

## Leveraging Credit for Prior Learning for Underrepresented Groups: Lessons Learned from the Global Literature

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**[Abstract]** Credit for prior learning (CPL) creates opportunities for underrepresented groups to thrive as individuals and contribute to their families, communities, and countries. Systematic literature reviews use rigorous methods to identify, collect, and analyze relevant literature for the purpose of creating new knowledge. The current review examined the use of CPL beyond the United States to create opportunities for underrepresented groups. Inclusion criteria comprised peer reviewed journal articles published in English over a 10-year period, with *credit for prior learning* (CPL) or related terms appearing in an article's abstract and at least five times in the body, and a purpose or objective of using CPL to create opportunities for underrepresented groups. Data collection used the matrix method to systematically capture data, and data analysis used frequency and characteristic analysis and thematic coding. Major findings included underlying frameworks to examine CPL and identify opportunities as well as four recurring themes—ideological and practical implications for CPL assessment, CPL for upward social mobility, epistemological intersection of nontraditional learning and traditional institutions, and challenges of and solutions for language difference—offering implications for CPL programs and practice.

**[Keywords]** credit for prior learning (CPL), prior learning assessment (PLA), recognition of prior learning (RPL), prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), underrepresented groups, immigrants, frameworks, opportunities

Credit for prior learning or CPL currently offers numerous benefits in the US and around the world. In the US, CPL often makes the difference between busy adults earning a college degree or not (Boden et al., 2019), using assessment testing or competency portfolios to document and award academic credit for knowledge gained through work or life experience (Cherrstrom et al., 2021; Klein-Collins & Wertheim, 2013). Benefits include stronger affiliation with one's university, bolstered persistence, sharpened analytical skills, shortened time to degree, and reduced costs, especially for adult learners and underrepresented groups (Boden et al., 2019; Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2011, 2017; Cherrstrom et al., 2021, 2023, Hayward & Williams, 2015; Klein, 2017; McKay et al., 2016). The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (2010) determined those earning CPL have higher graduation rates, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, age, academic ability, grade point average, and financial aid status, and Cherrstrom et al. (2021) found CPL creates opportunities for those in marginalized and special populations in the US.

Globally, CPL provides possibilities as a lever to create opportunities for those in underrepresented groups. In addition to awarding credit for prior learning to adult learners returning to school to earn their degree, CPL candidates include qualified professionals needing credentialing and language skills as well as those with nontraditional learning experiences or ways of knowing. An earlier systematic review of the CPL literature beyond the US (Boden et al., 2022) found empirical studies and examination of CPL overall as well as relevant programs, policy and systems, assessment practices, workplace applications, usage of technology tools, theory building, and immigration. Implications for practice included the use of CPL to create access to education, and by extension employment, and support adult learners in marginalized and special groups. As one example, global migration has increased by 34% since 2010 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020; McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024), including migration within countries, typically from rural areas to cities, and international migration, typically to urban centers in more developed countries (Ions, 2020). CPL provides one pathway for immigrants to demonstrate professional competencies for credentialing in a new country to thrive as individuals and contribute to their families and communities.

Everyone is needed, at their highest capabilities, for individual and societal well-being (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999), and effective interventions are needed to work toward this end. Inspired by earlier systematic reviews of the CPL literature in and beyond the United States, the purpose of the current review was to examine the use of CPL to create opportunities for underrepresented groups. Four research questions guided the study: What journals published relevant articles? When were the articles published? Who authored the articles? What purpose or objective did authors examine in articles? The answers to these questions will inform theory, practice, and policy related to the credentialing and awarding of academic credit for the prior learning of underrepresented groups. This article continues with the research design, findings, discussion, and implications, including ideas for future research.

### Research Design Systematic Literature Review

Systematic reviews use rigorous methods to identify, collect, and analyze relevant literature to create new knowledge through gaps, synergies, or themes (Booth et al., 2012; Kennedy, 2007; Torraco, 2005). To fully capture all perspectives from the literature without bias, *all* articles meeting the inclusion criteria become data for collection and analysis.

To systematically identify the 85 articles included in the original review of CPL literature beyond the US (see Boden et al., 2022), inclusion criteria comprised peer reviewed journal articles published in our primary language of English over a 10-year period. Criteria also included one more of the following search terms—*credit for prior learning (CPL)*, *prior learning assessment (PLA)*, *recognition of prior learning (RPL)*, *prior learning assessment or recognition (PLAR)*—appearing in an article’s abstract and at least five times in the body. To systematically identify literature for the current review, inclusion criteria further comprised a purpose or objective of using CPL to create opportunities for underrepresented groups, resulting in a dataset of 23 articles.

Data collection used Garrard’s (2020) matrix method and an Excel spreadsheet with one row for each article and individual columns to systematically capture data such as author name(s), journal name, publication year, article title, other publishing information (e.g., volume number, issue, page numbers, doi link), and article purpose or objective with additional columns for notes and analysis.

Data analysis began with review of the articles and matrix data in their entirety with notes added to the latter about the former. Guided by the research questions, we next analyzed the frequency and characteristics of the journals publishing articles, publication years, and article authors. For the purpose or objective of each article, two authors independently and inductively first coded each article for the underlying framework (e.g., situational analysis, application proposal, program design, learning theory), then repeated the process to code for the use of CPL to create opportunities for underrepresented groups (e.g., assessment, assessors, policies, epistemologies, and various challenges, opportunities, and solutions). As strategies for reliability and validation, they held several coding sessions to test and reach inter-coder agreement and categories (Creswell & Poth, 2024), ultimately leading to findings of frameworks and themes.

### Findings

Based on an earlier systematic review of the global CPL literature beyond the United States, the current review further examined the use of CPL to create opportunities for underrepresented groups. Findings included the journals publishing relevant articles and publication year, author perspectives, and the underlying frameworks and crosscutting themes related to the purpose or objective of each article. This section discusses each finding, organized by research question.

#### *Journals and Publication Years*

The first and second research questions asked what journals published the articles and in what publication year. Over 10 years, 18 journals collectively published the 23 CPL articles in this review (see Table 1). Four journals published multiple articles, the highest number being three in the *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, including two as part of a special issue on CPL in 2013. Three journals each published two articles, the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, *South African Journal of Higher Education*, and *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*. Two years represented almost half of the articles with 26% published in 2010 and 22% in 2013.

**Table 1**

*Journals Publishing Articles Examining the Use of CPL to Create Opportunities for Underrepresented Populations*

Publication year	Journal publishing an article(s)
2010	Australian Journal of Adult Learning (2 articles) Canadian Social Work Expert Systems with Applications International Journal of Lifelong Education Journal of Nursing Management
2011	International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning McGill Journal of Education
2012	Journal of Workplace Learning

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2013	International Journal of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning International Journal of Lifelong Education (2 articles in special CPL issue) Journal of International Migration and Integration Journal of Social Work and Values & Ethics
2016	International Journal of Higher Education South African Journal of Higher Education
2017	Studies in Continuing Education Studies in the Education of Adults University of South Africa Press
2018	South African Journal of Higher Education
2019	Africa Education Review Higher Education, Skills and Work- Based Learning
2020	Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning

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### ***Author Perspectives***

The third research question asked who authored the articles. Authorship of the 23 articles almost equally divided between 47.8% written by one person and 52.2% collaboratively written with others (see Appendix). Perspectives included 47 distinct authors, including 45 who authored or co-authored one article and two who authored more than one article (see Hamer, 2010, 2013; Hlongwane, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). Furthermore, author perspectives in the 23 articles represented eight distinct countries with nine articles situating in South Africa, five solely in Canada, one in both Canada and the Ukraine, four in Australia, and one each in Italy, Namibia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

### ***Framework and Themes Related to Article Purpose or Objective***

The fourth research question asked what purpose or objective the author(s) examined in articles. Major findings for this question included the underlying article frameworks and four recurring themes. The purpose or objective of each article related to one or more underlying frameworks and comprised 12 *situational analyses* (e.g., a case study), eight *application proposals* (e.g., to improve CPL programs and practices), six *program designs* (e.g., offering a pragmatic focus), and/or four *learning theories* (e.g., to influence CPL practices). In addition, the review identified four major themes intersecting within and among the articles with 95.7% of articles discussing multiple themes and 30.0% discussing all four (see Appendix). In descending order, 91.3% of articles discussed the ideological and practical implications for CPL assessment, 78.3% the use of CPL for upward social mobility, 65.2% the epistemological intersection of *nontraditional* learning and *traditional* institutions, and 43.5% the challenges of and solutions for language difference. The next section discusses the frameworks and themes using the literature.

### **Discussion**

The systematic literature review examined the use of CPL to create opportunities for underrepresented groups. This section begins with discussion of the underlying frameworks used by authors in articles to examine CPL. The section then discusses each of the four recurring themes,

highlighting the literature from the review—the ideological and practical implications for CPL assessment, CPL for upward social mobility, epistemological intersection of nontraditional learning and traditional institutions, and challenges of and solutions for language difference

### ***Frameworks to Discuss CPL and Opportunities***

This review identified four underlying frameworks—situational analyses, application proposals, program designs, and learning theories—with many articles using more than one.

*Situational analyses* applied to approximately half the articles and included works offering snapshots of various challenges within CPL practices. Examples include the impact of transnational migration (Andersson & Fejes, 2010), marginalized adult learners (Moss, 2011), and disparities between the policy and implementation of CPL programs (Shaketange & Kanyimba, 2016). Furthermore, over half the articles coded as situational analyses also received a second code, including four application proposals and three learning theories. To create opportunities for underrepresented populations, these doubly coded articles demonstrate how an effective and direct situational analysis can lead to the most effective CPL proposals as well as discussions and applications of learning theories in CPL. For example: Jacobs (2018) provides a situational analysis of institutional culture at a South African university that allows for a close inspection of CPL policy as it compares to rhetorical values within the institution; Van Kleef & Werquin (2013) provided a detailed account of how different learning theories apply in the situation of internationally educated nurses (IENs) seeking RN licenses in Canada.

*Application proposals* applied to approximately a third of the articles and consisted of various proposals to improve CPL application and implementation. As mentioned above, four of these articles also paired with a situational analysis. The remaining four application proposals included Hamer's (2010) work inditing the RPL system in Australia for marginalizing the individuals intended to be served by a program as redress for past exclusions. Others included proven ideas for using reflective narratives for assessment (Ions & Sutcliffe, 2020) and helpful details on how specific communities may benefit from CPL theory and practice (e.g. Hamer (2013) discusses the community services industry and Hlongwane (2017) discusses the discipline of library and information science).

*Program design* applied to a quarter of the articles with no secondary codes. These articles differ from application proposals by offering more focused discussion of specific design elements in CPL programs. Of the six articles, two discussed specific instrumentation devices, including Biletska et al.'s (2010) software for a semantic and lexical approach to standardizing academic credentials and Santa Mina et al.'s (2011) pilot study for an online PLAR instrument for internationally educated nurses (IENs). Half the program design articles discussed the effective use of portfolios, including multiple portfolio types (Cameron, 2012) and the use of portfolios assessments in postgrad nursing degrees (Jooste & Jasper 2010) and social work (Sutherland et al., 2010).

*Learning theories* applied to the remaining four articles, three of which double coded for situational analysis and provided context for the discussion of specific learning theories such as Naudé's (2013) third space of permeable boundaries. In the singularly coded article, Alexander et al. (2010) discussed the benefits of embracing multiple social learning theories for the equitable implementation of RPL in South Africa.

Individually and collectively, the four frameworks illustrate ways in which to examine CPL and create opportunities for underrepresented populations. The review continues with discussion of each of the four recurring themes, discussed in descending order of prevalence.

### ***Ideological and Practical Implications for CPL Assessment***

CPL can create opportunities for underrepresented groups through assessment. However, authors in the current review questioned the authority and power of institutional hierarchies awarding CPL, and such hierarchies varied by profession, geography, culture, and economics. This section discusses two hierarchies with ideological and practical implications for CPL assessment—communities of practice (CoPs) and academic institutions.

### ***Communities of Practice***

As influencers in CPL practice, CoPs, including regulated professions and special fields, benefit their members by providing on the job training and immersion. However, Naudé (2013) concluded CoPs also create boundaries prohibiting legitimate peripheral participation. Noting CoPs' ability to facilitate *and* inhibit the transition of learning, Van Kleef and Werquin (2013), described CoPs with stakeholders at the core, students on the periphery, and those with foreign accreditation excluded on the outside. Even with missions to include, CoP practices can perpetuate the *other* as a nonparticipant in the community, for example, when assessing the prior learning of immigrants (Andersson & Fejes, 2010). Regulated professions or special fields, by extension CoPs, struggle to control what knowledge is considered valuable (Cooper et al., 2017). Since knowledge is not always immediately translatable, CPL discretion is left to those currently in power who may have conscious or unconscious, bias or prejudice. Greater awareness, training, and new norms can help CoPs welcome members into the community to leverage the benefits of a CoP and create opportunities for all members.

### ***Academic Institutions***

As primary providers of CPL, academic institutions experience challenges and solutions related to assessment, assessor training, and policy.

*Assessment* presents challenges for academic institutions and requires solutions for effective CPL programs. Challenges include the transfer of transcripts without standardization or appropriate assessors of those credits (Moss, 2011), the lack of guidelines or types of knowledge the learner should exhibit (Shaketange & Kanyimba, 2016), and difficulty in articulating and translating highly situational topics into written narrative without sufficient guidance or direction (Rossouw et al., 2016). As solutions, Cooper et al. (2017) suggested dialogic and navigational models for CPL with curriculum operating in a framework open to negotiation. Jooste and Jasper (2010) recommended well-established assessment criteria in identifying competencies to satisfy all involved in process. Santa Mina et al. (2011) called for more studies and samples to refine CPL assessment and generalizable benchmarks for degree equivalence to ultimately assess and recognize credentials for registration purposes.

*Assessor training* benefits assessors and candidates in academic institutions. CPL in specialized professions requires assessors to have proficiency as a content specialist (Moss, 2011) or training for them to assess in multitude of subject areas (Anderssen & Fejes, 2010; Gair, 2013). These proficiency standards present challenges in finding qualified and available assessors (Hamer, 2010), and once found, retaining them despite the burdens of high demand to assess CPL (Rossouw et al., 2016). Training further supports assessors in knowing and executing the academic

institution's CPL policy objectives, for the absence of training increases personal judgement, bias, or prejudice in CPL assessment (Shaketange & Kanyimba, 2016). In the case of immigrant professionals, the latter can reinforce job segregation based on race and gender or unduly influence assessment based on the changing demands of economic markets (Bencivenga, 2017). *Assessors* play a critical role in CPL practice, often using culturally relevant and flexible pedagogy to guide candidates in making tacit or unconscious knowledge more explicit for assessment (Naudé, 2013). Assessors merit training for effective CPL practice.

*Policy* within academic institutions is often influenced by external policy. Cultural systems shape people's attitudes toward CPL, in turn shaping policy and a frequent tension between rhetorical values and practical implementation (Jacobs, 2018). The implementation of policy often lacks coherency (Shaketange & Kanyimba, 2016) and changing governmental priorities and funding influence academic institutions and their CPL policy. As one example, governments sometimes reverse economic incentives during implementation of long-range plans, decreasing resources for academic institutions and educators (Moss, 2011). As another example, an academic institution's policy related to the transfer of credits from other countries may reflect a government's current favoring of specific countries and occupations.

*Policy* within academic institutions may present barriers for underrepresented people. For example, residency clauses limit or preclude the awarding of academic credit in CPL programs (Rossouw et al., 2016). Length of residency presents even more difficulty for immigrants in rural areas with fewer universities and related services (Moss, 2011). To consciously address barriers to accreditation, Hlongwane (2017) proposed complete transparency and concern for physical flexibility (e.g., time, locale) when implementing services, such as advising services and programs, test preparation services, evidence collection assistance, and appeals processes.

CPL has long resisted the notion of a singular way of knowing (Alexander et al., 2010), instead promoting many ways of knowing to create opportunities for underrepresented people to credential or earn a degree. Ions and Sutcliffe (2020) advocated a shift from *what* has been learned to *how* it is learned to create an environment of balanced learning that makes CPL programs an exercise in community engagement.

In summary, CPL can create opportunities for underrepresented populations, requiring accurate assessment and depending on trained and altruistic trainers as well as effective policy. Furthermore, academic institutions and CoPs have power and influence in what is determined to be knowledge and the practice of CPL.

### ***CPL for Upward Social Mobility***

CPL offers opportunities to underrepresented groups for upward social mobility by creating a less traditional pathway to credentialing or academic credit, leading to job placement and security. CPL is in high demand for underrepresented groups (Biletska et al., 2010), but tensions exist between inclusive intent and practical implementation (Cooper et al., 2017; Harris, 2017). Bencivenga (2017) further identified a tension between academic excellence and social injustice where qualification frameworks may perpetuate "a social elite and cultural symbolic capital" (p. 140). Furthermore, recognizing nontraditional knowledge from alternative contexts presents challenges, sometimes manifesting in de-skilling processes resulting in downward social mobility (Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Bencivenga, 2017).

Immigrant professionals are often excluded from higher degree programs through formal or arbitrary prerequisites (Jooste & Jasper, 2010), in many cases, finding work within their field

but below their qualifications. For example, a teacher certified in another country may work at a daycare center in their new country, or those trained in hospital nursing may work in hospice care (Santa Mina et al., 2011; Van Kleef & Werquin, 2013). CPL programs can address such challenges; however, humanitarian crises or refugee migrations can lead to economic cutbacks that underfund CPL programs (Moss, 2011).

As solutions, a collaboration of CPL stakeholders, funds, and training initiatives can integrate education systems in the workplace to combat the descending social mobility of immigrants seeking work in their new countries (Andersson & Fejes, 2010). Jacobs (2018) expanded on this idea by proposing a home for CPL programs in academic institutions to develop a construction of constitutive meanings within institutional culture. To counteract downward social mobility, this programmatic home would allow for an environment of negotiation and adaptability to facilitate upward social mobility for immigrants seeking credentialing and academic credit. In summary, CPL can create opportunities for underrepresented groups to participate in upward social mobility.

### ***Epistemological Intersection of Nontraditional Learning and Traditional Institutions***

To create opportunities for underrepresented groups, CPL practices at an epistemological intersection—granting credentials or academic credit for *nontraditional* learning from *traditional* institutions. CPL facilitates the transfer of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, but such transfer also challenges traditional sources of epistemic authority (Bencivenga, 2017; Ions & Sutcliffe, 2020; Naudé, 2013; Rossouw et al., 2016). Traditionally, Eurocentric knowledge has been considered superior, while the knowledge of immigrants from less developed countries has been considered inferior (Bencivenga, 2017). In many cases, fear prohibits significant changes to current knowledge standards (Gair, 2013), promoting assimilation rather diverse epistemological contributions (Guo & Shan, 2013). In addition, many value explicit or formal knowledge more than tacit or informal knowledge, limiting immigrants in engaging cognitive faculties (Alexander et al., 2010). Knowledge creation is personal rather than institutional, yet academic institutions often ignore context and embodied experience in accreditation resulting in more mechanistic frameworks (Hamer, 2013). Beyond the classroom, epistemic authorities in CoPs often seek to control of knowledge determination (Cooper et al., 2017), and transition to a new profession also presents formidable challenges, as each is grounded in distinct biographical, cultural, historical, and social contexts (Van Kleef & Werquin, 2013) and epistemology.

Solutions for academic institutions include conceptual scaffolding through a multiplicity of platforms and forms of engagement beyond the physical academic department to broaden traditional pedagogies and knowledge paradigms by (Cameron, 2012). For example, consequential transition theory explores deliberate abstraction of transferred knowledge or skills to address such abstractions and how they influence the articulation of tacit knowledge (Van Kleef & Werquin, 2013). As additional solutions, Hamer (2013) encouraged a pedagogy of *positive individual transformation* to resist dominant culture assimilation practices. For example, a recognitive justice approach seeks to dismiss the cultural neutrality found in retributive or distributive justice frameworks (Guo & Shan, 2013). In summary, CPL operates at the intersection of nontraditional learning and traditional institutions, presenting challenges but also solutions for underrepresented groups.



### ***Challenges of and Solutions for Language Difference***

Differences in language present challenges for CPL, and CPL provides solutions for differing language to create opportunities for underrepresented groups. For underrepresented populations, language differences often result in hierarchical exclusion and marginalization (Andersson & Fejes, 2010) as well as lower earnings and employment rates (Sutherland et al., 2010). Along with artifacts, language most often indoctrinates newcomers into a cultural community (Van Kleef & Werquin, 2013). However, valuable tacit knowledge, defined as the “the wealth of collective expertise that exists within an organization, which is not written down or formally expressed,” (Ions & Sutcliffe, 2020, p. 128) often supersedes linguistic use. CoPs often protect specialized and technical language, making accessibility more difficult for those outside the boundaries (Naudé, 2013) and enabling unchecked gatekeeping (Cooper et al., 2017). At the same time, the vocational language of occupations held by immigrants frequently does not translate into a CoP in the new country (Bencivenga, 2017). CPL assessment requires higher literacy and familiarity with academic institutions resulting in alienation of underrepresented groups, including those programs intend to include and serve, specifically indigenous peoples and immigrants (Hamer, 2010).

As a solution, across the literature in the current review, authors championed portfolios for assessment of knowledge and advocated for such in CPL policy (Jooste & Jasper, 2010; Sutherland 2010; Santa Mina et al., 2011; Cameron, 2012; Naudé, 2013; Rossouw et al., 2016; Ions & Sutcliffe, 2020). Andersson and Fejes (2010) proposed a program pairing *parallel language training* with CPL for situated knowledge, accepting and developing vocational terminology as satisfactory language fulfillments. Ions and Sutcliffe (2020) encouraged CPL programs to provide tools to assist students in critical analysis of their learnings. They further created step-by-step modules for students to use in building portfolios for CPL assessment, supporting their academic knowledge and associated administrative practices. Furthermore, the role of assessor is mediated through portfolio training, boundary pedagogy, and reflective learning modules facilitating an underlying process for students’ articulation of prior knowledge. In summary, language difference presents challenges in assessing and awarding CPL, but CPL can provide solutions for those with language difference.

In summary of discussion, this review identified four underlying frameworks—situational analyses, application proposals, program designs, and learning theories—with many articles using more than one. These frameworks illustrate ways in which to examine CPL and create opportunities for underrepresented populations. The review also identified four recurring themes—ideological and practical implications for CPL assessment, CPL for upward social mobility, epistemological intersection of nontraditional learning and traditional institutions, and challenges of and solutions for language difference—intersecting and influencing each other. These themes support a fresh look at CPL, what it offers, and improvements in policy and practice. CPL programs, practice, and policy around the world serve as models to create opportunities for underrepresented groups by assessing prior learning for credentialing or academic credit.

### **Implications and Future Research**

The findings of this review provide implications for theory, practice, and policy as well as suggestions for future research. For theory, the review adds a systematic research design to identify, collect, and analyze articles relevant to a specific problem or topic, in this case using CPL to create opportunities for underrepresented groups, as well as findings including frameworks and themes. For practice, the *frameworks* provide CPL practitioners and researchers with four

approaches—situational analyses, application proposals, program designs, and learning theories—to document challenges, identify solutions, and inform current and future CPL.

For practice and policy, the recurring *themes*—ideological and practical implications for CPL assessment, CPL for upward social mobility, epistemological intersection of nontraditional learning and traditional institutions, and challenges of and solutions for language difference—intertwine and offer ideas for future research. For the first theme of assessment, CPL policies and practices in academic institutions and CoPs must ensure all are included and create opportunities by valuing academic *and* experiential learning (Shaketange & Kanyimba, 2016). To reach this end, policies requiring ongoing training and development for CPL and the programs providing such training present important levers for practice and improvement (Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Biletska et al, 2010; Moss, 2011; Naudé, 2013; Shaketange & Kanyimba, 2016). Future research could investigate policy changes as well as the effectiveness of assessor training.

Regarding the second theme of social mobility, downward trends are accelerating globally, particularly in developed countries such as the United States (Arizona State University, 2020; McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2022). CPL can be further integrated into universities to increase access to training and credentialing for those from underrepresented groups, improve academic and social outcomes, and include more adult learners in training and education to increase upward social mobility (Andersson & Fejes, 2010; Gair, 2013; Hlongwane, 2017, 2019a, 2019b; Moss, 2011). Future research could study how to scale CPL and credentialing across cities, states, and even across and between countries.

Relative to the third and fourth themes of epistemology and language difference, policies and practices focusing on positive individual transformation and widening current standards to promote diverse contributions, rather than assimilation, can be used as levers to integrate traditional and nontraditional ways of knowing (Gair, 2013; Guo & Shan, 2013). Using portfolios in conjunction with parallel language training supports credentialing for underrepresented groups. Future research could study the efficacy of language training in improving the quality of portfolios created for CPL assessment. Additional future research could examine post-COVID-19 CPL practices and standards, for example, related to the need for medical professionals during global health crises, including pandemics.

In conclusion, this systematic literature review identified frameworks and themes for the use of CPL to create opportunities for underrepresented groups. While CPL faces unique and shared challenges in various contexts around the world, these challenges are met with innovation and novel solutions. The lessons learned can be leveraged, shared, iterated upon, and implemented in new settings, including, and perhaps especially, to assist higher education in achieving its social mission and commitment to the public good. The dream of opportunities, inclusion for all, and in turn, contribution by all, merits study, effort, and action. As educators and educational institutions, we have the opportunity to use CPL to “adapt pedagogical approaches for the real and complexly human students who show up in our classrooms” (Stommel, 2020, para. 1). Let us continue to build robust and scalable CPL programs, strengthen policy and practice, learn from one another and for each other, and leverage CPL for the benefit of all.

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### Appendix

#### Credit for Prior Learning Articles Aligned with Recurring Themes

Authors	Article title with country for context	Assessment <sup>1</sup>	Social mobility <sup>2</sup>	Epistemology <sup>3</sup>	Language difference <sup>4</sup>
Alexander et al., 2010	Legitimate peripheral participation (LPP)—The case for recognition of prior learning sites and knowledges in South Africa’s transforming education system	✓	✓	✓	
Andersson & Fejes, 2010	Mobility of knowledge as a recognition challenge: Experiences from Sweden	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bencivenga, 2017	Translating the initial assessment of migrants’ informal learning in practice [Italy]	✓	✓	✓	✓
Biletska et al., 2010	A semantic approach to expert system for e-assessment of credentials and competencies [Canada, Ukraine]	✓	✓		
Cameron, 2012	Recognising workplace learning: the emerging practices of e-RPL and e-PR [Australia]	✓		✓	
Cooper et al., 2017	Recognition of prior learning: The tensions between its inclusive intentions and constraints on its implementation [South Africa]	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gair, 2013	Recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Australian social work field education: A standpoint promoting human rights and social justice?	✓	✓		
Guo & Shan, 2013	The politics of recognition: critical discourse analysis of recent PLAR policies for immigrant professionals in Canada	✓	✓	✓	
Hamer, 2010	Recognition of prior learning—Normative assessment or co-construction of preferred identities? [Australia]	✓	✓		✓

Authors	Article title with country for context	Assessment <sup>1</sup>	Social mobility <sup>2</sup>	Epistemology <sup>3</sup>	Language difference <sup>4</sup>
Hamer, 2013	Love, rights and solidarity in the recognition of prior learning (RPL) [Australia]	✓	✓	✓	
Hlongwane, 2017	The use of principles of good assessment in recognition of prior learning practice in library and information science in South Africa	✓			✓
Hlongwane, 2019	Legislative framework for implementing recognition of prior learning [South Africa]	✓		✓	
Hlongwane, 2019	Recognition of prior learning as an access tool [South Africa]		✓	✓	
Ions & Sutcliffe, 2020	Barriers to constructing experiential learning claims through reflective narratives [United Kingdom]	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jacobs, 2018	Values, institutional culture and recognition of prior learning [South Africa]	✓	✓	✓	
Jooste & Jasper, 2010	A framework for recognition of prior learning within a postgraduate diploma of nursing management in South Africa	✓	✓		
Moss, 2011	The recognition of prior learning in Quebec: Current practices	✓	✓		
Naudé, 2013	Boundaries between knowledges— Does recognition of prior learning assessment represent a third space [South Africa]	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rossouw et al., 2016	Assessing prior learning in English business communication at a South African university of technology	✓	✓	✓	✓
Santa Mina et al., 2011	The development of an online instrument for prior learning assessment and recognition of internationally educated nurses: A pilot study [Canada]	✓	✓		
Shaketange & Kanyimba, 2016	The kind of knowledge assessed through mature age entry admission tests in Namibia institutions of higher learning: Case study of the University of Namibia and the Polytechnic of Namibia	✓			
Sutherland et al., 2010	Approaches to portfolio development and applications for immigrants in a social work context [Canada]			✓	✓

Authors	Article title with country for context	Assessment <sup>1</sup>	Social mobility <sup>2</sup>	Epistemology <sup>3</sup>	Language difference <sup>4</sup>
Van Kleef & Werquin, 2013	PLAR in nursing: Implications of situated learning, communities of practice and consequential transition theories for recognition [Canada]	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Notes.* <sup>1</sup>the ideological and practical implications for CPL assessment, <sup>2</sup>CPL for upward social mobility, <sup>3</sup>the epistemological intersection of nontraditional learning and traditional institutions, and <sup>4</sup>the challenges of and solutions for language difference.