

Racial Justice in Literacy Research

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”

Martin Luther King, Jr, (1994).

Race and racism are part of the air we breathe in the United States. The history and legacy of race and racism are embedded in every aspect of life, including education, government, politics, society, and literacy. To address racism, we must be purposefully intentional in our pursuit of racial justice. In this report, we review how the field of literacy has responded to race and racism through an examination of equity and racial justice in literacy research. In accord with the stated purpose of a Literacy Research Report as outlined in the Literacy Research Association (LRA) *Policy and Procedures Handbook*, we identify racial justice in literacy research as a critical issue, provide definitions and a synthesis of literacy research needful to understand our focus on racial justice in literacy research. We also include a discussion about how race has operated as a construct in literacy research, along with a review of race and racism within Asian American and Pacific Islander literacy. In so doing, we disrupt and interrogate how the Black-White binary functions to delimit an examination the racialization of literacy in the United States for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) learners. We conclude with emerging principles for racial justice in literacy research, and demonstrate how racial justice can function as a basis for literacy equity.

Concepts, Definitions, and Understandings

As a nation, the importance of addressing equity and racism reached an inflection point during the late spring and summer of 2020, with the number of murders of unarmed Black people and global racial and social justice protests. In addition, as the COVID-19 pandemic waned, more attention was cast on the vast economic disparities and inequities in health care for

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). These discussions continue as citizens and politicians scrutinize acts of insurrection at the national Capitol by White Supremacists; attempts of voter suppression (removing, restricting, and removing votes cast by BIPOC); and on-going racial inequity in distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations. Given this context, several Executive Orders were recently issued, including the “Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” to:

provide everyone with the opportunity to reach their full potential . . . each agency must assess whether, and to what extent, its programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups (Executive Order 13985, Sec. 1 Policy, np.)

Further, in an effort to remove ambiguity, the Executive Order (EO) provides the following definition:

(a) The term “equity” means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer . (Executive Order No., 13985, Sec. 2. Definitions)

Importantly, the EO also stipulates that the policies of each federal agency and department will be “assessed, reviewed, and, if needed further recommendations will be issued” (Sec. 4(a) Methods to Assess Equity, np). In doing so, the EO attempts to address equity and racial justice at the federal level and to monitor each agency and department. How politicians will interrupt the EO for education is uncertain, but should begin with understanding the ideology of White

Supremacy that frames the history of education and the intersections with literacy and racial inequity.

In this report, we also provide definitions and understandings that guide our thinking toward racial justice. First, we acknowledge that *equity*:

means fairness and justice and focuses on outcomes that are most appropriate for a given group, recognizing different challenges, needs, and histories. It is distinct from diversity, which can simply mean variety (the presence of individuals with various identities). It is also not equality, or “same treatment,” which doesn’t take differing needs or disparate outcomes into account. Systemic equity involves a robust system and dynamic process consciously designed to create, support and sustain social justice. (*Race Forward*, 2015, p. 27)

Second, we recognize that equity is not synonymous with race, when the two words are linked—the broader concept, equity, is used more often than race. Definitions and discussions of race and racism are more complex and bound by the social construction of race. Racial justice, by contrast, requires a de-centering of Whiteness (aggression backlash, fragility, hierarchy, resentment, righteousness, supremacy etc.), and a discussion of racism, as Coates (2019) observes, “race, is the child of racism, not the father” (p. 7). His observation is foundational to understanding how race, and racism function in education, broadly, and literacy, specifically. Language use related to race is often co-opted for race-evasive purposes, heavily-coded to appear neutral, used as if interchangeable with culture and diversity, and misappropriated to dehumanize non-White people. More helpful are discussions about equity and racial justice that require reconceptualization of the ideological assumptions undergirding federal, state, and local laws and policies as well as literacy research approaches, methods, processes, and recommendations. In

literacy research this also means discarding criteria, definitions, and language that center on a singular language, method, and analytic approach as the only acceptable frame of reference. For example, the inappropriate and unflattering Othering of BIPOC students that seeks to characterize and dehumanize using aggregate terms: at-risk, challenging, disadvantaged, low-performing, and struggling, among other terms.

As indicated in our interim report, each person, herein researcher, can elect to adopt an antiracist approach to literacy research. Antiracism is defined as:

the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Antiracism tends to be an individualized approach, and set up in opposition to individual racist behaviors and impacts. (*Race Forward*, 2015, p. 25)

Each literacy researcher must make a personal commitment to oppose racism: from how literacy research is conceptualized and conducted; to how it is taught, assessed, written-up, published, and disseminated. Antiracism functions as part of a larger call to individuals to address equity and racial justice.

Given the history and legacy of racism in the United States, it is also important to understand how racism functions in society. We provide the following definitions. *Systemic racism*, often used synonymously with the term *structural racism*, is defined as:

A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity...[and] has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist. (Aspen Institute, 2016, np)

Additionally, the concept of *structural racialization* magnifies the legacy of racism, as it

connotes the dynamic process that creates cumulative and durable inequalities based on race. Interactions between individuals are shaped by and reflect underlying and often hidden structures that shape biases and create disparate outcomes even in the absence of racist actors or racist intentions. The presence of structural racialization is evidenced by consistent differences in outcomes in education attainment, family wealth, and even life span. (Powell, Heller, & Bundalli, 2011, np)

Finally, the concept of *institutional racism*, “refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage” (Aspen Institute, 2016, np). Expanding on this definition we note that, “the institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for Whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as non-white” (Potapchuck, Leiderman, Bivens, & Major, 2005, p. 39). These ideas provide a basis for examining racial justice in literacy research.

We acknowledge and recognize that systems of racism work within and across institutions and may not appear obvious to casual observers. Our focus on racial inequity in literacy “exposes how racial inequality reproduces itself structurally even in the absence of intentional discrimination” (Carbado & Roithmayr 2014, p. 163). In the next section, we undertake an introspective view of literacy research.

The Context of Race and Racism in Literacy Research

This report began in 2017 with a charge to describe and discuss literacy, equity, and race as reflected in literacy research. It is an extension of several documents produced by the Literacy Association (LRA), beginning with the organization’s mission statement:

The Literacy Research Association (LRA) is a community of scholars dedicated to promoting research that enriches the knowledge, understanding, and development of lifespan literacies in a multicultural and multilingual world. LRA is committed to ethical research that is rigorous, methodologically diverse, and socially responsible. LRA is dedicated to disseminating such research broadly so as to promote generative theories, informed practices and sound policies. Central to its mission, LRA mentors and supports future generations of literacy scholars.

The organization has issued a number of statements with respect to race and racism: “The Role of Literacy Research in Racism and Racial Violence,” in 2016, and a follow-up Statement from the Leadership Team (2020) that suggests specific steps individuals can take “against perpetuating racial injustice” (np). Herein, we examine how issues of anti-Blackness, anti-racism, bias, discrimination, equality, equity, implicit racism, justice, racial justice, and racism are characterized and used in literacy research. We acknowledge that race is a socially constructed idea, however, we also are aware that racism is a lived experience for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) globally. This report is framed around our understanding and application to literacy of three important ideas: antiracism, equity, and racial justice in the United States. We discuss definitions, provide examples, and propose steps toward inspiring racial justice in literacy research. The goal of this report is to outline the importance of racial justice in literacy research while realizing the solution will not happen overnight and must include a racial justice commitment from all stakeholders. To begin, we provide working definitions of terms used throughout our report.

Race in Literacy Research

It is our belief that literacy research often obscures discussions of race. For example, the history of reading and writing research in this country is replete with laws and policies that have been barriers to reading access and opportunity for People of Color. Recently, a research librarian at the University of Illinois and I (first author) conducted a survey using ERIC, Education Full-Text, and Professional Development Collection databases in EBSCO, from 1975 – 2020. We used the following search terms: ‘reading research’ AND ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘multicultural’, ‘minority’, ‘students of color’, or ‘diversity’. The original results were for 104 references, once the database de-duplicated records, there were only 84 references. Next, I read through all the abstracts of dissertations, journal articles, monographs, and research reports and eliminated outliers, texts that used the terms and either were not related to reading research, or terms used in ways unrelated to race – as in the ‘race to describe phonology.’ Sadly, this brought the total results down to 48 references... and, proudly I can report that this number includes of several articles published in *NRC/LRA* yearbooks. This project makes clear why it is important to advance an antiracism agenda for literacy research, as race is often un/under acknowledged.

Antiracism. An antiracism approach makes clear that some authors, editors, publishers, and researchers are addressing race; and others are NOT. Admittedly, we are using antiracism as the umbrella term that covers all forms of antiracism. For example: anti-American Indian/Alaska Native, anti-Asian, anti-Black, anti-Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and anti-Latinx – groups identified in the U. S. Census 2020 (<https://2020census.gov/en/about-questions/2020-census-questions-race.html>). This is not an either/or proposition, we are taking the position that antiracism in literacy research is a starting point to acknowledging, dissecting, and interrogating racism– in all forms, towards a racial justice in literacy approach.

Kendi (2019) describes four key concepts that frame antiracism: (1) being antiracist is an every-day, every-moment process; (2) being antiracist is not a fixed position (it is important to be aware of your stance toward anti-racism/race/racism at any given moment); (3) antiracists view the racial groups as equal; and (4) antiracists push for policies that create racial equity (np).

Research by McKinney de Royston, Madkins, Givens, and Nasir (2020) extend this framework by foregrounding race, which has been paraphrased here to refer to literacy:

1. Racial and political self-awareness - examining our individual racism and decolonization as well as cultivate an antiracism position, and opposing institutional racial equity;
2. Racial and historical knowledge - knowing the roots of White supremacy and demanding more accurate and complete histories of literacy;
3. Racial and political knowledge - understanding how laws and policies have been/are created to sustain power based on race; and demanding racial equity in literacy law and policy. (p. 31)

Systemic or structural racism. Systemic or structural racism in literacy research is premised, in large part of the ideology of White supremacy that undergirds U. S. education. A 2019 report, published by the National Academies, *Monitoring Educational Equity (MEE)*, serves as an example. The report seeks to:

identify key indicators for measuring and monitoring the extent of equity in the nation's K–12 education system. The purpose of such indicators is not to track progress toward aggregate goals, ... but to identify differences in progress toward that goal, differences in students' family background and other characteristics, and differences in the conditions and structures in the education system that may affect students' education. A carefully

chosen set of *equity indicators* can highlight disparities, provide a way to explore potential causes, and point toward possible improvements. (p. 1, emphasis added)

Authors of *MEE* provide insight during the early entrée into this discussion with a degree of ambiguity and present implications about “differences in a student's family background and other characteristics and differences” (p. 1). As is customary in such reports, a taken-for-granted and irrevocable standard lurks under such pronouncements, as the authors identify disability, economic, ethnic/racial, and linguistic differences as “barriers to attainment” (p. 2). Left unaddressed are the unnamed, comparison group: English dominant, middle-to-upper-middle class, performing ‘normally,’ and White students. Within the system of U. S. education, there is an unquestioned belief in a mythical hierarchy that normalizes the characteristics and placement of White students above all other cultural, economic, ethnic, linguistic, and racial groups, even when there is conflicting evidence.

The *MEE* report also is premised on the use of longstanding rhetorical strategies which negatively characterize BIPOC students’ academic achievement and performance as related to a possible host of ‘differences’: citizenship status, community, cultural, economic, ethnic, familial, linguistic, racial, and social class influences. Thus, invoking an academic whataboutism fallacy, researchers who use these terms have replaced the problem of inequity by redirecting the argument to ‘otherness,’ in an effort to prove inequity exists. The history and legacy of educational racism are often left unaddressed and unchallenged, so too is an examination of the structural and institutional processes that help to reproduce inequitable outcomes, thus racial injustice persists. The rhetorical stance provides a clever defense against criticism in that the government declares a ‘new’ study should be conducted and creates guidelines that privilege and restrict definitions, methods, and worldviews. Thus, each 'new' study mirrors innumerable

previous studies, and, not surprisingly, the findings of each 'new' study do not provide substantive information, and educational inequity is reproduced by fiat.

Institutional racism. In the multiple federally-funded literacy research reports and reviews as well as extant literature in the field, we recognize similar ideological assumptions underpin the research as well as likeminded rhetorical messaging. Over the last three decades, there have been a series of federally sponsored reports, laws, and policies that appear to confirm these ideological assumptions using similar rhetorical messaging. The failure to engage alternative explanations represents a way in which systemic racism becomes institutionalized, while simultaneously delimiting racial justice progress.

A review of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) recent Reading Report Card (2019) demonstrates that there has been a lack of progress in reading for BIPOC students. The NAEP website frames the agency and the processes it uses as neutral and centered in cognitive science. Descriptions of the reading instrument suggest that students are tasked with “understanding written text, developing and interpreting meaning, and using meaning appropriately for text type and purpose” (np), as if the tasks are not reflective of White-centric ethos, nuance, realities, and understandings. By oversimplifying and understating the goals, there is the appearance of an equitable instrument on which all students have the same opportunity to perform well, while failing to acknowledge the racist ideological roots of literacy assessments in the U.S. (Gould, 1996; Sokal, 1978; Willis, 2008). The most recent 2019 national results for reading reveal “higher percentages of twelfth-grade students perform **below NAEP Basic** in both mathematics and reading compared to 2015”

(<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/?grade=12>, emphasis added). A summary of the results also includes a brief history of NAEP results for twelfth grade readers:

The 30 percent of students performing below NAEP Basic in reading was higher than in all previous assessment years. The percentage of twelfth-grade students performing at or above NAEP Proficient in 2019 was not significantly different from 2015 in ... reading.

In reading, the percentage performing at NAEP Advanced in 2019 (6 percent) was higher than in 1992 (4 percent).

Stakeholders often reference NAEP results to amplify the reading performance among the nation's school children, yet remain silent about the lack of progress among Black and Brown students. If the reading progress among Black and Brown students is valued, the lack of reading progress, should be a siren call for change.

It has not always been so, as data supplied by NAEP was critical in the promotion of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002). The data permitted politicians and stakeholders to highlight the variances between the performance of White students and all other aggregate racial groups. It was used in support of the rationale calling for the need to improve reading performance among Black and Brown students, and, in support of a change in reading instruction as noted in the findings from the *National Reading Panel Report* (2000). Policymakers suggested that the adoption of the new instructional approach to reading would result in improved performance for all readers, including BIPOC students. Nearly twenty years later, the claim has fallen far short of its mark for BIPOC students. The *Nation's Reading Report Card*, nonetheless, continues to serve as a reference point as, "teachers, principals, parents, policymakers, and researchers all use NAEP results to assess progress and develop ways to improve education in the United States" (website). To be clear: the 2019 NAEP reading results for twelfth grade suggests a downward trend for all students, and is especially dire for Black, Latinx, and Native American students who have made very little progress since 1992. There is little wonder why racial differences in

reading performance persist: The research on which instruments are designed, is not informed by culturally, ethnically, linguistically, or racially inclusive research.

We conducted a review of how race and racism have been addressed in research articles published in the *Journal of Literacy Research* (2000-2020). Using an automated search engine, keywords submitted by authors as representative of the article content were scanned for linkages to race and racism. Significantly, individual authors differed in how these key words were used. Several broad patterns reveal: (a) Not Suggestive - articles where there is no indication that race is discussed, (b) Suggestive - articles suggestive of race in the title, but which do not engage issues of race or racism in the text and (c) Explicit - articles that explicitly refer to race, or to racial categories as an indicator of the article's content.

There is significant variation in the language around issues of race and racism. In the Not Suggestive category, 'gender' and 'literature' appear more often than other keywords. In the Suggestive category, frequent terms are 'citizenship,' 'civics', 'criticality', 'diversity', 'ethnicity,' 'gender', '(im)migration', 'language,' 'literature', 'social justice', and 'sociocultural,' suggesting that race will be addressed in the research. In the Explicit category, terms used include 'African', 'African Diaspora', 'Black', 'Black Lives Matter', 'Blackness', 'Faculty of Color', 'race', 'racist', 'readers of color', 'Ubuntu', and 'urban'. The majority of articles in the latter category are a part of special themed issues, either by authors who were Scholars of color Transitioning into Academic Research institution (STAR) participants, or by researchers who responded to a call for Black Lives Matter.

Overall, the literacy research articles' use of race/racism as keywords reveals a preference for suggestive references, a White Savior ethos, and a dearth of direct references to race/racism. More often than not, race/racism appears additive as the central foci are context

(interactions across school, interactions within classrooms, the body), or connections to content (bilingual education, literature, curriculum, literature, and teacher education), not race/racism.

Moving Beyond the Black/White Binary of Race in Literacy Research

In the United States, discussions about race are typically considered within a Black/White binary, however, there are eight federally recognized racial groups. During the COVID-19 crisis, there were thousands of acts of racial animus committed toward people of Asian descent. On January 26, 2021 a “Presidential Memorandum Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States” was issued to address racial equity and xenophobia against Asian American and Pacific Islanders. Racial injustice is experienced by all BIPOC in all facets of life, including education and literacy, but this is often under-recognized with the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. In the following section, authors Kim and Hsieh, provide context, definitions, and an examination of education and literacy research among Asian American and Pacific Islanders. This brief review serves as a lens through which to center, further complicate, and advance discussions of racial justice in literacy research.

Racialization of Asian American and Pacific Islanders in education

Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial minority group in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2013), comprising 5.8% of the general population and 5% of the school-aged population (Musu-Gillette, Robins, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2015), yet there is a surprising dearth of research on their literacy educational experiences (Hsieh & Kim, 2020; Kim, 2020). This is particularly surprising when taking into consideration that 10% of English language learners are of Asian descent, and Asians will outnumber Hispanics as the nation’s largest immigrant group by 2055 (NCES, 2019).

One possible explanation for this paucity is the sheer diversity of the Asian diaspora. Encompassing hundreds of languages, dozens of nationalities and ethnic groups, Asian Americans are one of the most diverse racial groups, a fact which is often obscured. Including a broad range of diversity both “vertically” and “horizontally” (Goodwin, 2010), there are differences in language, national origin, and ethnicity (the “horizontal”), but also intersectional differences (Crenshaw, 1991) in socioeconomic status, gender, and immigration status (the “vertical”) to name a few. In trying to capture such heterogeneity, there has even been much debate and discussion about the very label “Asian American.” While originating as a politically unifying label (Lee, 2015; Philip, 2012), it has become a racial umbrella for those originating from the continent of Asia, as well as from the islands and archipelagos off the Asian continent and in the Pacific. Because the label Asian American is often seen as primarily referring to those of East Asian descent, there have been attempts to revise it to be more inclusive, from Asian American and Pacific Islander American (AAPIA) to the Asian American Pacific Islander and Desi American (APIDA). Some within the Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian community have seen this inclusion via nomenclature as tokenizing, though, and have pushed back on these other terms (Hall, 2015). To this end, we use the term Asian American to describe people of Asian heritage in the Americas, but recognize this choice and term as contentious in and of itself.

Despite being such a quickly growing demographic, Asian Americans are often left out of the extant literature and accompanying discussions around diversity and race in the United States. Seen as successful and hard-working, they are invisible in schools, curriculum, and in research (An, 2016; Kim, 2020; Rodríguez, 2018). Ignoring the reality that Asian Americans struggle with stereotypes, histories, and other experiences unique to them, the racialized experiences of Asian Americans are forced into a Black/White binary within schools. Their

success or failure is seen as “acting” White or Black, as assimilable or not. Asian Americans who immigrated along higher socioeconomic and educational lines, such as Koreans or Taiwanese, are seen as nearly White or more assimilated (Tran & Birman, 2010), while those ethnic groups that have come to the United States with fewer economic and educational resources--and, as a result, may struggle more--are seen as “Black” (Ngo & Lee, 2007). There is little engagement with the distinct differences in experiences between and among various Asian ethnic groups.

To this end, there have been numerous calls from Asian American activists and scholars to disaggregate data (e.g., Paik et al., 2014; Pang, Han, & Pang, 2011; Siu, 1996). Asian Americans are not a monolith and, in order to better understand their experiences and their needs, we must first understand their individual realities. While there are some nascent trends towards this (An, 2020; Rodríguez, 2020), there is still a paucity of research looking at the literacy and educational experiences of Asian Americans.

Racial archetypes. The greatest areas of research revolve around two prevailing racial archetypes, the Model Minority Myth and the Forever Foreigner. Seemingly at odds with one another, they are also inevitably intertwined. These two archetypes encapsulate the polarized ways by which Asian Americans are viewed, as White-adjacent but always foreign, as hard-working but also sneaky and untrustworthy, as culturally successful but also culturally deviant. Asian Americans are both hyper-visible and invisible. Even as Asian Americans are nearly invisible in classrooms and in research, they are also held up as “the model minority” for other racial groups. The Model Minority Myth (MMM) is a:

racial stereotype [which] generally defines AAPIs [Asian American and Pacific

Islanders], especially Asian Americans, as a monolithically hardworking racial group

whose high achievement undercuts claims of systemic racism made by other racially minoritized populations, especially African Americans. (Poon, et al., 2016, p. 469)

In other words, Asian Americans are seen as “outwhiting the whites,” testing higher, working harder, achieving the American Dream, and “proving” that racism does not really exist.

However, the MMM also obfuscates the myriad resources and challenges different groups of Asian Americans bring with them into schools. The academic and socioeconomic success of some Asian Americans belies that, as a result of hyper-selection from East Asian countries after the Asian Immigration Act of 1965 (Lee & Zhou, 2015), earlier waves of Asian American immigrants tended to have higher levels of education and economic status, which provide greater opportunities for success than later waves of immigrants who came as refugees or with less educational and economic resources.

The broader perception that all Asian Americans are successful comes into question when ethnic-specific data is disaggregated. For example, in California, while 40-45% of Hmong, Laotians, and Cambodians have less than a high school education, 66-70% of Taiwanese and Asian Indians have college degrees (University of California Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Multicampus Research Program, 2010). Yet because of the stronghold the MMM has in schools, Asian Americans may be offered fewer support services and resources in schools (Pang, 2006) and even go under-diagnosed for special education services (Cooc, 2018). On the other end of the spectrum, for those who are seen as perpetually high-achieving, this allows little room for failure and some have even proposed the idea that the high levels of suicide rates, particularly among Asian American women, may be attributed to the pressures stemming from the MMM (Noh, 2007). This failure to see Asian difficulties and failures has been described as a form of racial violence (Wing, 2007).

Despite heralding the successes of Asian Americans in fulfilling the American Dream, they are perpetually seen as foreign and never truly American. The Forever Foreigner (FF) trope presumes that all Asian Americans are immigrants, English Language Learners, and culturally distinct from--and new to--the United States. This is regardless of whether their families have been here since before European colonization, as in the case with Native Hawaiians, or how well they culturally assimilate (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007; Takaki, 1998).

By broadly painting all Asian Americans as FF, such discourse draws upon cultural differences as explanations for students' successes or failures--particularly in regards to rhetoric around parenting styles--or only discusses challenges in schools as being ascribed to students' statuses as English language learners (ELLs). For example, cultural differences are used to distinguish Asian American parental practices from those of White parents, whether seen as contributing to students' success or to their failure. These practices include: parental participation in schooling (Jeynes, 2003; Sy, Rowley, & Schulenberg, 2007), parental practices in advancing students' academic achievement (e.g. intense test preparation) (Byun & Park, 2012), and lack of understanding of American schooling systems (Li, 2006).

Even further, the failure of some Southeast Asian students is justified using cultural difference, drawing distinctions between these "failing" cultures and more "successful" East Asian Confucian beliefs (Ngo & Lee, 2007). This "cultural difference" rhetoric dismisses persistent, structural causes that exacerbate inequality for Asian American students and erases the contributions of AAPIs throughout history to the development of the United States (Goodwin, 2010; Lee, 2015; Ng et al., 2007). Asian Americans are rendered a culturally distinct population, who merely inhabit America rather than being American themselves. Cultural

arguments also limit our understanding of Asian Americans' adaptive strategies to navigate with racism with the use of education as a tool to gain social capital (Ng et al., 2007).

While 74% of Asian American adults were born abroad, only 24% of the Asian American student population are English language learners (Goodwin, 2010; Redondo, 2008). There is a rich body of literature on ELLs; however, it generally fails to address language learning and multilingual needs specific to Asian immigrant populations (Goodwin, 2010). Some studies have looked at Asian subgroups of ELLs and how to support the literacy strengths of struggling Asian American ELLs, these studies are often smaller scale ethnographic studies (Fan, 2009; Han & Scull, 2012; Townsend & Fu, 2001; Yau & Jimenez, 2003) which do not examine the impact of language and education policy on Asian American immigrant ELLs' linguistic, academic and cultural development (Ngo & Lee, 2007). There is also a lack of focus on Asian heritage language students who come from oral cultures (e.g. Hmong students) and may thereby need additional support in the acquisition of English (Goodwin, 2010).

Beyond racialized language practices. Moving beyond the MMM and FF discourse, there are two emerging areas of study related to Asian Americans in education: 1) bilingualism/bicultural development (and related issues of heritage language loss and community-related linguistic strengths) and translanguaging practices of Asian Americans; and 2) representations of Asian Americans in texts, classroom, and curriculum. Biliteracy and bicultural development frame dual language and dual cultural competencies as strengths in an increasingly globalized society (Banks, Suárez-Orozco, & Ben-Peretz, 2016). Fostering biliteracy and biculturalism have been shown to enhance English literacy development as well as promote cultural connections (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Duranti, Ochs, & Ta'ase, 1995; Lam, 2009). Studies of bilingual and biliterate development, however, have indicated that pulls

towards Americanization (i.e., assimilation), attitudes towards heritage language and culture, situational uses of heritage language, and the use of only English in academic environments can impact Asian American students' desire and ability to maintain their heritage language skills (Hinton, 1999; Lao & Lee, 2009; Tse, 2000). While loss of heritage language can impact intergenerational relationships in immigrant families (Fillmore, 2000; Hsieh, Kim, & Protzel, 2020), heritage language loss can be mitigated through supportive environments for multilingualism across various contexts (Li & Wen, 2015; Pu, 2010; Tse, 2001) and a translanguaging framework (García & Lin, 2017; Wei, 2018) can be used to disrupt traditional heritage language pedagogies (Wu & Leung, 2020).

Beyond stereotypical notions of race. A few studies related to Asian American representation in American classrooms have shown that texts can be a powerful way to address feelings of loss and transition for Asian immigrant students in culturally responsive ways (Boatright, 2010; McGinnis, 2007a, 2007b; Vyas, 2004). It can also help native-born Asian American students see themselves as part of the curriculum, negotiate the stereotypes and experiences of Asian American characters, and draw from cultural funds of knowledge (An, 2020; Leu, 2010; Moll et al., 1992; Rodríguez, 2020; Schieble, 2014). Finally, translanguaging can be a tool for more inclusive practices within emergent bilingual classrooms, particularly if Asian American teachers have access to heritage language with their Asian heritage bilingual students (Fu et al., 2019).

Educators must continue to push for disaggregation when considering Asian Americans in research to illuminate intersectional differences, but more than that, we must continue to resist narratives that are placed upon varying cultural groups, support their efforts for self-determination, challenging dominant discourses and empowering diverse voices in the classroom

and in educational research. For Asian Americans, it is particularly important that the diversity of experiences, cultures, and identities within the diaspora are included through asset-based and critical lenses—with Asian Americans telling their own stories where possible—in order to push back against Asian American erasure and foreignization in literacy research, and to interrogate the complex positions that Asian Americans occupy in language and literacy research as well as in American society.

Racial Justice in Literacy

There is no quick fix to rooting out racial injustice in literacy research. An antiracist approach to literacy research, that we shared during LRA 2020, is a first step toward racial justice in literacy research as it supports critical racialized and politicized self-awareness, racial and historical knowledge, and racial and political knowledge (McKinney de Royston, Madkins, Givens, & Nasir, 2020, p. 31). We submit that the next step in the field and organization is racial justice to revolutionize how the field advances literacy, informs institutional praxis, redefines national literacy laws and policies, and promotes equity in literacy instruction. As such, racial justice in literacy research begins with systemic and institutional changes and political action, as well as an examination and deconstruction of systems, structures, and institutions that support racism in literacy, and a review of federal and state political actions (laws, policies and enforcement). *Racial justice* is defined as:

the systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice — or racial equity — goes beyond “antiracism.” It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and

preventative measures. (National Education Association Racial Justice in Education, 2018)

To dismantle racism in literacy research and in support of racial justice, we move forward cautiously. With history as a guide, there will be stakeholders who will attempt to appropriate and weaponize the language of antiracism, equity, race, and racism for purposes other than racial justice. And still others who will co-opt the language as their own in continued support of White supremacy. To avoid racial justice in literacy research becoming an additive discussion of literacy framed around Whiteness, much like Blake, Ioanide, and Reed (2019) and Welton (2020), we acknowledge these tactics as a way to prevent change in institutional policies, practices, processes and systems that reproduce racial inequity (Jackson, Obrien, & Fields, 2020). It is inexcusable that federal and state agencies and departments, educational institutions, and philanthropic agencies continue to deny the history and legacy of racial injustice in literacy research, the role of White supremacy, as well as the support of structural and institutional racism. These understandings are foundational and extend to epistemological, methodological, and theoretical approaches to conducting research among BIPOC (see Lee & Lee, 2021).

New Wine in New Wineskins: Systemic and Structural Transformations

Moving to racial justice in literacy research requires systemic change, i.e., changing the system and structures that make the reproduction of racism in literacy research possible within schools of education, publications of literacy research, as well as federal and state government agencies. Institutional change is a multi-step process: (a) unlearning of the ideology of White supremacy, (b) acceptance of BIPOC people, and (c) learning epistemologies, paradigms, and methods (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 252). Epistemology is paramount:

it investigates the standards used to assess knowledge or *why* we believe what we believe to be true...points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why” ... determines which questions merit investigation, which interpretive frameworks will be used to analyze findings, and to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put. (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 252, emphasis in the original)

Broadly, racial justice in literacy research should include the study of epistemologies, paradigms, and methods (critical race theories and methods, decolonial theories and research methods, critical race feminisms, among others), informed by the lived realities of BIPOC.

Paradigmatically, racial justice in literacy research should engage intersectional analysis to understand the impact of multiple forms of oppression as well as interlocking structural systems that reproduce racial inequity. Methodologies should be conducted with dignity and respect for each person as a fellow human, whose language and literacy are wholly complete without White interference, yet exists within a racialized society. Traditional histories of literacy that seek to ‘e-race’, ignore, and minimize race and racism must be replaced by more accurate historical knowledge, understanding of the history and contemporary role of White supremacy, and recognition of how politics are used to create oppressive laws and policies. A brief discussion of raciolinguistics illustrates this paradigmatic shift.

Raciolinguistics. Discussions of race and racism in the United States have emerged through a Black/White binary, as illustrated in the aforementioned Asian American Pacific Islander section. The binary functions in ways that sublimate experiences of individuals whose racialization and literate realities do not fit a prescribed mold. In so doing, often, examinations of race occur largely based on raciolinguistic ideology (see Rosa & Flores, 2017). *Raciolinguistic ideology* refers to the dominant practice of using perceptions of thinking to racialize language

and frame racialized speakers in negative ways (Rosa & Flores, 2017). These perceptions of thinking cause the “linguistic practices of racialized populations [to be] systematically stigmatized regardless of the extent to which these practices might seem to correspond to standardized norms” (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 3). This ideology has emerged from governance structures in society that have co-naturalized race and language discourses to negatively characterize literacies of racialized populations (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Raciolinguistic ideology creates a stigmatization of linguistic practices, for example, the meritocratic myth that accessing [linguistic] codes of power and being able to use these codes can solve the challenge that White supremacy poses to racialized persons in the United States (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Raciolinguistic ideology is present in many forms, including decisions to perpetuate discourses that attribute failures of certain racialized populations to their status as ‘English language learners’ (ELLs) and that supposedly position some students as deficient due to their English language despite the broad variation in English proficiency status among within-group populations. It is present in the bilingual label attached often to White students learning a language and which allows them additional social support while disallowing such a privilege for their ‘ELL’ counterparts (Flores, Phuong & Venegas, 2020; Flores, Tseng, & Subtirelu, 2021; Martínez, 2018). It is visible in ‘miscue’ analyses that label the legitimate English pronunciation of students as ‘wrong’ (Bloome & Dail, 1997) because approximations of language do not align with acceptable Eurocentric norms (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Raciolinguistic ideology also is evident in decisions to penalize accentuated use of English by immigrant students and in the commendation of certain people (including students) of color for being articulate while implying that many of their counterparts are not (e.g., see Smith, Lee, & Chang, 2022 advance online publication; see also Alim & Smitherman, 2020, discussion of raciolinguistic exceptionalism).

Engaging raciolinguistic ideology disrupts the examination of language use within racialized populations by interrogating broad and accepted labels that are applied to select student populations (e.g., Latinx, Asian-American, Black immigrant) (Martínez, 2018). Disrupting this ideology has the potential to interrupt the positioning of such students and their literacy practices as superior to other within-group counterparts, creating opportunities for literate support structures needed by all students while also silencing the invisibility of racialized persons and their literacies within certain populations, which remain overlooked due to the Black/White binary operating in U.S. literacy research. Addressing raciolinguistic ideology in literacy research requires a shift toward racial justice and critical rethinking of how language, race, and racism are manipulated to work together within and across racialized populations.

Institutional practices among editors, politicians, publishers, and researchers. Multiple literacy stakeholders should challenge scholarship that does not reflect BIPOC histories and systems of knowledge, as well as question limitations in perception, understanding, and consideration of the racialized realities of participants/subjects. For example, racial justice in literacy research among BIPOC, must begin with, and within, BIPOC communities, families, individuals, or schools. Literacy researchers should build upon critical BIPOC epistemological and theoretical foundations to construct reviews of literature, provide more than a parenthetical citation, using extant literature to interrogate a range of BIPOC scholarship. There is an expectation that researchers will not whitesplain or whitewash their stance, and will be unapologetic about emphasizing race in tone, presentation, and delivery.

Researchers must be able to address the racialization of language when explicitly examining abstract systems of language use in the experiences of participants; clearly explicate their analytical procedures and recommendations by addressing underlying racial assumptions

and by highlighting how their recommendations are racially just. With a view toward expanding recognition of race in literacy research, researchers can acknowledge, implicitly or explicitly, global extensions of race and racism, while also acknowledging the role of colonialization and immigration, globalization, and internationalization in reinforcing deficit discourses based on race and racialized language in literacy research.

Political actions. The epistemological shift from an ideology of White supremacy to literacy research about, and, among BIPOC for racially just research, starts with BIPOC. For some politicians and stakeholders any shift away from White supremacy will be understood as a threat to their control over the lives of BIPOC. For other politicians and stakeholders, the proposed paradigm shift will validate BIPOC cultures, ethnicities, experiences, languages, lives, and realities and be a welcome reprieve from centuries of racial oppression. Actions requested by politicians for racial justice in literacy research must be enforced to effect substantive change, and as suggested by the recent EO concerning equity for federal agencies. Federal and state funds should be used to produce racially-just literacy informed by BIPOC epistemologies, paradigms, and methods.

Conclusion

We have discussed how the failure to act is complicity, the failure to speak up is silence, the failure to acknowledge is willful ignorance; all of which are in support (knowingly or unknowingly) of White supremacy. Attempts to engage in literacy research that appears to address race, but fails in content, conception, methodology, and analysis, to center racial justice, also operates in service of White supremacy. We conclude with a call to the field for accountability and racial justice in literacy research: **There can be no equity in literacy**

research without racial justice. To move forward we must reconceptualize literacy research and dismantle structural racism in the field.

In closing, we return to the epigram quoted at the beginning of this report, as we reimagine literacy research as racially just, “*injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere*”

Martin Luther King, Jr, (1994).

Notes:

1. In February of 2017, LRA Vice President, Marcelle Haddix - on behalf of the LRA Board of Directors – requested a Research Report to focus on Race, Literacy, and Equity. A draft of the report was to be available for the Executive Committee meeting in October 2017. In accordance with the LRA Policy and Procedures Handbook, Reports consist of synthesizing extant literature, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the issue, as well as making recommendation/s for future directions (for the field). We are indebted to all the scholars who have worked on earlier drafts of the report: April Baker-Bell, Kisha Bryan, Mikel Cole, Christina Dobbs, Lamar Johnson, Althier M. Lazar, Danny Martinez, Gholneshar Muhammad, and Tiffany Nyachae.
2. Historically, labeling of non-White people, by White people, in the United States is an ideological morass of dehumanizing negative stereotypes. People of Color also have struggled with how to adequately distinguish individual ethnic and racial roots as well as to be inclusive of all non-White ethnic and racial groups. For convenience, we have adopted the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, or BIPOC, in this report, while acknowledging that similar terms, i.e., people of color, are likewise acceptable.

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