

**EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES THAT DECREASE OPPORTUNITY GAPS IN LITERACY**

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ABSTRACT

Historically, research in regards to the instruction of culturally and linguistically diverse students focuses predominantly on a comparison to mainstream culture as well as the use of primary language separate from the second language. The traditional approach focuses on a deficit lens, or perceived deficiencies of culturally and linguistically diverse students in comparison to a mainstream monolingual culture. This research perspective establishes one language and as a result, one culture, as dominant. Despite a large body of research on the need for high quality rigorous instruction to support linguistically and culturally diverse students, minimal research focuses on instructional approaches to support diverse student literacy. This paper discusses a review of the current research literature specific to evidence based practices to support academic literacy development in students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Overall, the research findings suggest that traditional approaches to academic literacy instruction are inadequate for developing academic literacy in culturally and linguistically diverse students.

*Keywords:* Achievement gap, culturally diverse students, ELs, literacy, opportunity gaps

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**Opportunity Gaps as a Perpetuation of Systemic Educational Inequity**

The national and state trends for underserved student populations point to a problem that at its root calls for additional inspection of the educational system's policies and practices in respect to the education of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students. The current policies in place for the instruction of diverse student populations demonstrate systemic injustice and inequities in educational practices. The traditional educational approaches upheld for decades may have the consequence of excluding particular groups of students from literacy as

a basic form of education. Limited representation in literacy and curriculum, the positioning of English as the language of academics, and limits on the personal student strategies validated for learning are some of the traditional approaches implemented with students of diverse backgrounds. The longstanding underperformance trend in academic outcomes raises questions about the ways in which the American school system addresses the needs of marginalized students.

### **A Cultural Divide**

The underperformance of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations is often explained as an issue of a student achievement gap. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is an assessment of what American students should know across contents and how they demonstrate what they can do in these content areas. In the area of reading, Black, Latinx, and low socioeconomic students continue to underperform in comparison to white students (NAEP, 2019). Similarly, Black, Latinx, and low socioeconomic students continue to underperform in the area of English Language Arts administration of the California Assessment for Performance and Progress (CAASPP) while English language learners are the lowest performing group in the state of California (CDE, 2020). In light of this assessment data, it is important to note that English language learners, Blacks, Latinx, and students of poverty are likely to be taught in settings that are segregated by language, income, and ethnicity (Gándara, 2013).

English language learners are one of the fastest growing diverse student populations in the United States. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the number of English language learners in US schools grew from 3.8 million in 2000 to 4.9 million in 2016. California has the largest Emergent Bilingual population in the country constituting approximately 1.2 million students (NCES, 2019). Approximately 2.6 million students in California public schools speak a language other than English (CDE, 2020). Despite this fact, English language learners also have the most significant academic underperformance of any other student group in the United States (NCES, 2019). In mainstream culture, English language learner low academic performance is often attributed to language as a barrier to academic achievement, educational attainment, and English language acquisition (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Cummins, 2005; Milner, 2012). Despite being categorized by their language, English language learners are students with a broad range of backgrounds most who are also children of poverty and Latinx (Gándara, 2013). Comparably, discipline data trends demonstrate that students of color, in particular Black and Latinx students, are formally disciplined at a higher rate than their white classmates in ways that exclude them from classroom instruction (Hammond, 2014).

Research studies within the last decade characterize diverse student underperformance as an issue of inputs rather than outputs. Welner and Carter (2013) define an *opportunity gap* as the differences in educational experiences between linguistically and culturally diverse students and white middle class students. The opportunity gap perspective calls for educators to examine how their decisions and choices within instructional settings affect student achievement (Welner & Carter, 2013). Even within diverse school settings, English language learners may be tracked into specific classes or courses with peers of similar language characteristics (Tyson, 2013). The perspective of opportunity gaps shifts the responsibility of underperformance away from students (Welner & Carter, 2013). Opportunity gaps point to issues of inequities in educational experiences, practices, and opportunities as the inputs that ultimately result in diverse student underperformance. Some researchers suggest factors such as poor teacher preparation, monolingual and monocultural environments, lack of access to grade level curriculum, and lack of

focus on strategies to increase English learner achievement contribute to the persistent underachievement of English language learners (Gándara, 2013; Milner, 2012; Welner & Carter, 2013). Consequently, many diverse students fail to achieve educational attainment and are underprepared to attend college, or compete in the job market. Geneva Gay (2010) calls for the consideration of achievement scores as “symptoms, not causes” of the problem (pp.17-21).

Some researchers consider systemic issues as the basis for academic underperformance of diverse students. In a 1988 article for the *Harvard Educational Review*, Delpit argues there is a culture of power in all aspects of society that extends to schools and their classrooms. Power issues play out in classrooms with the assumption of specific rules that are reflective of the culture of those who are in positions of power (Delpit, 1988). Consequently, Delpit (1988) states that knowing or learning the rules of the culture of power may help with acquiring power. Delpit (1988) posits that members of the culture of power typically do not know about it or ignore it. She also states that people who do not have access to power structures are more aware of them and typically draw comparisons to their own experiences from a position of less power. Delpit (1988) explains that in some instances even when power is earned, those who are born into power constantly seek ways to devalue new members. Delpit (1988) gives examples of situations where non-white educators with equal positions to white educators have attempted to engage in dialogue about best approaches to teaching diverse students, but the white educators have dismissed these experiences because they do not fall within the notion of what the culture of power perceives as fact. Based on this information, an assumption is that in instances where culturally and linguistically diverse people enter into the culture of power through education or position, culturally and linguistically diverse perspectives remain devalued. Identity traits such as language and cultural practices linger as cultural markers that do not fit into the mainstream culture of power.

Restrictions on use of personal learning strategies limit access to learning for diverse students. As it pertains to academic text comprehension, Delpit (1988) states “to deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them” (p. 288). She calls to “agitate for change—pushing gatekeepers to open their doors to a variety of rules and codes” (Delpit, 1988, p.292). Students need to receive direction on the expected outcome of academic assignments even if they achieve that product through alternative approaches (Delpit, 1988). This suggests that formalized academic outcomes may coexist with multiple approaches to learning because in the end, students are learning to succeed in the academic setting. As early as 1988, educational leaders are called to act for change as Delpit states “...we must agitate from the top down” (p. 293). If we maintain the status quo in teaching underserved student populations, then we are denying the basic right of literacy. It is therefore the ethical duty of educational leaders in their various positions at the state, county, district, school, and classroom level to implement evidence based practices for supporting the academic literacy of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

### **The Deficit Mindset**

There is a complex relationship between language and identity (Au & Raphael, 2000). Despite the connection between language and identity, traditional practices aforementioned have positioned English as the dominant language (Au, 1998; De Los Rios, 2017; Delpit, 1988; Perry, in press) and mainstream literacy as the norm (De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press). Consequently, language proficiency classifications such as that of Long Term English Learner or LTEL may produce perceptions of lowered ability among teachers (De Los Rios, 2017). In 2009, August, Shanahan, and Escamilla (2009) contested many of the 2000 National Literacy Panel (NLP) findings on the reading achievement of English language learners because her review of the report

found that it positions monolingualism as the norm. August, Shanahan, and Escamilla (2009) found there are no references to the benefits of bilingualism or biliteracy. The panel report minimizes the existence of evidence to support sociocultural factors in literacy development (Gutierrez et al., 2002; August, Shanahan, & Escamilla, 2009). Additionally, the 2000 NLP findings did not provide bilingual frameworks (August et al., 2009). The 2000 National Literacy Panel report was more about what is not known about working with linguistically diverse students (August et al., 2009) than an attempt to define approaches to support them.

A similar review by Gutierrez et al. (2002) found the 2000 National Reading Panel report omitted reference to the large diversity across the spectrum of English language learners, and their socio-economic traits. Gutierrez et al. (2002) found other subsequent reports did the same. Instead, the focus on English language learner instruction turned to more testing, a limited literacy curriculum, and the quality of their teachers (Gutierrez, et. al, 2002). Most of the focus of these reports and studies centers on the idea of reforming or restructuring schools where English language learners attend, and on the issues that prevent them from learning (Gutierrez et al., 2002) in a deficit model perspective. Gutierrez et al. (2002) also found the 2000 NLP report found a lack of content instruction in Structured Immersion classrooms. Standardized assessments do not align with the backgrounds of culturally and linguistically diverse students causing a further increase in poor performance among this group of students (Gutierrez et al., 2002). Despite this finding, Gutierrez et al. (2002) found these testing systems and their corresponding ranking systems largely influenced decisions and services provided by districts and the communities they served. For example, the focus on assessment outcomes increased the use of scripted texts and devaluation of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations in states like California and Texas (Gutierrez et al., 2002), who have some of the largest populations of diverse students in the country (NCES, 2019).

A *deficit mindset* approach characterizes typical instruction of linguistically and culturally diverse student populations (Milner, 2010; Tyson, 2013) within mainstream instructional approaches. Milner (2010) and Tyson (2013) define a deficit mindset as the idea that culturally, economically, linguistically, and racially diverse students inherently lack the ability and intellect to succeed in school. When students are viewed through a lens of less ability or lowered intellect, they are often not presented with, the same opportunities that other students receive (Milner, 2010; Tyson, 2013). According to Milner (2010) and Tyson (2013) the materials diverse students receive for instruction are modified or at a lesser grade level therefore placing a limit on the access to grade level content. These traditional practices are oppositional to the need to create independent learners. Instead, underserved student populations remain dependent on teachers, staff, other students, and scaffolds to survive within academic settings. This dependency is one factor contributing to under-preparation for the rigor of content literacy, state assessments, and success with college entrance exams such as the SAT.

Comparably, Au and Raphael (2000) cite insistence upon the use of traditional forms of literacy ignores the potential for more powerful forms of literacy found within families and the community. Achievement tests only measure school literacy and ignore highly literate and accomplished literacies found outside of school settings (Au & Raphael, 2000). Cultural literacies such as “Doin’ Steps” are often ignored in school settings because of their source of origin outside of school culture (Au & Raphael, 2000, p. 173). Similarly, the skills learned through cultural practices often do not have a place within conventional settings because they are viewed as less valuable (Au & Raphael, 2000). Oftentimes, diverse students are placed in special education or remedial classes and are generally held to lower expectations than students that are from non-

diverse backgrounds (Au & Raphael, 2000; Hammond, 2014). The argument is that students are not receiving opportunities to engage with mainstream literacy through the more complex non-mainstream models of learning (Au & Raphael, 2000; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press). Au and Raphael (2000) write:

“The differences in perspective that underlie these controversies remind us that literacies are associated with different degrees of power, and the value of mainstream literacy may best be appreciated by those without ready access to it ” (p. 174).

In a deficit mindset academic environment, much instructional focus and time is spent solely on the purpose of getting students to learn English and less rigorous skills based tasks. Metacognitive skills (Baker, 2005) are among the skills that characterize independent learners and these skills are underdeveloped in diverse student populations due to lack of opportunity to experience rigorous lessons to develop these skills. Exclusionary practices create a sense of otherness among diverse students for not fitting in to what the mainstream considers normal.

### **Constraints of Mainstream Literacy**

Since the introduction of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and its subsequent yearly assessments for literacy progress, English language learners have struggled to meet standards. Au & Raphael (2000) contend there needs to be a revision of the definition of literacy and literacy curriculum to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. There is a correlation between motivation, engagement, and self-direction within literacy and proficiency with literacy (Au & Raphael, 2000). Their research suggests that offering more opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to engage with literacy in non-traditional ways may lead to higher proficiency outcomes with literacy in academic settings. The forms, genres, skills, strategies not commonly used in literacy instruction within schools may serve to empower diverse students because they allow them to communicate, understand, and create through the mechanisms they already possess (Au & Raphael, 2000).

In her work with home language in Hawaiian schools, Au (1988) found that linguistically diverse students generally receive fewer opportunities to use their primary language skills for reading or writing to convey their understanding of English language texts. Au’s (1988) work includes observations of a classroom where the teacher directly compared the home language to the language of school and explicitly guided the student to draw connections to the value of both within specific contexts. In traditional school settings, most students of diverse backgrounds are unable to engage with academic content present in English texts using their home languages or alternative modes of meaning making (Au, 1998; Au & Raphael, 2000; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press). As a result, many linguistically and culturally diverse students are overrepresented in remedial or modified instruction settings because they are labeled as deficient according to mainstream norms (Au, 1998; Hammond, 2014). School structures, systems, policies, and practices are reflective of societal structures of power (Au, 1998). Mainstream conventional forms of literacy are exclusionary (Au, 1998). Similarly, Garcia & Kleifgen (2019) argue that traditional literacy approaches bind students to predetermined meaning-making skills and strategies with unrepresentative text that “...ignore more than half of their linguistic and semiotic repertoire, which is then rendered invisible” (p.8). Additionally, Garcia & Kleifgen (2019) found that English language learners have often not received extensive opportunities for practice with academic language and literacy using their primary language.

A 2003 study by Gersten & Geva implements authentic language instruction through reading instruction and vocabulary development within the context of reading. The study is a variation from past studies that treat language and literacy skills as autonomous. Despite this attempt to consider language development in authentic contexts, Gersten & Geva (2003) point to explicit teaching of specific literacy skills as a basis for teaching reading to English language learners. Strategies such as explicit teaching, English language learning, phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary development, interactive teaching, and instruction geared toward low performers, were offered as successful in teaching reading to English language learners in the first grade (Gersten & Geva, 2003). The claim that skills taught in this study lead to successful reading in first graders may not apply to other grade levels as text content difficulty increases. The strategy that suggests teaching to the lowest performers is problematic because it makes a general assumption that low rigor is required for English language learners and it does not consider what Garcia and Kleifgen (2010, 2019) describe as the complexities of the social and linguistic constructs that accompany knowledge of a first language. More importantly, discussion of primary language knowledge or literacy is ignored in this study.

Despite growing research challenging the separation of the primary and secondary languages, and focus on the complex language processes of English language learners, some current research continues to maintain a focus on the status quo. For example, Day (2020) offers specific reading skills that English language learners need to learn to become successful readers. Day (2020) provides a detailed explanation of each skill with an emphasis on what he calls extensive reading. He suggests that reading many grade level books across the content areas will support English language learners in becoming proficient readers (Day, 2020). In regards to English language learner materials, Day (2020) recommends *graded readers*—books at each grade level with specific vocabulary and grammar for the particular grade level which he calls “LLL—language learner literature”(p.17). Day (2020) states that the grammar and vocabulary contained within the graded readers are the most frequent words written at a basic level. Day also makes the point that reading comprehension needs to be taught while teaching to read. He argues that comprehension cannot be taught separately from the practice of reading (Day, 2020). Day (2020) points out there are six types of reading comprehension and each type of comprehension supports student interaction with reading. Day (2020) also notes that readers must practice reading to become readers. This linear approach to teaching English language learners to read ignores the diversity of English language learners and reaffirms the position of a mainstream perspective and literacy. Day (2020) also does not offer any approaches English language learners may use as they work with language learner literature.

Furthermore, Goldenberg (2011) argues the research on English language learners has historically focused on the debate over bilingual education or oral language proficiency in English. Research on literacy development for English language learners has largely been ignored beyond stating that the same literacy skills teaching that works for English only students works for linguistically diverse students (Goldenberg, 2011). Goldenberg (2011) cautions that existing bilingual education data reflects a multicultural and multilingual setting outside of the U.S. and may not directly apply to American schools because of the monolingual mainstream culture of US schools. The research suggests that we need to consider what may constitute a meaningful context for monolingual students may not have the same meaning for a multilingual or multicultural student. Goldenberg (2011) states that most studies do not go into detail to describe effective instruction for English language learners. Either most research on instructional supports for teaching reading to English language learners is focused on skills based primary language or

English language supports (Goldenberg, 2011). Teaching oral language fluency separate from academic content instruction minimizes the complexity of academic language acquisition. Goldenberg (2011) makes the point that teaching reading to English language learners using the English language may be supported through an instructional approach that considers their diverse experiences. Traditionally, mainstream approaches demonstrate a highly politicized systemic approach to restricting diverse students' use of their language, identities, and cultures as part of their basis for academic success in academic settings (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Goldenberg, 2011). The research findings highlighted in the next section explain a variety of studies utilizing culturally and linguistically diverse student approaches to attaining academic literacy.

### **Literacy Instruction For English Language Learners**

In the years following the 2000 National Reading Panel report and subsequent continuous underperformance by diverse students on standardized assessments, it became evident to some scholars that alternatives to mainstream literacy should be considered. A study by Ernst-Slavit and Mulhern (2003) found support for the use of the first language when learning to read. Writing in a second language assists the transfer of skills from one language to another particularly when the written systems for both languages are similar (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003). Even when the written languages are different the reading strategies transfer because students who learn how to read understand that print conveys meaning, know the formal structures of language, and understand its rules (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003). Ernst-Slavit and Mulhern (2003) found that developing biliteracy in students of diverse linguistic backgrounds is important in supporting their achievement in school. The research points to the importance of allowing for reading and writing in the primary language as strategies for learning within academic settings.

In the absence of primary language instructional programs in states such as California, a practical outcome of the research is to incorporate bilingual books into literacy instruction (Goldenberg, 2011). Similarly, Ernst-Slavit and Mulhern (2003) point to the availability of bilingual books in school settings as a message that a second language is valued. Additionally, Ernst-Slavit and Mulhern (2003) found student access to bilingual books in schools serves to provide the basis for motivation as well as provides opportunities for successful reading in the familiar language. Since the 1980s, most bilingual books tailor to the Latinx population however there are now some books available in other languages (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003). Ernst-Slavit and Mulhern (2003) recommend caution when selecting books to ensure the language, its translations, and cultural content are accurate. English language learners benefit from reading books depicting their own life experiences or culture in their own language (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003). Learning to read in the first language does not imply a need to relearn reading in a second language since most literacy strategies transfer particularly when the writing of both languages is similar (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003). Goldenberg (2011) makes the point that instructional approaches that consider the experiences of diverse students may support teaching reading to English language learners. Other studies discussed later in this paper support this notion.

## **Literature Review**

### **Beyond Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Early research cites *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, the inclusion in classroom instruction of a student's home culture as it relates to their emotional, linguistic, and social perspectives (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995), as an important approach for instruction of

diverse students. The practices of Culturally Responsive Teaching support a movement away from a monolingual and monocultural school environment to one that is pluralistic and more accurately representative of the world (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995). A move to the use of non-traditional approaches emphasizes the personal agency of diverse students. Recent research on best practices for teaching academic literacy to linguistically and culturally diverse students moves into deeper analysis of aspects of language and culture to support learning in schools.

### **Home And Community Literacies**

Au (1998) contends social constructivist theories of literacy learning seek to empower learners with benefits that serve both the learner and society as a whole. She notes the academic literacy outcomes of culturally and linguistically diverse students will improve when they are provided opportunities to construct their own meaning based on their existing literacies through their own perspectives in authentic ways that lead to success in formal settings (Au, 1998). As home language use is allowed and academic text is increasingly reflective of diverse perspectives, literacy outcomes for linguistically diverse students will increase (Au, 1998). Success with the academic literacy prevalent in classrooms will increase for culturally and linguistically diverse students as the instruction and interaction becomes more culturally relevant (Au, 1998). Additionally, consultation of parents and community members to increase cultural relevance within the school setting is important to increase success with academic literacy (Au, 1998). Finally, alternative methods of assessment will increase diverse student success when these formats allow for varied non-traditional expressions of literacy (Au, 1998).

Au and Raphael (2000) found the terms we use to describe culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse students is reflective of the change in student demographics from one characterized as monocultural and monolingual to one that is increasingly multilingual and multicultural. Students of diverse backgrounds are those who differ from the mainstream culture represented within schools (Au & Raphael, 2000). Students who view the use of cultural literacies as exclusive to settings outside school may pose some resistance to use of this approach (Au & Raphael, 2000). This is often the case because cultural literacies are often closely linked to cultural identity and perceived as exclusive to members of that culture (Au & Raphael, 2000). At times, when a teacher attempts to utilize these non-traditional methods within the classroom, they appear suspicious to parents and students alike (Au & Raphael, 2000). Some parents may view these alternative approaches to instruction based in home or community cultures as attempts to limit access to education (Au & Raphael, 2000). However, recent studies (Au 1998; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019; Perry, in press) suggest allowing students to approach academic tasks using literacies familiar to students outside the school setting may increase academic learning.

In his work with Jewish communities, Ben-Yosef (2003) found similar local literacies representative of social groups and cultural topics. He also noted that literacy is social and personal knowledge about the information contained in texts as well as about the world (Ben-Yosef, 2003). Literacy comes in many forms and addresses many topics within many settings (Ben-Yosef, 2003). His findings suggest that educators can create the mindset and conditions to welcome local literacies as a foundational basis for teaching school literacy.

### **Transnational Literacies**

In De Los Rios 2017 study, *transnational literacies* are examined as a form of literacy that is often ignored within US secondary classrooms (p.456). De Los Rios' (2017) study takes into



account the personal narrative of a southern California high school student who actively engages in the communities of Tijuana and his southern California neighborhood. The student De Los Rios (2017) calls Joaquin describes his process and inspiration for writing *corridos* and she credits this process with giving voice to culturally and linguistically diverse students (pp.456-457). Equally important, the account provides a lens on the complexity of the knowledge linguistically diverse students bring to the classroom in the form of unrecognized and undervalued forms of literacy (De Los Rios, 2017). *Corridos* are a nine stanza ballad, a form of “border rhetoric” (Noe, 2009 as quoted in De Los Rios, 2017, p.457) that bring attention to sociopolitical issues in Mexico (De Los Rios, 2017). According to De Los Rios (2017), there is a need to study the language and literacy practices of transnational and immigrant youth as a means to empower them against the current intensified negative climate against cultural and linguistic diversity (p.457). Similarly, De Los Rios (2017) presents a “corrido consciousness” as a form of empowerment for Latinx, bilingual, transnational, and immigrant students in American schools (pp. 461-462). The social and political considerations of a *corrido* consciousness model draw to light the complexities of the language and literacies use of students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (De Los Rios, 2017). The literacies possessed by these youth are not recognized within mainstream classrooms (De Los Rios, 2017). De Los Rios (2017) notes few studies identify particular skills sets and literacies that culturally and linguistically diverse students bring with them to the school setting.

De Los Rios (2017) argues the racial, ethnic, and social hierarchies that currently exist within American social systems and structures date back to colonization. The idea of “border thinking” emerged from the joining of colonial and modern constructs where historical and current community practices converge (De Los Rios, 2017, p. 459). De Los Rios (2017) describes border thinking as a conceptual process for making sense of life in two settings; the United States and Mexico for students who have interactions within both settings. De Los Rios (2017) notes that Joaquin’s highly literate interactions with composing, singing, and performing *corridos* are historically unrecognized as forms of literacy within the classroom. The exception is his Chicana studies class where his teacher provides opportunities for students to explore and express their understanding of the social and political aspects of their world using any style or language that is comfortable (De Los Rios, 2017).

The data in De Los Rios’ (2017) study pointed to substantial and sophisticated literacy practices commonly utilized by Joaquin when he engaged with *corridos*. De Los Rios (2017) notes Joaquin’s literacy practices were socially acquired through his family’s interactions with the *corridos*. In his practice of memorizing, performing, and composing *corridos*, Joaquin developed a *corridista* consciousness that led to his development of a critical literacy skills set (De Los Rios, 2017). Joaquin also used *corridos* as a form of literacy that allowed him to share his expressions about family and life situations (De Los Rios, 2017). De Los Rios (2017) concludes that these alternative literacies are “rarely valued for the acute analysis of metaphor, allegory, and figurative language inherent in such cultural practices” (p. 465). She calls for taking a translanguaging (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019) stance that considers the complexities of language practices in its classroom practices and structures (De Los Rios, 2017). The use of translanguaging (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019) requires a transfer of classroom control to students within traditionally monolingual and monocultural classrooms to give voice to multilingual student perspectives (De Los Rios, 2017).

The findings suggest that the idea of a *corridista* consciousness may be more broadly applied to other non-traditional forms of literacy genres where cultural, social, and political topics are important considerations (De Los Rios, 2017). The *corridista* consciousness (De Los Rios,

2017) brings to light authentic expressions of literacy in real life contexts. Joaquin's literacy practices affirm a less common form of reading, writing, and performance influenced by social power structures (De Los Rios, 2017). It is not enough to acknowledge and embed multicultural literacies while teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Incorporating non-traditional forms of literacy in the classroom requires a deep understanding as well as a socially responsible and culturally empowering engagement within the classroom (De Los Rios, 2017). De Los Rios (2017) acknowledges there is still much research to do on the complex cognitive abilities of multilingual, multicultural students.

### **Pluriversality**

In her work with communities in Uganda, Perry (in press) discusses the concept of *pluriversal literacies* as a challenge to the dominant perspective in literature (p.4). Pluriversal literacies stem from the idea of *Pluriversality* as a way of viewing the world and individual interactions within it from multiple experiences and perspectives (Perry, in press, p.4). Pluriversal literacies seek to engage learners beyond immediate more familiar influences to a broader perspective of interactions with the world and their place within it (Perry, in press). In this approach, Perry (in press) engages a consideration of personal perspective in its context and the role of the individual within the greater universe. Pluriversal literacy requires human interaction with local, global as well as the structural and human entities within the world (Perry, in press). In her study, Perry (in press) observes that people interact in social and practical ways within social structures, and the environment. She explains that literacies exist beyond the written text in daily tasks, language, music, and non-conventional symbolic forms.

### **Translanguaging**

Changing student demographics suggest a need to approach literacy instruction in ways that differ from the historical practice of language based approaches (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). Research dating back to the introduced support for multilingual perspectives in literacy however, subsequent research, and pedagogy did not reflect support for multilingual literacy (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). Garcia & Kleifgen (2019) found the focus on literacy instruction of linguistically diverse students has always remained on primary and secondary language as separate non-intersecting languages in literacy development. The research has also generally held the idea that bilingual/multilinguals process languages separately (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019).

In their study of alternative methods of literacy instruction, Garcia & Kleifgen (2010, 2019) note the complex conceptual processing of information by bilingual and multilingual students known as *translanguaging* has a basis in sociocultural literacy and sociolinguistics to the degree in which linguistically diverse students make sense of the world using a variety of approaches to learning (p.2). Hornberger (as cited in Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019) introduced the continua of biliteracy that includes use of dialects and mainstream formalized language on opposite ends (p.3). The continua illustrate the role of common language structures in support of formalized language acquisition (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). Martin-Jones and Jones (as cited in Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019) provide a social perspective on language and learning in multilingual settings reflective of the communication of language and literacy systems rather than application of each language independent of the other (p.3). Garcia & Kleifgen (2019) posit the dynamic of language and literacies as one of unbalanced power between diverse groups. According to Garcia and Kleifgen (2019), Welsh educators established the term translanguaging to extend beyond a bilingual

pedagogy rooted in monolingualism (p.2). Garcia and Kleifgen (2019) also credit the work of Chilean biologists, Maturana and Varela as contributors to the idea of translanguaging through their concept of *lenguaje* or the process of making sense of the world through the cognitive and communicative processes in which humans engage (p.4). In Garcia and Kleifgen's (2019) own words

“Instead, language is used by people to interact as an extension of their own humanity, not always according to the rules and definitions of language by political and social institutions. Translanguaging privileges the unbounded and agentive dynamic and fluid use of bilinguals' entire linguistic repertoire” (p. 5).

In this explanation, the researchers suggest that bilinguals use language in ways that are most familiar and comfortable. This approach to language use does not conform to the structures established within schools or other systemically socialized settings.

Garcia and Kleifgen (2019) state that translanguaging is the actions bilingual or multilingual students take while using all the physical, mental, social, and linguistic resources they possess to create an understanding of the world around them. This type of action does not only involve the cognitive processes the student undertakes but includes the physical, social, and linguistic actions of a student to build meaning (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). Translanguaging is characterized by the fluid, adaptive actions that cross perceived language boundaries to create plural literacies (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019, p.2) or pluriversal literacies (Perry, in press). The proponents of the concept of translanguaging view existing approaches to literacy instruction for linguistically diverse students as unjust and restricting (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). Garcia & Kleifgen (2019) argue that traditional literacy approaches bind students to predetermined meaning-making skills and strategies with unrepresentative text that “...ignore more than half of their linguistic and semiotic repertoire, which is then rendered invisible” (p.8).

Emergent bilinguals have often not received extensive opportunities for practice with academic language and literacy (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). In their work, Garcia & Kleifgen (2019) suggest translanguaging as a scaffold in a minimal sense of its application to an expression of literacies and language resulting from socio-political interactions in its fullest application. As a result of their research with English learners, Garcia and Kleifgen (2019) offer strategies for establishing translanguaging spaces in monolingual settings. The strategies they offer are oral discussions, annotation in any mode or language, internet searches for primary language text or video versions of their school texts, use of bilingual mentor texts that connect students to their culture and experiences exemplify translanguaging, and the use of multilingual/multimodal strategies to develop comprehension of texts within university/college settings (pp.9-10). The teacher's role is to demonstrate the value of the students' language and afford opportunities for translanguaging within the classroom setting (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). Bilingual students maintain their awareness of classroom writing or academic writing norms while practicing translanguaging in either of their languages (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). More importantly, Garcia and Kleifgen (2019) found the practice of translanguaging affords students self-efficacy and empowerment free from comparisons to monolingual peers. Students should be encouraged to use multimodal forms of language such as verbal, visual, and body to collaborate with peers within classroom settings (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). Additional findings by Garcia and Kleifgen (2019) suggest that Emergent bilinguals are often excluded from enrichment opportunities so their literary experiences are restricted to limited genres and contexts. The use of translanguaging in literacy

learning increases student awareness of their bilingual practices at a level that increases their metalinguistic engagement and awareness with text (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2019). Additionally, Garcia and Kleifgen (2019) posit the findings suggest that translanguaging helps students become aware of how the multilingual strategies and skills they possess are not accounted for in standardized tests.

### **Preparing Teachers to Work with Diverse Students**

Although the student population has changed to reflect a more heterogeneous world, the population of educators and researchers remains for the most part largely unchanged (Au & Raphael, 2000). While Au & Raphael (2000) found that teachers of all backgrounds may learn to teach students of diverse backgrounds, they also found there are some teachers who view themselves as not having culture or define culture as separate from personal identity or life experiences (Au & Raphael, 2000). Au & Raphael (2000) describe a teacher demographic with less than one in every eight teachers being of a diverse background. In addition, Au & Raphael (2000) cite the numbers of researchers from diverse backgrounds is far less than the numbers of teachers from diverse backgrounds. They also discuss a need to improve teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention from diverse backgrounds (Au & Raphael, 2000). Their research suggests that some of these issues may stem from the concerns with the foundational literacy education of students from diverse backgrounds that make them less prepared for success in college and career (Au & Raphael, 2000).

One of the most essential and rare resources for English Language Learner success is teachers and leaders skilled to work with them (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Flores, 2007; Kang & Hong, 2008; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Rouse & Barrow, 2006; Samson & Lesaux, 2015; Weglinsky, 2004). Teacher preparation programs need to include instruction about language, language development, the resources students use to develop language and the concepts and ideas about the world around them (Gutierrez et al., 2002). Reading instruction needs to highlight the social, cultural, and linguistic factors involved in teaching reading (Au, 1998; De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press). Teachers of English language learners require more professional development to strengthen their knowledge and skills to teach English language learners (Gutierrez et al., 2002). All programs need to evaluate how they approach English language learner teacher preparation including programs that promote social justice issues as its premise (Gutierrez et al., 2002). Bilingual teachers receive the same certification as mainstream instruction teachers with an added knowledge base on how to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students—some would argue these teachers are better prepared (Gutierrez et al., 2002).

The hiring process and subsequent teacher assignment is very important to the academic success of marginalized students. Teacher quality, defined by years of experience, full certification, and high educational levels, has a direct impact on student achievement (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Flores, 2007; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Rouse & Barrow, 2006; Samson & Lesaux, 2015; Weglinsky, 2003). Historically, most high quality teachers are assigned to monolingual, monocultural, higher affluence students in disproportionate numbers (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Ensuring that quality teachers are working with underserved students is essential to improving academic outcomes in traditionally underperforming student groups. Teachers with limited or no training in teaching underserved student populations are more likely to hold lower expectations for them, perceive them as less able to conform to preconceived social norms, or behavior expectations (Carter, 2013). Consequently, Carter (2013) argues that limited opportunities, and experiences are offered within those classrooms.

## Discussion

### Practices for Equity in Literacy

A need for practices for equity in literacy is evident. Based on the review of research (Au, 1998; De Los Rios, 2017; Delpit, 1988; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press), there is a vast difference in the academic success of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their affluent white classmates. The difference in academic outcome trends spans decades following the implementation of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and its mandates (August et al., 2009; Goldenberg, 2011). Garcia and Kleifgen (2010, 2019) promote the term Emergent Bilinguals to describe the student population that speaks a language other than English to highlight the asset of speaking a primary language that is not the mainstream language—in this case English. An assets based mindset is a shift in focus away from the notion that what defines Emergent Bilinguals (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019) is their lack of English language proficiency and it is the antithesis of a deficit mindset (Milner, 2010; Tyson, 2013). One of the primary approaches educational leaders must adopt to improve outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students is a culture centered on an assets based mindset. The idea that cultural and linguistic differences are positive personal student characteristics that can support learning in school is central to creating an assets-based mindset.

Another consideration for equity in literacy is valuing the home language and promoting the educator's role in support of the use of the first language (L1) in developing the second language (L2) or English. Allowing for use of L1 as a support in spoken and written forms can help scaffold academic progress in English (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Goldenberg, 2011). Promoting and encouraging translanguaging so that Emergent Bilinguals can draw on their knowledge of two languages utilizing complex cognitive processes to understand the world around them and learn in academic settings (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010) is equally important. Site and district leaders should promote teaching practices that support fluid use of the first and second languages through the practice of translanguaging (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019). Additionally, they should create the conditions (Ben-Yosef, 2003) to support varied learning styles, and literacies (De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press) to support successful learning in mainstream classrooms. Part of this process requires a loss of control from classroom teachers, and site administrators to students as they allow use of the first language even when it is not a language the adults know (De Los Rios, 2017). Additionally, the loss of control extends to allow for the use of different literacies to arrive at an understanding of the topics, vocabulary, and meaning of academic literacy (De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press).

The messaging of an assets-based culture is positively focused on valuing the traits and learning approaches of students within the school environment. Student traits such as language, home literacies, social norms, and cultural norms common to the home environment or community are valued as strengths (Au, 1998; Au & Raphael, 2000; Ben-Yossef, 2003; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press) used for academic learning. An assets-based culture promotes the value of focusing on student strengths and utilizing these strengths as a means for bridging instruction. The concept of an assets-based school culture is centered on intentionally seeking ways to connect student home and community culture to the school culture. As the traits of culturally and linguistically diverse students are increasingly recognized as valid approaches to learning in the school setting, diverse students become less marginalized. Figure 1 proposes a conceptual framework for practices for equity in literacy. The figure takes into account the research discussed in the literature review as practical approaches to teaching literacy to culturally and linguistically diverse students. An explanation of the concepts follows the graphic.

Figure 1  
*Practices for Equity in Literacy*

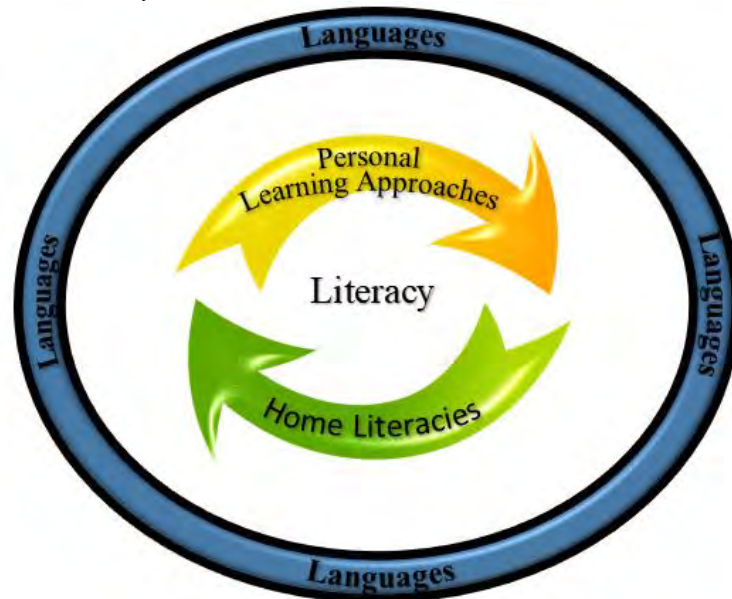


Figure 1 is a proposed framework to reduce opportunity gaps and increase equity in literacy. The figure outlines three specific systemic practices that stood out from the research in support of increasing equitable literacy opportunities for linguistically and culturally diverse students. Based on the findings of several researchers (Au & Raphael, 2000; Ben-Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press), traditional approaches to the instruction of students from diverse backgrounds are insufficient to support attainment of academic literacy. Current research specifically focuses on non-traditional methods for improving English learner outcomes (Au & Raphael, 2000; Ben-Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press). The literacy of schools is best attained through the basis of home literacies or the literacies practiced among the family, community, or religions, etc. (Au, 1998; Ben-Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press). Home literacies may not necessarily consist of print and may take many forms as well as address many topics or experiences (Au, 1998; Ben-Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press). Students from diverse backgrounds may use multiple approaches (De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press) and process their understanding of topics using their language processes (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019) to express their academic literacies. These personal approaches to learning can take on any form or method personally known to the student. Students' languages vary from the spoken languages of Emergent Bilinguals (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019), and signs, symbols, gestures, drawings representative of personal interactions with the world (Perry, in press). The figure represents a complimentary interaction among the different skills, strategies, and approaches a diverse student may possess and use in their process toward gaining academic literacy. Developing academic literacy or the literacy of school is a process that takes time and relevant instructional approaches. The figure does not suggest replacing English as the language of the classroom however, it does suggest allowing the use of other languages in text, written, or spoken forms, and non-traditional literacies to support literacy in the English language within academic settings.

Evidence based practices and policies specifically proven to reduce opportunity gaps and increase academic literacy for diverse students should be at the center of the decisions educators make and provide within a school setting. The reading data trend for English language learners, Blacks, Latinx, and students of low socioeconomic backgrounds calls for action for change from the status quo. As an overwhelming majority of Emergent Bilinguals (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019) and students from other underserved student groups continue to experience marginalization in mainstream culture centered classrooms (Au, 1998; De Los Rios, 2017; Delpit, 1988; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press), it is especially important to prioritize literacy instruction as one of the most powerful mediums to increase academic achievement. The steps that all educators can take to support the process of developing equity in literacy for underserved student populations are explained in the next section.

### **Focus Areas to Increase Equity in Literacy**

Table 1 illustrates four key areas to support work towards elimination of opportunity gaps and to increase equity in literacy for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Table 1

#### *Focus Areas to Increase Equity in Literacy*

<b>Focus Areas to Increase Equity in Literacy</b>	
Build an Assets Based School Culture	Understand and communicate cultural and language differences as assets that support learning (Au, 1998; Au & Raphael, 2000; Ben-Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Goldenberg, 2011; Perry, in press).
Support the Use of Home Literacies & Languages	Provide a school culture where home languages (Au, 1998; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Goldenberg, 2011), personal literacies (Ben-Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press), and life experiences (De Los Rios, 2017; Perry, in press) are valued and integrated into instruction.
Encourage Multiple Approaches to Learning	Allow and encourage the use of non-traditional approaches to make meaning of academic texts and contexts (De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2017; Goldenberg, 2011; Perry, in press).
Engage & Integrate Parent and Community Perspectives	Actively seek the input of parents and community members to determine the best approaches to facilitate academic literacy for diverse students (Au, 1998).

### **Table Summary**

#### **Build an Assets Based School Culture**

Educators need to demonstrate they understand and communicate cultural and language differences as assets that support learning in academic settings. They may do this by creating an inclusive environment that welcomes diversity in language, literacies, and personal learning approaches (Au, 1998; Ben-Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press). Educators should seek ways to feature and celebrate the many cultures represented in the school setting as a means of reciprocal teaching and learning and respectful collaboration.

### **Support the Use of Home Languages and Literacies**

Administrators at all levels as well as teachers and support staff should model a school culture where languages, literacies, and experiences practiced in the home or community are valued and integrated into instruction. Several studies demonstrate that non-traditional approaches to literacy instruction are successful in supporting culturally and linguistically diverse students with learning in academic settings (Au, 1998; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press). As literacy curriculum and instruction for diverse students is considered, social and linguistic practices as contexts for learning (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, 2020) should also be embedded in instructional settings. These considerations extend to ensuring representation of diverse perspectives, and experiences in reading materials used for instruction. A plan for frequent professional development opportunities should reflect support for teacher development of skills with teaching reading instruction to culturally and linguistically diverse students (Goldenberg, 2011). Literacy instruction pedagogy should strive to create independent readers that engage in reading with metacognitive skills (Baker, 2005) that transfer in application to new unfamiliar texts of varying genres, and for differing purposes.

### **Encourage Multiple Approaches to Learning**

Educational policies and practices should allow and encourage the use of non-traditional approaches to make meaning of academic texts and contexts (Au, 1998; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press). Classroom lessons should also include strategic student interaction with their learning environment, each other, and the content (Perry, in press). Site administrators should develop school-wide systems for strategic practice of the language of textbooks and academia for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Support for teachers should include developing their capacity to discern and utilize rigorous student to student and student to teacher discussion centered on academic content using academic language.

### **Engage and Integrate Parent and Community Perspectives**

Actively seek the input of parents and community members to determine the best approaches to facilitate academic literacy for diverse students (Au, 1998). Educators in positions at state, local, district, and classroom settings should actively seek the collaboration of parents and community members to develop systems that will provide relevant support for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Encouraging continuous participation of parents in planning for practices and policies will support a mutual understanding of support for diverse student populations.

## **Implications for Literacy Research and Practical Application**

### **Future research**

Future research should focus on continuing studies in the practical application of translanguaging (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019) in academic settings in US states with large numbers of English language learners. The research should focus on the use of translanguaging (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019) within districts, schools, and classrooms over several years with the intent of collecting data quantifying impact of its use on academic outcomes in English classroom settings.

Additional research with use of Pluriversality (Perry, in press) within classroom settings is necessary to determine its impact with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Adaptation



to K-12 settings may yield different findings pertaining to the development of self-awareness, and agency for students in relation to the larger concept of global, and social perspectives.

Similarly, the use of multiple forms of literacies (Au, 1998; Ben Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press) should be studied in a more generalized sense within the context of mainstream classrooms in schools with large numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Specific attention should be given to the types of literacies students engage with outside the school setting and how those literacies can be bridged to support learning in the classroom.

### **Recommendations for Practical Application**

A recommendation for practical application that may begin to address many of the concerns presented in the research is to develop a teacher preparation pathway for high school students in schools with students from predominantly diverse backgrounds. This pathway may provide culturally and linguistically diverse students a way to earn their high school diploma simultaneously with an Associate of Arts (AA) degree in Early Childhood Education. Students who earn the degree would then be able to work as instructional support staff in schools with high enrollment of students from diverse backgrounds and eventually attain a teaching credential to work in similar schools. Providing an opportunity to earn an AA degree while still in high school may begin to support the development of a teacher workforce that is more diverse and empathetic to the issues of students with similar life experiences and languages. Teaching high school students foundational courses in early childhood education pedagogy would allow teacher credentialing programs to include extensive culturally and linguistically diverse pedagogy for all teaching credential candidates.

Teacher credentialing programs should include several core classes on multiple literacies (Ben-Yosef, 2003; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press), multiple perspectives (Ay, 1998; Au & Raphael, 2000; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Perry, in press), and integration of primary language (Au, 1998; De Los Rios, 2017; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010, 2019; Goldenberg, 2011) into daily learning approaches. State credentialing requirements should restructure pedagogy to include recognition of varied languages, literacies, and personal approaches as valid forms of learning in mainstream classrooms. Credentialing requirements should include teacher assessments to determine teacher preparation to serve culturally and linguistically diverse students. It is equally important to provide similar training to administrators and teachers in the form of continuous professional development requirements during the course of each school year. In order to support equity in learning, it is critical to develop educator knowledge and understanding about the assets of the unique traits culturally and linguistically diverse students bring to the school setting. Allowing students to use their full collection of skills, approaches, and behaviors that may not necessarily conform to traditional approaches to learning is essential to allow multiple opportunities for success within academic settings. This focused coursework and training may help educators understand different approaches to bridge learning for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

### **Conclusion**

Ongoing issues of academic underachievement in culturally and linguistically diverse students are reflective of systemic issues of inequity. Limits on the skills, approaches, perspectives, and literacies that culturally and linguistically diverse students are allowed to use in the classroom setting render them powerless to use their personal agency to succeed with academic tasks. Education policies, and programs at federal, state, and local levels should reflect changes to support a changing student population. Policy changes should include a validation of non-

traditional learning approaches, reflect increased relevance, and expand representation of diverse students in the classroom. All stakeholders should work towards reducing school wide practices that create opportunity gaps that lead to inequities in learning. The role of school administrators at every level is to identify and remove the systemic practices, policies, and programs that limit learning opportunities for underserved students.

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