Destandardizing English: Seeking Linguistic Justice in the English Language Arts Classroom

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Abstract

Black students and families in the United States have been consistently underserved by educational institutions and their curriculum. Scholars are increasingly aware of the opportunity gaps that arise as a result of Eurocentric standardized pedagogy and curriculum, and educators have turned to scholarship such as critical race theory to combat racial inequity; however, current legislation threatens such antiracist tools. As the National Council of Teachers of English reports in "Educators' Right and Responsibilities to Engage in Antiracist Teaching", over half of the country is burdened with "legislation either passed, pending, or under discussion [that] would severely limit K-12 and university educators' ability to engage with critical race theory and antiracist teaching" (2021). What do these restrictions mean to the educator who wishes to validate, discuss, and foster the experiences of Black students? How can we, as engaged teachers, practice and foster cultural literacy skills that encourage students to find appreciation for a diverse world? How does one ensure Black students see themselves in what is being taught? My research investigates all of these questions through the lenses of English Education and linguistic justice concluding that antiracist teaching in the ELA classroom remains possible and crucial, even at a time where legislation challenges it. I explore the origins of and literature that uses Ebonics as a way to help educators make learning more representative and equitable.

1. Introduction

Oftentimes, the English classroom is regarded as a refuge for ostracized students. In a multitude of media, teachers of English are depicted as shepherds of good judgment, rationality, and at times secondary parental figures for students. Stephen Chbotsky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* presents a resonant example of the romanticized English Language Arts teacher with the characterization of Mr. Anderson. Through the reading and writing assignments he designs and the out-of-classroom attention he gives toward his pupil's mental health, the protagonist of the novel explores the experiences and identities he carries with him inspiring radical realizations that drive the story. Similarly, the guidance counselor in the 1989 film *Heathers*, Ms. Pauline Fleming, embodies many generalizations tied to an educator of the humanities. While the school faces increasing rates of teenage suicide, Ms. Fleming is seen as alienated at staff meetings and is the sole voice calling for dialogic responses to the tragedies the school was facing. When she takes the stage as an educator, she arranges the class in the form of a socratic seminar, explains the importance of openly sharing and listening, and attempts to bring the school closer to interconnectedness and understanding through dialogue – echoing many pillars English teachers attempt to build their classrooms upon.

These White-washed portrayals of humanitarian educators in the settings of English classrooms may seduce the general public into thinking that teachers of English, as exceptionalities, have somehow "figured it out". Although they may be alone and face repercussions from educators of differing disciplines, there is a wide acceptance that English classrooms are sanctuaries for students in America who are overlooked, undervalued, and marginalized; however, it is crucial we do not overlook the capacity of an English classroom to be perpetually oppressive and painfully complicit in the face of the injustices we see in the world. Further, romanticized ideas of the English classroom fail to recognize historical trauma of language education in America. Language eradication policies forced or coerced code-switching, and denied access to literacy education have left profound trauma in the families and stories of many Black and Indigenous students. How can we ever expect to uproot injustices if we cannot spot the roots themselves?

The following work aims to synthesize Black scholarship in order to implore what researched-based best practice looks like in a classroom dedicated to equity and linguistic justice. Turning to and leaning on esteemed Black pedagogues, I propose a framework for discussing Black brilliance in the context of a mixed race or dominantly-White classroom. Much of the seminal work in educational linguistic justice has taken place in nearly entirely Black schools with Black educators; however, the conversation pertaining to the politics of language cannot be contained within the walls of these classrooms. Where Black people are, have been, and

will be, critical dialogue about weaponized language ought to take place -- this means everywhere. It is no longer acceptable for a standard variation of language to be held as superior to another, neither in ideology nor praxis. It is no longer acceptable for curriculum to be censored based on White comfortability and complicity. It is no longer acceptable for the language intrinsically tied to community and cultural well-being to be fragmented, hidden, or stomped out in the classroom. If our goal, as educators of English, is to show future generations the power of words and literature, it is imperative that we ensure *every* student is given the opportunity to see, experiment, and create language that reflects who they are. The time is now to *de*standardize English.

2. Linguistic Injustice: Past and Present

Dr. Katherine D. Kinzler, professor of psychology at the University of Chicago, posits "when one group wants to oppress another, restricting the use of its language has been frequently used as a tool," (64) [1] yet contemporary conversations about the marginalization of Black Americans often overlook linguistic violence. Perhaps the lack of dialogue around linguistic equity can be accredited to rampant explicit acts of racism throughout the history of the United States that, because they are seen, are addressed first by social justice movements; however, it is of utmost importance that, as people dedicated to a more equitable nation, we dissect our national institutions that have grown from the roots of oppression – one of the many being education and the process of language learning.

The United States became a linguistically oppressive nation before the first bricks of a schoolhouse were laid and before the "founding fathers" signed the Declaration of Independence. In fact, the first moments of linguistic dehumanization and degradation precede even the arrival of enslaved Africans at the shores of Virginia, still a British colony. Nikole Hannah Jones, author and coordinator of the Pulitzer Award-winning *The 1619 Project*, proposes the moment the insidious institution of slavery began was in 1619 with the arrival of more than 20 enslaved Africans at the coastal port, Point Comfort, in Virginia (1) [2]. However, before these enslaved Africans even boarded the ship, their enslavers used tactics of language planning to "separate captive Africans who spoke the same language as a way to minimize rebellion," [3]. These colonizers weaponized the linguistic diversity of West Africa by isolating individuals from those who spoke mutually intelligible languages; thus, those who survived the turbulent voyage were forced to make-do with the only uniform language available – the language of the colonizer.

Dr. Michael Takafor Ndemanu lays out the process of language learning for enslaved Africans in his article "Ebonics, to Be or Not to Be? A Legacy of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," as largely environmental, as formal schooling and literacy training was strictly prohibited for captured African peoples. As a means to communicate with one another, enslaved Africans gleaned vocabulary and lexicon from the oppressors; however, as grammar and syntax structures are more difficult to learn orally, Africans meticulously placed the English words they were hearing within the grammatical structures of West African languages. Hence, the earliest forms of Ebonics and Black American English were born (Ndemanu) [4]. The birth of Black American language was anything but haphazard; Dr. April Baker-Bell, renowned scholar-activist-educator and author of *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*, explores how Black Language became a meticulous method of resistance. She comments "there was a moment… when my brother, or my mother, or my father, or my sister, had to convey to me… the danger in which I was standing from the white man standing just behind me, and to convey this with speed, and in a language, that the white man could not possibly understand, and that, indeed, he cannot understand," [3]. For survival, for resistance, and for community, systems of Black language grew and developed.

As early Black language formation amongst the enslaved triumphed language planning verbally, enslavers grew fearful of this resistance discourse and what increasing literacy skills may mean for their exploitative slavery. Ndemanu emphasizes the threat to White supremacy that is inherent in literacy amongst the marginalized, as he states "literacy can raise consciousness, politicize the minds of the oppressed, and trigger a revolt against the oppressors," (31) [4]. As slave-owners employed some of the enslaved as personal scribes or note-keepers, literacy rates amongst the enslaved began to rise, and as a means to maintain power, the Southern United States began to implement anti-literacy laws. The first of which was written as follows. This premier example is from the state of South Carolina, signed in 1740:

"Whereas, the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences; Be it enacted, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe, in any matter of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person or persons shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds, current money," [4].

In contemporary currency, this would be a $24,886.70 fine for each and every enslaved person found to be taught in writing. Anti-literacy laws are just one example of the "uncouth and unorthodox means to control the oppressed and to justify the oppression by limiting access to quality education," [4]; contemporarily, these means have become pedagogical ideologies of language that are prescriptive in nature and center eradication or respectability praxis. Educators who apply traditionally prescriptive ideas of language to their classroom often fail to recognize that prescribed "Standard English is a byproduct of white supremacy," [3] and further that those who write textbooks on the English language and linguistics have historically neglected non-White perspectives of language. Inevitably, these English pedagogies perpetuate the oppression of Black English speakers within the classroom and prevent Black students from learning about their linguistic history. Hence, in the educational space, Africanness and Black language has been falsely "perceived to be inferior, pathological, deviant, and unnatural" [3].

Just as anti-literacy laws grew from the fear of Black English being used to overthrow White supremacy, recent approaches to language education have been put in place in response to recognizing dialectical English within the classroom. These approaches regard diversity in linguistic expression as a weakness, and further have been utilized to uphold a standard language ideology that Baker-Bell describes as a "bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class," (15) [3]. Standard language ideologies in praxis may look like eradication and respectability approaches; however, they encapsulate various methods that English speakers utilize to uphold linguistic hegemony which is achieved when "dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and the usage as standard or paradigmatic. Hegemony is ensured when they can convince those who fail to meet those standards to view their failure as being the result of the inadequacy of their own language" [3]. Hence, in the context of American English Education, linguistic hegemony began with colonizers and slave-owners who used tactics such as language planning to continually posit the marginalized as unworthy, unintelligent, and unimportant; henceforth, the education system in America both historical and contemporary has been utilized to uphold this unequal representation of language in order to convince the linguistically oppressed that the artful ways in which they use language are wrong or invalid. From its origin, the Eurocentric institution of

language education in the United States has grown from and actively plays a role in White supremacy.

Baker-Bell's experiences as an English educator embody the effects of such oppression and have illuminated that "people's language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences. Indeed, the way a Black child's language is devalued in school reflects how Black lives are devalued in the world" (2) [3]. As aforementioned, the primary practices that neglect Black English in the classroom are ones that aim to eradicate all non-standardized dialects of the English language and are ones that enforce White-centric respectability. The former attitudes around Black English echo explicit practices that took place in Native American boarding schools where not only native tongues but also physical appearances underwent forced assimilation to White standards while the latter falsely encouraged code-switching as necessary for finding success in the United States. Both of these approaches to language education maintain a deficit mentality surrounding non-standard dialects of language and, in turn, undermine students as well as their intellectual and human abilities while upholding attitudes and teachings of White supremacy. The theories and pedagogies detailed below are racist in nature and, as Baker-Bell describes through the embodied experiences of her students, "divert the attention from the real defects of the education system to imaginary defects of the child" [3].

3. Eradication Approaches

Baker-Bell denotes "*eradicationist language pedagogies* [as those that aim] to eradicate Black Language from Black students' linguistic repertoires," (28) [3]. She elaborates that embedded in these pedagogies is a belief system where "Black students' language practices are viewed as deficient, and the goal is to correct what is presumed to be the deficiency and replace it with what is believed to be the better language," (28-29) [3]. Contextually, in the United States, this means that Black Language has been educationally targeted and eliminated to make Black students more susceptible to adopting a White lexicon. The eradication of Black language takes place not only when singular White ideas of grammar are taught but also when Black language usage is shamed. Historically, eradication approaches have manifested as programs and initiatives such as the NCTE's "Better Speech Week" and New York Public Schools' "Speech Demon list [3]. Baker-Bell includes the four pillars of the NCTE's "Better Speech Week" initiative, the following pledge was recited by students across the nation [3]:

i. That I will not dishonor my country's speech by leaving off the last syllable of words.

ii. That I will say a good American 'yes' and 'no' in place of an Indian grunt 'um-hum' and 'nup-um' or a foreign 'ya' 'yeh' or 'nope'.

iii. That I will do my best to improve American speech by avoiding loud, rough tones, by enunciating distinctly, and by speaking pleasantly, clearly, and sincerely.

iv. That I will learn to articulate correctly as many words as possible during the year [3].

Clearly, the aforementioned pledge is pointed toward not only Black but also Indigenous students. This pledge is an explicit example of how standard language ideologies may be upheld; however, contemporarily tactics of upholding linguistic Eurocentrism have become much more implicit, such as teacher's strictly correcting Black English when used by Black students, White-washed curriculum, and the false marketing of mainstream White English as the only dialect of success.

Baker-Bell includes one such implicit example of her student being shamed by another teacher when the student is told that their PSAT scores were too high for them to be speaking as if they lacked intelligence (50) [3]. Implied, this teacher equated the systematic and rule-based Black language as synonymous with language that "lacked intelligence". This microaggressive comment exemplifies the on-going paradigm where miseducated educators unknowingly transmit their own "miseducation, color-evasiveness, and white linguistic hegemony onto others" [3]. When linguistic shame manifests, a student may choose to abandon their home language altogether to avoid more aggressive comments from Eurocentric authority figures. Kinzler elaborates that when "children find themselves in a new world where everyone speaks a new language…they adapt,"; there is great danger in this as "some kids may even come to dislike their former linguistic identity," (43) [1]. Hence, eradication approaches to language education threaten not only the flourishing of Black speech but also the well-being of Black students. If we encourage the elimination of the lexicon student's were born upon and raised within, we encourage the abandonment of cultural identity for the sake of "fitting in" with White-washed ideas of what is acceptable. Inadvertently, this internalized linguistic racism manifests to students harboring hostile emotions toward their cultural upbring. The time is now to disrupt this generational cycle of ignorance.

Eradication practices are not limited to explicit comments of shame, however. A non-inclusive and White-washed representation of literature and speech may also encourage students to abandon home languages. For example, if an English teacher adopts a curriculum in which only White authors are read, White speakers are heard, and White scholars are

studied, Black students will begin to recognize a standard language of academia that excludes them. If only Eurocentric grammar structures are taught and there is little or no attention given to the process of language development, Black students will quickly recognize the dissonance between their writing instruction and the way they use writing to communicate with others in their racial community. It is of utmost importance to recognize that "language loss represents a loss of ideas, history, knowledge, creativity, identity, aspirations, cultural values, and humor" [4]. If we wish to encourage our students to think dynamically as human beings and as scholars, we must be embracing of many Englishes. Linguistic cleansing of the classroom resembles and later may enable ethnic cleansing of a society at large.

4. Respectability Approaches

Whereas eradication approaches to English education aim to completely eliminate linguistic diversity from the classroom environment, respectability approaches utilize the teaching of code-switching. Baker-Bell critiques these approaches as they "do not fully accept or celebrate Black Language"; conversely, "they teach Black students to respond to racism by adhering to White hegemonic standards of what it means to be 'respectable'" (29) [3]. Most often, this manifests when educators ask their students to consider the audience when creating written work or oral presentations. When home dialects are not taught in the classroom, a linguistic hierarchy is put in place positing White language as more formal, more intellectual, and more appealing. Consequently, home languages are presented in a manner that encourages them to remain restricted to the home space. Kinzler furthers that code-switching for respectability may lead to linguistic insecurity, a condition where students feel that "others devalue their speech, and they may even feel discomfort with their own accent," (77) [1] or dialect. Such insecurities echo W.E.B. DuBois' ideas surrounding racial double consciousness, creating what Baker-Bell deems a linguistic push-pull. Ultimately, students are placed into a position where they can choose to abandon their home language in its entirety or restrict their dialectical variances to low-stakes conditions. Either way, the language of the student is discredited and tarnished in a way that ultimately refracts onto their own self-image and self-worth.

While discussing the problematic nature of code - switching, Baker-Bell uplifts Fanon's theory of epidermalization which "suggests that Black children have been taught since early childhood to see themselves through the White imagination; that is, they have been unconsciously trained to correlate blackness with wrongness and whiteness with

rightness," (24) [3]. Certainly, this is perpetuated when teaching White language as formal and Black language as informal. Matthew Kay, Black pedagogy and scholar, begs the question:

"how come minority cultures [are] always discussed in relation to white oppression?" (77) [5].

Indeed, it seems a similar question can be begged about racial linguistics. Respectability politics have recognized the need to address Black English; however, the response has been inappropriately deeming it "informal". Thus, these practices maintain oppressive hierarchies enforced by the standard language ideology, yet are guised as more embracing of multiple Englishes. This performative approach to teaching English still neglects Black students, their language, and their being.

5. White Guilt

Beverly Daniel Tatum is a scholar who specializes in the study of Black identity development. In her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*, she posits that "most of the early information we receive about 'others' – people racially, religiously, or socioeconomically different from ourselves – does not come as the result of firsthand experience," (84) [6]. From this, one may conclude that stereotypes and prejudices on the basis of race within the classroom are often not derived from interracial interactions but instead on the misinformation and deficit mentalities held by the educator. For the progressively-dedicated educator, guilt can accompany realizations of complicity and unacknowledged biases; however, we may give ourselves grace that the linguistic prejudices we have been socialized into are not a result of our own interactions with those who use different dialects than us. We earn this grace by actively facing and challenging our ingrained implicit biases that inevitably show in our educational instruction. We must be dedicated to working on ourselves and critically analyzing the most commonly accepted and practiced language pedagogies for any trace of injustice.

It is crucial to acknowledge that perfection is nearly as ambiguous as language. Educators across the board will attest to the learning that comes from uncomfortable trial and error. Questioning the systems that socialize racial, social, and linguistic hierarchies is daunting, yet still the call to do better is dire. Any trailblazing teacher will surely have moments of failure; however, embedded in our missteps are the opportunities to practice accountability and commitment to our students. When these moments inevitably occur, own them publicly, apologize for the transgression, and reaffirm your commitment to do better. By leaning into the uncomfortable vulnerability of growth as educators, we encourage our students to do the same as they grow into responsible and educated citizens.

6. Linguistic Justice: Moving Forward

As one of the most accredited and looked to scholars in the field of equitable linguistic pedagogy, Baker-Bell defines Linguistic Justice as "a call to create an education system where Black students, their language, their literacies, their culture, their creativity, their joy, their imagination, their brilliance, their freedom, their existence, [and] their resistance MATTERS" [3]. A pedagogy of linguistic justice then goes far beyond refraining from eradication and respectability politics. In fact, it confronts such praxis while equipping students with the ability to critically consider the larger systems of inequity that such language education contributes to. Kay furthers that as educators committed to the personal and linguistic well-being of *all* students, we "must instruct where we used to admonish, encourage where we used to excoriate, and carefully track what we used to ignore," (17) [5]. Teaching for linguistic justice moves the marginalized to the center of language education both in curriculum and in praxis.

7. Instructing What We Once Admonished

First, the harm of linguistically oppressive pedagogies such as eradication and respectability must be acknowledged and disenfranchised through a more accurate learning of what language is and how it functions. Prescriptive ideas around language must be replaced with descriptive beliefs that highlight the fact that "accents and dialects do not have discrete breaks [and] language doesn't split into categories depicting a clear 'us' versus a clear 'them'," but in fact that "language is a continuum," [1]. This means, as educators, we must begin to not only *hear* but *actively listen* to the lexicon of our students. We must be encouraging students to complete work in their own languages and dialects; how else can we ensure that students practice effectively and impactfully using their voice after they leave our classroom? As Baker-Bell exposes, "a pedagogy is only successful if it makes knowledge or skill achievable while at the same time allowing students to maintain their own sense of identity," (33) [3].

Where once we admonished the use of Black language in the classroom, we must be able to acknowledge and honor the dialect as a "highly developed, functional rule-governed linguistic system," [3]. For example, in spoken Black English, it is common for post-vocalic Rs to be unsounded; similarly, the possessive 'apostrophe-s' is often

excluded in both speech and writing. These unique functions of language are different from widely taught standardized mainstream White English, yet do not disturb meaning, and thus, can be understood inter-dialectically. Hence, grammar ought to be taught as a dynamic and diverse function of language that is informed by the user and their context of existence. Black English grammar is necessary to discuss when encouraging students to engage with Black literature, but it is equally necessary when teaching critical media literacy, as Black English is commonly used and seldomly accredited. Perhaps most importantly, Ebonics is necessary to honor when teaching any class – regardless of the group demographic to encourage equitable opinions on language education.

Many educators and language-lovers may fear that traditional grammar will forever lose its place in the classroom; however, this will never be the case. There are certain grammatical and syntactical conventions that ring true across dialects. For example, structured subject-verb word order remains consistent across most varieties of English. Similarly, we can still instruct students in the critical difference between an independent and a dependent clause. At the root of these teachings is clarity and finely considering language usage. Traditional grammar instruction becomes inequitable and violent towards linguistically marginalized students when educators meticulously attack miniscule irregularities in usage that are often tied to the students prior experiences and exposure to language. For example, when an educator includes "grammatical correctness" as a pillar of their writing rubrics or "pronunciation" on speaking rubrics, one must consider how many 'points' are lost for students who are simply writing or speaking with a dialect other than mainstream White English versus how many 'points' are lost for actually unclear writing or speaking. These micro aggressive marks accumulate not only to significant impacts on the student's grade but also their own linguistic self-esteem. One must work diligently to explore linguistic variation in order to accurately assess a student's learning in reading, writing, and speaking.

Further, it is not enough to just instruct in what we used to admonish; we must also acknowledge the harm that past admonitions have caused, for "Black students learn to monitor their linguistic expressions based on how they have been treated and trained to view themselves in the language arts classroom," [3]. Hence, Black students will likely enter the language classroom having heard false corrections to their dialects and consequently shut down or hypercorrect their work to the point where it loses their character. To these students, who have gone through many teachers enforcing eradication or respectability, we must gradually reframe how they view language and the classrooms it is taught in. By uplifting dialects

and languages that have been historically marginalized, and by questioning the status quo alongside our students, we begin to effectively teach language as complex and worthy of critical discussion. Let us question how and why things have been done; let us unlearn and relearn; and let us embrace the beautiful ambiguity of language.

8. Encouraging What We Once Excoriated

Educators almost always aim to bring the most relevant and attainable resources into their classrooms; however, many facilitators of learning make a dire mistake of discounting dialectical scholarship as less credible or less formal, and consequently they exclude these works from the classroom. Similarly, prior student work may poignantly address classroom topics, but educators refrain from using it in the classroom as a resource for further learning because it is student work. If we continue to exclude student voices from the scholarship we discuss, students will never see one another, nor themselves, as scholars. Kay addresses these issues by having students cite one another in both formal and informal writing. He claims that "students almost always enjoy having their contributions dissected with the attention traditionally reserved for class texts," (157) [5] and certainly, this also tackles White linguistic hegemony. Not only will students begin to regard one another as intellectuals with profound contributions, but this practice requires students to actively listen and engage with one another in academic discourse regardless of dialect, race, or identity. Imagine the revolutionary classroom where students take pride in being cited as scholars, where thought and insight is prized over prescriptive correctness, and where students look to one another for answers instead of automatically looking to the teacher for the 'correct' answer.

Naturally, an approach such as Kay's where students cite and accredit one another in writing and speaking opens the conversation of appropriate language and the appropriation of language. Students will hear lexicon they are unfamiliar with, words that have been socialized as taboo, and phrases that they have not heard prior in their educational experiences. While some may fear what such exposure may insinuate, the engaged and justice-driven teacher will look to instruct upon these linguistic ignorances. For example, a student may respond to a prompt with the word "boojee" without knowledge of the racial underpinnings of the word. Historically, the term has referred to an "elitist, uppity-acting African American, generally with a higher educational and income level than the average Black, who identifies with European American culture and distances [themself] from other African Americans" [3]

however, modern usage has become much more generalized. Instead of appropriating the term, a purposeful tangent may be made to discuss the history of the word, its implications, and how it has developed throughout the history of its usage. Students become more keenly aware of their language choices, and they begin to practice the difficult task of deciphering what language they ought to use, and contrastingly, what language they ought not to use. These outstanding educational benefits are only possible when we encourage students to use their own language, and consequently, when we hold meaningful conversations about the choices they make. Kay furthers his practice by posing questions to his students to think about the critical intersections of language, privilege, and audience. He poses the following questions as examples [5]:

"How might a feminist critic read this? A Marxist critic? Your parents? The people in your neighborhood?" (128) and "What affects our sensitivity levels to abuses/words/ideas?" (147).

Reading the above questions may conjure concerns pertaining to parental and student pushback to such inquiries; conflict is inherent, and students may feel restless without a definite correct answer. Nevertheless, this is where dialogic learning encourages perspective-building that will serve students throughout their life, and it cannot be overlooked that "conflict is often a *result* of great curriculum design" [5]. Classrooms are microcosms of the world, and simply put, the world is not devoid of conflict. Where we have repeatedly told students to "drop their baggage at the door", we ought to sit beside them, help them unpack, and encourage an understanding of what they're carrying with them both personally and linguistically. As Baker-Bell exposes, "it is important for students to have an opportunity to create change within their communities" (86) [5] and this is not possible if their language education does not actively encourage them to purposefully use their voice.

9. Carefully Tracking What We Once Ignored

The aforementioned learning is ambiguous and non-linear; however, that does not mean it is not able to be assessed and tracked within the classroom. The learning objectives of linguistic justice pedagogies center *racial identity development*, which is "the process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a racial group" [6] as well as *critical language awareness* which aims to develop "a critical consciousness about language, power, and society" [3]. In tandem, implementing a justice-driven

linguistic pedagogy will allow students to see their language as a critical part of their racial being; further, such a pedagogy will celebrate the nuance and uniqueness that each student has linguistically.

Focusing on fostering *racial identity development*, Tatum raises James Marcia's theory of identity development and includes the four statuses that characterize where students may identify with as they search for identity significance [6]:

i. Diffuse, a state in which there has been little exploration and no physical commitment to labels or identities.

ii. Foreclosed, a state in which a commitment has been loosely made to particular roles or belief systems, often blindly correlating with one or more parental figure's identities.

iii. Moratorium, a state of active exploration of roles and beliefs in which no commitment has yet been made, or where a commitment that was once made has dissipated.

iv. Achieved, a state of strong personal commitment to a particular dimension of identity following a period of high exploration.

These are stages that may not be translated into gradebooks; however, the period of high exploration that the final stage, *achieved*, alludes to is the experience we must attempt to create for students. A lack of diversity in language, dialect, or experiences within a classroom may encourage students to remain in a *foreclosed* state of identity development, where they blindly subscribe to the socialization they have been subject to. Assigning culturally relevant resources and asking students to reflect upon their impressions and take-aways may be a wonderful way to assess growth in identity development. Perhaps you pose the following questions for students to respond to in writing or in speech:

How did this piece of literature question what you previously thought about this topic? What different perspectives did you see in this work, and how are they different from your own perspective? If you could give this article/book to one person in your life, who would it be and why?

These questions beg students to go far beyond understanding material and engage reflection that is personal and furthers an understanding of oneself. Naturally, when assigning racially relevant work, student's will reflect on their racial identities. Student's may reflect on these states of being in general, as well.

Just as Tatum utilizes Marcia's tiers of identity development, Baker-Bell has coined a progression of

linguistic identity development. The states she presents are as follows:

i. Internalized Anti-Black Linguistic Racism, a state where students maintain socialized ideas that posit Black English speakers as inferior to mainstream White English speakers.

ii. Linguistic Double Consciousness, a state that often may be caused by enforced code-switching. In this state, students may regard specific situations in which using "home language" and "school language" are appropriate and neither bleed into one another.

iii. Black Linguistic Consciousness, a state where Black students are able to value their language and identify the ways in which prior praxis have been falsely oppressive. This state involves the critical interrogation of linguistic systems and hierarchies [3].

The aforementioned states of being were used in a mostly-Black Detroit classroom to assess racial identity development through linguistic attitudes; however, each student has an opportunity to consider how they value or devalue their own linguistic practices. Mainstream White English-speaking students may use this model to acknowledge complicity in a system that has perpetually benefited them. Just as Black students ought to learn the intellectual magnificence of Black English and its users, White students ought to consider Whiteness and the academic dominance it has held in linguistic instruction. This must be done delicately and must take White students "beyond the role of the victimizer," (Tatum 201) [6]. This may look like questioning canonicity of writers and works within the classroom, considering media representations of those who have accented English versus "unaccented" English, or pondering how many of the public announcers on television speak a similar dialect of English. Regardless, discussions of Whiteness should always include tools for how privileged voices can be used to uplift those that are marginalized. It is of utmost importance to refrain from discussing Whiteness and Blackness as at ends with one another, for as Tatum expresses, "when we see strong, mutually respectful relationships between people of color and Whites, we are usually looking at the tangible results of both people's identity processes," (Tatum 208) [6]. To work together, to dismantle long-standing oppressive systems, and to understand one another, we must understand ourselves and our identities critically.

Institutionally, we can answer the demands of Black students and do so methodically and measurably. Tatum raises the American Council on Education's composite calls for equity compiled from Black college students across the United States.

There were great commonalities for what must be changed about the current education structure, and they are listed below:

i. Changes in institutional policies and practices affecting campus climate and diversity.

ii. Campus Presidents ought to take specific actions, such as acknowledging institutional hierarchies of racism, and further to demonstrate leadership for marginalized students.

iii. Need for greater allocation of resources for the support of marginalized students. (staff, programs, facilities, etc.).

iv. An increase in diversity amongst faculty, staff, and students.

v. Required diversity training for all campus constituents.

vi. Revising curriculum to include more appropriate and realistic perspectives, and requiring students to take perspective-building courses.

vii. Increasing supportive services and accessibility to such services, such as mental health supports, for marginalized students (43-44) [6].

With administration, with professional development teams, and within our classrooms we ought to respond to the cries of our students. Together, we ought to implement actionable goals with benchmarks to truly make school a place for *everyone* where each and every student feels not only accepted, but embraced. Staffing, professional development funds, and supportive service accessibility are measurable and, in turn, should be tracked. Systemic issues call for systemic responses. Both inside and outside of the classroom, educational professionals devoted to just and equitable practice must begin to look at the numbers and take action to ensure the institution of education is improving where it has too long remained stagnant.

10. Audience and Action

Tatum's in-school demographic research found that "nationwide, nearly 75 percent of Black students today attend so-called majority-minority schools, and 38 percent attend schools with student bodies that are 10 percent or less White," (4) [6]. Much of the work done in linguistic justice has been performed by Black scholars and educators within these primarily Black classrooms. Appropriately, these are the classrooms in which Black English must be embraced most readily, as it is used the most in these settings; however work must be done in primarily White classrooms to ensure students enter a linguistically diverse society with the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively. As

discussed, it has never been appropriate to expect or enforce code-switching practices; instead, we must instruct students to be literate beyond their dialect. Further, we ought to encourage critical discussions surrounding linguistic power and privilege and the consequential linguistic oppression both historical and contemporary.

Tatum's findings further that "Whites are the most isolated. They are the most likely to live in racially homogenous communities and the least likely to come into contact with people racially different from themselves," (8) [6]. Hence, we can anticipate linguistic ignorances that must be addressed. When unacknowledged, this White linguistic hegemony may support unequal practices, and students who have not learned otherwise may condemn or degrade their peers use of language as they've seen previous language teachers do so. Of course, a knowledgeable and justice-driven teacher is of utmost importance in creating a safe place for students, but a student's peers are arguably even more influential in creating a safe place. Being intentional in lesson planning and curriculum development can mitigate these ignorances and supply relevant information to ensure students are interacting with one another responsibly. Kinzer posits that maybe one of the most effective strategies we can use when combatting linguistic ignorance is also one of the most simple — exposure.

Kinzler finds that by exposing children to various languages and dialects greatly impact their ability to consider different perspectives, and she furthers that "by simply developing skills in perspective-taking, bilingual children may grow into more open-minded, more flexible, and potentially more tolerant people," (Kinzler 169) [1]. To clarify, the benefits of listening beyond your home language are not limited to the few who become fluently bilingual; excitingly, the positive effects remain as we practice listening to those who sound different from ourselves in language, dialect, or body language. Even if the exposure is minimal, the effects can be grand.

From her collective research and embodied experiences, Baker-Bell posits that "there is no venue more capable of discussing, critiquing, and dismantling linguistic and racial injustice than literacy studies and the ELA classroom" [3]. Certainly, this claim holds validity in the great *capability* of the English classroom, and further the potential its facilitators have to foster radical change; however the power that lies within the walls of an English Language Arts classroom to dismantle and to critically question systems of power and privilege can only be seized when one can recognize the many ways in which education has played an active role in the oppressive systems we aim to reform. The time to implement progressive change is overdue. By studying our own linguistic histories, we are able to question and reframe why and how we teach English

in schools. By consistently turning to Black scholars and creators and inviting them into our curriculum, we are able to make learning culturally relevant to our students. Most importantly, by making an active commitment to linguistic justice in and out of the classroom, we are able to be responsibly engaged in the world, and we are able to ensure our students can follow suit. Kay illuminates that "great learning happens when both teachers and students explore the limits of their own understanding through rigorous discussion;" (5) [5] let the great learning begin!

11. References

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