can make it difficult for educators to develop learning opportunities that challenge students cognitively. For instance, educators may believe that some students cannot master rigorous curriculum materials, and consequently, they may avoid designing important challenging learning opportunities for students (Ford, 2010; Gay, 2010). Educators may perceive what culturally diverse students possess in terms of knowledge and skills as liabilities rather than assets and resources from which to build. Where cultural deficit theories are concerned, gifted education researcher Donna Ford (1996) wrote,

These theories carry a “blame the victim” orientation, and supporters look upon Blacks and other minority groups as not only culturally but also intellectually inferior. According to deficit theories or perspectives, “different” is equated with deficient, inferior, and substandard. (p. 84)

When educators do recognize student assets, they sometimes struggle to understand how they can scaffold those assets or strengths with learning opportunities in the classroom (Milner, 2010). Accordingly, at times, student assets are not appropriately used as anchors to make instructional connections, and educators continue teaching in ways that avoid or overlook the brilliance and talents that students possess.

I have learned that educators’ conceptions and beliefs that lead to low expectations and deficit mindsets may materialize out of (a) conversations they have had among and between themselves about students perhaps in a

teacher's lounge, (b) their interpretations of student results on standardized tests—sometimes even before they have met the student, (c) historical perceptions they have developed from their families about particular groups of students, or (d) isolated negative experiences educators have had with particular groups of people (Milner, 2010). Regardless of the source, such deficit mindsets and low expectations can be transferred into instructional designs and practices and can prove detrimental to student academic and social success.

Due to a deficit mindset, educators sometimes believe they are actually doing students a favor by not developing challenging learning opportunities. These lowered expectations emerge in how and what they teach, and unchallenging content is often irrelevant and unresponsive to students' lives, experiences, and needs (Gay, 2010). For example, educators may not give students opportunities to engage in critical thinking, or they may fail to design a learning environment where students can be creative or offer views that differ from a teacher's or a textbook's explanations.

Educators may believe their students are incapable of academic success and thus may expect and accept only mediocre performance from students. Students, in turn, meet the low expectations set because they do not find what the teacher is proposing to be relevant or important to them. This approach seems to contribute to an unending and involving cycle: Educators do not teach with rigor and high expectations; students do not learn, or they learn a low level of knowledge and skill; students' test scores suffer, and then all involved may wonder why. I have learned that the blame for failure is too often placed on students (or their parents), without any serious interrogation of the role that educators and educational systems and structures play in the maintenance of the status quo (Milner, 2010).

Context-Neutral Mindsets

Thus far, I have outlined several important concepts to assist researchers and theorists in understanding, analyzing, and naming opportunity or the lack thereof through educational practices: color blindness, cultural conflicts, myth of meritocracy, and low expectations and deficit mindsets. The fifth and final concept introduced in this framework, a context-neutral mindset, is also essential in thinking about opportunity gaps in educational practice. Educators and students live in social contexts that have a huge bearing on their development, thinking, and behaviors. Social contexts of schools and communities can reinforce the status quo or in fact disrupt or interrupt it. Context-neutral mindsets do not allow educators to recognize deep-rooted and ingrained realities embedded in a particular place, such as a school in a particular community.

The social context should be considered when attempting to understand opportunity and the impact it has on educators' and students' performance and outcomes. Consider, for instance, the following contextually grounded examples that can inevitably and perhaps inadvertently influence the nature of opportunity for both teachers and students. I have adapted many of these examples from policy analyst Paul Barton's (2003) *Parsing the Achievement Gap: Baseline for Tracking Progress*:

- There is a disproportionate number of new educators in urban and high-poverty schools; students whose teachers have 5 years of experience or more make 3 to 4 months more progress in reading during a school year.
- Teachers are absent from school more often in urban and high-poverty schools in comparison to schools in other locations; as a result, students in urban schools are taught by substitute teachers, many of whom are not trained in subject matter domains or instructional strategies, approaches, and techniques necessary to help students learn.
- There is often a lack of commitment and persistence among new educators in urban and high-poverty schools. Educators graduate from college and teacher education programs and work in urban and high-poverty schools until another position becomes available in what teachers may perceive as a "more desirable" location.
- There is a disproportionate number of educators teaching outside their field of expertise in urban and high-poverty schools.
- Money and resources are inequitable in different social contexts: Numbers of high-need districts, where resources are low, too often receive the same resources as districts with much greater resources. Some districts distribute

equally funded programs into schools regardless of how many students need them. For example, a district might allocate \$100,000 to each school with English-language learners, even though one school might have 200 students with limited English proficiency and another—often a more affluent school—might have only 20 [students]. (Roza, 2006, p. 11)

It is no secret that urban and high-poverty schools face persistent challenges that may put student learning opportunities in jeopardy (Anyon, 1980; Kozol, 2005; Tate, 2008). Educators' knowledge and ability to understand and disentangle how factors presented above as well as similar ones can

influence students' opportunities is critical, as such understanding can allow us to think about how a social context shapes opportunity rather than focus primarily on the students themselves, on achievement gaps, or on an end result or outcome, such as a test score. Focusing on what happens when the contextual factors above are in place allows researchers and theorists to address opportunity structures and realities and to uncover some of the logical reasons why too many culturally diverse students are underserved in schools across the United States. For instance, focusing on absenteeism among educators in urban and high-poverty schools can help us understand the necessity for student opportunities to receive instruction from highly qualified educators rather than from substitute teachers who may not have the necessary subject matter or context knowledge to teach effectively. In a similar vein, it is not enough for educators to have deep subject matter knowledge if they lack deeply situated context-centered knowledge (Milner, 2010). It is insufficient for teachers to possess subject matter knowledge in science when they do not understand how to teach science to particular students in a particular social context. Sadly, I have observed that many education researchers and theorists treat these two important dimensions of knowledge (subject matter knowledge and social context knowledge) separately, in terms of theory, research, and practice. Consequently, the research literature suffers, and what we know about educational practices that may better meet the needs of all students is underdeveloped.

There is also an added problem when educators believe that issues of race and diversity are insignificant in mostly White social contexts. Banks (1998) explained that diversity studies and multicultural education are "to help *all* students, *including White mainstream students*, to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they will need to survive and function effectively in a future U.S. society" (p. 23; emphasis added). Centralizing notions of race, diversity, and multicultural education, then, are not only important for students of color, linguistically diverse learners, or students who have some type of special learning need; to the contrary, students in the mainstream of learning, namely, White students and students who grow up with some degrees of wealth from any racial background in a range of social contexts, should also focus on these matters (Lewis, 2001; Milner, 2005).

It is important for educators to deeply understand both the broader and more localized social context that shapes their work. Relevant, effective, and responsive teaching requires that educators know more than their subject matter (Milner, 2010); they must understand the differences, complexities, and nuances inherent in what it means to teach in urban, suburban, and rural environments. Thus, learning about opportunity gaps should provide a space

for researchers to interrogate, challenge, and operationalize what it means to live and learn in different social contexts.

Recommendations and Conclusions

I conclude this article with several recommendations for three interrelated groups in light of my argument for emphases on opportunity gaps in educational practices. I focus the recommendations for new researchers, seasoned researchers, and practitioners (mainly teachers, principals, and counselors) in an attempt to help these professionals think about the utility of the framework I share in this article. One important recommendation is for those researchers, namely, professors, who are preparing new students in higher education to become researchers. I am hopeful that seasoned researchers who are preparing new researchers will assist in broadening conceptions, paradigms, worldviews, research, and methodological practices to focus on educational processes, structures, and systems and not solely those regarding achievement outcomes. In this way, the field will be able to continue building knowledge about some of the pressing *underlying* issues that shape patterns and disparities that exist in education. When we at least expand the culture of our practices of inquiry as researchers and envision our research designs, others may expand their ideologies about what matters as well. For example, when researchers build knowledge about the links between cultural conflicts and opportunity, teachers, principals, and counselors in P-12 schools may place more attention on addressing cultural conflicts and deepen their understanding about how such conflicts can have lasting influence on not only opportunity but also achievement.

In addition to the recommendation to expand the culture of our research designs among new researchers in education, the framework also has important practical implications for practitioners themselves, especially teachers, principals, and counselors. It seems that the framework can help teachers think deeply about what they are doing in their practices and why in their social contexts. The idea is that teachers understand that there are many reasons some students do not perform well on standardized tests, for instance. Some of the challenges that students face are far beyond a teacher's control. For instance, teachers cannot control whether students' parents are college educated or whether parents have the ability or will to help students complete their homework. However, the framework can help teachers think about some of the areas where they *do* have some control and also focus on some of the assets that parents actually have rather than focusing on what may be absent.

Teachers can control whether they will be color-blind in their practices. They can think seriously about how they will identify and address cultural conflicts with their students. Teachers can also broaden their mindsets and understandings about how people succeed in society and in the classroom. Accordingly, they can see meritocracy for what it is: Factors far beyond merit afford people their opportunities and success in society and also in the classroom. Teachers can also think about and reconceptualize their low expectations and deficit mindsets that they may have and hold about particular groups of students, especially culturally diverse students. And finally, teachers can refuse to teach without understanding how the localized and broader social contexts shape students' experiences and, consequently, their success. Thus, a second recommendation is for teachers to think about the framework and to adopt practices that may challenge their thinking and practices that can negatively influence students' experiences and, consequently, performance because they are focused on opportunity structures rather than solely achievement gaps.

A third recommendation is for researchers and theorists to critique and build on and from the framework. While I believe this framework offers an alternative and an expanded way for researchers and theorists to approach, research, and theorize about educational practice, I also recognize that the framework can be expanded in our collective effort to understand opportunity structures that can influence the kinds of interventions, supports, and experiences possible to support all students. Thus, I encourage researchers and theorists to critique the framework but also to provide alternatives and complementary constructs and frameworks to assist in building knowledge about students, teachers, and their experiences in and through educational practices.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. *African American* and *Black* will be used interchangeably throughout this article.
2. Although similar, *equity* and *equality* are not synonyms. They are different in that *equality* means "sameness," while *equity* is more responsive and context

specific. In his mathematics research, Walter Secada (1989) pointed to a major difference between equality and equity. He wrote,

There is a history of using terms like equity and equality of education interchangeably. Though these constructs are related, equality is group-based and quantitative. Equity can be applied to groups or to individuals; it is qualitative in that equity is tied to notions of justice. (p. 23)

Equity, according to Secada, is defined as judgments about whether or not a given state of affairs is just. For instance, equity in education may mean that we are attempting to provide students, regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic background, with what they need to succeed—not necessarily the exact same goals and visions across multiple and varied environments.

3. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that although studies and conceptual discussions examining race existed in the field of education and have been established for many years, the field of education suffered from lack of analytic tools to assist in explaining empirical and theoretical arguments related to race. Ladson-Billings and Tate argued that race was undertheorized, not underresearched, in education and that although studies existed in the field of education that examined race as its central focus, the field suffered from a lack of conceptual and analytic tools to discuss race, operationalize it, and ultimately, move the field forward. In a similar way, I offer this framework to help situate and frame related studies of opportunity in education to move the field forward.
4. For instance, in literacy, knowledge about and achievement related to traditional canonical readings from authors such as William Shakespeare or Charles Dickens are considered high culture, while African American literature written by authors such as Zora Neale Hurston or James Baldwin, for instance, may be classified as low culture (from a White-dominated societal perspective).
5. Ladson-Billings (2001) provided an astounding picture of the diversity teachers may encounter in P-12 schools, explaining that

not only [will teachers encounter] . . . multiracial or multiethnic [students] but they [students] are also likely to be diverse along linguistic, religious, ability, and economic lines. . . . Today teachers walk into urban classrooms with children who represent an incredible range of diversity. Not only are students of different races and ethnicities, but there are students whose parents are incarcerated or drug-addicted, whose parents have never held a steady job, whose parents are themselves children (at least chronologically), and who are bounced from one foster home to the next. And there are children who have no homes or parents. (p. 14)

6. Throughout this article, I use *culturally diverse students* to refer to African American students, Latino/Latina American students, students whose first language is not English, and those living in poverty. I recognize that each person possesses layers of diversity; however, for the sake of space and clarity, I use *culturally diverse students*. In other cases, I use *students of color* to refer mainly to African American and Latino/Latina American students.
7. White students are viewed as the norm by which all others are compared. Even when other racial and ethnic groups, such as Asian students, “outperform” White students on academic measures, they are still compared to the norm: White students.
8. Some sociologists would argue that it is actually ineffectual to focus extensive amounts of time comparing one group with another (see, for instance, Carter, 2005).
9. The *curriculum* can be defined as what students have the opportunity to learn in schools (Eisner, 1994; McCutcheon, 2002). Curriculum theorist Elliott Eisner (1994) postulated several important forms of the curriculum: (a) The explicit curriculum concerns student-learning opportunities that are overtly taught and stated or printed in documents, policies, and guidelines, such as in course syllabi or on school websites; (b) the implicit curriculum is intended or unintended but is not stated or written down and is actually inherent to what students have the opportunity to learn; (c) a third form of curriculum, the null curriculum, deals with what students do not have the opportunity to learn. Thus, information and knowledge that are not available for student learning are also a form of the curriculum because students are actually learning something on the basis of what is not emphasized, covered, or taught. What students do not experience in the curriculum becomes messages for them. For example, if educators are not taught to question, critique, or critically examine power structures, the students are learning something—possibly that it may not be essential for them to critique power structures and the world in order to improve it. From Eisner’s perspective, what is *absent* is essentially *present* in student learning opportunities.
10. *Culture* can be defined as a group of people who possess and share deep-rooted connections, such as values, beliefs, languages, customs, and norms. Yet culture is not a static concept, “a category for conveniently sorting people according to expected values, beliefs, and behaviors” (Dyson & Genishi, 1994, p. 3). Rather, culture is dynamic and encompasses other concepts that relate to its central meaning. The supplemental categories that make up culture include, but are not limited to, identity (race and ethnicity), socioeconomic status, class, economic status, sexual orientation, and gender.
11. Hip-hop culture, some would argue, is a culture that allows youth to live and engage in customs and experiences that allow them to express themselves through music, film, art, and other forms of expression that can run counter to more mainstream and dominant forms of living and being in society. Beachum

and McCray (2011), Hill (2009), and Irizarry (2009) explained that educators have successfully incorporated features of hip-hop culture in the classroom to make teaching and learning more relevant, responsive, and accessible to youth. From Hill's (2009) perspective, hip-hop can be used to "improve student motivation, teach critical media literacy, foster critical consciousness, and transmit disciplinary knowledge" (p. 2).

12. Classroom management continues to be a serious concern for most educators, especially new educators (Melnick & Meister, 2008). Educators' concerns are sometimes exacerbated when considering classroom management in urban and highly diverse settings. In the 39th annual Gallup Poll, Rose and Gallup (2007) found that the public consistently ranked "discipline" as one of the top five problems that schools face.

References

- Anyon, J. (1980). Social class and the hidden curriculum of work. *Journal of Education*, 162(1), 366-391.
- Apple, M. W. (2006). Understanding and interrupting neoliberalism and neoconservatism in education. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 1(1), 21-26.
- Artiles, A. J., Klingner, J. K., & Tate, W. F. (2006). Representation of minority students in special education: Complicating traditional explanations. *Educational Researcher*, 35(6), 3-5.
- Banks, J. A. (1998). The lives and values of researchers: Implications for educating citizens in a multicultural society. *Educational Researcher*, 27(7), 4-17.
- Banks, J. A. (2001). Citizenship education and diversity: Implications for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(1), 5-16.
- Barton, P. E. (2003). *Parsing the achievement gap: Baseline for tracking progress*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Services.
- Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2010). *The Black-White achievement gap: When progress stopped*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Services.
- Beachum, F. D., & McCray, C. R. (2011). *Cultural collision and collusion: Reflections on hip-hop culture, values, and schools*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Blanchett, W. J. (2006). Disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education: Acknowledging the role of White privilege and racism. *Educational Researcher*, 35(6), 24-28.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *School in capitalist America*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Carter, P. L. (2005). *Keepin' it real: School success beyond Black and White*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Chapman, T. K. (2007). Interrogating classroom relationships and events: Using portraiture and critical race theory in educational research. *Educational Researcher*, 36(3), 156-162.

- Chubb, J. E., & Loveless, T. (Eds.). (2002). *Bridging the achievement gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Davis, J. E., & Jordan, W. J. (1994). The effects of school context, structure, and experiences on African American males in middle and high school. *Journal of Negro Education, 63*(4), 570-587.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Dillard, C. B. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(6), 661-681.
- Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2005). Turn up that radio teacher: Popular cultural pedagogy in new century urban schools. *Journal of School Leadership, 15*, 284-308.
- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (1994). *The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Eisner, E. W. (1994). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs*. New York, NY: MacMillan College.
- Ford, D. Y. (1996). *Reversing underachievement among gifted Black students: Promising practices and programs*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Ford, D. Y. (2010). *Reversing underachievement among gifted Black students*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Foster, M. (1999). Race, class, and gender in education research: Surveying the political terrain. *Educational Policy, 13*(1/2), 77-85.
- Foster, M. (1997). *Black teachers on teaching*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G., & Howard, T. (2000). Multicultural teacher education for the 21st century. *Teacher Educator, 36*(1), 1-16.
- Gordon, B. M. (1990). The necessity of African-American epistemology for educational theory and practice. *Journal of Education, 172*(3), 88-106.
- Haberman, M. (1991). Pedagogy of poverty versus good teaching. *Phi Delta Kappan, 73*(4), 290-293.
- Henslin, J. M. (2004). *Essentials of sociology: A down-to-earth approach* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Hill, M. L. (2009). *Beats, rhymes + classroom life: Hip hope pedagogy + the politics of identity*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Howard, T. C. (2001). Telling their side of the story: African American students' perceptions of culturally relevant teaching. *Urban Review, 33*(2), 131-149.
- Howard, T. C. (2010). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- Irizarry, J. G. (2009). Representin': Drawing from hip hop and urban youth culture to inform teacher education. *Education and Urban Society*, 41(4), 489-515.
- Irvine, J. J. (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: Seeing with a cultural eye*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Irvine, J. J. (2010). Foreword. In H. R. Milner's (Ed.), *Culture, curriculum, and identity in education* (pp. xi-xvi). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jencks, C., & Phillips, M. (Eds.). (1998). *The Black-White test score gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Jenkins, T. S. (2006). The challenges of educating Black males within American society. *Journal of Black Studies*, 37(1), 127-155.
- Johnson, L. (2002). "My eyes have been opened": White teachers and racial awareness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 153-167.
- Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of a nation*. New York, NY: Crown Books.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives: Preparing teachers to teach African American students. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 206-214.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2004). New directions in multicultural education: Complexities, boundaries, and critical race theory. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 50-65). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, B. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-67.
- Lewis, A. E. (2001). There is no "race" in the schoolyard: Colorblind ideology in an (almost) all White school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 781-811.
- MacLeod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood*. San Francisco, CA: Westview Press.
- McCutcheon, G. (2002). *Developing the curriculum: Solo and group deliberation*. Troy, NY: Educators' Press International.
- Melnick, S. A., & Meister, D. G. (2008). A comparison of beginning and experienced teachers' concerns. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 31(3), 39-56.
- Milner, H. R. (2005). Developing a multicultural curriculum in a predominantly White teaching context: Lessons from an African American teacher in a suburban English classroom. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 35(4), 391-427.
- Milner, H. R. (2006). Preservice teachers' learning about cultural and racial diversity: Implications for urban education. *Urban Education*, 41(4), 343-375.

- Milner, H. R. (2010). *Start where you are, but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Milner, H. R., & Williams, S. M. (2008). Analyzing education policy and reform with attention to race and socio-economic status. *Journal of Public Management and Social Policy*, 14(2), 33-50.
- Monroe, C. R. (2006). Misbehavior or misinterpretation? Closing the discipline gap through cultural synchronization. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 42(4), 161-165.
- Monroe, C. R., & Obidah, J. E. (2004). The influence of cultural synchronization on a teacher's perceptions of disruption: A case study of an African-American middle-school classroom. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(3), 256-268.
- Morris, J. E. (2004). Can anything good come from Nazareth? Race, class, and African American schooling and community in the urban South and Midwest. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(1), 69-112.
- Nieto, S. (1994). Lessons from students on creating a chance to dream. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(4), 392-426.
- Noguera, P. A. (2003). Schools, prisons, and social implications of punishment: Rethinking disciplinary practices. *Theory Into Practice*, 42(4), 341-350.
- Obidah, J. E., & Teel, K. M. (2001). *Because of the kids: Facing racial and cultural differences in schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- O'Connor, C., & Fernandez, S. D. (2006). Race, class, and disproportionality: Reevaluating the relationship, poverty and special education placement. *Educational Researcher*, 35(6), 6-11.
- Pino, N. W., & Smith, W. L. (2004). African American students, the academic ethic, and GPA. *Journal of Black Studies*, 35(1), 113-131.
- Randolph-McCree, I., & Pristoop, E. (2005). *The funding gap 2005: Low-income and minority students shortchanged by most states. A special report by the Education Trust*. Washington, DC: Education Trust.
- Rose, L. C., & Gallup, A. M. (2007). The 39th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's attitude toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(1), 33-45.
- Roza, M. (2006). *How districts shortchange low-income and minority students*. Washington, DC: Education Trust.
- Secada, W. G. (1989). Agenda setting, enlightened self-interest, and equity in mathematics education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 66(2), 22-56.
- Sheurich, J., & Young, M. (1997). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased? *Educational Researcher*, 26(4), 4-16.
- Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *Urban Review*, 34(4), 317-342.

- Stanfield, J. H. (1995). The myth of race and the human sciences. *Journal of Negro Education*, 64, 218-231.
- Tate, W. F. (2008). Geography of opportunity: Poverty, place, and educational outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, 37(7), 397-411.
- Tatum, B. D. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 1-24.
- Tillman, L. C. (2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches: An African-American perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 31(9), 3-12.
- Zumwalt, K., & Craig, E. (2005). Teachers' characteristics: Research on the demographic profile. In M. C. Smith & K. M. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education* (pp. 111-156). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bio

H. Richard Milner, IV is an associate professor of education in the Department of Teaching and Learning with a secondary appointment in the Department of Leadership, Policy, and Organizations at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. His research, teaching and policy interests are urban education, teacher education, and the sociology of education. He is also editor in chief of the journal *Urban Education*. His work has appeared in journals such as *Educational Researcher*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Urban Education*, *Journal of Teacher Education*, and *Race, Ethnicity and Education*. His most recent book, *Start Where You Are, but Don't Stay There: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps, and Teaching in Today's Classroom* (Harvard Education Press), received the 2012 American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Outstanding Book Award and the 2011 American Educational Studies Association Critics' Choice Book Award.