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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO LINGUISTIC JUSTICE IN SETTINGS AND SCHOOLS

This free document has been created to support educators in having necessary conversations about Linguistic Justice.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Warda and Vishnu are co-conspirators, collaborators and friends. Their work individually and collectively subverts from the traditional medical model of Speech & Language Therapy by centering language as a multimodal emancipatory tool that resists standard language ideologies imposed on Black and minoritised individuals.

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Warda is a Social Entrepreneur, Speech and Language Therapist, lecturer, consultant and author. She set up her company Language Waves to address the barriers that Black and minoritised families face when accessing Speech and Language Therapy services that are culturally and linguistically affirming.



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Two key definitions :

Standardised Language Ideologies

Suggests that language is viewed as an idealised, uniform form that is structured by logic and limits. It is solidified and reinforced through educational practices and teaching methods in schools. This specific form of language is considered superior and reflects the interests of the most influential social groups.

Raciolinguistics

Raciolinguistics examines how language is used to construct race and how ideas of race influence language and language use.

In our society today, language and linguistics play a dominant role in shaping the identities of all individuals. Working in education, it is especially important to foster an environment that not only adheres to equity and justice through anti-racism but also honours linguistic diversity. Raciolinguistic ideology continues to oppress Black and marginalised children through standardised language expectations and exclusion. As educators, there is real potential for us to make sure we equip young children with the skills they need for navigating linguistic justice. This guide will introduce you to raciolinguistics principles within the classroom context as well as exploring ways which we can combat linguistic racism effectively so every child is able to freely communicate in their own authentic style.

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INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF RACIOLINGUISTICS AND HOW IT AFFECTS BLACK & MARGINALISED CHILDREN

For Black and marginalised children, language development is a crucial aspect of their growth and identity formation. However, the concept of raciolinguistics sheds light on the way in which their bodies are racialised as black and disabled, leading to unfair judgement of their speech abilities. This means that these children's language skills are often evaluated in a way that is biased against them, leading to negative perceptions of their intelligence. Understanding the impact of raciolinguistics is essential in creating educational environments that support the development of Black children's language skills and their overall well-being. By acknowledging the ways in which language and race intersect, we can strive to create more equitable and inclusive communities for all children to thrive in.

EXAMINING LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES PERPETUATED BY STANDARDISED LANGUAGE TESTS

Standardised language assessments are often touted as objective and fair measures of language proficiency. However, a closer examination reveals the ways in which these tests perpetuate harmful language ideologies. Historically, these tests have been linked to eugenics and colonialism, perpetuating racist beliefs about language and intelligence. Additionally, the emphasis on so-called "standard" language perpetuates a word gap rhetoric that values the language of white, middle-class individuals over the language of marginalised communities. Ultimately, it is critical to question the assumptions behind these tests and strive for a more equitable approach to language assessment.

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EXPLORING WAYS TO DISMANTLE RACIST IDEOLOGIES ON LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

As a society, we must acknowledge that racism has historically been ingrained in many aspects of our culture, including language. It is crucial that we explore ways to dismantle these harmful ideologies in education. Educators have a responsibility to create an inclusive learning environment where all children feel valued and heard, and this includes understanding the impact of language on young minds. By actively working to combat racism within language, we can ensure that our children grow up with a broader understanding of the world and a greater appreciation for diversity. Education is key to creating a more equitable future, and dismantling racist ideologies in language is a powerful step towards achieving that goal.

VALUING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

The early years of a child's education present an opportunity to not only teach them fundamental skills but also to celebrate diversity. Valuing linguistic diversity in the early years means going beyond just teaching multiple languages. It includes recognising the variations in dialects and accents that exist within languages that are already being spoken. Every child has a unique background and perspective, and embracing their linguistic diversity can be a powerful tool for building empathy and understanding. It ensures that children feel represented and included in the learning environment, fostering a culture of respect and appreciation for differences. By treating linguistic diversity as an asset, we can help create a generation of individuals who not only appreciate different cultures but can also communicate across them, using their own authentic voice.

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STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATORS TO PROMOTE LINGUISTIC JUSTICE AND CREATE A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT VALUES EVERYONE'S LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

In today's increasingly diverse education landscape, promoting linguistic justice has become a crucial goal for educators. The reality is that children come from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds, and a "one-size-fits-all" approach to language instruction just won't do. To create a learning environment that values everyone's linguistic background, educators need to embrace strategies that promote inclusivity and celebrate linguistic diversity. This might include providing individualised support for children who are learning a new language, incorporating culturally-responsive teaching practices, and creating opportunities for children to share their own linguistic experiences. Ultimately, by taking steps to promote linguistic justice, educators can help all children feel valued in the setting and classroom.

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RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES, EDUCATORS, AND CHILDREN TO HELP PROMOTE LINGUISTIC JUSTICE AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE CLASSROOM

In today's multicultural society, the need for linguistic justice and understanding in the setting and classroom cannot be overstated. It's important to ensure that all children, regardless of their linguistic background, receive the resources and support they need to succeed in their learning. This is where a dedicated team of educators and professionals who understand this area is necessary. Educators should offer a range of resources and support services for families, educators, and children alike, all aimed at promoting linguistic equality and enabling children to reach their full potential. Whether it's providing language classes for “non-native speakers”, affirming children’s different cultural and linguistic abilities, offering training for educators on how to support diverse learners, or simply providing a safe and welcoming space for children to learn. Settings should be committed to fostering an environment where linguistic justice and understanding are top priorities. With the right support, children can flourish and achieve their academic goals, while also developing a deep appreciation for the diverse cultures and languages that make our world so rich and fascinating.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT & SUSTAINING PEDAGOGIES

Culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, first introduced by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, are educational approaches designed to help create a positive learning environment for all children regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These pedagogies emphasise meeting the cultural needs of children by incorporating strategies that draw on their experiences, language, culture and perspective as part of instructional activities. This approach helps make school more meaningful for children from diverse backgrounds and promotes success in learning because it connects classroom learning to children's lived experience.

In this approach, teachers create supportive learning environments where diverse identities are valued and validation of children's cultures is an essential component of every lesson. Embracing cultural relevance in classrooms means incorporating culturally responsive texts, music, artwork and other materials into instruction. Teachers also strive to build relationships with families from different cultures by holding meetings or providing them with educational opportunities at home.

Culturally relevant instruction is based on the idea that our differences should be celebrated and used as a path towards children's achievement. By using this approach in the classroom, teachers can ensure all children—regardless of background—feel supported so they can reach their highest potential academically.

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Language Racism/Discrimination can take many forms, even in the classroom, and unfortunately, children are at the receiving end of it. Here are some simple strategies to combat it in the setting or classroom:

1. Educate children about the effects of linguistic racism and how to combat it, emphasizing that it is something to be addressed and taken seriously. Emphasise respect for all languages and cultures in order to foster a safe learning environment.
2. Introduce children to different cultures, backgrounds, and dialects through books, audio-visual materials, trips, etc., in order to increase understanding and appreciation for diversity.
3. Teach children about the history of language discrimination and the importance of recognising privilege in terms of language access.
4. Encourage conversations between children of different backgrounds or language abilities by providing ways for them to connect with each other through activities or open dialogue. Create spaces where they can share their stories without judgement or fear of being discounted based on their language background or ability level.
5. Create a setting/school-wide policy around linguistic racism that recognises its damaging effect on children's self-esteem and learning while also promoting an environment of understanding, acceptance, and positive growth towards increasing cultural understanding amongst staff as well as children.

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6. Encourage active listening skills in the setting or classroom and foster a culture of open dialogue when discussing language and cultural differences.

7. Develop a culturally responsive curriculum that is rooted in anti-racist education and emphasises the contributions of people from all backgrounds throughout history. Doing so will help to break down stereotypes and build a positive relationship between languages, cultures, and educational success.

8. Utilise storytelling as a way to engage children in meaningful conversations about language racism and discrimination, as well as encourage empathy among classmates from different backgrounds.

9. Foster collaboration between teachers, families, administrators and other stakeholders to ensure there is adequate support for children facing linguistic discrimination in the setting or classroom. This could involve providing additional language resources or offering mentoring programs that enable at-risk children to find success in school despite experiencing racism or ableism

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FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

April Baker Bell is an important scholar in this area of work

<https://www.routledge.com/Linguistic-Justice-Black-Language-Literacy-Identity-and-Pedagogy/Baker-Bell/p/book/9781138551022>

How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain - Bernard Coard, 1971

Linguistic Justice Video for Speech Bubbles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7QWAICDbvM>

Dr Tasha Austin & Dr Aris Clemons Towards an Expansive Blackness: Critical Conversations Season 2 January 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1moictmTgE>

Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. Harvard Educational Review, 85(2), 149–171.

<https://doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149>

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A Critical Analysis of Standardized Testing in Speech and Language Therapy

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369824516_A_Critical_Analysis_of_Standardized_Testing_in_Speech_and_Language_Therapy

