

“We’re not going back!”

The Impact of Project 2025 on Black Youth in the World Language Classroom

A WHITE PAPER

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The Impact of Policy Changes on Black Language Learners and the Role of Educational Leadership²

The Black community has always had its head “on a swivel,” but since 2016, there has been an uptick in the overt and open attacks against Blackness and Black bodies. Clearly, this is a conservative estimation, but there is a correlation between the 2016 presidential election and now that shows us as a community, just merely survivin’ is no longer an option. Specifically, the publication of the book, *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* (2019), which was then released as the GOP agenda, *Project 2025*, has placed the entire nation on high alert.

Let’s be clear: the election results of 2024 will not make *Project 2025* magically disappear. Depending upon who moves into the White House in 2025, it may simply move to the shadows to fester, grow, and become stronger for its next opportunity to strike.

Therefore, as a community, we must be adequately prepared and primed so we are aware of the situation. During the Summer of 2023, I began curating my thoughts about the impact of education-focused policy changes on Black students. I did this through other white papers, “[The State of Black Child in the World Language Program](#)” and the forthcoming, “Mind/Mine the Gap: A Year of Black Discernment”, and social media.

At first, I danced around the actual naming of this “agenda” but during the 2024 election season, it became clear that I was doing society a disservice by not being clear about the source of all of this -- *ahem* -- work. So I started calling a spade a spade and a problem a problem ***and this project is a problem***, especially for the Black child.

Project 2025 is an intentional decision by a political party and social ideology to regress and roll back our progress toward equity and having policies that reflect the rich diversity that is the United States. Let’s take a look at three ways the Black child is impacted, particularly concerning language learning: Headstart, Public Education, and DEIA&B initiatives.

¹ “We’re not going back!” is a tag line from the 2024 Harris-Walz Presidential Campaign

² *This is a sensitive topic. I’m sensitive to it, you’re sensitive to it and I will do my best to be as objectively academic as I can as I present this information. Please forgive me though, if, on occasion, I dip into African American English or Hip Hop English as a means to self-soothe as I process this work.*

The Critical Role of Head Start in Supporting Black Language Learners: A Pathway to Equity and Success

Early childhood is a critical period for language development, and Head Start provides rich linguistic environments that support this growth, particularly for bilingual and multilingual learners. Research shows that language acquisition during early childhood is crucial for later success in both academic and professional contexts (García, 2009). Head Start offers tailored language instruction and exposure for Black language learners, ensuring proficiency in multiple languages. The program's elimination would deprive many Black children of essential linguistic support, impacting their ability to thrive in multilingual settings.

Child development and sociolinguistic research have shown us the impact of language education on the holistic development of children as readers, writers, and scholars and their capacity to develop socially through language. This is not to argue the Black child is lacking in language ability, but to demonstrate how ELA pedagogy and strategies at the early childhood education level, not only prepare children for reading but also secure the language learning foundation that makes acquiring more languages in the future easier.

In my book, *Raising Bilingual Brown Babies: Everyday Strategies to Become a Confident Bilingual Family* (2022), I explain that “one’s ability to speak in more than one language has been proven to boost standardized test scores in vocabulary” (p. 79). Head Start programming helps Black children develop their English language skills and prepares them for language learning in the world language classroom. What we can give children in the Head Start program is one of the strong foundations for language learning in public education.

The potential elimination of the Head Start program would significantly hinder the academic success and equity of Black language learners. Head Start provides crucial early learning opportunities that are foundational for long-term success. As noted by scholars in early childhood education, such programs lay the groundwork for closing achievement gaps that disproportionately affect marginalized communities (Barnett, 2011).

Head Start plays an essential role in preparing children for formal education. It offers a structured environment that fosters cognitive, social, and emotional development. For Black children, this is particularly critical given that systemic inequities often result in less access to early childhood education (Garcia & Weiss, 2017).

Programs like Head Start are also vital in fostering confidence in young learners. By providing an environment where children can succeed academically and socially, Head Start helps build the self-esteem necessary to navigate future challenges. For

Black children, who often face additional societal barriers, this early confidence boost is crucial (Zigler & Styfco, 2004). The program instills a sense of competence and agency that has long-lasting effects on their educational trajectories and life outcomes.

The elimination of Head Start would have profound negative impacts on Black language learners, depriving children of essential early education opportunities. As research has shown, early intervention is key to long-term academic success, particularly for already marginalized populations (Heckman, 2011). Protecting and expanding programs like Head Start is not only a matter of equity but also a necessity for ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to succeed and contribute to society. Even more so for the Black world language learner, it allows them the opportunity to lay the foundation for a multilingual global citizenry.

The Implications of Project 2025 on Public Education and Its Impact on Black Students

The introduction of Project 2025 presents a significant threat to the foundation of public education in the United States, particularly for Black students. The potential reduction in Title I funds, Pell grants, and the blocking of race education in schools pose critical risks not only to the education system but to the lives and futures of the most marginalized students. These changes target access and equity, crucial elements for fostering success in historically underserved communities. There are far-reaching consequences of Project 2025, particularly for Black language learning students, and the vital role public schools play in their education, particularly in the realm of culturally relevant curricula and representation in the classroom.

Project 2025's goal of restricting or eliminating race-related education in schools is another alarming aspect. Efforts to block the teaching of race-related issues erase the experiences and histories of Black and other minority communities from the curriculum, perpetuating a narrative that ignores systemic inequality (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The exclusion of race education from the classroom denies students an opportunity to understand their own identities and the social structures that shape their world.

In particular, this shift would limit access to culturally relevant pedagogy, which has been proven to benefit students of color. Culturally relevant teaching allows students to see themselves reflected in what they learn, making education more engaging and meaningful (Gay, 2018). Black students would miss out on this crucial connection to their heritage and the broader historical context of race relations in America and globally. The implications for identity development, motivation, and overall academic success are dire.

In the language classroom, this means further marginalization or complete omission of Afro-descended people present in the language learning diaspora. In my book, *The Color of Language: Centering the Student of Color in the World Language Classroom*, I stress the importance of infusing Afrolatino culture and content into the Spanish classroom, This also stands true for Francophone, Lusophone, Asiatic, and Germanic languages.

Public schools are not only a place of academic learning but also a critical site for cultural exchange and development. In world language classrooms, the presence of Black educators and access to culturally relevant curricula are essential to fostering an inclusive learning environment for Black students. We already know, Black students benefit greatly from having teachers who reflect their racial and cultural background, particularly in fields like world language learning, where cultural connections enhance the learning experience (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

But to be clear, the ultimate goal of Project 2025 is to dismantle public education altogether. The appointment of Betsy DeVos, a prominent advocate for the complete elimination of the Department of Education, during the 2016 Trump Administration was a signal of that ultimate goal.

Specifically, in addition to ending Head Start, it calls for the gradual elimination of funding for schools in low-income areas, cutting funding off to schools with vaccine requirements, and shuttering the Department of Education completely.

The potential dismantling of public education infrastructure, as proposed under Project 2025 would not only severely impact Black children, but it would have severe consequences for the pipeline of Black educators, especially in specialized areas like world languages. Without proper funding and support, fewer Black students would enter the field of education, leading to a decline in the representation of Black teachers in the world language classroom, a content area already with a low percentage representation of Black educators (about 4%). This is particularly concerning in world language education, where Black students often thrive under the mentorship of Black teachers who understand their cultural experiences and can bridge connections to language learning (García & Wei, 2014).

The Threat to Language Learning Opportunities

Language learning plays a key role in providing students with access to global opportunities and allowing them to connect with different cultures, including their own. The removal of federal support for public schools would widen the gap in access to these opportunities for Black students. As world language programs are typically among the first to face cuts in underfunded schools, Black students would be disproportionately affected by these reductions (Hornberger & Link, 2012). This not

only limits their educational experiences but also reduces their chances of becoming proficient in languages that could connect them to their diasporic heritage and the global community.

Language learning can foster a sense of belonging and pride in one's cultural identity, while also promoting empathy and understanding of others. Cutting these opportunities from public education will widen the cultural and linguistic gap, depriving Black students of the chance to fully engage in a globalized world. The potential impact of Project 2025 on world language education represents not only an educational loss but a cultural one as well.

Project 2025 presents a direct attack on public education, in particular, the impact on world language classrooms, where Black educators play a critical role, will undermine the cultural and linguistic growth of Black students. This is not simply an issue of funding; it is a battle for equity, access, and the future of Black students. As a society, we must stand firm in protecting our public schools and ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to succeed. The final concern addressed here for Project 2025 is its negative impact on overall Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access & Belonging (DEIA&B) initiatives.

The Elimination of DEIA&B Initiatives and Its Impact on Black Students and Professionals in Language Education

Project 2025 calls to rescind Obama Administration guidance that addressed racial disparities, the Office of Civil Rights would be moved to the Department of Justice, and it opposes addressing systemic racism and gender identity issues in schools which may lead to hostile environments for many students. It also proposes prohibiting accreditation agencies from mandating educational institutions to adopt DEIA&B policies and winding down “area studies” programs at universities (African American Studies, Latin American Studies, Francophone Studies, and Gender Studies to name a few).

The current wave of resistance to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access, and Belonging (DEIA&B) initiatives poses a significant threat to both Black students learning world languages and Black professionals working in the field of world language education. These initiatives have played a critical role in creating opportunities, ensuring representation, and providing much-needed support networks for marginalized communities, particularly Black individuals. The elimination of DEIA&B programs endangers the progress made toward educational and professional equity and the broader societal risks of reducing access to these crucial resources.

DEIA&B initiatives have been instrumental in breaking down barriers for Black students and professionals in world language education. These programs provide

essential resources that enable access to quality world language education, scholarships, mentorship opportunities, and career development pathways. For many Black students, DEIA&B programs represent the only chance to engage in world language learning, an area traditionally dominated by those with greater access to resources and support systems (Paris & Alim, 2017). Without these initiatives, Black students would face increased obstacles to participation in language programs, resulting in fewer opportunities to excel academically and professionally.

In plain speak, DEIA&B programming allows for the reduction of the historic practice of restricting access to world language education and bilingualism to the wealthy, white, and privileged. This exacerbates the practices of denying teacher candidates who do not “sound” like a native speaker but may “sound black” receiving point deductions in oral certification assessments and not allowing success in teaching certification credentials.

For Black professionals, DEIA&B initiatives provide career advancement opportunities that may otherwise be inaccessible. These programs offer mentorship, networking opportunities, and professional development workshops that are tailored to the specific challenges faced by Black educators and linguists (Gándara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2008). Eliminating these resources would limit career growth, further isolating Black professionals in a field where they are already underrepresented. The lack of access to these support systems would widen the gap between Black professionals and their peers, making it harder for them to break through systemic barriers and advance in their world language teaching careers.

Representation Matters: Ensuring Black Voices in Language Education

Representation in world language education is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment where Black students feel seen, valued, and understood. DEIA&B initiatives ensure that Black voices, stories, and experiences are reflected in the curriculum and professional spaces. In world language classrooms, the presence of Black educators who understand the cultural and linguistic needs of Black students creates a more relatable and effective learning experience (Anderson 2023; Anderson 2021; Anderson, 2018; Nieto, 2018; Anderson, 2015). Without these initiatives, there is a real risk of erasing Black perspectives from language education, which would perpetuate a curriculum that does not reflect the diversity of its students.

The importance of representation extends beyond the world language classroom. In professional spaces, DEIA&B initiatives ensure that Black professionals have a seat at the table in decision-making processes and curriculum development. This representation is vital for ensuring that world language programs remain relevant and inclusive of the diverse cultural backgrounds of all students (Banks, 2015).

Without DEIA&B, we risk creating an environment where Black professionals are excluded from key discussions, leading to a lack of cultural diversity in educational content and professional spaces.

One of the core missions of DEIA&B initiatives is to fight for equitable access to resources for all students, regardless of their background. In the context of world language education, this means providing access to quality instruction, extracurricular programs, and materials that support the development of language proficiency. Black students, who are often disproportionately affected by underfunded schools and limited resources, rely on DEIA&B initiatives to help close the gap in educational outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

If DEIA&B programs are eliminated, the already wide disparity in access to resources will grow even larger, leaving Black students further behind their peers. This loss of equitable access would not only impact academic achievement but also limit Black students' ability to compete in an increasingly globalized job market where multilingual skills are highly valued. The elimination of these initiatives would exacerbate existing inequalities, making it even more difficult for Black students to succeed in language learning and beyond.

Professional Growth: The Impact on Black Educators in Language Learning

For Black professionals, DEIA&B initiatives are essential for career development and growth. These programs provide opportunities for mentorship, leadership training, and professional development that are tailored to the unique challenges faced by Black educators and professionals in world language education (Sleeter, 2012). Without these initiatives, Black professionals would face additional barriers to career advancement, making it more difficult to move into leadership positions or influence the direction of language education programs.

The elimination of DEIA&B initiatives would not only limit professional growth opportunities for Black educators but also reduce the overall number of Black professionals in the field. This would have a ripple effect on the quality of language education, as fewer Black educators would mean fewer diverse perspectives in the classroom and fewer role models for Black students. Ultimately, the loss of DEIA&B programs would weaken the entire field of language education by reducing its cultural and linguistic diversity.

The elimination of DEIA&B initiatives would have devastating consequences for Black students and professionals in language education. These programs provide access to opportunities, ensure representation, and create support networks that are essential for the success of marginalized communities. Without DEIA&B, Black students and professionals will face increased barriers to success, limiting their ability

to participate fully in language education and diminishing the diversity of voices and perspectives in the field. As a society, we must continue to fight for the preservation of DEIA&B initiatives to ensure that all students and professionals, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to succeed.

Cognitive Dissonance in Educational Leadership

Sooooooooooooo.....here's a touchy subject. Educational Leadership should address the dissonance when it comes to academic excellence and the realities of schooling for many students, especially Black students. Educational leaders need to face the **cognitive dissonance** that exists between their neutrality, colorblindness, and individualism, and the lived realities of Black students.

One of the underlying reasons for this cognitive dissonance in educational leadership is its foundation in business managerial models. Educational leadership theories, often drawn from corporate practices, prioritize efficiency, metrics, and outcomes over the lived experiences of students. According to McCray, Beachum, and Yawn (2013), these models are ill-suited to the complexities of educational environments, particularly when it comes to addressing issues of race and equity. The focus on performance metrics can lead to a "colorblind" approach, where the unique challenges faced by Black students are overlooked in favor of broader goals such as standardized test scores or graduation rates.

For Black students, particularly in the world language classroom, this dissonance is a significant barrier to their academic success and cultural empowerment. Cognitive dissonance, in this context, refers to the conflicting beliefs held by educational leaders who, while professing neutrality, fairness, and individualism, overlook the systemic inequities that disproportionately affect Black students. The failure to recognize race in academic policies and leadership decisions only serves to perpetuate these inequities.

Ignoring race under the guise of fairness only perpetuates inequity. When we profess to be colorblind, we ignore the unique distinctions our Black students bring to **AND** experience in our world language classrooms. Neutral policies, inaction, and the myth of individualism dismiss the collective struggle of Black students, creating a system that fails to support their success.

Part of the reason that Project 2025 believes it can be successful in its implementation is that the theoretical foundations of Educational Leadership are rooted in business managerial models (McCray, Beachum & Yawn, 2013). This approach sterilizes the process making children's education a SMART goal product rather than meeting the needs of a human who needs to be adequately prepared for a globalized world.

Educational leaders often subscribe to a "neutral" stance, particularly when addressing issues of race. While neutrality may seem like a fair and impartial approach, it often masks the systemic racism embedded within the educational system. Neutrality is not justice. By ignoring race under the guise of fairness, educational leaders fail to acknowledge the unique challenges that Black students face, especially in areas like world language education, where representation and access to culturally relevant curricula are critical.

The world language classroom holds the potential to be a transformative space for Black students, allowing them to connect with global cultures and gain linguistic skills that expand their career opportunities. However, neutral policies that do not actively seek to address racial disparities in these classrooms only widen the gap in educational outcomes. When educational leadership remains colorblind, Black students are left to navigate an educational system that does not recognize or support their specific needs. As a result, they are often marginalized and overlooked in spaces that should be inclusive and empowering.

In addition to neutrality, the concept of individualism—where success is seen solely as a personal achievement—undermines the collective struggles faced by Black students. Individualism dismisses the importance of community, shared experiences, and systemic barriers. For Black students in world language classrooms, this means that their struggles with underrepresentation, cultural alienation, and a lack of tailored support are often seen as individual shortcomings rather than the result of structural inequities.

This myth of individualism is particularly damaging because it absolves educational leaders of the responsibility to create inclusive environments. Instead of implementing policies that address racial disparities and support Black students, the burden is placed on the students themselves to "overcome" obstacles. In world language education, where Black students may already feel disconnected from the Eurocentric focus of many curricula, this further isolates them and diminishes their potential for success.

In world language classrooms, this managerial mindset can manifest in policies that prioritize language proficiency outcomes without considering the cultural relevance of the curriculum or the support needed for Black students to succeed. For example, a curriculum that heavily emphasizes European languages and cultures without integrating African or Caribbean linguistic and cultural content marginalizes Black students and limits their engagement. Educational leadership, influenced by business models, may see no issue with such a curriculum, as long as proficiency metrics are met, but this approach ignores the importance of representation and cultural relevance for Black students.

Addressing these issues is not only a matter of equity but also of academic excellence. Black students deserve to thrive in the world language classroom, where they can connect with their heritage and gain the linguistic skills needed to succeed in a globalized world. Educational leaders must take action to ensure that the systems in place support—not hinder—the success of these students. By recognizing and addressing the cognitive dissonance that exists, educational leadership can begin to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

Yes, there are concepts and practices such as the Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework (CRLF), however, these options do not completely address the needs of students in the world language classroom. Frameworks such as these use a broad brush when discussing culture, by centering the organization as culture instead taking into account best practices for integrating the cultural knowledge of all stakeholders. It narrows the discussion of cultural responsiveness to team-building and shared decision-making and rarely includes the role of “low-power” actors such as the students in the school building (#sideeye).

The Solution: Advocacy for Culturally Sustainable Education and True Culturally Responsive Leadership in Schools

World language learning is a powerful tool for Black students, offering them more than just communication skills—it provides a pathway to connect with their heritage and engage with the global community. By learning world languages, Black students can explore the rich cultural, historical, and linguistic ties that link them to the African diaspora, whether through African, Caribbean, or Latin American languages. This connection fosters a deeper sense of pride, identity, and belonging, bridging gaps between their personal histories and the broader world.

However, for this learning to truly resonate, it must be guided by culturally sustainable pedagogy and culturally responsive leadership that centers the student experience rather than the needs of the school building or administrative decision-making. For Black students, this means world language education that doesn't just teach vocabulary and grammar but also explores the historical and cultural contexts that shape their identities and true culturally responsive leadership which goes beyond surface-level inclusion, placing the needs, voices, and experiences of students at the heart of educational decision-making.

In world language education, this means creating spaces where Black students can see their own histories, cultures, and perspectives reflected in what they learn and how they learn it. At the forefront of this movement are Black educators, who not only teach languages but also bring in diverse perspectives that challenge the status quo. They provide students with culturally relevant lessons, helping them to see themselves as part of the larger global tapestry. By centering the student experience

and fostering an inclusive classroom, Black educators ensure that language learning becomes a tool for empowerment—helping Black students see themselves as active participants in both their local communities and the wider world.

Public education is a cornerstone of democracy and a fundamental right that must be protected and promoted, especially for Black students. Ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students is not just a moral imperative—it's a matter of justice and opportunity. Black students, in particular, face unique challenges within the education system, making it all the more essential to fight for schools that are inclusive, supportive, and reflective of their needs.

World language learning programs are especially crucial for Black students. Maintaining and strengthening programs that support Black world language learners—whether through world language courses, bilingual education, or culturally relevant instruction—is vital to their academic development and personal empowerment.

Yet, these opportunities are under threat. Project 2025, a rightwing decision-making initiative aimed at reshaping (or obliterating) government policies, includes proposals to eliminate public education as we know it, drastically reducing federal involvement in schools. This shift threatens to dismantle public education, eroding access to equitable, quality schooling for all students. For Black students, this would be catastrophic, deepening disparities and stripping away critical support systems that help them succeed academically and beyond.

The dismantling of public education would widen existing inequalities, limiting the futures of Black students and reducing their chances to engage meaningfully with the world. Now, more than ever, there is a call to action to protect public schools and ensure that every student, particularly Black students, has access to a high-quality, equitable education. This means safeguarding world language learning programs that empower Black students to thrive in an increasingly globalized world.

By protecting public education, we protect the futures of Black students and uphold the promise of equity and opportunity for all. If we fail to act, we risk undermining the very foundation of what education should be—an inclusive space where every student, regardless of background, can grow, learn, and succeed.

Bilingual Brown Babies - the Beautiful Disruptor “for the culture”

Bilingual Brown Babies stands at the forefront of transforming language education for Black students, offering innovative solutions that address the unique challenges they face in world language acquisition. By equipping teachers with tools that prioritize anti-racist language practices and culturally sustainable pedagogy,

Bilingual Brown Babies is increasing the number of Black students not only enrolling but excelling in advanced world language classes and study abroad programs.

Programs like *Bringing Language Swag to Your Content™*, *The Color of Language™*, and *Building a Beloved Language Community™* empower teachers and schools to create inclusive, culturally responsive classrooms that resonate with Black students. These initiatives focus on leveraging student knowledge, family assets, and cultural awareness as critical components of language retention and success. Bilingual Brown Babies recognizes the importance of going beyond traditional teaching methods to build communities where language learning becomes a tool for social justice, identity affirmation, and global citizenship.

By centering the needs of Black students, Bilingual Brown Babies ensures that language learning becomes not just an academic pursuit but a pathway to empowerment, self-discovery, and global connection. In doing so, it offers the most effective solution for promoting equitable, culturally responsive world language education that benefits students, teachers, and communities alike.

For more information on how you can get Bilingual Brown Babies to facilitate these workshops for your school of world language department, please visit our website: www.bilingualbrownbabies.net.

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