# Can You Hear Me? Imperative Conversations on the Amplification of Marginalized Student Voices to Ensure Student Agency

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Minority youth are a complex and diverse population in America who are often misunderstood, misclassified and misrepresented. These youth face a school system that has been teaching an inaccurate and negative narrative about who they are and a system that does not understand their unique needs. Using the findings from studies on Arab American youth as well as migrant youth in America, this qualitative exploratory study examines the factors that can better equip our schools, administrators and teachers to help minority youth succeed.

Keywords: marginalized, migrant, Arab American, invisible

Underserved, disregarded, ostracized, invisible - these are only some of the words used to define marginalized student populations in our schools. Coupled with this, discrimination and negative perception of marginalized student minorities permeate across societal boundaries and into schools, blatantly evident today and manifested against our students. Significant emotional stressors put on these populations raises the question of how this is affecting these youth's construction of a cultural identity (Ahmed, Kia-Keating & Tsai, 2011; Khouri, 2016; Kumar et al., 2014) as well as their peers' understanding of who they are. It also begs the question: how do we understand our marginalized youth?

This paper synthesizes the work of two separate, but closely related studies on Arab American youth and migrant youth in our schools. Although the studies focused on two specific marginalized populations, the findings highlighted the ways that both groups of students were struggling in and outside of their classroom, as well as the impact these experiences had on their view towards education.

Specifically, this paper spotlights the ways in which marginalized students feel disconnected from their schools, teachers and peers. It informs the audience on how their invisibility in the curriculum and the gap in knowledge about who they are hindered their ability to make a home/ school connection. Moreover, it showcases how when students receive information regarding their cultural background in school that conflicts with the information they are receiving at home, it creates a dichotomy that can hinder their development of a cultural identity, as well as play an important role in continuing with their education (Britto, 2008). The lack of a strong foundation and its impact on the relationship between students and their education system is one of concern.

# **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the common themes in two separate studies - one focused on Arab American youth cultural identity formation and the other focused on migrant youth needs in our schools. Highlighting these themes allows the authors to and offer a call to action on how leadership and educators can begin to better serve these and all marginalized students on their campuses.

## **Research Questions**

- 1. How are schools helping to build visibility with a call for action for marginalized minority youth?
- 2. In what ways can invisible student voices illuminate marginalization in order for educators to create transformative school change?

## **Conceptual Framework**

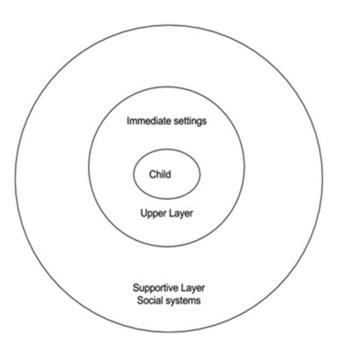
The two studies used in this paper each used a different conceptual framework but both focused on amplifying the needs of our marginalized students by understanding their core needs and values through their student voice.

The first study, which focused on Arab American youth, uses Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development as its conceptual framework. This model underscores the holistic framework assisting the interpretation of youth's perceptions of their own identities. The model

situates identity in the epicenter and factors, or as the theorist calls them, systems in concentric circles outside the epicenter (Hendry et. al, 2007). This framework contributes to the understanding of factors constructing a youth's identity and how they work together in systems to contribute to cultural identity formation (see Figure 1). The model distinguishes between microsystems that are placed closer to the center of the child's identity, such as family, and macrosystems, placed closer to the periphery. This study specifically looks at culture and how it fits into this framework, not as a separate system, but rather a factor within each of the micro and macro systems.

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Original Ecological Model from 1974

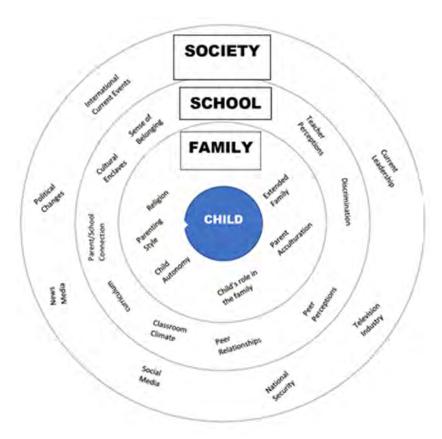


Many of this model's original premises were altered to create a conceptual model that examines Arab American youth identity formation. For example, rather than use Bronfenbrenner's macro and micro systems, we developed categories for systems (society, school climate, family). This iteration emerges from the findings in the literature review that highlights these three specific systems as the main contributors to the identity formation in Arab American youth (Jones, 2017; Brown et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2014).

Although all the systems examined within the revised framework are valuable in understanding how to help Arab American youth connect positively to their cultural identity, this paper focuses on the part in the framework that looks at how schools play a role in this system. For example, the study analyzed how variables within the school system, including curriculum, teachers, peers and classroom climate, among others, hindered or helped develop these students' understanding of and connection to their culture.

Figure 2

Adapted Conceptual Framework from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



The second study uses Cultural Proficiency as the lens and framework to understand the experience of migrant students. Utilizing the Cultural Proficiency Continuum allows for a way to explain one's values and beliefs associated with actions that manifest in everyday actions. The Framework states that the school system must incorporate cultural knowledge into practice in policy to support students that arrive with a variety of academic foundations and needs (Quezada et al., 2012). Ensuring students' historical context is embraced and amplified is crucial as all students come in with beautiful lived experience whether they are migrant students or Arab American students.

Figure 3 Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Educational Practices

### The Five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence

Serve as standards for personal, professional values and behaviors, as well as organizational policies and practices:

- Assessing cultural knowledge
- Valuing diversity
- · Managing the dynamics of difference
- Adapting to diversity
- Institutionalizing cultural knowledge

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum portrays people and organizations who possess the knowledge, skills, and moral bearing to distinguish among healthy and unhealthy practices as represented by different worldviews:

# Unhealthy Practices:

Differing

# Healthy Practices:

- Cultural destructiveness
- Cultural incapacity
- Cultural blindness
- Worldviews
- Cultural precompetence

Informs

- Cultural competence
- Cultural proficiency



Resolving the tension to do what is socially just within our diverse society leads people and organizations to view selves in terms Unhealthy and Healthy.

# **Barriers to Cultural Proficiency**

Serve as personal, professional, and institutional impediments to moral and just service to a diverse society by

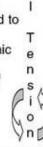
- being resistant to change,
- being unaware of the need to adapt,
- not acknowledging systemic oppression, and
- benefiting from a sense of privilege and entitlement.

#### **Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency**

Provide a moral framework for conducting one's self and organization in an ethical fashion by believing the following:

- Culture is a predominant force in society.
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
- People have individual and group identities.
- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.
- Each cultural group has unique cultural
- The best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all.

The Framework is grounded in the Five Essential Elements as follows: 1) Assessing Cultural Knowledge, 2) Valuing Diversity, 3) Managing the Dynamics of Difference, 4) Adapting to Diversity, and 5) Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge (Lindsey, 2017). Utilizing student voices on their experience guided the understanding of the structures needed to build systems of



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academic support for this marginalized population. Although the framework was based on these Five essential Elements the main focus in this study was the following two Essential Elements:

- Assessing Cultural Knowledge: Identification of cultural groups present in the system.
- Valuing Diversity: Developing an appreciation for the differences among and between Groups.

The first Cultural Proficiency element Assessing Cultural Knowledge allowed us to understand the need for educators, administrators, and stakeholders to hear students' voices as they described themselves, their feelings, and goals. This element is defined by (Quezada et al., 2012), us understanding the students' history as a principal factor in understanding the student. Cultural Proficiency refers to the values and behaviors of an individual that enable that person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment (Quezada et al., 2012).

The second Essential Element of Cultural Proficiency is Valuing Diversity, this element allows us to understand the need for students' voices to be heard by educational leaders as they described who they were and what they valued. Furthermore, it invites an understanding of the supports required for these students to obtain their high school diploma in their new school setting. This element is defined by understanding the students' culture as a vital factor in understanding them (Quezada et al., 2012). The Framework acknowledges the incorporation of cultural knowledge as well as valuing students' diversity and culture. Allowing students to share with their peers and in their schools their culture and diversity will in return allow them to feel welcomed just as who and how they are.

Although the paper utilizes data collected from two frameworks, they are brought together through the lens of social justice and equity for our most marginalized of students. To amplify their voice, needs, and wants in order to feel part and own their educational experience in the end their future. Whereas in the framework examining the cultural identity formation of Arab American students the study looked at factors within the school and home that enabled a positive development of this identity, the framework for migrant students looked at how the school system, in conjunction with family and community, enabled effective supports that allowed for the ultimate success of the student.

#### Literature Review

When looking at ethnic identity frameworks, most agree that the ethnically related messages and experiences youth have and perceive significantly shape their attitude regarding where they fit in with their cultural group (Rivas Drake, Hughes & Way, 2009). For example, in research on familial ethnic socialization (FES), the study found that Chinese American adolescents connected better with their ethnic identity when there was a high concentration of ethnic group members in their community. Similarly, in findings on Filipino youth, the study found that ethnic socialization is an integral part of the family (Umana Taylor, 2006). In schools, Native American adolescents who reported both high ethnic identity and a lower level of being stereotyped had higher grade point averages than their counterparts (Jaramillo, Wello & Worrell, 2015). Ultimately, research shows that non-White youth in the United States that had a high ethnic affirmation show to have a higher self-esteem and lower depression than youth with a low ethnic affirmation (Romero, Edwards, Fryburg & Orduna, 2014).

Adding on, just as the society and the media characterizes Arab Americans as the enemy, other minorities are also characterized in a negative light. For example, Black males in the United States have been portrayed as docile and hypersexual for centuries and continue to be characterized as such (Gibbs, 1988). This portrayal has stood in the way of a positive identity development for this population, which hinders their ability to do well academically (Nasir, 2012). Moreover, racism influences the lives of Asian American students (Museus & Park, 2015). In fact, members of this population at the college level feel pressured to assimilate to their White campuses (Museus & Park, 2015). In contrast, research has found that when youth have high ethnic affirmation have higher self-esteem and ethnic affirmation. Therefore, the exploration of ethnic and cultural identity can positively contribute to a youth's psychological well-being (Edwards et al., 2014).

Research highlights that discrimination against marginalized students from several facets is negatively affecting their socio-emotional well-being, self-identity and cultural identity formation. Schools are not paying attention to the inequities on their campuses, nor are they addressing the negative effects it has on these students. Notably, the literature alludes to the idea that a child's context, both at home and in their social environment plays a role in helping or hindering their sense of belonging at school and in their community (Shammas, 2015). Youth need to work through the identities they inherit from their family and society and begin to take control over their identity in order to feel satisfied and to resolve their crisis in identity formation (French, 2006). This is important because it allows the adolescent to feel satisfied with their identity, which in turn brings them a feeling of industry and competence, as well as belonging.

Coupled with this, schools need to find ways to help students feel safe in identifying as Arab Americans, migrant students or any other marginalized category of students, as well as support them in navigating through this identity process; as research on the current state in schools shows little to no evidence of this (Tabbah et al., 2012). Ultimately, the distress caused by discrimination against these youth leads to a loss of control in their own lives, which may decrease self-esteem and increase psychological distress (Moradi & Hasan, 2004). Therefore, research on how to help this population positively navigate and develop their cultural identity is pertinent to their social and emotional well-being.

Adding on, for decades immigrants continue their plight to have an opportunity to achieve their American dream (Short & Boyson, 2012; Silva & Kucer, 2016). They bring important assets, great optimism, ethics, and faith in the virtues of work, family, and education. As families arrive in this new land, their children become active participants in the education system. Newcomer immigrant adolescent students begin their journey through an educational system that looks different from the one in their native home. This new system requires steps for achieving the American dream, including a high school diploma and skills to be successful after graduation.

Therefore, it is imperative that leaders examine the academic, social, emotional, linguistic, and leadership structures that hold the livelihood of these students' futures and their ability to achieve their American dream. A classroom where inclusion is at the forefront of all actions increases the likelihood of newcomer students to feel part of the school instead of an outsider and one that is invisible. Experiences of alienation often result in disengagement and the formation of racial enclaves. This alienation often serves as the driving force for newcomer immigrant adolescent students to leave school before obtaining their high school diplomas. Throughout history the voices of children have been silenced in decisions about the way their education was provided (Fielding, 2004, Rudduck & Flutter, 2004; Smyth, 2006). It is crucial for a student to participate in the creation and implementation of their learning. Personalizing education can have a positive impact on student engagement, as it provides opportunities for students to develop

greater influence and control over their learning (Quinn & Owen, 2014; Roberts & Owen, 2011). Engaging students in their education builds their sense of responsibility and ownership.

## Methods

These studies were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board through California State University, San Marcos. Both methodologies utilize semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interviews, which result in a significant amount of qualitative data (Hatch, 2002). The first study focuses on adolescent Arab Americans because cultural identity is an important aspect of adolescents' developmental experiences. It is related to their psychological well-being, academic achievement and psychological adjustment. Notably, we know little about the factors that influence the development of adolescents' cultural identities, which highlights the need for this study (Umana Taylor et al., 2006). The participant population includes seven Arab American youth, 17-21 years old, who are attending secondary or post-secondary school in the U.S. Youth that attend Arabic or Islamic school full time are excluded from this population. The participants come from Christian, Catholic Orthodox or Muslim religious backgrounds. Participants reside in various cities across California and Texas. Although all participants were identified by members of the Arab community as youth that have a strong connection to their Arab cultural identity, they represented a variety of perspectives and experiences of Arab American youth residing in the U.S.

The second study focuses on the experiences of newcomer immigrant adolescent students as they try to obtain their high school diploma. Specifically, the experiences that contributed to and detracted from their ability to persevere toward graduation. This study aimed to understand these specific experiences and criteria that have an impact on their academic success and social-emotional well-being. The purpose was to understand the collective voice of these students and their experiences, to better recognize what specific contributors support their academic success. The participant population includes five newcomer immigrant adolescent students in grades 10th, 11th, and 12th enrolled in a United States high school for less than 36 months. Participants in this study were born and attended schooling in Mexico or Guatemala before arriving in the United States. Students exceeding the 36-month enrollment mark were excluded from this research. The principal reason for this was because this study aimed to understand the experience of newly arrived immigrant adolescent students as they navigated through their new academic setting in obtaining a high school diploma.

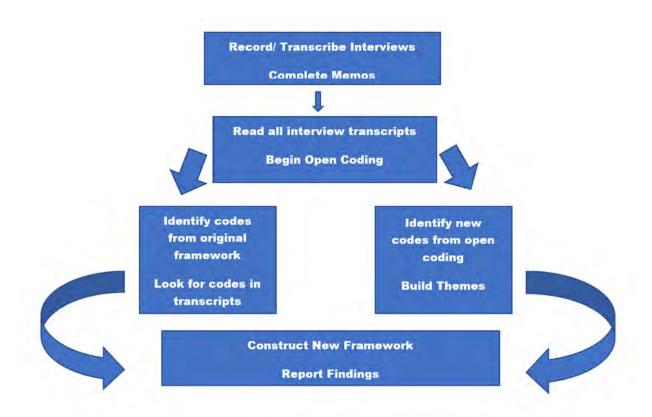
The type of instrumentation used in both studies allows the researchers to enter the world of the participants and to further understand their experience through their own voice (Patton, 2015). It does not allow for a restriction of the views of the participants but is open to open-ended information instead. Interview questions were developed to analyze the ways in which these youth are developing their cultural identities well as how they perceived their learning environment. This measure was developed because there are no established instruments that addressed specific concerns relative to these (Tabbah, Miranda & Wheaton. 2012). The studies use one-on-one individual interviews with the participants. The reason for doing individual interviews is because this allows participants to feel more comfortable sharing some of their responses with the researchers (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti & McKinney, 2012).

Guided by the conceptual framing, and utilizing a two-tier set of analytical questions (including main questions and possible probing questions), the researchers engaged in an analytical process of data analysis (Patton, 2015). Moreover, the studies use a combination of interview approaches including a conversational strategy within an interview guide approach, similar to a semi-

structured interview (Gubrium et al., 2012). This allows for a structured set of interview questions for each participant with the flexibility of probing when appropriate to explore certain topics in more depth for certain interviewees (Patton, 2015). After conducting all interviews via Zoom, the videos are transcribed and checked for accuracy using the Otter.ai add-on application, a feature in Zoom. Interviews were video recorded, transcribed and coded. Through open coding, several themes arose.

Figure 4

Flow Chart Representing the Process Used for Data Analysis in this Study on Arab American Youth



Kaiser highlights that researchers need to give greater voice and power to participants in order to steer the direction of the research and dictate the findings (as cited in Gubrium et al., 2014). The design of this research allows for the youth to dictate the findings of this research. Participants in both studies navigated interview questions aimed at understanding how their perceived their education. Secondly, the studies took a more in- depth look at how it contributes to these factors in order to bridge the gap between the home, school and society. The following conclusions focus on the common findings in both studies.

# **Results and Findings**

Although the results and findings of each study were unique to the population of participants and their context, this paper has synthesized the common themes within these findings to offer a more holistic response to the research questions.

Firstly, the curriculum offered in K-higher education has failed these populations and needs to be amended. Participants from both studies discussed the need for schools to educate students on where these marginalized populations are from. One student explains their plight:

"What I feel like kind of sucks about the American education system is that they kind of just... it's really hard to define your Arab identity because like, for example, like the standardized testing, like during like when the ethnic portion like you have to choose what ethnicity you are, we are classified as White and that's really vague. And I think it's very questionable and unfair because...there's so many countries that make up the whole European continent and being White... And so it's really big because like all other races get their own boxes where Arabs aren't acknowledged."

Additionally, when Arabs are mentioned in a classroom context, these examples are minimal and mostly negative. In fact, the historical contributions of Arabs are all written through a deficit lens. As one participant shares, "I definitely felt that growing up like every time I said the word Arab... even today, to some extent, like it's totally ignorant it feels like a very strong word or something I shouldn't be saying or something I should be embarrassed to say or identify with." Therefore, schools must cultivate partnerships with their Arab families and communities and begin to reimagine how to teach about Arabs in order to change the negative narrative being taught for decades about this population.

In regards to migrant students three themes emerged from using the cultural proficiency essential element assessing culture and cultural proficiency essential element valuing diversity: the importance of historical context, family, and community programs. Student voices played a key role in this analysis, allowing students to describe their experiences through their own voice allowed them to describe in its truest form what they experienced, felt, and remember. Understanding their historical context, family, and community programs through their own voice allows one to see the specific gaps that need to be filled to strengthen schools in order to leverage specific support for migrant students.

Data also reveals that understanding students holistically should include the acknowledgement of their life before arrival to the US. As one participant shares his life before arrival, "I looked for work around my pueblo as I knew the quarter fees would be coming soon for enrollment in my classes. In a small pueblo work is nonexistent but I was able to obtain work by picking up and burning old corn husks from the fields. I had worked enough to pay for the upcoming fees." He continues to share that after his sister fell suddenly ill, the money he had collected went to paying for her medication. He shares the pain he felt at that moment and the struggle he endured. Therefore, understanding the students "why" becomes just as crucial as knowing their reading level.

Similar to their Arab American peers, migrant students are invisible and unspoken of. Their plight cannot be found in any curriculum. Often immigration is found as one of the nation's most controversial political issues. This research highlights that we need to change the way students learn about who these marginalized minorities are, then we need to explore how they appear – or do not appear – in our curricula. More importantly, we need to give them a seat at the table by

representing them through the content in our classes. As well as acknowledging their contributions to our society as a whole. That being said, Cutshall (2012) strongly advises language educators to:

Realize that following a textbook and reading over the cultural points that in the occasional sidebar is not sufficient to impart cultural knowledge to their students. Nor is it enough to offer 'Cultural Fridays' or to think culture is taken care of by celebrating a holiday, learning a few dances, or tasting some authentic food now and then. (p.33).

**Table 1** *Research Findings* 

<b>Research Questions</b>	Themes	Assertions
How are schools helping to build visibility with a call for action for marginalized minority youth?	Building a sense of belonging. Correcting misconceptions about their culture.	When students are able to feel a sense of belonging in school, they feel confident in sharing and exploring their own culture, therefore developing a closer connection with it.
	Receiving support from peers.  Acknowledging students' life before	The more supported marginalized youth feel by their peers, the more confident they grow to embrace their cultural identity.
	arrival as a key factor in understanding who they are as individuals	The more students can share with teachers and peers, who they are as individuals, the stronger sense of trust they were able to build.
	Using community as a foundation for collective unity	As students navigate their sense of belonging it is imperative to include what they hold a strong bond with, family and community.
In what ways can invisible student voices illuminate marginalization in	Connectivity to students past, present, and future	Giving students a voice in the classroom makes them feel empowered and visible, therefore helping them connect positively to their cultural identity.
order for educators to create transformative school change?	Purposeful relationships to achieve goals	Having a structure and taking the time for students to voice their needs will eliminate guessing and wasted time to meet the needs of these students. Asking students who they are, what they need, and where they want to go, will answer important information from this population. This will allow for a stronger sense of purpose for both educator and

# **Conclusions**

Elements that contribute to fostering a more equitable system for these populations are identified in this study. Invisible minority youth seek to advocate for their people by correcting the misconceptions being shared about who they are in their schools. Opportunities to act as the voice for their people are embraced by almost all the participants, adding that it is important that their schools offer them a platform to use their voice to educate others and feel a sense of belonging on their campuses. One participant shares her thoughts about having a voice by explaining the importance of schools giving Arab American students a platform.

"I mean in a space where they give you... they give you the opportunity for your voice to be heard. But also to do so without any judgment. And I think that's the kind of platform that my high school gave me as opposed to my middle school." This will begin to correct some of the stereotypes and discrimination by students and teachers against these populations.

Specifically, supportive systems help invisible minority youth take pride in their culture rather than reject it (Suleiman, 1996). Most notably, teachers have an impact on these youth's experience with cultural identity formation at school. Teachers not only neglect to take action, but also create situations where the youth become vulnerable in their own classrooms. These examples include the anti-Arab content or policy discussions that present negative narratives about migrant students used in the classroom. This also includes instances where these youth are singled out because of their race or religion. Creating space to experience purposeful inclusion by daily activities in school is imperative for students to voice not only their needs but as well who they are and hope to become. As one student describes the power of this opportunity "The feeling there was different; it felt like we were learning something and moving forward. We talked often about our homelands and even shared how to speak our language for the last 10 minutes of the class. We presented in English our favorite traditional foods. The teachers were different, they cared about who we were before coming into their class."

The issue of inequity for marginalized students in schools is one that has not received attention in research and needs to focus on how they are doing socially and emotionally due to the way in which they are perceived and discriminated against in schools. This population is battling a system that consistently silences their voice or highlights misconceptions about them (Albdour et. al, 2016). Moreover, Arab Americans do not see themselves as part of the current Ethnic Studies curriculum across the country. A re-examination of how marginalized students can be integrated into this curriculum is crucial to aid in the process of making these youth visible.

#### Call to Action

The question all educators need to ask themselves when considering serving and supporting their marginalized students is: How can we create visibility for these students by amplifying their voice and addressing their needs? This begins with courageous conversations between leadership and teachers about the barriers that exist, whether politically motivated or not, that discourage teachers from looking beyond their current curriculum and practices (Suleiman, 1996). It further requires them to truly look at students holistically and listen to what they have to say. To look at their strengths and leverage those strengths at every opportunity possible. By purposefully building

connections with our students, it will allow us to build and strengthen their relationship with the love of learning and their education.

More importantly, stakeholders need to have brave conversations with themselves about some of the cognitive biases they hold and the misconceptions they may have surrounding who these populations are (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Most importantly, this calls on educators teachers and administrators alike, to reflect on how they have learned about these marginalized populations through their own education. What misinformation have they been passing on in their classrooms? When these biases are addressed and confronted is only when one can serve and see these students for who they are and what they bring into our classrooms. Until these biases are addressed students will be viewed through jaded, biased views that contribute to misconceptions of students and their true potential (Singleton & Linton, 2006). If these barriers are not addressed and broken down, they will hamper true growth not only for students but for all adults serving these students. Allowing us to be critical conscious to deeply understand the historic and systemic inequities that shape the lives of racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally marginalized youth; the types of knowledge and language that are considered valid in school; and how much of the curricula in schools serves to replicate the power structure in society (Suleiman, 1996). It calls for educators to challenge simple explanations for things like achievement disparities and instead adopt more complex explanations that reflect societal inequities.

The barriers placed upon students have implications that heavily impact students' educational future and view of themselves as learners (Pendergast, Allen, McGregor, & Ronksley-Pavia, 2018). This leads to disengagement in learning and a broken relationship with their educational trajectory. This also leads them to developing a negative perception of their cultural identity or a complete disconnect from it (Tabbah et al., 2012). One call to action is for educators to adopt the liberatory mindset. Liberatory Design is a creative problem-solving approach and practice that centers equity and allows us to build structures and thinking to ensure liberation on all it serves. These mindsets force one to take a deep honest look into their values to ground and focus their design practice. Liberatory Design generates self-awareness to liberate designers from habits that perpetuate inequality, shifts the relationship between the people who hold power to design and those impacted, fosters learning and agency for those involved in and influenced by the design work, and creates conditions for collective liberation (Harvey, 2021). The power of Liberatory Design comes from its ability to help us better understand challenges in highly complex interconnected systems, to see ways systems of oppression are impacting our context, to root our decision-making in our values, to combat status quo behavior with deep self-reflection, and to learn and change in a fast-moving, meaningful way. In situations as complex as equity challenges, the way forward is led by noticing, experimenting, learning, reflecting, and repeating. Liberatory Design is structured to build your equity leadership capacity to create real change with the communities you care deeply about (Hasseler, 2022). The process itself, as well as the outcomes, are building towards greater collective liberation. A liberation that all can benefit from specially our marginalized populations

Notably, COVID has brought to light the inequities present in our current structures that created an even greater barrier for these populations. Access to technology and level of in-home support varied greatly depending on the zip code a student lived in. Students often rely on outside community partners and a need stemmed from not feeling as if they were receiving adequate support from their school or home. As COVID-19 impacted the world, students swiftly had to understand and perform in their new world of distant learning (Bartlett, 2022). Notwithstanding

are the language and/or cultural barriers that exist in this new world. How can educators ensure that the new protocols and systems put in place are equitable for all students?

It is for these reasons that it is imperative we understand the needs of our students and engage their support systems as their families as a way to understand students deeply and holistically. Schools have a responsibility not only to battle racism on school grounds, but to ensure that all of their students are represented using an equitable lens (Pole, 2001). In both studies findings concur that the family system plays the most significant role in feeling included and supported. It was clear that students relied heavily on their family for motivation to continue progressing forward and saw them as a system of support and motivation. The connectedness of sharing that pride of their culture and valuing the uniqueness they bring into this system is important and viewed by some researchers as the apex point of any successful program for newcomer students (Olsen, 2021). Inclusivity is crucial for students to feel they belong. Inclusivity builds on valuing diversity and understanding what attributes and characteristics make people different (Altugan, 2015). Working with marginalized students' families and communities brings a powerful connectedness that school leaders can build on to ensure inclusivity.

One asset each child comes to our schools with and we have full access to embrace to help us guide our students is their family. Students' families and communities are very important. Creating ample opportunities to integrate knowledge about students' lives so they can see themselves in the curriculum and through their home. It affirms their identity. It makes school relevant. It encourages their sense of purpose. Building intentional system conditions will allow for effective outcomes. As leaders it is imperative that we align and articulate within and all systems that support our students.

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