

# Imagining a Language of Solidarity for Black and Latinx Youth in English Language Arts Classrooms

Danny C. Martinez

In this article, I argue that English educators must interrogate acts of physical and linguistic violence against Black and Latinx youth and take them into consideration when shaping curricula. English teachers can provide a space for youth to make sense of their racialized experiences. I highlight the marginal treatment of Black and Latinx languages in English classrooms and show the relationship between the racialized physical violence against Black and Latinx communities and the linguistic violence many Black and Latinx youth face in English classrooms. I then present examples of emerging solidarity movements between Black and Latinx activists and communities and illustrate how this renewed sense of solidarity can be leveraged to incite transformative learning experiences. I conclude with recommendations for how a language of solidarity framework can take place in *all* English classrooms.

**M**y work as a teacher and researcher in English classrooms is steeped in the cultural-historical past of my family. As I imagine a much-needed language of solidarity for Black and Latinx<sup>1</sup> youth in English classrooms, I must return to the experiences my parents shared at Willow High School<sup>2</sup> (WHS), located in an urban Southern California community I call Tajuata. My mother attended WHS until her senior year when she was pushed out,<sup>3</sup> never encouraged to return. My father attended night school at WHS to learn English after arriving as an immigrant from Mexico at the age of 25. My becoming a teacher at WHS, where I taught for several years as well as conducted research for one academic year about the linguistic repertoires of Black and Latinx youth, was bittersweet for my parents. They have nothing positive to share about their experiences at WHS in the early 1960s, and having one of their own children become a teacher there was something they never imagined, given the meager opportunities, the lack of resources, and even fewer teachers who believed in their worth at the school.

My mother is the daughter of Mexican immigrants. Her mother preferred that her children not speak Spanish because she knew how teachers would treat them at the first Spanish word spoken. This familial language policy did nothing to stop the educational injustices to follow, though. Even my father, who voluntarily enrolled in night school classes to learn English, was teased about his accent, called a wetback, and treated unfairly by educators. For my parents, racism and linguicism were part of what they learned to deal with attending public schools, and they did what they could to protect us from the treatment they received.

Did it work? I can never fault my parents for decisions they made to protect their children. As the youngest of five children, I grew up across the tracks from Tajuata, where English was the dominant language in our home despite living in a community that was nearly all Latinx, mostly Mexican at the time. My schools were 98 percent Latinx, from elementary to high school. I heard Spanish all the time; however, nobody forced me to speak Spanish in our home, and schools I attended did nothing to bring in the rich linguistic features of the community into my classrooms. As the youngest, the absence of any home or educational policy requiring me to speak Spanish led to my loss of the familial language as a K–12 student. I grew up with some resentment for not being made to speak Spanish, but also ill feelings toward those who did not speak English. I could have been what Richard Rodriguez (1982) called a “scholarship boy,” someone who believed the only way to succeed, particularly in academia, was to abandon the “private” cultural and linguistic practices of the home, particularly those tied to being Mexican. However, I managed to reclaim Spanish through my work with Latinx children, youth, and families in communities similar to my own. In this time of reclaiming Spanish, I also learned that despite my socialization to the English language, I was still looked down on for my accented utterances that to this day can place me in my Latinx community.

## **Personal Experiences Teaching and Researching Black and Latinx Youth**

During my first week as an English teacher at WHS in 2002, I walked out of the office and witnessed two school police officers dragging a Black youth from the bustling quad area where students were eating lunch into a long hallway of the main building on campus. This youth’s arms were fixed behind his back in handcuffs, and his head dragged below his shoulders while his eyes faced the floor. The officers held him up as they yelled at him, words I cannot remember. Seeing a Black youth—a child—in handcuffs inside our

school was shocking to me. I remember feeling angry, particularly because no one else batted an eye at the sight. For the next five years, this scene would frequently reoccur. Sometimes, several youths were handcuffed—Black and Latinx, male and female—for offenses such as ditching classes, getting into fights on campus, being “defiant” to teachers and administrators, and so on. As a new teacher, I did not have the skills to debrief with youth about their experiences. For many students at WHS (and in other documented research), dealing with police harassment and brutality, on and off campus, was a common experience (Fine et al., 2005). It seemed as though some of my colleagues internalized images of Black and Latinx youth as offenders, perhaps criminals. My colleagues’ perceptions often translated into difficult experiences for these youth in classrooms, where they became easy targets because of the way they dressed, looked, and sounded.

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After teaching at WHS for five years, I left to begin doctoral studies. However, I soon returned to engage in ethnographic research for one academic year documenting the regularities and variances in the language practices of Black and Latinx youth. In Martinez (2016) I documented Black and Latinx youth attempting to engage in literary conversations about Julius Caesar only to have their contributions rejected for not aligning to monolingual and monocultural expectations. I observed youth attempting to make personal and contextual connections with literature, only to be dismissed for not using experiences directly from the text to engage in meaning making. I noted multilingual teachers who suppressed their multilingual capacities to align their practices with monolingual ideologies of language. Instead of modeling multilingualism for youth, only monolingualism was sanctioned. I witnessed well-intentioned teachers engage in dehumanizing practices that marked and devalued the linguistic practices of these youth, their families, and the communities to which they belonged. I heard teachers shame Black and Latinx youth for uttering “ax” instead of “ask.” I saw youth being called *illiterate* by teachers simply for walking by their classrooms looking and sounding too Black or Brown.

Conversely, Black and Latinx youth engaged in sophisticated social analysis of their experiences with teachers, police, and other authority figures in schools. They often did this while deploying utterances that were filled with the range of languages available to them. When these utterances were “corrected,” or repaired, their contributions were stunted by the demands made for them to sound “right,” or, as many youths explained, sound “White.”

For me, witnessing their language being “repaired” or corrected by their teachers for sounding too Black or too accented was equivalent to these same youth being handcuffed for minor offenses. The *linguistic violence* (Anzaldúa, 1987; Ek, Sánchez, & Quijada, 2013) that Black and Latinx youth experience in classrooms and the racialized physical violence enacted in schools mirror the state-sanctioned racial violence committed against Black and Latinx communities. Unquestionably, Black and Latinx youth experience violence on a daily basis, in and out of schools, as their bodies are racialized, their utterances marked, and their dispositions questioned for not aligning with the expectations of dominant culture.

In this article, I argue that English educators must interrogate acts of physical and linguistic violence against Black and Latinx youth and take them into consideration when shaping curricula. I make the case that English teachers can provide a space for youth to make sense of their racialized experiences by using the tools of the English classroom to foster linguistic solidarity between Black and Latinx youth. I begin by highlighting the marginal treatment of Black and Latinx languages in English classrooms. Next, I show the relationship between the racialized physical violence against Black and Latinx communities and the linguistic violence many Black and Latinx youth face in English classrooms. I then present examples of emerging solidarity movements between Black and Latinx activists and communities, and I illustrate how this renewed sense of solidarity can be leveraged to incite transformative learning experiences for youth who often do not have a language to express their own frustration, anger, and sadness about their collective experiences. I conclude with recommendations for how a language of solidarity framework can take place in *all* English classrooms.

## **Linguistic Violence in the Lives of Black and Latinx Youth**

Unlike the damage of physical violence that many Black and Latinx youth experience outside of classrooms, where the damage is immediate and too often deadly, the impact of linguistic violence does not immediately show its effects. Skutnabb-Kangas (1995) describes *linguicism* as “the domination of one language at the expense of others” (p. 40). Acts of linguicism are often enforced on Black and Latinx youth in school, and they uphold, reinforce, and circulate White linguistic supremacy (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). One way in which linguicism gets upheld in classrooms is when Black and Latinx youth get categorized as English learners, long-term English learners, standard English learners, or the more common catch-all label, “at risk” (Orellana & Gutierrez, 2006). By labeling youth from these deficit perspectives,

educators undervalue the linguistic resources of these youth, stigmatizing their practice through forms of corrective feedback, repairing, or explicit ridicule of youths' utterances.

In my research at WHS, I have documented the linguistic ingenuity of Black and Latinx youth who traverse multiple cultural and linguistic boundaries with an agility that often goes undetected by teachers. In interviews, Black youth were quick to recall instances where they were repaired for utterances that followed Black Language<sup>4</sup> features, and Latinx youth recounted moments where they were treated differently, often infantilized, because of their emerging proficiencies in English (Martinez, 2016). Others expressed a strong sense of pride in their linguistic practices, citing benefits to speaking more than one language. Some of the youth reported enjoying speaking Spanglish or "hood" language with their peers.

While there was a sense of linguistic pride held among many of the Black and Latinx youth, the effects of linguistic violence were also clearly articulated. Some youth reported wanting to speak "better" or speak the "right" kind of English. These youths held what Martínez (2010) has called "deficit rationales" about their language practices, attributing their "lack of knowledge" in dominant ways of speaking for their use of stigmatized languages. As illustrated, when the languages and experiences of Black and Latinx youth deviate from those expected by their teachers, they become victims of language ideologies that exclude them from robust learning experiences.

I am reminded by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) that language is integral to identity; therefore, any attack on a person's language is a form of "linguistic terrorism" (p. 80) that reaches far beyond the act of silencing. In her manifesto to Chicanas, Anzaldúa shows the relationship between oppressed languages and oppressed peoples:

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (p. 81)

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Here Anzaldúa powerfully conveys how the ability to use *any* language, particularly the languages of one's home and community, are central to feeling legitimate as a human. Anzaldúa's message relates to the ways in which Black and Latinx youth are *not* able to communicate in many classrooms without having to translate for the White listener (Flores & Rosa, 2015). For too long, Black and Latinx youth have been asked to sound like their White counterparts in ways that fail to legitimize and humanize them in our English classrooms.

Although the physical violence Black and Latinx youth experience in communities across the United States is brutal and too often deadly, linguistic violence also can have a physical component. Rhetoric scholar Corsevski (1998) argues that attacks on a person's language can cause physical harm: "The verbal or linguistic manifestation of hatred, that is, the linguistic violence, results in real hurt. It is physical violence because the person's body becomes sick. The linguistic violence creates a measurable, physical result" (p. 513). Corsevski draws on several psychological studies to make the claim that while linguistically violent acts may not cause immediate physical pain, it can lead to ailments resulting in future mental and physical pain. She states, "violence that is communicated via words (gestures, or facial expressions), should not be considered a lesser form of violence" (pp. 515–516). I extend this argument to suggest that the acts of linguistic violence launched by teachers onto Black and Latinx youth are forms of linguistic violence. Attacking the languages of these youths' homes and communities is tantamount to saying that their cultural and linguistic resources have nothing to contribute to learning.

## **Solidarity among Black and Latinx Youth**

### **Linguistic Solidarity**

Now more than ever, English educators must consider Black and Latinx youth together, since they are more likely to attend schools with one another more than any other racial/ethnic group (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). Similarly, language researchers Alim and Reyes (2011) argue that research on language must move away from dialect orientation approaches (studying Black Language or Chicanx English) or a group orientation approach (studying Blacks or Chicanxs). Rather, they call for scholars to "highlight . . . how processes of race and racialization are produced between groups and across multiple linguistic and social dimensions" (p. 380). An approach of this kind can help teachers recognize the solidarity Black and Latinx youth have within their

language practices as well as foster a sense of shared historical, political, and linguistic solidarity that can inform pedagogical practices.

In considering notions of solidarity between Black and Latinx youth, it is important to point to research that demonstrates that a shared experience exists in the languages used by both groups. Sociocultural language researchers have brought attention to this alignment through close analysis of language and by centering youth perspectives on language (Alim, 2004; Martinez, 2016; Paris, 2011). For example, Alim (2004) notes that Black “hip hop heads”<sup>5</sup> are more likely to align themselves with other avid listeners of hip-hop, which creates a sense of community leading to linguistic flexibility with youth. For Black and Latinx youth in my research, hip-hop and other music genres such as reggaeton and pop music were often a shared interest that led to discussions and debates. The shared interests that Black and Latinx youth have should be treated as points of leverage for learning that encourages solidarity between them in English classrooms.

In his discussion of “language sharing” by Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander youth, Paris (2011) introduces Miles, a Black youth who is making sense of how Latinx and Pacific Islander youth speak Black Language in their schools and community. Miles states, “We’re all cool. I think it’s like in my middle school where it was White people, and Black, Mexican, and Polynesians; we all gotta stay together. I think it’s like that here. We all gotta stay together. We’re the minorities” (p. 17). Such acts of language sharing, according to Miles, illustrate how language is used “across difference” to facilitate youth solidarity across racial and ethnic groups. A Black male youth in my research (Martinez, 2016) similarly argued that his Latinx peers spoke Black Language because it was the language of the larger community, or what he called the “biosphere” we live in. It is in “sharing” or in the use of similar languages that we can capture a language of solidarity for Black and Latinx youth. In the quest to engage in humanizing and legitimizing pedagogical practices, the English classroom must work against linguistic supremacy, and create a space that invites the Englishes, Spanishes, and other languages of our youth to make meaning, and create solidarity movements, similar to those I will explicate below.

## Political Solidarity

The linguistic solidarity I observed in my and others’ research is a microcosm of larger social practices emerging in the wake of racial violence. Police violence enacted on Black and Latinx communities and the anti-immigrant

rhetoric and explicitly racist and xenophobic discourse of the 2016 presidential race have ignited a movement among young people of color across the country who have expressed their rage on city streets and on social media outlets. #BlackLivesMatter<sup>6</sup> activists throughout the country have protested the tragic and senseless murders of Black men and women at the hands of law enforcement officers. Young Latinx activists confronted anti-immigrant rhetoric and record numbers of deportations conducted under the Obama administration. Black and Latinx activism has catapulted young organizers onto the national spotlight via mainstream media outlets and social media platforms. Facebook and Instagram posts, tweets, and the collective uses of hashtags offer a platform for youth of color to respond to and provide critiques of racialized violence and discourse that blame Black and Latinx victims for the violence enacted upon them (Carney, 2016). The collective work of these young people reframes deficit narratives that construct Black and Latinx communities as lacking in language and literacy skills necessary to become productive citizens. Rather, the critical and digital media literacies deployed by young Black and Latinxs position them as producers of knowledge for the purposes of civic engagement (Garcia, Mirra, Morrell, Martinez, & Scorza, 2015).

Solidarity between young Black and Latinx activists has been brought to the forefront by their collaborations on issues detailed above. For example, in May 2016, youth in Sylmar, California, illustrated Black and Brown solidarity when they walked out of their classes in unity to refute mainstream media claims of racial tension on their campus following a large brawl that took place involving Black and Latinx youth (Mejia & Rocha, 2016). Rather than wait on mainstream media to tell their story, these youths took to social media and protested around their campus and into their neighboring community with arms linked and carrying signs visible from news helicopters hovering above reading “Hey Media” and “#SHSUnited.” “Hey Media” signaled these youths’ actions to call out mainstream media for accusing Black and Latinx youth of racial divisiveness leading to the reported violent brawl. The social media hashtag #SHSUnited contained messages and youth-produced images of Black and Brown unity that countered notions of Black and Brown opposition.

Two months prior, in March 2016, a coalition of Black, Latinx, and Muslim college students worked collaboratively to stop Republican candidate Donald Trump from speaking at the University of Illinois at Chicago. During their protests, several images were captured depicting Black and Brown activists protesting alongside one another, holding signs proclaiming their



dissent of Trump and his platform. A widely circulated Associated Press image captures Black and Latino activists embracing one another after learning that Trump canceled his rally because of security concerns. This image was usually accompanied by captions that highlighted the solidarity between these communities, explicitly valuing “Black and Brown” unity. Similar images have circulated throughout social media of Black and Latinx protesters gathered together holding #BlackLivesMatter and #stoptheraids<sup>7</sup> signs.

Latinx politicians and activist leaders have also called on their constituents to support their Black neighbors in Maryland, Chicago, Texas, and Los Angeles. For example, Albert Retana, a Chicano community leader in South Los Angeles, called on the Latinx community in Los Angeles and across the country to “speak up for Black lives.” He argues, “In South Los Angeles, we live next to each other. We send our kids to the same schools, eat at the same restaurants, and share the same buses. We share many of the same injustices” (Retana, 2016). Though there are many examples of Black and Brown solidarity among youth, college activists, politicians, and activist leaders, young Black and Latinx activists have made clear their critiques of prominent organizations for remaining silent or not taking a strong enough stance on issues affecting each respective community.

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## Challenges for Black and Latinx Solidarity

Activists, bloggers, and Twitter users have called out prominent Latinx organizations for remaining silent about the tragic deaths of Black people at the hands of the police (Carmona, 2015). Activists have also been critical of Black organizations and their leaders for not taking a stand against the record number of deportations under the Obama administration, or for not supporting DREAMers, undocumented youth who have been active in seeking a path to citizenship (Brownstein, 2012). The tensions that exist between Black and Brown communities harken back for decades as these communities have struggled to make sense of the oppressive and dehumanizing experiences of their collective pasts. Often it was easier to blame one another than to work collectively.

Historically, reports of Black and Latinx communities in opposition to one another have been catapulted onto mainstream media reports. Black

and Brown violence is too often cited as the cause of major issues in urban centers (Baca, 2008), with little attention to social issues confronting either communities. In urban areas across the United States, predominantly Black communities in Los Angeles, Chicago, Austin, and New York (to name a few) experienced a reversal in demographics that first saw Mexicans arriving to their neighborhoods followed by other Latinx groups such as Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and other Central Americans (Johnson, 2013). In these contact zones, which Pratt (1991) describes as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (p. 2), tensions may rise as groups vie for social and political power in addition to access to limited resources such as education, jobs, and social services (Johnson, 2013; Pulido, 2006). However, Black and Latinx opposition did not completely characterize these communities. Scholars (e.g., Johnson, 2013; Kun & Pulido, 2013; Pulido, 2006) contend that several alliances were established through grassroots organizing between Black and Latinx activists, artists, and musicians, all of whom worked toward examining both unique and collective issues confronting their respective communities. Many of these moments of Black and Brown solidarity rarely reached mainstream audiences and were often overshadowed and/or ignored to forefront Black and White and Latinx and White solidarity, which showcases attempts by Whites working to provide charity to “impoverished” or “under-resourced” communities.

In the wake of racial violence, many Black and Latinx youth activists have been working in solidarity to address issues facing their communities through organizations within their communities, colleges, and universities—spaces where dialogue about local and national injustices are available. Yet, many Black and Latinx youth who attend our nation’s public high schools are not afforded these spaces. They are not given opportunities to make sense of their experiences about racial violence or make sense of how these experiences intersect with race and racism. They are not given opportunities to make sense of how their own subject positions are read via their utterances, or the ways in which their utterances mark them as the “other” within racialized discourses that are upheld in the White public spaces of our classrooms. Many of our classrooms do not provide Black and Latinx youth with opportunities to genuinely cultivate activist stances and alliances that foster a sense of shared historical, political, and linguistic solidarity. Given this reality, I argue that there remains a need for English educators to imagine a language of solidarity in English language arts classrooms.

## **Imagining a Language of Solidarity: Praxis and Implications for the English Classroom**

A language of solidarity framework (1) develops a sense of pride in the home and community languages that Black and Latinx youth bring to schools; (2) provides a critical language pedagogy where Black and Latinx youth understand the social, historical, and political nature of their languages and those we seek to add; (3) engages youth in literacy tasks that allow them to make sense of the physical and linguistic violence they see and face; and (4) facilitates a language of solidarity across Black, Latinx, and other communities that may be a part of these youths' schooling experiences. A language of solidarity framework builds on critical language awareness (Alim, 2005), culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012), and humanizing research (Gutiérrez, 2006; Paris & Winn, 2013) to provide youth with education that extends beyond classroom walls.

### **Developing Metalinguistic Awareness of Home and Community Languages**

Black and Latinx youth do not often get an opportunity to discuss their languages or make sense of the complexity of their collective language practices. One way to provide youth an opportunity to talk about their linguistic practices is to design activities where they must document their own languages across their daily lives. In Orellana, Martinez, Lee, and Montaña (2012), we provided Latinx middle school youth with small, inexpensive digital cameras and asked them to document how they use language in their everyday lives. More specifically, after providing students with a workshop on film techniques, the youth recorded their language use with their peers, teachers, administrators, siblings, parents, family members, neighbors, and even pets! Our purpose was to work alongside these youths to see and hear how their languages shifted across respective audiences. Collectively, we noted similarities within a predominantly Latinx student demographic; however, differences across this seemingly homogeneous group emerged. Ways of using English and Spanish, for example, wavered as children took note of regional differences in their Spanish language use, or their hybrid language uses as they spoke to adults who were English dominant versus Spanish dominant. This task allowed youth to recognize that while we can all speak English or Spanish, the ways we speak these languages vary. Most

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importantly, youth were able to develop their metalinguistic awareness about the ways they used language across their everyday lives, developing a language to talk about language. Youths' emerging understanding of the diverse languages of their school, homes, and communities as well as the differences among them provided a platform for building an awareness that was lacking prior to our work.

## Providing a Critical Language Pedagogical Perspective

It is imperative that Black and Latinx youth know where their distinct languages come from: the social, historical and political contexts of their languages. Baker-Bell (2015), drawing on Alim (2007), argues that educators and researchers must engage in a *critical language pedagogy* that is designed to

- (1) engage teachers in the same type of critical language pedagogies outlined for their students, (2) provide teachers and their students with a “wake up call” of linguistic inequality, and (3) encourage teachers and students to interrogate received discourses on language, which are always connected to issues of race, gender, power, class, and sexuality. (p. 358)

I have argued elsewhere that in the English language arts classroom, there is little talk about the art of language (Martinez & Montaño, 2016). Providing students with critical language pedagogy provides both teachers and students with a “wake up call” that can foster an expansion of what counts for language and an ability to critique why some languages count more than others. It is through expanding what counts for language that teachers can learn alongside their students where distinct types of language come from, socially and historically. In our classrooms, after documenting the different languages youth speak, it is important to discuss the “prestige” or value of these languages in different spaces. For example, students in the previously mentioned project knew that their accented English or Spanish made some people believe they were not smart. These feelings must be explored by youth through journal writing, playwriting about their experiences, and facilitated discussions about how teachers might make them feel about certain uses of language. Engaging youth and teachers in these practices highlight, for all participants, the nuances of language, and the power structures embedded in language.

## Making Sense of Physical and Linguistic Violence

Jamila Lyiscott (2014) discusses the use of her three Englishes in a fascinating TED Talk where she combines spoken word with a powerful narrative of

her Englishes and how these fare in the multiple communities to which she belongs. With my preservice teachers, this piece serves either as a wake-up call or a reminder of the ways youth use language and how these youths might feel to have their languages marked. The linguisticism, or linguistic violence, they face must be connected to the larger institutionalized and racialized language we hear in reports about the physical violence experienced by Black and Latinx communities. In any English classroom, Lyiscott's words can help facilitate many conversations about the ways youth have experienced differential treatment because of the ways they speak, or how racialized treatment at the hands of law enforcement or educators escalated because of their marked ways of speaking. Lyiscott productively weaves these themes together in her talk. Using this same genre (or other styles such as Ignite Talks or Digital Stories), students can use *any* language to discuss how their languages function in their own varied communities.

In my experience with predominantly White preservice English teachers along with a few preservice teachers of color, discussing their language practices revealed forms of racialized linguistic and physical violence they experienced. Many preservice teachers of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds experienced familial language loss. Others recalled being teased about their “different” or accented ways of speaking and being excluded from educational opportunities. It was unfortunate how Black and Latinx preservice teachers in my courses could speak about their experiences with law enforcement on and off campus. After digging deep into issues around language, privilege, and power dynamics around the languages of racialized youth in schools, preservice teachers in my courses reported feeling more confident talking about language with their own students. Others also reported being more flexible with what counted as language for their own students.<sup>8</sup> My students' efforts give me hope that all English teachers can work alongside their students to encourage an expansive view of their own languages. In teaching future teachers, I work to instill in them a commitment to linguistic justice where not one student is made to feel his or her language(s) is/are not worthy. This is a personal goal since I was so close to losing my family language myself. In doing this work, English teachers have the potential to reveal the privileged and oppressive stances every individual brings to interactions with others.

## **Facilitating a Language of Solidarity Framework across Black and Latinx Youth**

The work of solidarity is not easy. In my work with Black and Latinx youth it was complicated to engage in conversations about their similarities. Doing

this work means working against years of media images and narratives that divide Black and Latinx communities. It means working against decades of real divisiveness and opposition that continues to hurt both communities in ways that empower dominant communities. However, providing a language of solidarity for Black and Latinx youth can begin with providing them with real-life examples of solidarity movements that exist in their own communities, locally and nationally. As mentioned previously, countless recent examples can serve as tools to mediate tough conversations. Building on what youth bring to classrooms means that English teachers must be willing to reach into the digital worlds of youth. It means that we have to loosen up on our positions as experts to also learn from students. Providing a framework for a language of solidarity began for me by diving into my own social media worlds, by making sense of what I was feeling as a teacher educator, as a father to a brown Chicana daughter, and as a human. As I seek to find my language of solidarity with Black youth, teachers, and researchers, I know it is possible for English teachers to dig deep into their students' lives to begin the first steps to imagine their lives, without ever pretending to know exactly what the racial and linguistic physical and emotional violence our youth experience means for them.

English classrooms engaging in a language of solidarity framework will be committed to humanizing the experiences of everyone in the course. Not only must English teachers engage in pedagogical practices that cultivate experiences that aid in uncovering and undoing some of the physical and linguistic violence Black and Latinx youth experience, they must also facilitate the development of youths' abilities to speak back to dehumanizing experiences. We cannot expect Black and Latinx youth to do the work of adults in our schools. English teachers must also work to speak back to linguistic violence that often becomes normalized through curricular, pedagogical, and policy decisions made in schools. English teachers can work together to create linguistically rich departments and teaching practices that truly build on the linguistic richness of Black, Latinx, and other minoritized and stigmatized communities. It is through a linguistic solidarity framework that we can work to humanize English classrooms. Working toward sustaining the cultural and linguistic practices of Black and Latinx youth, particularly in times of heightened racialized physical and linguistic violence against these youth, is an urgent and necessary task for English teachers as we move forward.

**Notes**

1. I use the term *Latinx* or *Chicanx* in this article to demonstrate a gender inclusive stance with those not included in the gendered uses of Latina/o and Chicana/o. I use *Latina* or *Latino*, *Chicana* or *Chicano* when referring to the specific identity of a participant or the author.

2. All place names are pseudonyms.

3. I use the notion of “pushed out” instead of “dropped out.” This places the onus on the educational institution for pushing students out rather than placing all responsibility on the student. My mother was pushed out since her earliest recollections of school, which included being placed in vocational courses to prepare her for a domestic life, being placed in remedial classrooms with other Mexicans in her school, never being encouraged to pursue higher education, and for not providing an educational plan that reflected the rich practices of her community. My mother explains that teachers were “nice” to her but never spoke to her about career options.

4. Black Language is also variously called Black English Vernacular, African American Vernacular English, African American Language, and Ebonics. The use of the term *Black Language* goes back to Geneva Smitherman, and more recently has been taken up by H. Samy Alim, Django Paris, and others. I also prefer Black Language because the youth in my study identified as Black, rather than African American. Black Language also recognizes the various languages that can be associated as Black Language, in the United States and globally.

5. According to Alim (2004), hip-hop heads are individuals who are familiar with or avid listeners of hip-hop.

6. #BlackLivesMatter is a “chapter-based national organization working for the validity of Black life. We are working to (re)build the Black liberation movement. This is Not a Moment, but a Movement” (BlackLivesMatter.com). BlackLivesMatter was created by three Black women—Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors—after the tragic death of Trayvon Martin, who was 17 years old when he was murdered.

7. #stoptheraids was used by immigration activists who demanded immigration reform and a halt to the increased immigration raids throughout the country. Various organizations throughout the country used this hashtag; however, there were varied organizations that work toward this cause.

8. Preservice teachers reported this in class presentations, journal reflections, and final papers where they engaged in classroom discourse analysis.

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**Danny C. Martinez** is an assistant professor at the University of California, Davis’s School of Education. Using ethnographic methods, his research examines the language and literacy practices of Black and Latinx youth in urban classrooms, in addition to teacher learning with respect to leveraging youth practices for creating expan-

sive learning environments. Martinez's work is informed by his previous teaching experiences in San Francisco and Los Angeles. He was a fellow in the 2010–2012 cohort of NCTE's Cultivating New Voices among Scholars of Color program. His email address is [dcmr@ucdavis.edu](mailto:dcmr@ucdavis.edu).