# Linguistic and Educational Equity Through Culturally Sustaining Curriculum

## Black Language in a Memphis, TN School

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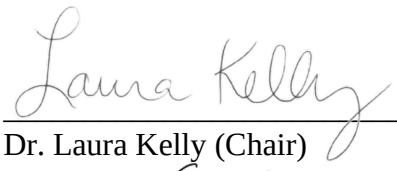

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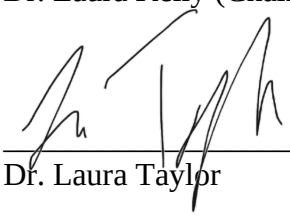

Dr. Laura Taylor

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## Abstract

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This thesis proposes a month-long curriculum, drawing from culturally sustaining pedagogy, for eighth-grade students at The Soulsville Charter School in Memphis, Tennessee, to investigate the interrelations between language, identity, power, and justice. Specifically, students will accomplish this through linguistic understanding and analysis of Black Language (frequently referred to as African American Vernacular English) and White Mainstream English (frequently called standard or dominant English), culminating in the participation in a Socratic seminar discussing language and justice. This research is founded upon the work, most notably, of April Baker-Bell and Lisa Delpit, among many other linguistic and educational researchers.

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# Acknowledgments

Unwittingly, I started what will continue to be a lifelong journey in this research in 2017. My deepest gratitude goes to the University of Mississippi and the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College (SMBHC) for opening the floodgate of knowledge that would set me on this path through their required senior thesis project. To Dr. Ethel Young-Scurlock: you were my first SMBHC professor. Your love, light, and passion from our very first class together in 2015 inspired me. I took every class you offered, and I am a better person, student, and scholar because of your example. You wrote my recommendation to Teach For America, without which, I would not be in the space I am today to interrogate power, privilege, and identity in the context of classrooms, generally, or of my classroom. From serving as a reader on my undergraduate thesis, the baby sibling to this project, to our now yearly meetings, your continuous support means the world to me. You shaped me into who I am today.

I am also grateful to the faculty at Rhodes College for your guidance throughout the completion of this program and this project. You have each challenged me to become a more critical teacher and researcher.

I am deeply humbled and indebted to my circle of support over these past few years of research, especially throughout the creation of this thesis. To my dearest friends, Darilynn, Kytanna, Harleigh, and Alexis; to my church community of the past four years at All Nations Worship Assembly – Memphis; and to the educators, administrators, and coaches who have shaped how I show up in the classroom since 2019, Nyisha, Deshanta, Jasmine, Mo, and Dr. Biles: thank you. You challenge me in all the most meaningful ways. You have gifted me the time both to rant and to gush about this project; you have

prayed for me; you have supported me in working through the night to meet deadlines; you have worked alongside me to hold space for students to have these conversations in our humanities and math classes over the years. You make me better.

Finally, to my students, past and present: I learn more from you each day than I have ever managed to teach you. My gratitude goes beyond words, but I will try. To my students of *the* Hanley Middle School: thank you for building trust with me and for your vulnerability in difficult dialogue as we deconstructed linguistic racism and linguistic equity in education. Despite all the critiques I've heard over the past five years, your initial engagement and persistence to keep talking about (what we then called) African American Vernacular English, racism, and equity after our first lesson showed me that this work is vital in classrooms. Our interactions encouraged me to transform that undergraduate thesis into the project detailed in the pages to come. To my students at The Soulsville Charter School: thank you for your critical questioning of systems and structures, of power and privilege, of me and of each other. Y'all taught me the importance of asking a question, stepping back, and letting you lead our conversations, which has guided so much of the proposed curriculum in this thesis. Every student I have had the honor of teaching will undoubtedly change their world. Y'all have undoubtedly changed mine.

For Ken Taylor: my friend, my mentor, my brother. My acceptance to this program was the last conversation we had before you left this earth, and your legacy pushes me to continue doing this research and this work.

## Introduction

This curriculum project proposes teaching eighth graders in Memphis about linguistic justice regarding Black Language (hereafter BL) and White Mainstream English (hereafter WME) in education and life. Though not frequently explicitly discussed in English Language Arts classes, language is inherently and intricately related to identity. Because WME is considered the "standard," students who speak so-called nonstandard dialects, such as BL, often experience the erasure and devaluing of their language and, further, their identities. Students often hear and repeat that speaking "slang," a term that teachers sometimes use to refer to BL, is improper or sounds less educated, or that they need to "correct" their use of BL to fit White Mainstream English language structure (Baker-Bell 2020; Godley and Minnici 2008; Lyiscott 2017; Marshall 2018). This posits that a language variety derived from and spoken by predominantly Black individuals is somehow less meaningful or intelligent than a predominantly white dialect. Because of the connection between language and identity, students may internalize these biases about who they are and the value their ideas and identities have in the classroom and in the world (Baker-Bell 2020).

Students deserve to be welcomed fully into classroom spaces. That means recognizing their language as part of their identity and sustaining its value in educational spaces that have systemically devalued and/or corrected it (Baker-Bell 2020, Godley and Minnici 2008; Lyiscott 2017; Marshall 2018). It is also important that students understand *why* their language is so often corrected in classrooms. There is therefore a need to recognize, address, and analyze the intersections of language, race, and power in educational institutions. Presently, there are no curriculums in the state of Tennessee that address each of these pillars. This gap in relevant curricula addressing these intersections demonstrates a need for such a curriculum. Few curriculums in the United States have addressed these points; those that have were created by an individual or small team to be

used on a small scale within a specific classroom or school.

Given that there are no similar curriculums to the one proposed in this thesis in the state in which it is proposed, this curriculum will follow the suit of the few similar ones before it. This thesis proposes a curriculum to teach eighth graders – one grade – at The Soulsville Charter School – one school – about linguistic justice. Throughout the proposed unit, students will connect knowledge to their existing frameworks, analyze, and form their own opinions regarding linguistic justice, educational equity, and social justice.

For me, this research began in 2015 and will continue for the rest of my life. As a college freshman, I majored in linguistics. It was in my introduction to linguistics course my freshman year that my professor made a passing comment, no more than two minutes' time, about Shirley Brice Heath, a linguist who devoted years of her life to researching and working alongside educators in two communities to value linguistic diversity in their classrooms. Then, in 2017, I was required to turn in my first thesis proposal as a scholar in the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College. That passing comment from two years earlier had stayed rooted in my mind, and I proposed researching what I then referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Mississippi public education. In 2019, I defended my senior thesis entitled "Incorporating African American Vernacular English in Education: Fostering Linguistic Diversity Within Mississippi K-12 Classrooms." At that time, though my thesis was directed by the School of Education at the University of Mississippi, I was not an education major or minor and had spent no professional time in a classroom. While that does not diminish the value of the research I accomplished, I was idealistic and hopeful about its implementation.

Then, I moved to Memphis, Tennessee, as a member of the Teach For America 2019 corps, teaching special education at Hanley Middle School in Orange Mound, Memphis. Though most of my job focused on small group remediation, I was able to co-

teach alongside general educators in their classrooms. Early in 2021, during the height of the pandemic, an article entitled "Op-Ed: Bias against African American English is a pillar of systemic racism" spurred a conversation amongst our grade team, and our humanities teacher, knowing my research, asked me to plan and lead a lesson utilizing the article. For the first time since my undergraduate thesis defense, I removed my thesis from the shelf, where it had been gathering dust, and planned an actual lesson that would be taught. Throughout that lesson, student engagement was at an all-time high, and students advocated for more lessons like it. It was the first time I recognized that other teachers cared about this content. It was the first time I realized that it mattered to students to engage with and analyze the pillars that this thesis proposes in its curriculum.

## Theoretical Framework

### Linguistic Theory

Wolfram and Schilling (2015) stated that a standard is simply a "socially favored" (p. 2) dialect. When members of socially disfavored and systemically devalued identity groups produce nonstandard language, it is often assumed by socially favored groups that the standard was attempted and failed. Instead, Wolfram and Schilling explain how dialects are not deviant, but rather that they are different linguistic forms with "distinct subsets of language patterns" (p. 4). Careful linguistic study shows that these features are intentional and are not mistakes or deviant forms of standard or dominant language. Dialects are valid as their own linguistic existence. Further, linguistic research has proven that Black Language, frequently referred to as African American Vernacular English in contemporary research, is a dialect that follows systematic and orderly patterns (Baugh 1995; Wolfram and Schilling 2015). Therefore, the deficit attitudes against the use of BL in education and life perpetuate an educational and social institution upholding social values of whiteness, especially those within WME, as superior to nonwhiteness (Baker-Bell 2020; Marshall 2018).

Black Language has had a variety of names throughout history, including Ebonics, African American English, African American Vernacular English, and Black English, among others (Baker-Bell 2020; Wolfram and Schilling 2015); however, all of these names encompass specific linguistic features. For example, according to Wolfram and Schilling (2015), some distinguishing features of BL include the use of habitual *be* to mark habitual or intermittent activity; copula deletion for contracted forms of *is* or *are*; the absence of present tense, third person *-s*, the absence of possessive *-s*, the absence of general plural *-s*, simple past tense construction using *had + verb*; using *ain't* for *didn't*; reducing final consonant clusers to a singular consonant (i.e., *lif'* for *lift*) when followed by a word beginning with a vowel; replacing *str-* initial clusters with *skr-*, and using *[f]* or *[v]* for word-final *-th* (pp. 221-222). These are what the authors define as "marked" features, meaning that they are actively noticed as different from the dialect of the person reading or listening to BL. While this list is not at all exhaustive of the vastness of Black Language, it comprises many of the most easily recognized features.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Language**

This curriculum draws from culturally sustaining pedagogical views. According to Paris (2012), "culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). As he developed his argument for culturally sustaining pedagogy, Paris explicitly expressed that the policies and practices in the American education system now uphold a "monocultural and monolingual society based on White, middle-class norms of language and cultural being" (p. 95). Instead, culturally sustaining approaches would support young people in *sustaining* the linguistic and cultural practices of their communities and offer ways of accessing the dominant (white) culture. Later, Paris and Alim (2014) challenged what was meant by "sustaining" in the original 2012

framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy. They wrote:

> Increasingly, we can no longer assume that the White, middle-class linguistic, literate, and cultural skills and ways of being that were considered the sole gatekeepers to the opportunity structure in the past will remain so as our society changes. CSP, then, is increasingly needed not only to promote equality across racial and ethnic communities but also to ensure access and opportunity. (p. 89)

Historically, students of color have been taught that mastery of WME and white, middle-class cultural practices are the ways to ascertain power; however, Paris and Alim argue that this teaching pedagogy would instead reduce their access to power in our increasingly multicultural and multilingual society.

Throughout her research, Lisa Delpit (1988) refers to "the culture of power," or the ways in which white norms are the cultural force dominating most institutions in America and in the world. The rules of the culture of power reflect the culture of those who have the power; hence, the rules of American society and education right now reflect an emphasis on the importance of all people reading, writing, and communicating in WME. Further, Delpit (2012) writes, "What we call 'basic skills' in literacy are typically the linguistic *conventions* of middle-class society and the *strategies* successful people use to access new information…. What we call basic skills are only 'basic' because they are one aspect of the cultural capital of the middle class" (p. 53). WME is a predominantly white dialect, which reflects the power of whiteness in the United States of America (Baker-Bell 2020). Codeswitching may often be viewed as a way in which those who speak non-WME dialects can ascertain power, but Paris and Alim's (2014) argument demonstrates that teaching codeswitching or otherwise reducing language variation in education and society reduces students' access to that power.

Baker-Bell (2020) deeply critiques the need for codeswitching in her book *Linguistic Justice.* She writes:

> Telling children that White Mainstream English is needed for survival can no

> longer be the answer, especially as we are witnessing Black people being mishandled, discriminated against, and murdered while using White Mainstream English, and in some cases, before they even open their mouths. (p. 7)

Her statements resound with Paris and Alim's (2014) contentions. She further argues that requiring Black students to code-switch is requiring them to "reject their language and culture" and that doing so "essentially penalizes Black students for the existence of Anti-Black Linguistic Racism" (p. 21). She delineates the interrelation between language and identity as well as language and justice, and those connections are precisely what inspires this project. Together, these quotes illustrate the need for instruction that values and destigmatizes Black learners and Black culture, using frameworks of knowledge that students are experts in already.

Freire (1968) described differences between what he refers to as "banking education," a model in which an all-knowing teacher deposits knowledge into students, and "problem-posing" education, where teachers are learners and learners are teachers, sharing power in instruction. Problem-posing education requires accepting that students are also experts in the classroom, much in the way Delpit (2012) asserts that new information in literacy instruction should connect to the cultural frameworks students bring to school. Later, Freire (1968) writes, "Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to *be*, it must *become*…. It cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so" (pp. 84-85). When educators ignore the cultural frameworks that students enter school with and/or the societal, systemic, and institutional oppression that students face through the content they do (and, further, do not) provide instructionally, they strip students of their full humanity. Delpit (2012) described this as reasoning by which students would either protest or withdraw from educational spaces.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy offers another framework point that underlies the research within this curriculum project: the intersection of language, identity, and justice.

Paris and Alim (2014) contend that most of the prior research fails to critically examine how youth might reify hegemonic discourses and structures across identity markers (p. 93). Using the example of Hip Hop pedagogy, they write that "few take up the fact that the Hip Hop battle can sometimes be a masculinist space that excludes young women, queer youth, and young men of color who do not identify as Black (even as young women, queer youth, and youth who are not Black continue to 'roc the mic')" (p. 93). This example illustrates the need for curriculums that not only sustain the linguistic and cultural practices of Black communities but also examine the intersection of power and powerlessness in connection to identity. Baker-Bell (2020) writes:

> 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, their resistance MATTERS. (p. 3)

This thesis proposes a curriculum that, though not Baker-Bell's "education system," seeks to create a space where her vision comes to life so that students can recognize the value and importance of their language, identity, and existence while critically examining the connections between language, justice, and power.

**A Note on Terminology**

Language and power have always been intricately related. Therefore, the terminology one uses to discuss dialects of language, especially connected to power, equity, and justice, is a necessary discussion before reading deeper into this research. bell hooks (1994) repeatedly refers to this as "the oppressor's language." Further, Delpit and Dowdy (2002) extend Delpit's (1988) understanding of the "culture of power" to dialects of American English, calling what is most frequently referred to as "standard English," a predominantly white dialect, the "language of power." Godley and Minnici (2008) echo this sentiment, noting that "standard" and "nonstandard" distinctions in the naming of language are constructed as relating the social favor and power dynamics given to one

dialect over another (p. 321). These authors utilize the term "privileged" rather than "standard" to distinguish the dialects which are preferred in "influential academic, political, economic, and civic institutions" and the term "stigmatized" rather than "nonstandard" to refer to the dialects "that are devalued in such settings" (p. 321) to call readers into the discussion of dialects without reinforcing negative attitudes or stereotypes about varieties of English. Still, these naming practices leave spaces to grow: "stigmatized" can deemphasize the value of those varieties, and "privileged" calls into question: privileged by whom? Further, the dialect referred to in this thesis as Black Language has been named and renamed many times throughout history.

The few examples above highlight the difficulty in asserting an appropriate terminology; while "standard" and "nonstandard" are widely accepted and utilized across linguistic and educational research, other frequently utilized terms across research are "Dominant American English" or "Mainstream American English" and "African American Vernacular English." Because of the impact of both the culture of power and language of power, it is a necessary critique that, though the terminology chosen is reasonable, it still privileges the way varieties of language, and thus identity, are discussed and how they challenge or fall short of challenging, social, socioeconomic, and racial power relations. Baker-Bell (2020) critiques this convention, stating that "the use of the adjective 'dominant' in the descriptor oftentimes reinforced the white linguistic dominance it was intended to deconstruct" (p. 2). Instead, she utilizes the terms Black Language (BL) and White Mainstream English (WME) throughout her book. After historically utilizing the terms "African American Language" and "Dominant American English," Baker-Bell explains her shift to BL and WME as intentionally and explicitly naming the intersections between language and race. She writes, "people's language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences" (p. 2).

Her argument resonates deeply with the core motivation of this curriculum: providing students space to interrogate the interrelations of power, justice, language, and

identity. Doing so requires naming practices that are as illustrative as possible of those intersections. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I will utilize Baker-Bell's naming conventions of Black Language (BL) and White Mainstream English (WME).

## Positionality

### Statement

I am a 25-year-old white, cisgender woman who was born and raised in the St. Louis metropolitan region of the United States. After my first-generation undergraduate graduation from the University of Mississippi with a Bachelor of Arts in linguistics and a minor in African American studies, I moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and completed two years in the Teach For America Memphis Corps. I first taught at Hanley Middle School in Orange Mound, Memphis, and now at The Soulsville Charter School in Soulsville, South Memphis. Both schools have a student enrollment profile with 98% of students identifying as African American (Hanley School, n.d.; Soulsville Charter School 2019-20 Profile, n.d.). As an educator, I must recognize my positional power as the authority figure in the classroom and my power as a white woman, who was raised speaking White Mainstream English, talking about Black language in classrooms with predominantly Black students.

During my undergraduate coursework, I completed and defended a thesis for the Honors College entitled "Incorporating African American Vernacular English in Education: Fostering Linguistic Diversity in Mississippi K-12 Classrooms." Now, I am completing my second thesis in this field. When I began this research five years ago, I was not as involved in Black communities as I am today, in part as a teacher and in part due to my involvement over the past four years in a Black church in Memphis. I choose to be a part of these spaces, and my existence in them will always be as an active participant and engaged learner. Every day, I work to develop a deeper understanding of and connections between the cultural contexts, lived experiences, and language of some

of the people I care deeply about: my students.

I incorporated the voices of Black scholars on language and identity like April Baker-Bell, Lisa Delpit, and Tanji Reed-Marshall to better represent the importance of this work. As stated throughout the introduction to this thesis, language is intricately connected to identity, and identity to power, so it would be insensitive, at best, and ignorant, regardless, to avoid discussing the intersections of my identity with the curriculum proposed here. The scholars before me built the foundation on which this work is written, and I desire that this thesis uplifts their voices and leverages their insight to push forward into an actionable curriculum for schools in Memphis, Tennessee.

**Critiques of My Positionality**

Any positionality statement must sum the author's identity and relationship to their work with clarity while simultaneously embracing that the totality of one's positionality cannot possibly be encompassed in, at most, the limitations of one page. That is certainly true of my positionality statement after the introduction to my master's thesis. Further, because of the intersections of my identity, privilege, and power, there will reasonably be critiques of the motivation of the work I do and the curriculum I am proposing, so I will briefly attempt to address those critiques and expound on those intersections in meaningful ways.

98% of my students identify as African American (Hanley School, n.d.; Soulsville Charter School 2019-20 Profile, n.d.), and my positionality statement aims to acknowledge the importance of their language as a part of their culture and identity. This leaves an obvious gap: anyone who identifies as African American or Black does not, by ethnic or racial identity, speak BL in the same ways. Blackness is not a monolith; neither is Black Language. The features of BL that any one speaker may utilize in *their* use of BL vary as much as the identity markers between speakers. I hope to acknowledge that BL is intricately related to societal judgments of Blackness in America. Recognizing and

naming that is part of my attempt to bridge the connections between linguistic and social justice and linguistic and educational equity.

Whiteness permeates our educational systems. As a white educator, I must recognize the culture of power at work in curriculums and classrooms. Baker-Bell (2020) details how "standard English is a byproduct of white supremacy" (p. 6); many of the expectations of academic success in U.S. classrooms are based on white norms, especially those of written and spoken language. This project proposes a curriculum for The Soulsville Charter School – Middle, specifically for eighth-grade students. Therefore, the students for whom this curriculum is written will have at least eight school years' worth of indoctrination of conventions and strategies associated with WME. Most likely, they will have experienced the devaluing of BL in educational spaces as well (Baker-Bell 2020; Godley and Minnici 2008; Lyiscott 2017; Marshall 2018). Learning these "conventions" often leads to "correcting" linguistic structures in BL. Consciously or unconsciously, in correcting BL structures, educators instill that there is something to be corrected about BL – that something is wrong or unintelligent about it (Baker-Bell 2020). Because I mainly teach eighth-grade math, I do not have the responsibility many English Language Arts (ELA) or history teachers often feel to "correct" students' writing. When students respond verbally, however, I often must question myself: do I redirect their responses to what is deemed "appropriate" or "scholarly" discourse – as Delpit (2012) says, the conventions and strategies of WME, of middle-class whiteness? To honor their language, culture, and identity, if I understand their meaning, I choose not to correct their speech, despite knowing that some would argue that it is against their survival or success to not teach them the importance of speaking WME.

It is the oppressor's language – my language – but I need it to talk to them (hooks 1994). Therefore, in some ways, the work of this thesis can be read as hypocritical. In the United States, the socialized model of success is a college degree. To even make it to college, students are expected to pass K-12$^{th}$ grades and each year's standardized tests;

then, most colleges require the completion of a national standardized test, the ACT or SAT, for acceptance and/or for scholarships. As much as I want to respect the heritage, culture(s), and identities of my students and their language, I also wrestle with the requirement of knowing that part of their "success" is commanding the oppressor's language. I can do everything in my power to recognize and celebrate their language and all the identities associated with it, but whenever I reframe their language, I am communicating that there is something to be, at best, changed and, at worst, corrected about it. Throughout the work of this thesis and the proposed lessons, all lessons are written to convey that there is nothing wrong with the features of BL that students may speak. Linguistic research shows that it is a dialect (Baugh 1995; Wolfram and Schilling 2015) or language (Baker-Bell 2020) that follows systematic and orderly patterns just as any other dialect or language does. Students must understand that the structures within BL are just that: structured.

Though deficit attitudes may have previously conveyed that BL was just misspoken or intentionally disrupted WME, it is linguistically demonstrated that BL is as systematic and orderly as any other dialect of American English (Baker-Bell 2020; Baugh 1995; Delpit & Dowdy 2002; Marshall 2018; Wolfram & Schilling 2015). Freire (1968) writes, "Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to *be*, it must *become*…. It cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so" (pp. 84-85). Ignoring the cultural and linguistic frameworks students enter school with and/or the societal, systemic, and institutional oppression that students face through curriculum would strip students of their full humanity. Therefore, it is built into both the curriculum and the way I approach students' language broadly that they deeply know that their language is a language, not a mistake. Neither are their identities. Their humanity is welcome in the classroom, especially in the classrooms for which this curriculum is proposed.

However, Delpit (1988) describes what parents of color, who do not function in the culture of power, desire from pedagogy in the classroom: “They want to ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society” (p. 285). Anyon (1980) details the differences between the explicit curriculum educators believe themselves to teach in schools and the “hidden curriculum:” the unspoken, unintentional content, skills, and beliefs taught. As a white educator, it is important to me that students understand that their language is a language, despite the hidden curriculum of U.S. ELA classrooms that seek to eradicate linguistic diversity in favor of WME structures. As a white educator, this curriculum’s importance to me may stand in stark contrast with what is important to the parents and families of the students I teach. I am not a speaker of BL. Families who are speakers of this dialect may desire that I teach students how to “codeswitch,” or move from BL to WME in certain spaces due to the social capital associated with WME.

Further, even if I asked them, these families may not share their true thoughts or feelings about what or how I teach with me because of the intersectional identity markers we may not share – like our racial/ethnic background. Utilizing Delpit’s framework, I push this curriculum to critically engage teachers and students in doing both: learn about WME as a linguistic structure and how WME has been used as a tool of oppression while also providing the discourse patterns and codes of WME for student success. Then, students and teachers can intentionally engage with what "success" means in this context and critically question and critique why WME can be such a strong determinant of success as related to power and oppression. The intent of this curriculum project is not to remove the power of choice that families have over what their students learn and gain access to; it is to weave into those codes the privileging of certain languages and identities in historical context.

I argue that positionality statements are, by nature, incomplete. In a few words,

they will seek to explain the importance of one's identities and contexts as connected to their research. What one chooses to include requires the choice of exclusion, as well, which easily lends itself to critiquing what one chose as important and less, or un-, important. My positionality statement is no different. Critiquing it may come easily: I am a white woman who teaches a predominantly Black student population, who is proposing this curriculum for the students I teach, who speaks the oppressor's language but desires to "educate" Black children on Black Language as an important linguistic pillar despite its devaluing in K-12 education. I have done my best to build upon the foundation laid by the scholars who came before me, especially the work of Black scholars of language and education. Yet, I am aware of many of the critiques that may be made, and I embrace them. It is part of this work.

## Curricular Context

The Soulsville Charter School (TSCS), a public charter school in Shelby County Schools (SCS) in the Soulsville community of South Memphis, Tennessee, serving grades 6-12, offers a class called Revolutionary Student 101 (Rev 101) to all middle school students. This course prepares students for high school, college, and career readiness by integrating self-reflection, social-emotional learning, study and communication skill building, and Black history and anti-racism into a year-long curriculum. At TSCS, this curriculum is created by an executive leadership team member, with input from staff, and implemented by teachers of various contents as a required elective course for students. Based on the 2021-2022 school year model, any English Language Arts (ELA), math, science, social studies, or special education teacher at TSCS may be assigned to teach a section of Rev 101 to students for 45 minutes a day, twice a week.

Since Rev 101 curriculum is created and implemented within The Soulsville Charter School for their specific student population, there is an opportunity to integrate

into the curriculum a unit to critically engage students in understanding the intersections of identity and culture, educational and linguistic equity, and linguistic and social justice as pertaining to BL and WME. Though Rev 101 may not be a required class at every school in Memphis, Tennessee, or in the broader context of urban education, the curriculum presented in this project would apply to similar elective courses or units of study, especially in, though not limited to, history and ELA classes. Core content classes in urban education often utilize scripted or otherwise pre-planned curriculum; however, elective classes have more flexibility in creating the curriculum.

There are no current middle school classes or curriculums explicitly targeting teaching students about educational, linguistic, and social justice at once in Memphis, TN. Specifically, this proposed curriculum seeks to engage students in learning the about Black Language (BL) broadly and in an educational context, connecting the structures of BL to White Mainstream English (WME) and modern code-switching, and analyzing the connectedness of linguistic inequity to systemic racism utilizing texts, videos, and class discussions. As these are not yet present altogether in curriculums, the sections below will explore existing research and curriculums centered on teaching about BL and teaching about social justice in 6-12 classrooms.

## Existing and Related Curriculum

### Overview

Researchers in both the linguistics and educational disciplines have studied best practices regarding language pedagogy and its implementation in the classroom. Regardless of the native dialect a student speaks, all students in a classroom could benefit from interacting with a curriculum learning about BL. This research, however, should not be misinterpreted as being appropriate only for BL speakers. John Baugh (1995) writes:

> Considered collectively, we should have special language programs for all students. [WME] speakers would learn about the history of American dialects and

> languages, giving them a better sense of the linguistic dimensions of 'the melting pot.' Courses that enhance linguistic tolerance (and more?) are needed to counter existing linguistic prejudice. Students who speak non-Standard English would not only learn about this history, but would also receive special instruction based on their personal linguistic heritage; again, that instruction should be tailored to the needs of [WME] students at individual schools. Moreover, this instruction would be provided in such a way that no student would be made to feel ashamed of her or his linguistic ancestry. (p. 101)

Various methods of teaching about Black Language have been utilized in education and, as presented in this thesis, do not focus solely on connecting BL and WME to equity and justice. Instead, the pedagogical practices discussed below highlight how teaching about BL can be addressed in classrooms while focusing on dialectal diversity and linguistic equity and justice.

## Language-Inclusive Approaches

### *Linguistic Awareness and Varied-Language Curriculum*

Both Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and Lyiscott (2017) encourage educators to incorporate hip-hop and/or rap lyrics to foster linguistic awareness while also teaching standards, especially those in connection to poetry, figurative language, and theme. Lyiscott (2017) goes on to discuss varied-language curriculum and the necessity for Black literature in classrooms, noting that when stories written by and about people of color are left out, it "reflects larger social attitudes about Black lives" (p. 50). Critically engaging students with textual expressions, be that books or lyrics, and connecting them to sociocultural contexts can, Lyiscott argues, promote classroom inclusion and lead to a discussion of social and institutional power relations. When curriculums leave out stories and songs written by people of color, it leaves out their language, further promoting BL in schools and ignoring the experiences of non-white people and communities.

### *Critical Language Pedagogy*

Godley and Minnici (2008) created their model of critical language pedagogy, in which they advocate for a democratic classroom structure in which "students' viewpoints are highlighted through discussion and debate, differences are celebrated rather than squelched, and no single understanding of language is presented as 'the truth'" (p. 323). Further, they believe that students should be able and allowed to incorporate their prior knowledge and usage of language, including their native dialects (p. 323). Godley and Minnici conducted their research in an urban Midwestern high school, talking with 31 tenth-grade students during a year-long qualitative study on how language and grammar are taught in urban high schools. As part of this study, the authors designed a weeklong unit on language variation and dialects that they implemented in the studied classes and on which they collected data. They named the goal of the unit as:

> to encourage students to develop critical perspectives on language by (a) critiquing dominant language ideologies, (b) emphasizing the diversity of dialects spoken in the U.S. and in the students' communities, and (c) raising students' awareness of the ways that they used language for different purposes and audiences. (p. 326)

Students were not expected to simply draw upon prior knowledge. Instead, the weeklong unit first taught sociolinguistic concepts like those of dialects and grammar and discussed dominant language ideologies by utilizing passages from a novel the class had read. Then, students explicitly compared the structure of BL and written WME to show both the social uses and grammaticality of BL. Throughout the unit, students watched films and mini-lectures to learn sociolinguistic concepts, engaged in class discussions, completed small-group work, and worked on exercises in code-switching and generating linguistic hypotheses (pp. 326-327).

Throughout the unit, students were able to make connections between dominant language ideologies, the novel they were completing in class, and their lived experiences.

Sometimes, students were "hesitant to talk about the racism undergirding [the characters'] negative assumptions about the dialect spoken in [another character's] African American community," (p. 328) but as they continued talking, students related community segregation and how some ways of speaking would be inappropriate in certain contexts or communities. Most students believed that society valued WME more than BL and verbalized seeing that prejudice at school. These class discussions "indicated that students recognized the value judgments inherent in widespread language ideologies...but they were still considering the extent and cause of these prejudices" (p. 329). The researchers noted that Godley, who facilitated this unit, identified as white, and that may have influenced how comfortable students of color felt to fully express their beliefs at the beginning of the unit during these discussions. Additionally, students completed beginning- and end-of-year questionnaires about their beliefs about language variation. By the end of the year, the percentage of students who believed everyone should speak WME all the time had dropped from 46% to 17% (p. 331).

### *Code-switching*

Godley and Minnici's research is one of the countless examples of teaching about BL in K-12 schools. One of the activities students completed at the end of this unit asked them to "translate" sentences from BL to WME or WME to BL. Often, this is referred to as the act of code-switching, in which people "switch" their "code," or language, based on the context they are in and what is deemed appropriate for that time. Baker-Bell (2020) defines code-switching as using language "to fit the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose" (p. 29). Students were able to express multiple translations of the same sentences, showcasing that BL is not a monolith but a varied dialect. Further, students' responses illustrated that they had "constructed an understanding of [BL] that was centered in their own language use and that forefronted variety within the dialect" (p. 333). The idea of translating between dialects is found throughout the linguistic-

educational research practices when teaching about BL in schools. In his book *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Y'all Too*, Christopher Emdin (2016) explores a whole discourse approach in which students and teachers co-create a comparison chart that grows throughout the year to encompass BL, WME, and content-specific vocabulary (p. 179).

While detailing curriculums and lessons that encourage educators to teach students to code-switch, it is also necessary here to provide readers with a critique of code-switching. Baker-Bell (2020) argues:

> The problem with this approach, as applied in most classrooms, is that it encourages students to code-switch without any regard to their racial realities or the role that Anti-Black Linguistic Racism plays in why they are being asked to 'code' their language in the first place…. What is really achieved? Who is privileged with making decisions about who has to code-switch to be successful and who does not? (p. 30)

Teaching about language, often in English-Language Arts (ELA) classrooms, is coupled with a discussion of code-switching as a tool to ensure students' success on high-stakes testing. Baker-Bell et. al. (2017) wrote about their experiences with Black Language in life and the classroom. Baker-Bell and Jackson shared an interaction they had while discussing the relationship between BL and classroom pedagogy in which Jackson stated, "At the end of the day, standard English is what's expected on the ACT, college entrance exams, and academic writing" (365). Like Jackson, teachers may feel pressure or obligation to teach "standard English" because of high-stakes testing. Baker-Bell goes on to state,

> I am not saying that you shouldn't teach them standard English, that would be irresponsible. But what I am suggesting is that you don't have to teach it to them at the expense of their own language. Code-switching pedagogies set up a linguistic hierarchy that teaches students that their language can never lead to

success and that standard English will in every situation. (p. 365)

As Baker-Bell's discussion above outlines, teaching about BL and WME should not uphold a linguistic hierarchy. The linguistic hierarchy described in Baker-Bell et. al. (2017) is an enactment of Delpit's (1988) understanding of the culture of power. Educators' perspectives on code-switching may be well-intentioned, but they fail to challenge the status quo. Jackson (2017) reflected on the dialogue presented above and stated that having a dialogue about BL in the classroom would provide students "the opportunity to disrupt dominant, discriminatory notions about their language in ways that would sustain their identities and practices (a core tenet of [culturally sustaining pedagogy])" (p. 366).

### *Language, Identity, and Culture*

Using the conversations with Baker-Bell et. al. (2017), an educator created a curriculum within her classroom inside of a five-week-long unit on language, identity, and culture. Students took conversations from class home, interrogating their "family's ideologies about language as well as BL and its relationship to identity and culture" (p. 368). By the end of the unit, students reported feeling value in BL, though they had begun the unit summarily viewing BL as negative and incorrect. Further, at the end of the unit, students "understood that in a society dominated by White middle-class norms, one needs [WME] in many spaces" (p. 368) without feeling that BL was, in comparison, "bad" or "a problem." Through the unit Jackson created, students understood "the worth and value of our Black language and Black lives in a schooling and research system that often devalues both" (p. 373), and they were able to challenge internalized ideologies about BL within themselves and their family and life structures. This unit demonstrates that teaching about social justice and language can be done, though it is not currently done broadly in ELA or other content's curriculums, and is valuable for students, especially students of color, to learn.

# Conclusion

## Limitations

### *Length*

One limitation of this curriculum is its length. It is only four weeks long. Whenever curriculum writers or teachers must choose what to condense into a lesson, we privilege some content and inherently diminish other choices. For example, in the first lesson, students watch a video explaining AAVE, which overviews some of the features of Black Language. However, there is not a dedicated class period in which students can dive deep into playing with language to understand and recognize those features. Further, that video or later articles in the unit that utilize different terminology for Black Language may pique student curiosity about the various names. Another week's time spent learning about the linguistic and historical origins of BL that spark differentiation between language, vernacular, and dialect would better benefit overall learning.

Additionally, because it only spans four weeks' time, this unit would be situated amongst other units in Rev 101 at Soulsville. Though a major focus of this course is antiracism education, unless TSCS works to bridge learning from this unit amongst the other units in the Rev 101 curriculum, it may feel disjointed to students, and they may or may not be able to connect the learning goals of the proposed curriculum to broader goals of the Rev 101 course.

### *Lack of teacher training*

As discussed throughout this thesis, I have been hands-on in this research since 2017 and am situated amongst historically and culturally Black communities from whom I am always learning. With that said, every teacher who implements this curriculum may not have the same levels of awareness of their own positionality when teaching the content. Additionally, for educators who do not have any background in language or cultural studies, this may be entirely new content to digest and lead students in learning.

This curriculum would therefore require teacher training before and throughout its implementation to ensure that educators felt equipped to discuss the content. Additionally, educators would need to investigate their positionality and biases prior to teaching this content to create a safe space in which students can analyze linguistic justice, educational equity, and social justice regarding BL in education. Educators deserve a safe space in which to be trained, to ask questions, and to learn, so that they can provide that space for students, too.

Right now, such training materials do not exist with this curriculum, which affects its potential implementation.

**Outlook**

I have done my best to build upon the foundation laid by the scholars who came before me, especially the work of Black scholars of language and education. Language is an integral aspect of identity; identity is intricately related to power; power and oppression are institutionalized and systemic foundations of education. By the end of the proposed unit, students will be able to integrate learning about BL, WME, systemic and institutional racism, and justice into their existing frameworks. Further, students will be able to express and defend their opinion about the role of language in oppression and K-12 education. After completing the unit, students will gain more linguistic and justice-based vocabulary and context to define and describe Black Language and White Mainstream English, the interconnections between them, and the interrelations between these languages, identity, power, and justice.

From these conversations, I believe that students will recognize the inherent worth that their identities, including their languages, bring to their environments, especially in schools, and feel more confident to discuss these topics with peers, family, and teachers moving forward. Their identities and languages add value to educational spaces. Space, therefore, must be created to uplift and honor their personal and linguistic experiences.

This curriculum seeks to help provide that space.

A few months after I co-taught my first lesson on Black Language at Hanley Middle School, I became an eighth-grade math teacher at The Soulsville Charter School. Though I was contracted to teach math, these conversations didn't stop. Instead, I utilized an eighth-grade standard, solving multi-step equations, to talk with students about the big problems they cared about and how math gives us a framework to break problems down into steps and determine the next best step to solve the problem. At the conclusion of my first year at TSCS, I asked students to complete a reflection form. One question asked: what is the most important thing you learned this year, and why? A student wrote, "That my voice matters a lot, because without it there is no power."

My co-taught lesson at Hanley inspired this curriculum, so much so that the op-ed that we read is the foundational article in the fourth week's lesson plan for the Socratic seminar. More than that, it energized me to continue having these conversations, because I know that they matter for students. Students deserve to have these conversations – and not just with me as their teacher or as an aside during a math lesson. Students deserve dedicated space to deconstruct and analyze linguistic justice, educational equity, and social justice in their educational experience. Like my student said, their voices matter. Their Black Language matters.

Appendix A: Unit Plan

| **UNIT: Language, Identity, Power, and Justice** |
| --- |
| LENGTH OF UNIT: 4 weeks |
| UNIT OBJECTIVE(S): Students will be able to (SWBAT):<br>- Integrate learning about BL, WME, systemic and institutional racism, and justice into their existing frameworks<br>- Express and defend their opinion about the role of language in oppression and in K-12 education |
| **LESSON ONE: Existing Frameworks and Foundations** |
| LENGTH OF LESSON: 90 minutes |
| LESSON STANDARD(S):<br>Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) *Social Justice Standards*<br>- (Identity) ID.6-8.5: I know there are similarities and differences between my home culture and the other environments and cultures I encounter, and I can be myself in a diversity of settings.<br>Tennessee State Board of Education (2019) *Tennessee English Language Arts Standards*<br>- 8.SL.CC.2: Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media formats; evaluate the motives, such as social, commercial, and political, behind its presentation. |
| LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): SWBAT identify similarities and differences between their language(s) and identities and analyze how BL and WME structures fit into their |

existing language frameworks.

ASSESSMENT(S):

- Pre-Assessment

**LESSON TWO: Code-switching and the Classroom**

LENGTH OF LESSON: 90 minutes

LESSON STANDARD(S):

Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) *Social Justice Standards*

- (Justice) JU.6-8.12: I can recognize and describe unfairness and injustice in many forms including attitudes, speech, behaviors, practices, and laws.

Tennessee State Board of Education (2019) *Tennessee English Language Arts Standards*

- 8.SL.PKI.6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): SWBAT define codeswitching and analyze the role of code-switching between BL and WME in classroom spaces.

ASSESSMENT(S):

- Parking lot exit ticket: How might code-switching in the classroom be an example of injustice?

**LESSON THREE: Language and the Law**

LENGTH OF LESSON: 90 minutes

LESSON STANDARD(S):

Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) *Social Justice Standards*

- (Justice) JU.6-8.12: I can recognize and describe unfairness and injustice in many forms including attitudes, speech, behaviors, practices, and laws.
- (Justice) JU.6-8.13: I am aware that biased words and behaviors and unjust practices, laws and institutions limit the rights and freedoms of people based on

their identity groups.

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): SWBAT analyze the intersections of language and (in)justice in the United States legal systems and begin preparing for a Socratic seminar.

ASSESSMENT(S):

- Language and the law exit ticket

**LESSON FOUR: Op-Eds and Opinions**

LENGTH OF LESSON: 90 minutes

LESSON STANDARD(S):

Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) *Social Justice Standards*

- (Justice) JU.6-8.12: I can recognize and describe unfairness and injustice in many forms including attitudes, speech, behaviors, practices, and laws.
- (Action) AC.6-8.18: I can respectfully tell someone when his or her words or actions are biased or hurtful.

Tennessee State Board of Education (2019) Tennessee English Language Arts Standards

- 8.SL.PKI.4: Present claims and findings in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): SWBAT defend and critique differing opinions regarding the relationship between language and justice through analysis of a text and through participating in a whole-class Socratic seminar.

ASSESSMENT(S):

- Socratic seminar
- Post-Assessment

Appendix B: Lesson One

| **LESSON ONE: Existing Frameworks and Foundations** |
|---|
| LENGTH OF LESSON: 90 minutes |
| LESSON STANDARD(S):<br>- (Identity) ID.6-8.5: I know there are similarities and differences between my home culture and the other environments and cultures I encounter, and I can be myself in a diversity of settings.<br>- (Tennessee ELA) 8.SL.CC.2: Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media formats; evaluate the motives, such as social, commercial, and political, behind its presentation. |
| LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): SWBAT identify similarities and differences between their language(s) and identities and analyze how BL and WME structures fit into their existing language frameworks. |
| ASSESSMENT(S):<br>- Pre-Assessment |
| MATERIALS:<br>- Documents: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1MySV92wlBPL4cYeGCzgRqN0qturkOMh2exDLsHZRsNo/edit?usp=sharing<br>- Slides (with videos): https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1EkAiRLcOAZZ9rvQKNPhRLNlROHxwfLHY0cBqZRFaqsA/edit?usp=sharing |

**Introduction** (2 minutes)

Slide 2 (1 minute): Have a student read the objective for the day. Review the agenda.

Slide 3 (1 minute): Review the standards for the lesson.

**Pre-Assessment** (8 minutes)

Slide 4 (8 minutes): Pass out pre-assessment. Ask students to fill in their name and date. Students should complete the pre-assessment silently and independently at their seats.

**Instructional Sequence** (75 minutes)

Slide 5 (5 minutes): Ask students to stand silently. Set a timer or queue up a song and instruct students that they will have 1 minute to find a partner in the room to work with, then to sit together at a desk. Play the timer or song. Once students are seated with their chosen partner, pass out the WebQuest handout and instruct students to fill in their name and date. Review the expectations on the slide.

It is important that six pieces of anchor chart paper are already labeled with each vocabulary term and hung around the room so that students can reference what to do with their definitions once they complete the handout.

Slide 6 (20 minutes): Students should utilize technology (i.e., Chromebooks) to complete the WebQuest with their partner. Around the 12-minute mark, encourage students to begin adding their definitions to the posters.

Slides 7-18 (15 minutes): For each vocabulary term, first start on the slide (odd numbers) that lists the term alone. Ask students to share their definitions and prior knowledge; students might share directly off their paper or may reference what they saw written on the posters as they added to them around the room. Then, advance to the slide that lists the term with the lesson's definition (even numbers). Have a student read the definition and encourage students to add to the definitions on their paper if they need.

Slide 19 (5 minutes): Give students the opportunity to think/ink-pair-share about the terms on the board. Students should be given 1 minute to think/ink ("inking" being to write down their thoughts if they prefer) silently and independently and then 2 minutes to

pair with their seat partner and share thoughts or questions that came up for them. Then, the teacher can take 2-4 volunteers to share out whole-group about what they and their partner discussed.

Slide 20 (3 minutes): Ask students to read the definition first of BL. Then, ask students to read the definition of WME. Give students the chance to make connections between what is on screen and their think/ink-pair-share.

Slide 21 (2 minutes): Pass out Video Notecatcher handout and review expectations for video.

Slide 22 (8 minutes): Play the video. Students should be engaged and writing down meaningful notes for themselves. Notes can and should look different for each student.

Slide 23 (7 minutes): First, have 2-3 volunteers share something that resonated most with them to the whole group. Then, have student partners combine into groups of 4. Ask students about their frameworks: what did they already know about BL? Give them 3 minutes to talk in their group, then take 2 volunteers to share out.

Slide 23 (5 minutes): Ask students about the foundations in the video: what did they learn about BL? As the teacher circulates, the teacher should hear key vocabulary from the WebQuest and notes from the video Notecatcher referenced in the discussion. Have students chat for 3 minutes, then ask 2 new volunteers to share out.

Slide 24 (5 minutes): Reserve the last 5 minutes, at minimum, for student questions and wonderings. Questions may be content-specific, referencing the video or vocabulary, or more curious about the overarching topic. Invite other students to answer questions or share thoughts about questions and wonderings that are voiced before directly answering.

**Lesson Closure (5 minutes)**

Slide 24 (2 minutes): After the discussion finishes, collect Video Notecatchers and grade (later) for participation. Students should have notes in each section, but each student's individual notes can and should vary. At this time, students should pack their materials.

Slides 24-27 (3 minutes): Review that BL is not a monolith and varies between people and places, the debate on the origins of BL, and that there are various features of BL that show that it is BL. Preview the topic for the next lesson.

Appendix C: Lesson Two

| **LESSON TWO: Code-switching and the Classroom** |
| --- |
| LENGTH OF LESSON: 90 minutes |
| LESSON STANDARD(S):<br>- (Justice) JU.6-8.12: I can recognize and describe unfairness and injustice in many forms including attitudes, speech, behaviors, practices, and laws.<br>- (Tennessee ELA) 8.SL.PKI.6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. |
| LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): SWBAT define code-switching and analyze the role of code-switching between BL and WME in classroom spaces. |
| ASSESSMENT(S):<br>- Parking lot exit ticket: How might code-switching in the classroom be an example of injustice? |
| RESOURCES:<br>- Documents: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1_t1s9dNCJWZ8Tw_zkJbUU_76Fat1oEwgvjiPc2aFkrE/edit?usp=sharing (Notes) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lqV24wEST7Y6HUl84gmTaIOnsNr6KB8L/view?usp=sharing (Jigsaw reading)<br>- Slides (with videos): https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fLfUSvJLdhZo0DYz18ypOlMPHv-zWTt_HORJUKQc2jo/edit?usp=sharing |

**Introduction** (6 minutes)

As students enter class, they should be handed a Do Now handout.

Slide 2 (1 minute): Have a student read the objective for the day. Review the agenda.

Slide 3 (1 minute): Review the standards for the lesson.

Slide 4 (2 minutes): Students should complete Do Now handout silently and independently at their seats.

Slide 5 (2 minutes): Students should turn and talk with their shoulder partner to review their answers to the Do Now. Review expectation that Partner 1 should talk for the first minute and Partner 2 for the second minute.

Depending on the classroom setup, the teacher may need to name which partner is Partner 1 and which partner is Partner 2.

**Instructional Sequence** (72 minutes)

Slide 6 (4 minutes): Pass out Daily Notecatcher worksheet. Instruct students to complete the first two questions while watching the video. Play the video clip (1:13) twice, then give students 30 seconds to wrap up any final thoughts. Ask for 2 volunteers to share out a comparison or contrast that they noticed in question 1.

Slide 7 (1 minute): Review expectations for watching the video. These are the same expectations from Lesson One and should not be new to students.

Slide 8 (7 minutes): Play the video for the first 5:16. Students should be engaged and silently taking notes while they watch based on the questions on their Notecatcher.

OPTIONS:

- Pause briefly when students are writing furiously to give them space to finish answering questions before continuing the video.
- When the video ends, give students the remaining 1:44 of these 7 minutes to finish answering questions they may not have had time to fully answer while watching the video.

Slides 9-11 (7 minutes): Move through the three sections (frameworks, foundations, and

questions/wonderings) on this slide at student-pace as a whole group. Assign a student the role of timekeeper to ensure that the conversation progresses through each question. Students should have the agency to make connections and lead this conversation with minimal teacher redirection.

Slide 12 (10 minutes): Ask a student to read the question on the board. Preview expectations: when the direction is given, students will move to the side of the room aligned on the board ("agree" to the left and "disagree" to the right). Give the direction. Once students have moved, start the timer. As a group, students will have the first 4 minutes to talk together and determine their argument. At the end of the 4 minutes, the groups will debate each other. Groups should cite evidence from the video notes and may also reference notes from the prior lesson. Emphasize that the point of the "debate" is to hear both sides and their reasoning, not to "win."

Slide 13 (8 minutes): Students should have the Notecatcher from the previous activity. Pass out copies of the pre-annotated article "I Was Punished for Using AAVE as a Child, but Now I Wield It in Defiance" and ask students to take notes of where the lines dividing the different sections are. Divide students into groups of four (student choice, teacher choice, assigned seats, counting off to fours, etc.) and give students 30 seconds to move if necessary. Give students 1 minute to determine who will read and annotate which section, then start the 5-minute timer. During this time, students should read and annotate their section of the article. As necessary, students should access a dictionary (paper or online) to define words/phrases they are unfamiliar with, given that the article was not originally written for this grade level. When the timer goes off, students should have 3 minutes to go around, in numerical order, and summarize the section they read so that each group understands the full reading.

Slide 14 (15 minutes): Preview the expectations for this time: during the next 15 minutes, students should work as a group to answer the questions on the Notecatcher. These questions should serve as jumping-off points for student discussion. By the end of the 15

minutes, student groups should each develop one question they want to pose to other groups about BL in the classroom. After reviewing expectations and checking for understanding, start the timer and circulate to support as needed.

Slide 15 (20 minutes): Whole class Q&A could happen in a variety of formats, including:

- Depending on class size, the 20 minutes is divided evenly amongst groups. Each group has the chance to read their question, and the rest of their time is dedicated to other groups answering the question they posed.
- A representative of each group writes their question on the front board. Randomly select a student (use a random name generator, class popsicle sticks, etc.) to choose a question they want the class to answer first.
- A representative of each group writes their question on the front board. The class votes on the top 3 questions to spend time answering.

**Lesson Closure** (10 minutes)

Slide 14 (5 minutes): Have students answer the question "How might code-switching in the classroom be an example of injustice?" using a parking lot method. Pass out one sticky note to each student. Ask students to write their name on it and answer the question. When they are done with their response, they should add the sticky note to a pre-planned area (section of the whiteboard, anchor chart paper poster on the wall, etc.).

Slides 17-20 (5 minutes): After exit ticket, collect Notecatchers and grade (later) for participation. Students should have answers in each section, but each student's individual notes can and should vary. At this time, students should pack their materials. Review that codeswitching generally refers to language but can refer to other ways of being and is intricately connected to identity and to power. Preview the topic for the next lesson.

Appendix D: Lesson Three

| **LESSON THREE: Language and the Law** |
| --- |
| LENGTH OF LESSON: 90 minutes |
| LESSON STANDARD(S):<br>- (Justice) JU.6-8.12: I can recognize and describe unfairness and injustice in many forms including attitudes, speech, behaviors, practices, and laws.<br>- (Justice) JU.6-8.13: I am aware that biased words and behaviors and unjust practices, laws and institutions limit the rights and freedoms of people based on their identity groups.<br>- (Tennessee ELA) 8.RI.CS.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints. |
| LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): SWBAT analyze the intersections of language and (in)justice in the United States legal systems and begin preparing for a Socratic seminar. |
| ASSESSMENT(S):<br>- Language and the law exit ticket |
| RESOURCES:<br>- Documents: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1FwCGo55iNRqW6vVxxEQOC1hxObGAvs36g2x5YRiFcGY/edit?usp=sharing (Notes) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1It8uSpWYKgzuwU01zCHUyqSywvM53mq_/view?usp=sharing (Core content) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rrxCAd5CT1N8k- |

p7iwflgTnNabg6GlN9/view?usp=sharing (Socratic seminar prep)

- Slides (with videos): https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1zB40wxban7PfgvA6RfqExuyLf53_rmh-agYrlZb02V8/edit?usp=sharing

**Introduction** (13 minutes)

Slide 2 (1 minute): Have a student read the objective for the day. Review the agenda. Preview with students that they will have homework to complete to prepare for the Socratic seminar; emphasize that students will have time to begin preparing for it in class.

Slide 3 (1 minute): Review the standards for the lesson.

Slide 4 (3 minutes): Pass out Do Now handouts and have students complete the question silently and independently during the 2-minute timer.

Slide 5 (1 minute): Give students 1 minute to turn and talk with a shoulder partner about what they know about Trayvon Martin or the George Zimmerman trial.

Slide 6 (7 minutes): Play the video. Students do not need to take notes during this time but should be silently watching the clip.

After watching the clip, give students space to share their thoughts or feelings about the case overall for 2 minutes. This can be done with their shoulder partner from before or as a whole class, dependent on students' emotional needs and comfort after watching.

**Instructional Sequence** (41 minutes)

Slide 7 (5 minutes): Allow students to form groups of 3-4 (teacher-assigned or student-chosen). Pass out printed copies of the article "In the Legal System, Talking White Is a Precursor to Justice—and That's Wrong" and copies of the Notecatcher to each student. Review the expectations on the board: students will be given a timer to read and annotate specific sections of the article with their team (the section to be read will be displayed on

the screen with the timer). By the end of the timer, each group should discuss and write down a question, a quote that stood out to them, or a connection to what the class has been learning on their Notecatcher.

Slide 8 (5 minutes): Students should read and annotate the section of the article on the board as a team. Teams should decide on one question, quote, or connection to add to their Notecatcher. The teacher should circulate and answer questions as needed.

Slide 9 (1 minute): Play the video and have students silently watch part of the trial video of Rachel Jeantel's testimony. Let students know that this is contextual for the next section of the reading.

Slide 10 (5 minutes): Students should read and annotate the section of the article on the board as a team. Teams should decide on one question, quote, or connection to add to their Notecatcher. The teacher should circulate and answer questions as needed.

Slide 11 (5 minutes): Students should read and annotate the section of the article on the board as a team. Teams should decide on one question, quote, or connection to add to their Notecatcher. The teacher should circulate and answer questions as needed.

Slide 12 (10 minutes): Each group should share a question, quote, or connection. Students then have time to discuss the connections between language and the law and justice.

Slide 13 (10 minutes): Pass out Exit Ticket handouts. Students will have 10 minutes to complete the graphic organizer and write a paragraph in defense of their opinion. Exit Tickets should be completed silently and independently, then collected to be graded.

**Socratic Seminar Preparation** (33 minutes)

Slides 14-15 (6 minutes): Introduce the new section of the lesson and play the video. Students should actively engage in watching the video silently.

Slide 16 (7 minutes): Pass out individual copies of the Socratic Seminar Rubric. Give students 2 minutes to review it silently and independently, then open class discussion. Explain the rubric and then allow students to ask questions about how the Socratic

Seminar will work and how it will be graded.

Slide 17 (20 minutes): Pass out individual copies of the Socratic Seminar article "Op-Ed: Bias against African American English speakers is a pillar of systemic racism." Review the expectations on the board. For the first 15 minutes, students should read and annotate the article silently. Students should be invested in writing questions aligned with content in the article for the Seminar. For the last 5 minutes, students can continue working independently or may whisper with a shoulder partner about the questions they've constructed or about questions they still have about the reading.

**Conclusion** (3 minutes)

Slides 18-21 (3 minutes): At this time, students should pack their materials. Review that the legal system is not equitable for BL speakers, language can influence justice in America, and that people in power in the justice system should recognize BL as a dialect. Remind students to finish any annotations and questions for the Socratic Seminar in the next lesson.

Appendix E: Lesson Four

| **LESSON FOUR: Op-Eds and Opinions** |
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| LENGTH OF LESSON: 90 minutes |
| LESSON STANDARD(S):<br>- (Justice) JU.6-8.12: I can recognize and describe unfairness and injustice in many forms including attitudes, speech, behaviors, practices, and laws.<br>- (Action) AC.6-8.18: I can respectfully tell someone when his or her words or actions are biased or hurtful.<br>- (Tennessee ELA) 8.SL.PKI.4: Present claims and findings in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation. |
| LESSON OBJECTIVE(S): SWBAT defend and critique differing opinions regarding the relationship between language and justice through analysis of a text and through participating in a whole-class Socratic seminar. |
| ASSESSMENT(S):<br>- Socratic seminar<br>- Post-Assessment |
| RESOURCES:<br>- Documents: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1xc4JWF3SXDc_Nw6iFAXFqFA2dtVPk9QcDKlWKkB7vvQ/edit?usp=sharing (Notes) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rrxCAd5CT1N8k-p7iwflgTnNabg6GlN9/view?usp=sharing (Socratic seminar)<br>- Slides (with videos): |

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1FYNrfufIjjYw1gBrwyxJRr7Vi0v_tm--c0pigLE7lD0/edit?usp=sharing

**Introduction** (15 minutes)

Slide 2 (1 minute): Have a student read the objective for the day. Review the agenda.

Slide 3 (1 minute): Review the standards for the lesson.

Slide 4 (10 minutes): Ask students to take out their annotated copy of the reading from last class. If students have lost their copy, provide new copies. Students will have 10 silent minutes to finish annotating and questioning from their copy of the article.

Slide 5 (3 minutes): Pass out Do Now handout. Students will have 3 silent and independent minutes to complete the handout synthesizing the preparation they've done so far to help organize their thoughts for the Socratic Seminar

**Instructional Sequence** (60 minutes)

Slide 6 (10 minutes): Students will move their desks to form one large circle. The teacher should sit on the outskirts of the circle and intervene in the Seminar as minimally as possible. Ask students to place their annotated reading on the left of their desk and their completed Do Now on the right. Pass out another copy of the Rubric for each student and ask them to write their name at the top. Pass out copies of the Socratic Seminar Sentence Stems for each student as well. Name one strategic student as the discussion facilitator. Each student should receive 3 popsicle sticks. Once they've participated, they will turn in their popsicle stick to the teacher. Once they are out of popsicle sticks, they can no longer participate.

Slide 7 (50 minutes): The discussion facilitator should open the discussion by asking a question and referencing a quotation. Students should respond without teacher intervention. If the conversation lags, the discussion facilitator may call on a specific student to add to the topic or ask a new question or present a new claim. The teacher

should only intervene as necessary to probe student thinking on important questions or topics. The teacher should remain engaged outside of the Seminar circle, grading student participation in the Seminar utilizing the Rubric. At the end of the Seminar, students should return desks to regular classroom arrangement.

**Post-Assessment** (8 minutes)

Slide 8 (8 minutes): Students should complete the Post-Assessment silently and independently at their seats. The teacher should keep the Pre-Assessments nearby to staple to the Post-Assessments to grade later and compare growth in academic content and in the Likert scales of justice standards confidence.

**Conclusion** (7 minutes)

Slide 9 (7 minutes): Pass back previously collected student note packets. Review the Post-Assessment together.

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