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AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH IN THE CLASSROOM: THE
ATTITUDES AND IDEOLOGIES OF URBAN EDUCATORS

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Teacher Education
The University of Mississippi

by

MELANIE RACHAEL HINES-KNAPP

August 2015

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ABSTRACT

The study of embracing African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the classroom is often misunderstood. AAVE is an informal dialect spoken by many African Americans in the United States. Considering this dialect is spoken by many African American students, teachers have struggled with the appropriateness and legitimacy of its usage in the classroom for years. In order for teachers to help students maintain the richness and character of AAVE, yet allow students to learn and incorporate Standard English conventions, they must embrace culturally relevant instruction.

Culturally relevant instruction (CRI) is an instructional approach that involves using students' cultural and linguistic experiences to create a positive, nurturing, and non-threatening classroom environment (Delpit, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy 2002). One way to incorporate CRI in the classroom is through code-switching. With code-switching, students are able to engage in meaningful instructional activities and discussions using AAVE as well as Standard English. This heuristic qualitative inquiry investigates AAVE in the classroom and how urban educators feel about its existence and usage in the urban classroom. This study is significant because if the participants have positive attitudes about AAVE's usage in the classroom, then they may be more willing to incorporate CRI strategies, like code-switching, that effectively infuse AAVE in the classroom.

The researcher sought to gather explicit information from 16 urban educators in regard to their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about AAVE and its usage in the classroom. In this study, the researcher purposefully selected the 16 urban educators through a network sampling.

The study participants consisted of school administrators, classroom teachers, an instructional coach, and a librarian. The researcher used three means of collecting data: a focus group interview, individual interviews, and writing responses. By analyzing the attitudes and ideologies of the study participants, the researcher was able to identify misconceptions about AAVE and bring awareness about dialectal differences in the classroom. Culturally relevant instructional strategies including code-switching pedagogical strategies are discussed and recommended to help teachers and other educators with the incorporation of informal and formal dialects in the classroom.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Russell Hines Jr., and my mother, Patricia H. Hines.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAVE	African American Vernacular English
MAE	Mainstream American English
SE	Standard English
SAE	Standard American English
CRI	Culturally Relevant Instruction
SEP	Standard English Proficiency
CT	Casual Talk
AT	Academic Talk

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In addition, I am grateful for my family. Antuan D. Knapp provided continuous and unwavering support throughout my studies. Russell and Patricia Hines instilled values of resilience and persistence in me from birth.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Culturally relevant instruction is an empowering instructional approach that involves using students' cultural and linguistic abilities to create a non-threatening classroom atmosphere (Delpit, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Cultural groups have distinct characteristics, beyond the color of skin, that make them different from other cultural groups. One of these distinct differences is the language or communication pattern (Ladson-Billings, 2009). According to Ladson-Billings (2009), a study by Mohatt and Erickson discovered that teachers who found effective ways to communicate with their students used an "interactional style that the authors termed culturally congruent" (p. 18). With this cultural congruence, the teachers must make the way that they interact with students similar to the students' culture. Whether the term is culturally congruent (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), culturally responsive (Au & Jordan, 1981), or culturally relevant instruction (Ladson-Billings, 2009), all terms focus on using all aspects of a student's culture to reach them. There are various dialects that students use during their daily conversations with people at home and with people at school. One dialect that has gained national recognition is referred to as African American Vernacular English, Black English, or Ebonics.

Researchers and linguists like Ladson-Billings (1995), Smitherman (1977), and Rickford (1999) agree that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a dialect spoken by many

people in many different regions across the nation. African American Vernacular English is a dialect with written and oral consistent conventions (Orr, 2000). Though its features are not evident in all forms of speech, Rickford and Rickford (1999) consider AAVE the main dialect of African American students. African American Vernacular English is worthy of respect and approval because it is a stable and reliable dialect that follows a systematic set of rules of grammar and pronunciation, similar to any language (Pullum, 1999). According to John R. Rickford (1997), deciding if two varieties are two languages or two dialects is usually based on social and political criteria. If 80 percent or more words are shared between the two varieties, they are dialects of the same language; hence, AAVE is a dialect (personal communication, February 16, 1997). Linguists and scholars argue as to whether AAVE is a language, a dialect, or even a language system. According to J.R. Rickford (personal communication, February 16, 1997) African American Vernacular English is a dialect, but according to Delpit (1995) Ebonics, another term used to describe AAVE, is a language spoken by many African American students.

During the year of 1996, the Oakland California School System had a debate about whether or not they should consider Ebonics a language. This debate brought on the Ebonics Resolution. The Ebonics Resolution stated that “African Language Systems are genetically based with origins in West African and Niger Congo languages and not a dialect of English” (O’Neil, 1998, p.39). It further stated that an instructional program must be implemented that will help African American students use and maintain their first language while mastering the English language. Although Rickford (1999) considers AAVE the main dialect of most African American students, Wolfram (2004) asserts that AAVE is not a dialect of all African American people. However, it is a dialect in which its features and patterns are most evident in working

class urban areas (Wolfram, 2004). Most words and grammar affiliated with AAVE can be easily recognized in Mainstream American English (MAE).

African American Vernacular English has a rule-based syntax, conventions, and style that allow students to communicate with their peers and those from their home communities. According to Rickford and Rickford (2000), AAVE is considered a variation of the English language because of its rules, systematic phonological and grammatical features.

Some grammatical features of AAVE include, but are not limited to, dropping the third-person singular *s*, as in *he do* for *he does*. Some of the phonological features include the absence of *r-*, such as *doe* for *door* and the absence of *-g*, as in *goin'* for *going* (Rickford & Rickford, 2000). The idea of the dropping certain consonant sounds from words is also a feature. For example, in AAVE *test* may be pronounced as *tes'*, and *respect* may be pronounced *respec'*. Another grammatical feature is the zero copula. In AAVE, the auxiliary verb that takes the forms *be*, *like been*, *being*, *am*, *are*, *is*, *was*, and *were* are called the copula. The copula is used differently in AAVE than it is in MAE. It is rare that the copula can be omitted in AAVE, but certain rules apply. One example of where the copula cannot be omitted is when an auxiliary verb is at the end of a phrase; *couldn't nobody say what color he is*. Another example of where the copula is not omitted is when *be* expresses a habitual aspect like, *He be singin* (Cukor-Avila, 2002).

Another characteristic of AAVE is double negation like, *I ain't no ugly person*. One other aspect of AAVE is the negative inversion. This negative inversion is changing the placement of the negative auxiliary verb at the beginning of the sentence when the subject is indefinite (Pullum, 1999). The negative inversion, *don't nobody know about it*, means nobody

knows about it (Pullum, 1999). There are many more characteristics of AAVE, but those mentioned are just to name a few.

According to Delpit (1997), some teachers of African American students believe that without a knowledge base in MAE, the students' chances of success in life may be hindered. Regardless, constant correction of students' speech habits rarely has the desired effect. When students are consistently corrected for the way that they speak, this causes them to monitor the way they talk. This monitoring can thereby make it a task to talk, thereby creating a situation where "Forcing speakers to monitor their language typically produces silence" (Delpit, 1998, p. 18).

In 1996, Oakland, California received a large amount of attention because of the Ebonics Resolution. With this resolution, the Oakland school board stated that Ebonics was not only the home/community language of African American children, but it was also a language with rules and systems that were the most frequently spoken language of African American children in the Oakland school system. Because of this, the school board maintained that Ebonics should be "affirmed, maintained, and used to help African American children acquire fluency in the standard code" (Perry, 1998, p. 3).

Because of the Ebonics Resolution, Oakland implemented a program, referred to as Standard English Proficiency, to help close the gap between teachers' knowledge and attitudes of Black language and literacy instruction. Prescott is a school in Oakland, California which chose to use the Standard English Proficiency (SEP) program. According to Carrie Secret (1998), teacher at Prescott Elementary, this program promotes "honoring and respecting" (p. 80) Ebonics as a home language, not a dialect of English for those who speak it. With this program, teachers use second-language learning instructional strategies to reach students who must read and

comprehend MAE. The Prescott teachers explained the view of the SEP program as one in which they are teaching students Standard English (SE) as a second language instead of correcting Ebonics, the language they bring to school from their home communities (Secret, 1998). Secret (1998) explained that there are three pillars of the SEP program: culture, language, and literacy.

As suggested by experts in the field of literacy and language, students should use their home language to assist them in learning and using MAE in a way that does not intimidate the student (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999; Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006; Delpit, 1995). According to Perry (1998), most teachers are prone to have negative attitudes about Ebonics and those who speak it because teachers tend to have a small amount of knowledge about the dialect. One way to help teachers gain knowledge about their students' dialects, and assist them in effectively using their home dialects in school is to code-switch.

Under the umbrella of culturally relevant instruction falls code-switching pedagogy or instruction. With code-switching pedagogy, students use their home dialect to assist with learning the mainstream standards for writing and speaking (Adger et al., 1999; Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Code-switching pedagogy is where teachers allow students to use both MAE and their home dialect at various times during classroom instruction (Adger et al., 1999; Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). For example, students may write and recite their journals in AAVE and later write an expository essay in MAE. When teachers use code-switching pedagogy, they help students differentiate the settings that are appropriate for the various dialects (Baker, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006).

According to Minor (1997), if properly embracing code-switching, teachers do not consider or refer to AAVE as incorrect or a dialect with errors. Instead of trying to correct students' dialectal differences, a California teacher observed that students were more receptive when they were asked to translate their AAVE to MAE (Minor, 1997). It is imperative that teachers are knowledgeable of the AAVE features (Delpit, 1997) so they can adequately demonstrate and model appropriate AAVE features and MAE features. (Baker, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). The AAVE feature *momma house*, for instance, corresponds with the MAE feature *momma's house*. Teachers should not think that students are not comfortable with or knowledgeable about using possession. Rather than guess that students do not comprehend possession, teachers should look at the grammatical differences in both dialects and help students decide on the appropriate context to use the dialects (Wheeler & Swords, 2006).

It is not necessarily which curriculum we use; but instead, how we use the curriculum or “the way we teach” that has the greatest impact on student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 15). In order to teach and reach students who are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, the teacher must teach in a different way (Ladson-Billings, 2009). When Ladson-Billings (2009) searched for research between 1980 and 1990 that dealt solely with preparing teachers to teach African American students, she was unsuccessful. The question arose for Ladson-Billings (2009), considering the lengthy history of substandard academic achievement of African American students, why is there very little literature that speaks to their educational needs. American education fails to recognize African Americans as a cultural group (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Something was wrong with the educational practices for African American students because teachers were not embracing other parts of student and school culture like rituals, values, celebration, and language (Ladson-Billings, 1990).

One way to embrace student and school culture is to have a culturally relevant school. The purpose of a culturally relevant environment is to rise above harmful effects of the dominant culture and uphold the student's culture by using it in the school and classroom. A culturally relevant school may reflect the student's history, culture, or background in the textbook, curriculum, and classroom (King, 1991). Misrepresentations of the student's culture through the curriculum, textbooks, or even the staff are all negative attributes brought out by a lack of cultural relevance in the school or classroom. Some of those misrepresentations can be the presence of only African American custodial and cafeteria workers, along with an overrepresentation of African American students in low level classes (King, 1991).

Similar to the SEP program in Oakland, studies have been conducted that show AAVE and other non-standard dialects can be used effectively in the classroom. This review of the literature will highlight studies involving the AAVE dialect, the Tagalog dialect, Native American dialects/communication patterns, and the Greek Cypriot dialect. If students are able to write, speak, and read in their home dialect at school, then it is quite possible that they may be more willing to learn how to write, speak, and read in MAE at school (Richardson, 1997). African American students need instruction that is relatable (Richardson, 1997). For this reason, it is important to explore urban educators' attitudes and ideologies about AAVE and its usage in the classroom setting.

This study is designed to investigate the experiences of a group of urban educators in regard to the implications of AAVE in life and in school settings. This study provides insight about how culturally relevant instructional techniques and code-switching strategies help African American urban students appreciate MAE and feel more intrinsically motivated to continue using AAVE and reach higher academic achievement.

Research Questions

The intent of this heuristic qualitative study is to investigate and discover the experiences of the study participants about the phenomenon AAVE as it relates to instruction. The following questions assist all study participants involved during the heuristic inquiry investigation:

1. What is the essence of AAVE, according to the participants and researcher? How does AAVE look, feel, and sound? What is the sensory nature of AAVE?
2. How do urban educators live through AAVE and interpret it?
3. How do the study participants live through dialectal differences in the school/classroom?
4. What belief systems about AAVE are already in place prior to any definitions or explanations provided by the researcher?
5. Do the participants use AAVE during the focus group interviews, individual interviews, or in the writing samples? In what capacity?
6. After a mini-lesson on conventions and many uses of AAVE, do the perceptions about the dialect change or remain similar?

Purpose Statement

AAVE is a dialect I have spoken my entire life; not only do I speak AAVE, but my students and colleagues speak it as well. I have also used AAVE in the classroom as a teaching tool when I taught secondary English; I continue to use AAVE as a teaching tool during professional development sessions/workshops that I conduct in my role as an instructional coach. Many other professionals with whom I work use AAVE techniques similar to mine. Because of my lifelong experiences with the dialect, and the experiences of others in my profession with AAVE, I will conduct a heuristic qualitative study.

The purpose of this heuristic qualitative study is to investigate the attitudes and ideologies of urban educators toward AAVE and toward student usage of AAVE in and outside of the urban classroom. According to Patton, (2002) heuristic inquiry is a type of phenomenological research in which the phenomenon under study could be a program, a culture, a language, a relationship, or even an emotion. The way the study participants use and relate with AAVE is considered the phenomenon under study. In heuristic inquiry, the researcher must also have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). Sixteen urban educators including administrators, teachers, and academic coaches are chosen through a snowball sampling to participate in the study. Through a focus group interview, individual interviews, and writing responses, I wanted to find that after a mini-lesson on AAVE, the vast majority of the chosen educator participants would have genuine, eye-opening ideas and attitudes about AAVE and its usage in the urban classroom. I also wanted to determine if the participants are willing to learn more about AAVE, and other culturally relevant instructional practices and the influences of its usage in the urban classroom.

Limitations

1. The study focuses on sixteen urban educators; the small number of participants may be limiting to the study.
2. African American Vernacular English is often misrepresented as slang or incorrect grammar; therefore, getting participants willing to be a part of the study can be difficult.
3. There are various definitions of AAVE and its synonymous counterparts (Black English, Black Vernacular English, African American English, Black English Vernacular, Ebonics) which can lead to a lack of clarity with the dialect.

4. It is possible that interviewees are not honest during the interviews, which can distort the results.

Delimitations

1. I only look at urban educators who work in schools who have a significant population of African American students.
2. Writing responses, focus group notes, individual interview transcripts and recordings are collected from urban educators.
3. Selected participants are individually interviewed in order for the researcher to gain insight on the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies about AAVE.

Definition of terms

African American Vernacular English - is a [variety](#) or [dialect](#) of [American English](#), most commonly spoken today by urban [working-class](#) and largely [bi-dialectal middle-class African Americans](#).

Pidgin language- a shortened means of a language or linguistic communication, that is unrehearsed and usually between individuals or groups of people.

Bidialectal- [naturally capable](#) of using two [dialects](#) of a [language](#) as an effective method of communication.

Code-Switching – the ability for a speaker to effectively move smoothly through speech from one dialect to another depending on the situation and audience.

Dialect - a [variety](#) of a [language](#) that is a characteristic of a particular region or social class, of the language's speakers.

Ebonics – was derived from the word Ebony meaning a dark-colored wood and phonics a method for teaching reading. Ebonics is often referred to as another name for AAVE.

Language - a system of communication or dialect varieties within a communication system.

Slang – a type of language that has no grammar of its own; it consists of a small array of informal words and phrases used most often by a particular group of people.

Significance of the study

Based on Perry's (1998) research, many teachers do not have a suitable amount of knowledge about AAVE. Because of this apparent lack of knowledge, teachers are susceptible to have negative feelings about AAVE and those who speak it (Perry, 1998). This study is significant because if the participants have positive attitudes about AAVE and its usage in the classroom, then they may be more willing to incorporate culturally relevant instruction like code-switching pedagogy, and differentiated instructional strategies that effectively infuse AAVE in the classroom. This study will add to the literature on code-switching pedagogy and culturally relevant instruction. The genuine experiences of the study participants fostered a call to action for something to be done in order to help students with dominant informal dialects. Although there is literature that speaks to culturally relevant instruction and code-switching pedagogy, this study exposed instructional strategies that teachers use to help the communication barrier in the urban classroom.

Organization of the study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study by providing information about the background of AAVE, stating the purpose(s) of the study, listing the research questions and hypotheses, describing the limitations and delimitations of the study, defining important terms, and emphasizing the significance of such a study. Chapter 2 is a review of the related literature in the area of AAVE including language acquisition, emergentist, poverty, and culturally relevant instructional theories. The literature chapter continues with a

discussion of various research studies of how schools implemented culturally relevant pedagogy involving AAVE and other dialects. Chapter 3 provides insight on how research was collected and analyzed in addition to a discussion of the techniques and strategies used to substantiate the results. In addition, this chapter also will include information on the heuristic inquiry approach. Chapter 4 involves the analysis and interpretation of all forms of data collected from the study participants. The final chapter, Chapter 5, discusses the further research of current AAVE issues as it involves urban education. The researcher provides instructional strategies that will help educators appreciate and respect dialectal differences in urban students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 2 presents a summary of the literature related to the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the educational setting. Due to possible misunderstandings about AAVE, this review of literature discusses the history and conventions that support AAVE as a useful and viable dialect or language system. Later in the review, dated and current educational studies that confirm AAVE's continuous presence in America and confirm the need to address the dialectal issues in the classroom are also highlighted. The review of the literature is presented as follows: First, the meaning, relevance and uses of culturally relevant instruction as it relates to AAVE are discussed. Second, the background, historical aspects, and features of AAVE are pointed out. Next, the effects of AAVE in the educational environment, along with pertinent research studies that provide more insight about how AAVE and other language systems have been incorporated in schools are presented. Lastly, the theoretical frameworks of language, grammar, and culturally relevant pedagogy that help give meaning to AAVE are discussed.

Culturally Relevant Instruction

Culturally relevant instruction is finding a different way to guarantee the growth and development of students (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In other words, culturally relevant instruction

“empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically” by using cultural agents to share information that can include values, beliefs, and skills (Ladson-Billings, 2009 p. 20).

Culturally relevant teaching includes the following: helping students who do not have many educational, social, and/or financial opportunities become classroom leaders; apprenticing students in the learning environment; using students’ real-life experiences as an integral part of the curriculum; using both literature and oratory in literacy learning; engaging in conversations about going against the status quo; and knowing and understanding the student and the content (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Culturally relevant teaching is also referred to as culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and culturally compatible pedagogy. With culturally appropriate teaching, teachers incorporate characteristics of students’ cultural backgrounds into literacy instruction (Au & Jordan, 1981). At a school in Hawaii during the 1980s, teachers allowed students to “talk-story,” which is a type of interactive language used by Native Hawaiian students. It was documented that these students scored higher on their standardized tests than the teachers had originally predicted (Ladson-Billings, 1995). According to Jordan (1985), cultural compatibility involves observing the home environment.

Educational practices must match with the children’s culture in ways which ensure the generation of academically important behaviors. It does not mean that all school practices need to be completely congruent with natal cultural practices, in the sense of exactly or even closely matching or agreeing with them. The point of cultural compatibility is that the natal culture is used as a guide in the selection of educational program elements so that academically desired behaviors are produced and undesired behaviors are avoided (p.110).

Culturally relevant instruction is motivating students to express themselves in the dialect of choice before requiring Mainstream American English (MAE) grammatical structures (Baker, 2002). Baker (2002) studies the languages that students bring from their communities, including speech patterns, grammar rules, vocabulary, and tone.

Students bring various dialects of language to school; yet, many teachers refuse to allow usage of the students' home dialect in the classroom. Teachers not only prohibit usage of the dialect, but they also consider the dialect unintelligible or even unnecessary for the school setting (Orr, 2000). Many researchers and linguists like Ladson-Billings (1995), Smitherman (1977), and Rickford (1999) found that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a dialect spoken by many people in many different regions across the nation. AAVE is referred to as Vernacular Black English, Black Vernacular English, Black English Vernacular, and Ebonics (Smith, 1998). According to Ernie Smith, (1998 p. 51), Black English is a "hybrid dialect invented by English-speaking European people during the colonial era as a contact vernacular or trade lingua franca." According to Rickford & Rickford (2000), Taylor (1972), and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998), AAVE is a remnant of a "pidgin-creole" language system inspired from a mixture of the early English creole languages spoken most often in Africa.

AAVE has syntax, vocabulary, conventions, and style that allow students to communicate with their peers and those from their home communities (Orr, 2000). If students are able to write, speak, and read in their home dialect at school, then it is quite possible that they may be more willing to learn how to write, speak, and read in Mainstream American English (MAE) at school (Moore, 1996). AAVE is more than a dialect; it is a way of life for African Americans that express a depth of culture. African American students need instruction that is relatable (Richardson, 1997).

History of AAVE

In the early 1600s, it was said that some of the slave ships carried Africans of similar linguistic groups; however, as the slave trading proceeded in bringing slaves to the New World (America), the dialects began to mix even more (Dillard, 1972). Slaves had to quickly learn a secondary language so they could communicate in their new heterogeneous groups to which they were forced to belong. The mixing of a variety of languages, with no language acting as a dominant one, was the prescription for a pidgin language (Dillard, 1972). A pidgin language is characterized by conventions as other languages.

In order for slaves to communicate effectively with their masters, the slaves had to be somewhat fluent in their master's language. So slaves communicated with their masters and other slaves via pidgin. Derived from the existing texts of the speech of slaves Pidgin English was considered the language of the vast majority of slaves in the present day United States (Dillard, 1972). Around the 1700s, an African Pidgin English was quite prevalent. By the late eighteenth century, adequate amounts of Black speech had been collected in order for historians to get a better idea of how Black language had evolved.

By the early nineteenth century, Black English could be seen in print quite regularly. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of the first published novels to differentiate the language of many slaves and that of many whites during the Civil War period. By the early twentieth century many academicians labeled Black English as an equivalent to southern White English (Dillard, 1972). Because of this history, there was not much time or opportunity for African Americans to make a gradual transition to Standard American English (SAE) as the other racial/cultural groups who immigrated to the United States (Baugh, 1998).

In the early 20th century Paul Lawrence Dunbar, an African American poet and writer, wrote in both AAVE and MAE in his many published works. Dunbar was considered rare because of his literary and linguistic abilities, yet lack of known European ancestry. Dunbar wrote many of his poems in AAVE because he believed that would be the most acceptable language for Blacks (Rauch, 1991). Many Blacks criticized Dunbar because it was assumed that his style of writing was condescending and a mock of Black stereotypes. Likewise, Whites criticized Dunbar because he was an educated Black who chose to write in “plantation dialect” (Johnson, 1922). Dunbar’s work addressed many of the issues that arise about AAVE today, which include the social and political parameters of AAVE and the culture of African American people (Morgan, 1994). Because African Americans historically were deprived of schooling and were forced in many aspects to be separated from mainstream society, AAVE, also referred to as African American English, became a form of communication and cultural identity among African Americans in the United States (Rickford & Rickford, 2000).

Over the years, the dialect AAVE has been referred to as Black English, African American English, Black English Vernacular, and Ebonics. Ebonics became a popular term in 1996. In 1996, there was a huge controversy about whether or not the Oakland, California, School System should begin to recognize Ebonics as a language. The name, Ebonics, was coined in 1973 by Dr. Robert L. Williams, former clinical psychologist and current Professor Emeritus at Washington University. Ebonics came from the two terms ebony and phonics. Ebony is the color of a dark colored wood and phonics is a method of reading instruction (Pullum, 1999).

Many of the students in Oakland schools were not only impoverished, but they were also African American. The African American students in the Oakland School District had an

average grade average of a D+; they made up 80% of the students with suspensions, and 71% of the students were identified as special education (Perry, 1998 p. 3). The Oakland school board believed that they needed to give more concern for the language that many of their students spoke at home (in most cases Ebonics). The school board agreed that their teachers should be trained in ways to use the language (Ebonics) in the classroom effectively and without any biases. After the Oakland School Board made a suggestion (Ebonics Resolution) to consider Ebonics a language, various national newspapers and magazines misinterpreted their statement for wanting to consider slang as a language (Pullum, 1999). According to the Ebonics Resolution of the Board of Education Adopting the Report and Recommendation of the African-American Task Force (1996), the original Ebonics Resolution states that:

...Be it further resolved that the Superintendent in conjunction with her staff shall immediately devise and implement the best possible academic program for imparting instruction to African-American students in their primary language for the combined purposes of maintaining the legitimacy and richness of such language whether it is known as “Ebonics,” “African Language Systems,” “Pan-African Communication Behaviors” or other description, and to facilitate their acquisition and mastery of English language skills... (“The Oakland Ebonics Resolution,” 1998 p. 144-145)

Other media venues presented the Ebonics Resolution as the school board’s decision to cease the teaching of Standard English and in its place teach Ebonics. This was not the intent or stated in the original resolution. Oakland called Ebonics a language, when many linguists and researchers agreed that it was a dialect or language system of the English language. The Linguistic Society of America unanimously supported the Oakland school board’s 1997 resolution to use AAVE in the classroom as a teaching tool (Pullum, 1999). The teachers in

Oakland who used AAVE innovatively in the classroom got better academic results, while those who were negative toward AAVE pronunciations and construed them as reading mistakes got the worst results in their efforts of teaching AAVE-speaking children to read (Pullum, 1999). The program that many teachers of Oakland Unified School District use to incorporate Ebonics into the curriculum was the Standard English Proficiency (SEP) program. The SEP program is a statewide initiative that recognizes and embraces Black English while assisting students in learning Standard English. Prescott Elementary was one of the only schools in the district where the vast majority of teachers volunteered to adopt the SEP.

According to Carrie Secret, teacher at Prescott Elementary, the SEP programs throughout the state can differ. But Oakland's SEP program "dared to honor and respect Ebonics as the home language that stands on its own rather than as a dialectical form of English." (personal communication, 1998 p.79). With Oakland's SEP program, the teachers are using methods to teach students a second language (MAE), and not trying to remedy the language they bring from home (AAVE). The purpose of the SEP program is to use students' home language as a scaffolding tool toward learning MAE. The SEP program is based around three areas: culture, language, and literacy. Ladson –Billings (2009) agrees that the construction of literacy is essential in the study of culturally relevant teaching.

Respecting the students' culture is crucial because if the teachers do not respect the students' culture then it is basically ignoring that they exist. With the SEP program, the Center for Applied Cultural Studies and Educational Achievement (CACSEA) at San Francisco State University provide professional development for the teachers of African American students. Many of the trainings include using African American culture to increase reading achievement by incorporating spirituality, resilience, emotional vitality, musicality, rhythm, humanism,

communalism, orality, and verbal expressiveness in conjunction with research based instructional strategies established as effective for African American students. They read literature that incorporates Ebonics patterns in it; yet, with writing, students are encouraged to write finished pieces in English even though Ebonics may appear in their initial drafts. Secret explains that she asks for students to translate when they use Ebonics in their writings. Secret agrees that it is essential that the students who speak Ebonics must hear themselves dropping certain consonant sounds (which is a feature of AAVE or Ebonics). So she does a lot of over-enunciation and dictation; the teacher will read a sentence and the students will listen and write exactly what they hear. One of the best tips for teaching reading to Ebonics speakers is reading to students often (C. Secret, personal communication, 1998 p.83).

According to Hafeezah AdamaDavida Dalji, an English teacher at Castlemont High School in the Oakland public school system, the SEP program is a “vehicle to address the specific needs of African students in Oakland” (personal communication, 1998 p. 105). Dalji incorporates African symbols and art into his classroom environment to embrace the SEP program. He infuses character development, academic development, skills development, and African proverbs into his lesson plans. For example, students write vignettes about their name and other parts of their culture and personalities. In Dalji’s class, students also celebrate culminating units and successful completion of classroom activities. Members from the community, parents, along with food and dance participate in this celebration. When studying African literature written in Standard English and Ebonics, students practice writing the Standard English in Ebonics and the Ebonics in Standard English. The best way that a non-Ebonics- speaking teacher can learn about Ebonics is to simply listen to the students because from listening, a teacher can learn about the language, social interactions, and culture of his/her students. Students will then indirectly

instruct the teacher on how to best teach them (H. AdamaDavia Dalji, personal communication, 1998 p. 105).

AAVE Conventions

It is imperative that teachers are knowledgeable of the Ebonics or AAVE features (Delpit, 1997) so that they can adequately demonstrate and model correct AAVE features and Standard English features (Baker, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). AAVE has many conventions and grammatical features that make it a distinct dialect. Wolfram (2004) even makes some distinctions between urban and rural AAVE.

African American Vernacular English is a dialect with written and oral consistent conventions (Richardson, 1997). Of all the vernacular types of American English, more research and studies have been conducted on the dynamics of AAVE (Wolfram, 2000). But, according to Filmer (2003), because of the racism and ignorance of non-AAVE speakers, they have a hard time understanding why AAVE speakers would want to continue to embrace and uphold their dialect. There are sound contrasts, noun patterns, and verb patterns that differentiate AAVE from Standard American English. Some of the sound contrasts include: “Ax” for *ask*, “dem,” “dese,” “dat,” “dose” for *them, these, that, those*; “wif” for *with*; “tess” for *test*; “dess” for *desk* (Adger et al., 2007; Meier, 2008). Some of the noun patterns include: Possession (“mamma jeep” for *mama’s jeep*); plurality (“two dog” vs. *two dogs*); A vs. *an* (“an rapper vs. *a rapper*,” “a elephant” vs. *an elephant*). Some of the verb patterns include (Green, 2002, 2011; Wheeler & Swords, 2006, 2010): Regular subject-verb agreement (“She walk to the store everyday” vs. *she walks...*); Subject –verb agreement with irregular *be* verbs (“We is working” vs. *We are working*); Past time (“Martin Luther King talk about a dream” vs. *MLK talked about a dream*); Past time with irregular *be* verbs (“We was working” vs. *We were working*), “be understood”

(“she good” vs. *she is good*). More detailed grammatical patterns are mentioned below.

Grammatical patterns of AAVE can also include the following: zero copula, habitual/aspectual/stressed/invariant be, remote (past) been, auxiliary absence, completive done, simple past had + verb, specialized auxiliaries, subject-verb agreement, negation, nominals, dropping of consonant sounds, question formation (Smitherman, G, 1998 p. 31, & Wolfram, 2004).

One grammatical feature of AAVE is the zero copula, or using *is* or *are* very differently in sentence structures. In AAVE, the auxiliary verb that takes the forms be, like been, being, am, are, is, was, and were are called the copula. One example of where the copula is used differently and cannot be omitted is when an auxiliary verb is at the end of a phrase; *didn't nobody know where he was*. If the copula is made negative, it is not omitted. For example, *you ain't goin to no heaven* (Pullum, 1999).

Another example of where the copula is present and used differently than MAE is when *be* expresses a habitual aspect like, *They be hummin* (Cukor-Avila, 2002). Like the habitual be, the invariant be is also non-finite. For example *sometimes they be playing basketball*, instead of sometimes they play basketball. Habitual *be* shows a recurrence of events or activities. The aspectual *be*, also a habitual marking, can precede all predicate types but occurs with verbs ending in *ing*. An example of aspectual be is *Mark be reading*. This indicates that Mark is currently or usually reading (Green & Roeper, 2007).

The remote been is a stressed use of the word *been* in which *been* is used with a past tense form of the verb or *been* is used with an apparently deleted contractual form of the subject and verb in perfect tense. An example of remote been used with past tense is *I been had them for about five years*. Remote past BIN suggests that something occurred in the distant past (Green &

Roeper, 2007). An example of remote been with deleted contractual form is *she been married*. If *been* is remote the speaker means that she has been married for a while.

Auxiliary absence is a grammatical feature that uses contractible forms of *is* and *are* (e.g. Labov et al. 1968; Rickford 1999). An example of the auxiliary absence is *they acting crazy*, instead of *they are acting crazy*. Another example of the auxiliary absence is *she nice*, instead of *she is nice*.

With completive done, though the verbal particle *done* is used in some Caribbean Creoles, the semantic pragmatic function is different for AAVE. In AAVE *done* is used in conjunction with the past tense of the verb. For instance, *they done went to the skating rink*; or even *I done told you not to eat the candy* (Wolfram, 2004).

Wolfram refers to the simple past *had + verb* convention as a more recent grammar convention of AAVE. An example is *they had went to the store and then they had forgot the eggs*. The MAE version is *they went to the store and then they forgot the eggs*. Because this feature is used so often by youth in both rural and urban areas who speak AAVE, it may be a feature that presents itself according to the age of the speaker (Cukor-Avila, 2001).

Special auxiliaries normally set AAVE apart from other English dialects. Key terms that frequent this AAVE special auxiliary convention include: *come*, *steady*, and *finna*. *Come* signifies resentment; *steady* marks a continuous intense activity; *finna* refers to a future event. An example of using *come* is, *she come prancing in here like she pay the dane rent*. With *steady*, an AAVE speaker may say, *Marcus steady trying to get with Erica*. Lastly, an example of the term *finna* in an AAVE context would be *I'm finna go in a minute*.

Most studies of urban and rural AAVE have noticed a pattern of 3rd person singular –s absence when it comes to subject-verb agreement. Similar to the simple past *had + verb* AAVE

feature, the subject-verb agreement 3rd person singular –s absence is more commonly present in younger AAVE speakers. Some examples include: *he walk*, instead of *he walks*; *he have shoes*, instead of *he has shoes* and *even that dog bark like he crazy*, instead of *that dog barks like he is crazy*.

African American Vernacular English also uses negation features like, “*It wasn’t nothing* (Wolfram, 2004 p. 123) or *They didn’t do nothing about nobody having no money or nothing like that.*” Another example of an AAVE negation involves a preverbal indefinite and verbal negative like *Nobody can’t work with her*. In AAVE, the clause is labeled negative by the auxiliary verb or the zero copula. AAVE speakers often switch the order of the subject and the auxiliary verb which gives way to *Ain’t nobody gonna find out* as opposed to *Nobody ain’t gonna find out*. Various languages negate quite often; however, what makes AAVE different from other dialects is the word choice like *I ain’t never seen her before*. Along with the multiple negation, is the negative inversion. To create a negative inversion, one must move the negative auxiliary verb to the beginning of the sentence when the subject is indefinite. The negative inversion, *ain’t nobody gonna find out*, means nobody is going to find out (Pullum 1999).

The AAVE feature *Sharon car*, for instance, corresponds with the MAE feature *Sharon’s car*. Both are examples of possession, only the AAVE example has no apostrophe- s. With AAVE, sometimes there is an absence of the inflectional –s on possessives and plurals; which is a constant AAVE feature (Rickford, 1999 p. 271 & Wolfram, 2004). When it comes to nouns with quantifiers, there is a pattern of –s absence, for example *She got 40 cent* instead of *She has 40 cents*. Along with the absence of –s on plurals and possessives, there is an associative plural in AAVE. Instead of the MAE version of *Marcus and his friends*, the AAVE version would be *Marcus an ‘em*.

It is important for teachers to consider the context in which the possession feature is used and take note of patterns in their students writing and speech. Rather than assume that AAVE speaking students do not fully understand possession, teachers must notice the grammatical differences in both dialects and help students decide on the appropriate context and time to use each dialect (Wheeler & Swords, 2006).

The idea of dropping certain consonant sounds from words is also an AAVE feature. Smitherman (1998) refers to this feature as postvocalic/r/ and /t/ deletion. For example, in AAVE *best* may be pronounced as *bes'*, and *fast* may be pronounced *fas'*. Dropping consonants also includes dropping the third-person singular *s*, as in *she do* for *she does*. Some of the phonological features include the absence of *-r*, such as *flo* for *floor* and the absence of *-g*, as in *doin'* for *doing*. Likewise, another phonological feature is the replacement of *-th* with *-d*. In some cases, *that* is pronounced *-dat* and the word *them* is pronounced *-dem* (Rickford & Rickford, 2000, p. 151). There are also voiceless stops and voiced stops that can include words like *stopped*, *hand*, and *old*. With *stopped*, the *-ed* is dropped after the voiceless *p*, and should be pronounced *stop'*. With *hand*, the *d* is dropped in pronunciation after the voiceless *n*, which causes it to be pronounced *han'* (Pullum, 1999). Pronunciation is key with AAVE. In AAVE, along with other dialects of the English language, the *-ing* used at the end of many words is often replaced with the *-in* ending. For example, words like *something*, *singing*, and *nothing* are pronounced *somethin'*, *singin'*, and *nothin'* (Pullum, 1999).

Lastly, the way that many AAVE speakers form questions is a distinct AAVE feature because AAVE question formations can have a subject auxiliary inversion or it can be non-inverted. An example of an inversion is *I asked him could I go with him*. Questions that use the

wh- tend to be non-inverted yet still in the AAVE dialect. For instance, *Who that is?* or *Where that is?* instead of *Who is that?* or *Where is that?*

Rickford (1999) states that AAVE is not just combining the various previously mentioned features; but instead, AAVE is a practiced dialect with systematic rules in which those who speak it merge those features along with unique AAVE words, prosodies, and verbal dramatic styles, to not only inform, refute, attract, praise, celebrate, and entertain, but to also educate, manipulate, mark identity, reflect, persuade, and chastise.

Language vs. Language System vs. Dialect

A language can have many different dialects, and many of these dialects are derived from the region and the cultural or ethnic groups. There are vast differences between a language, a dialect, and the slang version of a language or dialect (Pullum, 1999). There are no consistent grammar conventions in slang (Pullum, 1999). According to linguistic theory, slang is a novel vocabulary that is created and used by adolescents and young adults (Adger et al., 2007). Still many English speakers persist that AAVE is merely English with some slang and grammatical errors (Pullum, 1999). A dialect is a “variety of the language associated with a regionally or socially defined group” (Adger et al., 2007, p.1). Dialects differ by their grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Both MAE and AAVE can be labeled as communal dialects, neither one more proper or correct than the other. The dialect of English that is considered “standard” just happens to be the dialect used by those in power and the population majority (Smitherman, 1977). According to Pullum (1999), the goal was to use AAVE as a method of instruction, but not to teach people how to speak AAVE.

Research has not shown one specific way to differentiate between a language and a dialect; most times linguists and researchers have their own way of considering languages and dialects. Stuart refers to languages as systems and dialects as varieties within a communication system (Stuart, 2006). In most cases if two communication systems are dissimilar but both comprehensible to each other than dialects of the same language are usually considered; however, if the two systems are not understandable to each other, then they are probably two different languages. Yet this premise does not exist for many other languages (Stuart, 2006). Papapavlou & Pavlou (2004) discussed the differences between linguistic varieties, dialects, and languages in their study, *Issues of dialect use in education from the Greek Cypriot perspective*. For years, linguists have had a hard time distinguishing between dialect, language, language system, and language or linguistic varieties. Wardhaugh described a linguistic variety as “a set of linguistic items or human speech patterns (presumably sounds, words, grammatical features etc.) which can be uniquely associated with some external factor (presumably a geographical area or a social group).” (2006, p. 22) According to Baker (1992), and Chaika (1989), a language includes all of the diverse dialects of a particular language. Languages that are considered standard not only have congruence between the written and spoken forms, but they also have a consistent place in the areas of education, courts, media, and other professional domains (Baker, 2001 p.44). On the other hand, non-standard varieties are used most often in the private sector in which those involved share a unity in the group.

A Review of Studies on Code/Dialect-Switching

Code-switching pedagogy is when students use their home language to assist with learning the proper or formal standards for writing and speaking (Adger et al., 1999; Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). A research study followed two African

American girls who not only spoke AAVE, but who also were formally publically educated in Detroit, and were recently transferred to Barrington Middle School in Oak Valley (a suburban school district) . One of the biggest issues was that many of the teachers at Barrington Middle were not adequately prepared to teach urban African American students. They equated their language differences with low academic abilities (Hill, 2009). The teachers were not comfortable providing instruction in standard writing conventions in a “nonthreatening manner” (Hill, 2009, p. 120). The teachers were not equipped in culturally relevant instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Mr. Lehrer, a teacher at Barrington Middle School in the suburban Detroit school, allowed students to use their home language and various dialects of Standard English during classroom instruction and for writing assignments. According to the results of the research study, the students involved had positive experiences in the classroom. As suggested by experts in the field of literacy and language, students should use their home language to assist them in learning and using Standard English (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999; Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006), in a way that does not intimidate the student who speaks in a non-Standard dialect (Delpit, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy 2002). Lehrer consistently reminded his students that everyone spoke some form of Standard English (Delpit, 1997). In doing this, Lehrer used culturally relevant instruction to teach his students. If teachers use culturally relevant instructional practices, like Lehrer, students would feel comfortable speaking, writing, and using speech and/or customs that are relevant to their home culture. Culturally relevant teaching is using students’ cultural and linguistic abilities to create a non-threatening classroom atmosphere (Hill, 2009).

One way of creating the non-threatening classroom environment is allowing students to code-switch or dialect switch. Code-switching was a part of Lehrer's classroom culture. According to Ting (2002, 2007), code-switching is a thriving phenomenon that is used daily in home communities, schools, and in professional settings, especially in multilingual communities. According to Gumperz (1982), code-switching is using more than one dialect, code, or language during one dialogue experience. Teachers do not consider or refer to AAVE as incorrect or a dialect with errors. Instead of trying to correct students' dialectal differences, students are more receptive when they are asked to translate their AAVE to Standard English (Minor, 1997).

"It is quite typical for speakers of AAVE to be able to switch back and forth between their dialect and one much closer to Standard English" (Pullum, 1999, p. 39). If students are allowed to dialect or code switch in the classroom, it is quite possible that students learn to respect MAE and realize it is an instrument that can be used when needed and put away when it's not necessary. Similar to a light switch, AAVE or MAE can be turned on and turned off at one's discretion. Moore (1996) compares changing dialects to changing "outfits for appropriateness" (p.6). But the teachers must prepare the students for when and how to change clothes. Based on Hill's (2009) study with the two African American students who attended Barrington Middle, they were able to acknowledge differences between home and school dialects. Mr. Lehrer incorporated poetry, informal literature responses, writer's notebook, a letter to future self, formal literature response, and district writing assessments to help students explore with their home and formal dialects (Hill, 2009). When teachers use code-switching pedagogy, they help students differentiate the settings that are appropriate for the various dialects (Baker, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006).

Baker, a high school English teacher of mostly minority urban students, developed a respect for her students' home language because she firmly believed that language is one of the most important ways that people express themselves toward family and friends. Baker (2002) asserts that students should be proficient in three dialects of the English language in order to live socially satisfying lives: "home" English, "formal" English, and "professional" English. She termed her instructional technique as a means toward trilingualism. This culturally relevant form of instruction, trilingualism, does not consider one dialect better than or more correct than another (Baker, 2002).

Although Baker refers to code switching as being able to switch back and forth between formal, professional, and home English, other researchers and linguists use the terms casual talk (CT) and academic talk (AT) registers. Registers are "broad co-occurring patterns of language that serve different purposes" (Biber, 1995; Halliday, 1978). Registers are used often times interchangeably with dialects. Joos (1967) used the terms frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate registers: Frozen register is static language like wedding vows and the Lord's Prayer. Formal register contains standard sentence structure which is appropriate for school and work. Consultative register is used during conversations but not as official as formal. Casual register is spoken between close companions which includes incomplete sentences. Intimate register is used among lovers. Similar to Joos' registers of language, Kleeck (2014) conducted a study that emphasized the need for speech-language pathologists to consider both CT and AT registers when helping preschoolers develop language skills. Most school curricula cater to language and cultural experiences of children from White, middle-class homes; therefore, children from racially, economically, and linguistically diverse backgrounds are at a greater disadvantage for using the AT register (Kleeck, 2014). Nystrand (2006) believes that it is crucial

that students are able to master AT because it has a direct relationship with school success. Fluency in AT is incredibly beneficial for reading comprehension. Kleeck's research supports the premise that if speech-language pathologists are aware of the preschoolers' mastery or lack of mastery in the AT register then they should be more successful in helping them become competent in the AT register.

Hart and Risley (2003), conducted a study on the growth of children's language capabilities. They developed a half day program for preschoolers of various socioeconomic backgrounds that focused on children's language growth. Hart and Risley's goal was to build the everyday language children use and evaluate its growth. In this study they found that most things that the children learn come from their home life (families). Children's vocabulary and number of words addressed to children differed immensely across income groups. Welfare and working class families tend to talk with their children using a variety of words less often than professional families. This study provided support about the importance of using a variety of language around children so that they can growth in language acquisition. An elementary school teacher, Gracie Bloomberg, used the research of Hart and Risley to increase the amount of informal talk with her students. Bloomberg decided to simply talk to her students. Bloomberg realized that participating in informal talk with her students led to teachable moments in and outside of the classroom. According to Bloomberg, "Just talking to kids reinvigorated my classroom practice, enriched my curriculum, and reminded me why I became a teacher in the first place."

Some researchers and educators refer to dialects as formal and informal registers, whereas other researchers and educators refer to dialects as informal talk, academic talk, or even casual talk. Fisher and Lapp (2013) use the term home register when referring to informal

dialects. Students who do not speak English as a first language are not failing because of a lack of intelligence, but they are failing because some are not yet proficient in English. Contrastive analysis is an instructional strategy mostly use for those learning a foreign language that allows students to compare phonological and syntactic features of the home registers with formal registers. In order to help student talk like the test and become proficient in Standard American English, Fisher and Lapp integrated contrastive analysis in their work. Contrastive analysis is a teaching strategy that supports culturally relevant instruction (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Contrastive analysis involves teacher modeling, group work, and independent learning. Instead of the teacher volunteering information about differences in their home language and formal language, Fisher and Lapp wanted students to figure it out independently and through interactive conversation with their peers. Through this language comparison, students must also identify and analyze the audience, intent of communication, and the wordage best conveyed in message sharing. As students' language ability in the school register becomes more fluent, the language frames become more rigorous. This allows students to show growth in language acquisition skills. Because of the contrastive analysis, sentence frames, and modeling the students under study were successful at passing the test. In order to support language development in students who struggle with the formal register educators should consider the following strategies: explain why the school register is important, respect and value the home register of students, use social and academic interactions to solicit both formal and informal registers, and scaffold the language process.

When teachers are able to differentiate reading error from dialect influence, they must then respond appropriately towards students' misconceptions (Wheeler, R. et al, 2012). There are three major responses that are termed appropriate for students' use of informal dialects:

eradication, celebration of African American –centered literacies, and bidialectalism (Fasold & Shuy, 1970, pp. ix-xiii). Eradication is the approach that places Standard English as a superior dialect in which the teacher corrects the students. With the celebration approach, teachers do not attempt to change the students’ speech; instead, the teacher addresses the prejudices of language with the students. The third approach, bidialectalism, embraces the students’ informal dialect and adds Standard English to the students’ “linguistic repertoires” (Fasold & Shuy, 1970, pp. xi). The bidialectal approach for teaching SE to students who speak in other informal dialects is a method adopted from English as a second language in service of Standard English as a second dialect.

Many researchers and educators who support the bidialectal approach use contrastive analysis as an effective strategy to help students differentiate between informal/regional dialects and SE (Calderon, 2006; Reed, 1973; Stewart 1970; Wilkinson et al., 2011). The more students become aware of the phonological and structural differences between the dialects, the easier teachers are able to guide students into code-switching. According to Canagarajah (2003), educators should reach the goal of competence in a “Repertoire of codes and discourses instead of just joining a speech community;” educators should also teach students to move about, language wise, between communities.

In order to effectively reach the level of competency in Standard English, teachers should use metacognitive awareness, contrastive analysis, and code-switching. In Wheeler, Cartwright, and Swords (2012) article entitled, *Factoring AAVE into Reading Assessment and Instruction*, they provide examples of how contrastive analysis is an effective strategy for language learning. With contrastive analysis, the authors help students become familiar with context like time, setting, and place so that they become metacognitively aware of how different dialects function

in different contexts. Wheeler et al., (2012) begin the process of contrastive analysis using clothing and places. Students must differentiate the appropriateness of clothing and places for various informal and formal situations. After students are successful with that, the focus is on language. One of the major tools for contrastive analysis is the T-Chart. With language, students use the T-Chart to compare and contrast grammar patterns, language phrases, and eventually literary elements (Wheeler et al., 2012).

English classrooms are where many of these comparisons of language patterns and literary elements take place. Godley and Esher (2012) conducted a study in which they researched the beliefs that bidialectal African American teens have about language expectations in English classrooms. Researchers, policymakers, and even African American parents agree that literacy instruction should include instruction in SE while acknowledging and respecting any other dialects of English that students bring to the classroom (Baugh, 2007; Common Core Standards 2010; Delpit, 1988; National Council of Teachers of English, 1974). However, research indicates that there are a lack of instructional strategies that would support bidialectal students (Godley & Escher, 2012).

Godley and Esher's study focused on the beliefs of 10th grade students in a predominately African American, economically disadvantaged urban high school. The study began with a three-day curriculum unit that focused on language differences and dialects. After the unit was taught, students were asked to complete a writing assignment that elicited their perspective about speaking various dialects in English Language Arts (ELA) class. The prompt for the writing assignment was similar in nature to the state writing assessment. The writing prompt asked students to decide, based on what they learned from class discussions about language and the film *American Tongues*, what kind of language and dialects should students speak in their

English classes. Students were to construct a persuasive essay supporting the use of informal dialects in ELA class or supporting Standard English or School English in class (Godley & Escher, 2012). The data revealed that 45% (23 students) of the study participants agreed that only AAVE should be spoken in class; 35% (18 students) believed that both AAVE and School English should be spoken in class; 20% (10 students) felt that only School English should be spoken in class. One student who was a proponent of using AAVE in the class stated, "I believe we should be allowed to speak the way we normally talk." Others who were proponents of speaking AAVE in the classroom felt that they were more effective in speaking AAVE and could also communicate better in AAVE (Godley & Escher, 2012).

The 51 students who participated in the Godley and Escher (2012) study displayed consciousness of code-switching. The majority of the students (63%) discussed the importance of code-switching in various situations; 59% (30 students) remarked that there were advantages for using School English outside of the classroom. The findings from this study indicated that students were not only aware of their code-switching abilities, but that they also valued both School English and AAVE. The results of this study led to possible productive strategies to help incorporate code-switching pedagogy in the classroom. Teachers should develop a sincere understanding of bidialectal students' perspectives on code-switching. Teachers should support conversations that include authentic examples of language use and using video clips for students to discuss the differences between dialects, slang, formal, and informal registers. Teachers should also limit judging students when practicing School English.

Charity, Escaborough, and Griffin, (2004) discussed a research study involving the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) dialect and reading achievement. The hypothesis of this study was that more familiarity with School English, another term for MAE,

would be associated with a greater success rate in reading for children in the early grades (kindergarten through second grade). The sample was pulled from African American students in kindergarten, first, and second grades, who attended low-performing schools in the free or reduced federal lunch program. The participants in the study included 217 urban African American students ranging from kindergarten through second grades (ages 5-8). The researchers assessed the sentence imitation and the reading skills of the participants. They attended low performing school that were economically disadvantaged from three large U.S. cities- Cleveland, New Orleans, and Washington D.C. The chosen schools were also participants in a project to give reading professional development to those who teach in inner city schools. A random sample was taken from the kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2 classes at each of the schools. There were equal numbers of boys and girls. Eleven reading teachers, both Black and White, assessed the students throughout the study.

According to this study conducted to determine whether or not familiarity with school English has any relationship with reading achievement, it was discovered that the students from New Orleans demonstrated less familiarity with School English on their assessment than did the students from the other cities from which the samples were drawn. The subjects produced both School English and AAVE versions on the assessments. Not many were able to create all of the phonological and morphosyntactic styles. It also was found that the students from the schools with higher percentages of students participating in the free and reduced federal lunch program had lower phonological and grammatical scores, which meant that the familiarity with School English was undeniably related to socioeconomic status. The researchers also were able to validate their hypothesis about reading achievement. There was a correlation with the students' familiarity with School English and reading achievement. It is quite possible that learning to

read may in fact be a tedious task for this population and other populations similar to the subjects from the study. The researchers stated that the students' memory abilities were not a factor in the relationships between reading achievement and familiarity of School English. Therefore it is quite plausible that students who are not very familiar with School English could have a more difficult time with reading and reading comprehension (Charity et al., 2004).

In 1977 a reading program, called Bridge, was developed to foster a rich learning environment filled with AAVE culture, syntax, vocabulary, and conventions. This program was designed to determine whether or not their reading program called Bridge was successful in raising reading scores. Using both AAVE text and MAE text, William Stewart (1975) experimented with a group of AAVE speaking children. Stewart (1975) believed that children could learn how to read in their home/community dialect and then later move to text in MAE. So, Simpkins, Holt, & Simpkins (1977), formed a set of text in three different versions and referred to the readers as bridge readers. The three text varieties of the Bridge program included identical content in an AAVE version, a "bridge" version, and a Standard English/ Mainstream American English version. The bridge version included content similar to MAE without the formalities. Although the Bridge program, which was also considered a Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD) program, had the qualifications of a potentially good program, it was not very well accepted. The results indicated that Bridge was quite successful in raising reading scores on a standardized test. Studies have shown that embracing and using the dialect of African American Vernacular English speaking students not only raises reading scores, but could possibly increase their overall well-being as a student (Smitherman & Baugh, 2002).

According to Richardson (1997), allowing students to use AAVE in the classroom as a teaching tool can help in many ways:

- Students may become more knowledgeable about language and usage;
- classroom activity is linking to life,
- thought and action in the real world;
- students are rewarded for cultural knowledge;
- students are encouraged to see themselves as heirs and guardians of the Black literacy tradition. (p. 8)

Though some teachers or professors use code-switching to fix the silent nature of university classes (Ustunel, 2004); in some places in China teachers use code-switching as a strategy to become acclimated to the students' English proficiency levels (Yang, 2004). The main reason for switching to languages or dialects familiar to students is to help their understanding and vocabulary of the language (Chen-On Then & Ting, 2009).

In Malaysia, English was recently designated as the language of instruction for science classrooms. The previous years in Malaysian education, forced teachers to discontinue the use of Bahasa Malaysia, the national language, and use English instead. Bahasa Malaysia was to be used for subjects that were not science, math, and language subjects (Chen-On Then & Ting, 2009). A research study was conducted in three secondary schools in Sarawak, a Malaysian state of Kuching City in which the language of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia; the participants included two English teachers and one Science teacher. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher code-switching in secondary school English and Science classrooms in Malaysia where the language of instruction for Science was English. The students in School 1 made efforts to respond in English, but would usually respond in Bahasa Malaysia. Similar to School 1, a small amount of students in School 2 spoke English well. The students in School 3

were very similar to Schools 1 and 2 in that many students did not speak English well; however, in School 3 the students had better listening skills (Chen-On Then & Ting, 2009).

The researchers analyzed the transcripts from the recorded classroom lessons which demonstrated numerous and small amounts of code-switching (Chen-On Then & Ting, 2009). The seven functions of code-switching observed by the researchers included: reiteration, message qualification, interjections, quotations, personalization or objectivisation, addressee specification, and situational switching. Reiteration (41.67%) was the most frequently used code-switching function with the function of message qualification (37.50%) close behind. These two functions of code-switching aim at student comprehension. The results from the Chen-On Then & Ting (2009) study indicate that there were 48 occurrences of code-switching in all lessons combined. The study also revealed that the content knowledge focus of the Science and English recorded lessons requires the use of code-switching to effectively express the message to students. The study not only affirmed the use of code-switching for conversational or discussion purposes, but it also affirmed that the strategies of reiteration and message qualification were quite useful when trying to improve teacher explanation of academic content to students (Gumperz, 1982). Although some researchers regard code-switching in language lessons nullifying the second language of students instead of helping them to comprehend (e.g., Lin, 1996; Montague & Meza-Zaragosa, 1999), this study implies that in situations “where students’ proficiency in the instructional language is lacking, code-switching is a necessary tool for teachers to make their messages more comprehensible to students” (Chen-On Then & Ting, 2009, p. 12).

It is often assumed by those who are not specialists in the areas of language and linguistics that most societies in the world function around a type of society that is one

dimensional as far as language is concerned (Paulston, 1994). In fact, the whole idea of using non-standard dialects in education has been a world-wide concern of scholars for years (Cheshire et al., 1989; Driessen and Withagen, 1999; James, 1996; Rickford, 1996; McKay and Hornberger, 1996). Papapavlou, A. & Pavlou, P. (2004) conducted a study in the Republic of Cyprus through the University of Cyprus. In this study the researchers investigated elementary school teachers' opinions about the use of a non-standard dialect, Greek Cypriot Dialect (GCD), in the classroom. In the Republic of Cyprus, Standard Modern Greek (SMG) is considered the language used during instruction as well as the official language of Cyprus (Papapavlou, A. & Pavlou, P., 2004). Study participants included 133 teachers at the elementary levels. Using a five-point Likert scale, teachers were asked to agree or disagree with 38 statements about their classroom experiences with GCD. As referenced below, statements in the first part of the questionnaire centered around the participants' feelings about student usage of GCD in the classroom and the participants' personal language behavior inside and outside of the classroom. Statements in the second part of the questionnaire were about the participants' views on the consequences of students using GCD inside and outside of the classroom. Statements in the last part of the questionnaire focused the participants' ideas about the recent language policy of their particular state. Some of the questionnaire questions included the following:

1. I discourage students from expressing themselves in GCD during lessons.
2. I correct students when they express themselves in GCD during lessons.
3. I correct the use of GCD more often in written assignments than in speaking.
4. I do not pay particular attention to the code used (GCD or SMG) when the student provides correct answers.

5. I am more tolerant when a student uses GCD in speaking rather than in his/her written assignments.
6. I use GCD expressions when reprimanding a student.
7. I use GCD when I try to explain concepts that students find difficult to comprehend. (Papapavlou, A. & Pavlou, P., 2004)

About 60% of those surveyed admitted that they “correct” students when they speak in GCD. Approximately two thirds of the study participants responded that they purposely avoid using GCD in class with students and often times even self-correct if they realize they have used GCD. A very large percentage of the participants agreed that they do not have negative perceptions about students who use GCD during instruction. For this reason, using GCD as a tool toward learning SMG could be quite beneficial for students of Cyprus (Papapavlou, A. & Pavlou, P., 2004).

Similar to the U.S. and Cyprus, the Norwegians have various non-standard dialects that are held in high esteem. In a study with a Norwegian school district where they experimented with total Standard Norwegian immersion and gradual Standard Norwegian immersion in the classroom. There was evidence that gradual immersion was best (Papapavlou, A. & Pavlou, P., 2004).

Educational Act and Standards

Because language can be substituted for race, power, and identity in many cases it is difficult to develop a policy that excludes one over the other. In 1974, the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) was developed to ensure equal education for all children. This act stated that:

No state shall deny equal educational opportunities on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, or by the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by students in its instructional programs (20 USC §1703 [f]).

The result of this act was bilingual education. According to Gallo, Garcia, Pinuelas, and Youngs (2008), bilingual education is a method in which students are encouraged to effectively use and learn a second language, (most often English) while continuing to preserve or uphold their primary language. Because so many Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the United States, especially Hispanics, were being discriminated against in the classroom, something had to be done to remedy the language barriers. All students deserve to academically succeed in school and bilingual the world outside of school (Gallo, Garcia, Pinuelas, & Youngs, 2008). According to Gallo et al., (2008) there is a lack of consistency in school systems with bilingual programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education (OCR, 2000), approximately 2.4 million national-origin minority children who are limited in English language skills have a difficult time achieving in school.

Children have already learned various forms of literacy skills before they enter elementary school. Many African American children come to school with a language different from the MAE used during instruction. Often times these AAVE speaking students are misdiagnosed as having speech problems (Stockman, 2006). In 1977, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 15 AAVE speaking children were labeled as learning disabled because of speech problems. The students were wrongly labeled. These students were not only identified as students with behavior problems, but they also were identified by their academic problems.

The Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) was also crucial in the 1979 case in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The parents of African American students at Martin Luther King, Junior Elementary school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, sued the school board because of inequitable practices in the classroom. These parents felt that because their children spoke a dialect different from the dialect of the teachers and textbooks that their children's dialect should have been acknowledged as a form of communication. These teachers considered the students' dialect as incorrect and refused to help them code-switch between the two dialects (Stuart, 2006). This case was pivotal for the educational justice for African American children because schools were held responsible for the academic failure of African American students, not the parents. Judge Charles Joiner contended that AAVE was indeed a justifiable type of speech (Smitherman & Baugh, 2002).

In California, the state school board wanted to forbid students from receiving any instruction in their home language while receiving instruction in MAE. According to Stuart (2006), equitable instruction should be synonymous with differentiated instruction. In order to differentiate or consider equity while teaching, the teacher must recognize and embrace the diversity of backgrounds and various needs of the students.

Prior to the 1970s, some schools labeled Limited English Proficient (LEP) students as mentally retarded and placed them in remedial classes (OCR, 2000). The Title VI mandate of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 stated that schools were required to give any alternative language programs priority to guarantee that LEP minority students have complete access to the school's language programs (Gallo et al., 2008). However, even after this Title VI mandate, many schools continued to discriminate against LEP students. In a 1974 class action law suit of *Lau v. Nichols*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Chinese students who were denied equal

educational rights under Title VI at a San Francisco Public School. This case made it illegal for educators not to provide English language support for LEP students in the classroom (Gallo et al., 2008).

Speech patterns, grammar rules, vocabulary, and tone are all affiliated with English Language Arts teaching standards. The International Reading Association (IRA) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) standards (1996) support culturally relevant instruction. Standard 4 states that students should be able to “adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.” Standard 9 states that students should “develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.” Standard 10 asserts that students whose first language is not English should make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts so that they develop understanding of content across the curriculum. Lastly, standard 12 expresses the importance of students not only using spoken and written language to accomplish purposes for learning or pleasure, but also using visual language to accomplish those same or similar purposes. Currently, 43 states of adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The Language standards for grades K-12 of the CCSS state that students must “Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.” In the speech 9-12 CCSS content standard it states that students will develop the skills needed to prepare for oral presentations that can adapt delivery to different environments and audiences.

Similar to the double standard of what dialect is considered acceptable, there is also a double standard when it comes to labeling AAVE as a dialect or a disorder. Some speech-

language pathologists receive clients who speak AAVE, but are labeled as having a type of speech disorder. However, one who speaks with a strong Southern or strong Northern dialect may not appear to have a speech disorder. AAVE dialects must be separated from disorders in order for any justice to be served for AAVE speakers. Since AAVE can be identified by a distinct group of phonological, morphosyntactic, lexical, and discourse features, some type of assessment must be developed to accurately identify children with a disorder versus children with a dialect (Hinton & Pollock, 2001). Because there is an overrepresentation of African Americans (especially boys) in Special Education, clinicians need to be mindful and fully aware of the AAVE features so that AAVE speakers are not misdiagnosed as having a speech disorder (Hinton & Pollock, 2000).

Views of AAVE

From a study that investigated how Japan viewed AAVE as compared to MAE speakers, the results indicated that male speakers of AAVE were ridiculed more often than their female counterparts (Cargile, Takai, & Rodriguez, 2006). On the whole, female AAVE participants were viewed quite similar when compared to MAE speakers.

According to Pullum (1999), many people who speak MAE believe that AAVE is just a poorly spoken version of their language. AAVE is not a poorly spoken version of the English language; instead, it is a distinct dialect of the English language. A study that investigated the dynamics of AAVE in Davenport, Iowa, and Memphis, Tennessee, was conducted in the late 1990s. The researchers were trying to see whether AAVE was a converging or diverging dialect. While Davenport's percentage of African Americans was approximately 5% and Memphis' percentage of African Americans is near 50%, the results from the study showed contrasting differences. Many African American inhabitants of Davenport are not profound speakers of

AAVE; as a matter of fact, it is considered the rural talk that their grandparents and parents brought from the South. Based on the findings from the study, AAVE is quite different in usage and forms depending on the region. African Americans in Davenport do not use AAVE as much as Blacks in Memphis; therefore it makes one question whether or not AAVE is a regional dialect (Denning, 1989). Denning (1989) found that AAVE is converging and diverging concurrently. Meaning, using Davenport and Memphis as examples, AAVE is coming together and it is leaving; AAVE is not a static dialect. Memphis is a very racially segregated city; whereas Davenport is the opposite. Due to these differences in race dynamics, African Americans from Davenport have more social contact with Whites than Blacks from Memphis (Hinton & Pollock, 2000). Both Ash and Myhill (1986) agree that African Americans who mingle more with Whites will use more forms of the MAE dialect.

Orr found that some believe AAVE is some form of slang, or street language that it is considered poorly constructed English, and that it is the cause for so many African American students failing and dropping out of school (2000). According to Rickford (1999), AAVE is considered the “primary means of communication of African American students” (p. 1). Due to the socio-economic disadvantages of many African American inner city students, it is not only crucial that AAVE speaking students connect to literacy learning, but these students must be able to connect to all learning.

Often times, these students find it difficult to connect because of the language barriers between the various texts and sometimes the teachers. Non-AAVE speakers and White teachers who teach African American students must be aware of any cultural biases, stereotypes, or notions they may have before working with their students (Orr, 2000). Embracing AAVE and using it to help teach MAE is not really a racial issue. But, as Moore (1996) states, there are

some African American teachers who do not have strong skills with infusing AAVE into the MAE curriculum; whereas, some White teachers do. It is all about relationships and respect. If an African American teacher rarely, if at all, uses AAVE and believes that AAVE is useless and unnecessary, then he/she may have a difficult time reaching his AAVE speaking students. On the other hand, if a White non-AAVE speaking teacher respects AAVE and has a good relationship with his/her students, he/she will most likely have better results by trying to infuse AAVE into the MAE curriculum (Moore, 1996).

There is a misconception that MAE will make students smarter. Teaching MAE is similar to adding another “tool and vehicle of expression and reception of ideas and knowledge” (Orr, 2000, p.5). America is often considered a salad bowl, in which there are a plethora of not only cultures, but also languages and dialects. Using AAVE dialogue in conjunction with MAE will improve student’s writing (Richardson, 1997). African American writers are “bidialectal” (Orr, 2000 p. 10); they use both AAVE and MAE in their writings and find both dialects “useful tools of expression” (Orr, 2000 p.10). Some teachers may consider AAVE a playground or free time language, i.e. not to be used in any formal or school setting (Orr, 2000). As Moore (1996) stated, it is really not about if English/Language Arts teachers agree with AAVE; but instead, it is about helping students effectively read, write, and speak using Standard English. Teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders continue looking for the one perfect technique or curriculum that will guarantee African American students learn and use MAE.

One strategy/technique toward incorporating AAVE in the Language Arts classroom is including teachers who speak AAVE in the conversation and curriculum planning. Differentiated instruction, meeting students at their levels and teaching them based on individual

needs, is another research based instructional strategy that has proven effective for classroom instruction.

Another source suggests the direct instruction approach for teaching MAE to AAVE speaking students.

Some other educational strategies that have been known to help low-income or African American students learn MAE is on-going professional development technical assistance, and mass changes in the school culture. One may think schools should have remained segregated; therefore, teachers of African American students could have more autonomy as to what and how English/Language Arts is taught (Moore, 1996).

Similar to Filmer (2003), many teachers' goals are to help students become proficient in MAE. However, if African American students succeed in MAE, they are labeled by their peers as "acting white," or "Uncle Toms" (Moore, 1996, p.33). Black students are often teased for performing well academically and speaking in MAE because it is a "White" (p.33) thing (Moore, 1996). It is up to teachers and parents to change this academic stigma. Speaking in MAE is not a "White thing," the same way that speaking in AAVE is not an "ignorant thing." It is about being able to effectively communicate with your audience. The inability to communicate is the problem. Hence, both dialects are quite useful in everyday life.

Unlike Moore (1996), Filmer (2003) believes that AAVE has no place in the classroom. After working as a mentor/tutor with three African American female high school students and considering the experiences of other educators, Alice Ashton Filmer (2003) was convinced that MAE should be the major method of teaching in the classroom. Filmer (2003), a linguist, respects and honors AAVE; however, she believes that its place is in the home community not schools. Because speech is a social marker of status, Filmer (2003) did not want her student

protégées to be discriminated against for their speech patterns. She is aware that all Blacks do not speak AAVE but she is concerned that if Black AAVE students are not taught MAE in schools that they are doomed for success in college and future mainstream endeavors (Filmer, 2003).

Teachers must be prepared for other possible challenges as well. Allowing students to use AAVE in the classroom as a tool toward learning MAE should be approached on an individual basis (individualized instruction). All students learn and understand information at different levels. The English or Language Arts classroom has historically forced students to abandon their native (home) language and use the language of power (Mainstream American English). Those who speak AAVE do not have the political power to demand that the dialect be treated with respect (Moore, 1996). AAVE gives affirmation to personal identity, and it brings its speakers together to develop a common identity (Orr, 2000). If students change their language, then they are changing their identity (Moore, 1996). Forcing students to abandon a part of their culture can cause resistance, thereby stifling the learning process. AAVE is not Mainstream American English with errors (Pullum, 1999). Schools and teachers should understand how beneficial AAVE can be if used as a quality to be built upon instead of a barrier to triumph over (Orr, 2000). According to Rickford (1999), the disparity between the student's home culture and the school culture, and the stubbornness of the schools can cause the student to digress. Students may then begin to view the classroom as a "battleground, instead of a safe haven" (Moore, 1996, p.20).

Theoretical Framework

According to Bates (1979), people acquire language from their learning, or the nurture they receive through environmental factors. The Emergentist Theory of Language Acquisition

follows the belief that the way one acquires oral language is not solely nature or nurture, but instead a little of both with an emerging element involved. Theorists and other experts in the field of language acquisition seldom discuss language theories without mentioning Noam Chomsky. Like Chomsky, Bates does agree that genes play some role in the development of language (Karmiloff-Smith, 2005). Many theorists like Chomsky believe that oral language development is almost totally an innate phenomenon. This innate idea of oral language development strongly supports nature over nurture as the sole motivation behind language acquisition. Pinker (1994) also studied the thoughts of Noam Chomsky. Pinker, a scientist of language and mind, suggests that “language is a human instinct, wired into our brains by evolution.” Pinker says that at birth, the brain is not void of experiences; instead, humans are born with instinctual experiences and talents. Language is naturally in our brains and partially learned (S. Pinker, personal communication, September 2007).

Bates (1979) believes that genes play an important role in language development. However, she strongly feels that if one is going to examine genes in the development of language, then one needs to look at the many roles that each gene may play in the human body. Knowing that genetic alterations can possibly lead to social make-up or even alter mental states that may stimulate behavior, one should consider nature and nurture as motivators behind AAVE (Bates, 1979). Moreover, Marchman and Thal (2005) discuss how children acquire words and grammar. Because there are so many models that involve language acquisition, it is difficult to develop one model that would include all components of the many (MacWhinney, 2005).

According to McNeil (1970), language has two structures: the underlying structure which focuses on meaning or content, and the surface structure which can focus on sound or expression. Those who speak English fluently are very familiar with both the underlying and

surface structures, without much assistance from nurture or society. Children tend to use the underlying structure of language first when acquiring language mainly because it is easier for them to make meaning from the grammar relations (like nouns and verbs). McNeil (1970) discusses Chomsky's LAD or Language Acquisition Device to better explain the theory of acquiring grammar. The LAD can be based on the regularities of speech in which McNeil (1970) refers to as "a corpus of utterances" (p. 70). Most of the utterances are English grammatical sentences that were exposed by the LAD (McNeil, 1970).

According to Chomsky (1965), the theory of grammar is a depiction of the form of language. McNeil (1970) posed many questions throughout the book which require the reader to think about language, thought, linguistic abilities, cognition, and content. First he asked about whether or not thought can influence language. Since thought can sometimes involve effort, meaning it takes effort to think, McNeil asserted that thought has minimal influence on language, especially when considering AAVE. McNeil believed that in most instances, it takes little thought to use language. Considering AAVE is a dialect acquired innately, through exposure, speaking it does not require much thought or effort. It would, on the other hand, require thought for a non-AAVE speaker to speak AAVE. When people interview for a jobs, they practice and put thought into their language before they speak. However, when that same interview candidate calls his/her mom to talk about life's many issues, thought about language is probably of little concern.

McNeil (1970) poses another question about whether or not linguistic abilities come from cognition or special linguistic capacity. Language abilities can come from both cognition and special linguistic capacity. This is very similar to the nature- nurture debate when it comes to language development or acquisition. Nature and nurture coexist for language development,

especially in regard to AAVE. When McNeil (1970) further explains the theory of grammar, he mentions that every language consists of very similar constructs, for example, consonants, vowels, syntax, noun phrases, verb phrases, etc. African American Vernacular English is a dialect of the English language that embodies the above mentioned constructs.

Another theory of language is critical language pedagogy which is an instructional approach that helps students critically examine ideologies around language and dialects (Godley & Minnici, 2008). Godley and Minnici (2008) conducted a study with three predominately African American 10th grade English classes to implement critical language pedagogy. The researchers examined classroom conversations from 31 bidialectal students to gain information on how they viewed stigmatized and privileged dialects (Milroy, 2001). This critical language curriculum allowed students to critique and compare dialectal differences which led to a more positive and reflective insight of their own dialect (Godley & Minnici, 2008).

Ruby Payne has made a significant impact on poverty and language. According to Ruby Payne's position and research on poverty, the more money a family makes the higher its academic achievement; likewise, the less a family makes, the lower its academic achievement (Kunjufu, 2006). Kunjufu's (2006) goal was to present all sides of the poverty issue and state the facts because he wanted to improve the educational situation for African American children. Payne also studied the research of Hart and Risley on language in pre-school children as it relates to economic group. With this research, Hart and Risley found that people of the welfare economic group tend to use language that affirms their children less often than the working and professional economic classes. Children, who are ages 1-4, whose parents are from the professional economic group are exposed to about 3 times more words than the same age children from the welfare and working classes.

Kunjufu feels that similar to the media, Ruby Payne tends to place all African Americans in the same category, when in actuality Black families can vary socioeconomically, regionally, and financially. Not all Black families are poor, neither is the Black family monolithic.

As the Black family is not monolithic, according to Kunjufu (2006), Black English or AAVE is not monolithic either. Though some people may equate AAVE with poverty, poverty is not a precursor to speaking AAVE, and vice versa. Simply stated, all African Americans do not speak AAVE nor do all poor African Americans speak AAVE. According to Ruby Payne, people speak in a variety of language registers. These language registers are very similar to formal and informal dialects. Payne's research on language registers was adapted from Martin Joos' *The Five Clocks*, which focused on the following language registers (also discussed under the sub-heading code/dialect switching):

- Frozen register is static language.
- Formal register contains standard sentence structure.
- Consultative register is used during conversations.
- Casual register is spoken between close companions.
- Intimate register is used among lovers.

Whenever language is a topic of concern, culture can also be a topic as well. After teacher observations, interviews, and data analysis, Ladson-Billings (1995) was able to notice characteristics that gave theoretical meaning to the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy. She observed that teachers who used culturally relevant pedagogy varied in their instructional approaches. This grounded theory of culturally relevant pedagogy was developed through constant observation of exemplary teachers. Some teachers were sterner in their instruction;

whereas, other teachers had a more relaxed type of teaching style. Three very general proposed ideas developed from Ladson-Billings' (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy:

- the conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers,
- the manner in which social relations are structured by culturally relevant teachers,
- the conceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers

Teachers, who Ladson-Billings observed, demonstrated culturally relevant pedagogy consistently followed conceptions about themselves and their students. The teachers not only believed that all students could achieve academically, but they also believed that teaching was an art. These teachers considered themselves members of the community in which teaching was their way to give back to their community (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant teachers purposefully create social interactions in their classrooms through smooth student-teacher interactions, through demonstrations of connectivity with all students, and through encouragement of peer collaboration and accountability (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The last proposed idea about the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy dealt with how the teachers viewed the curriculum, content, and assessment. For these culturally relevant teachers, knowledge actively involved the students and the teacher. The students learned and acquired knowledge from their peers and the teacher, and the teacher learned from the students.

Conclusion/Implications

In conclusion, as reflected in the studies mentioned above, incorporating non-standards dialects in the classroom like AAVE can yield higher academic growth and an increase in student morale. Research shows that if AAVE is respected and treated fairly in the classroom, students may be more receptive to learning MAE and its various components, similar to Hill's 2009 study with Mr. Lehrer.

Given the research, there are effective strategies for incorporating code-switching pedagogies and culturally relevant instruction in the classroom where the vast majority of the student population is African American. My plan is to gain insight about urban teachers' attitudes and ideologies about using these strategies and techniques in the classroom with African American students to help motivate them academically, emotionally, and socially. In the next chapter, the methodology, I provide information about the type of study, my role as the researcher, and my means for carrying out the study conducted.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The intent of this heuristic qualitative study was to investigate and discover the experiences of the study participants about the phenomenon AAVE as it relates to instruction.

The following questions assisted study participants involved during the investigation:

1. What is the essence of AAVE, according to the participants and researcher? How does AAVE look, feel, and sound? What is the sensory nature of AAVE?
2. How do urban educators live through AAVE and interpret it?
3. How do the study participants live through dialectal differences in the school/classroom?
4. What belief systems about AAVE are already in place prior to any definitions or explanations provided by the researcher?
5. Do the participants use AAVE during the focus group interviews, individual interviews, or in the writing samples? In what capacity?
6. After a mini-lesson on conventions and many uses of AAVE, do the perceptions about the dialect change or remain similar?

Rationale for Using Qualitative Research

Qualitative inquiry investigates issues on a level that involves details and depth. Interviews, observations, and recordings are all forms of data collection that are vital in

qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiry makes people think about decisions before they make them. Most data that accompanies this type of inquiry is collected through fieldwork. With fieldwork, the researcher spends a vast majority of time in the environment under study. Also, the number of participants is smaller for qualitative research so that details can be easily revealed. Generalizability is not a priority with qualitative inquiry as it is with quantitative research (Patton, 2002).

Because I sought to study the attitudes and ideologies of educators toward AAVE, it would have been difficult to capture any relevant data without interviews and written responses. According to Patton (2002), directly participating in or observing the phenomenon under study could be considered one of the best techniques for research. With this study, I investigated AAVE through a focus group interview, individual interviews, and written responses. Through qualitative inquiry, the data tends to be vast, which leaves more room for answering or changing research questions.

The Research Process: Emergent Design

Considering there is a substantial amount of depth and details with qualitative inquiry, the research process should not be prearranged or too confined. The emergent design is the research process for qualitative research. With emergent design, the various phases and steps taken throughout the study are liable to alter depending upon the data being collected. For instance, interview questions may change, along with locations and participants (Creswell, 2009).

Heuristic Approach

Heuristic inquiry is based around the humanistic psychology academic discipline. Heuristics asks the following questions: what is my experience of this phenomenon, and what is the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely? Heuristic

inquiry is a type of phenomenological research. With a heuristics study, the researcher must have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). The phenomenon under study could be a program, a culture, a marriage, a relationship, or even an emotion. The researcher aims to find out what his/her experiences are in regards to the phenomenon as well as the experience of another group of people or person in regards to the phenomenon. The others who are a part of the study also must have powerful experiences with the phenomenon being studied. This form of inquiry heavily relies on insights of the researcher (Patton, 2002). I believe that my dissertation topic, an investigation of the attitudes and ideologies of urban educators toward AAVE, is a heuristic study because of my personal experience and intense interest with the dialect. Because a phenomenon can be a culture, emotion, or a marriage, I believe a phenomenon may also be the way a culture or group of people use and relate with a dialect. I incorporated my experiences with AAVE, and the experiences of a group of urban school educators with AAVE to gain more insight about their attitudes toward the dialect and possible affects AAVE can have on the students who speak it.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument for data collection. Because the researcher is the data collection instrument, it is important to know information about the background of the researcher. So, the credibility of the researcher for qualitative inquiry heavily depends on the skill level, research interests, competence, and precision of the researcher (Patton, 2002). This study combined my experiences, thoughts, insights, and feelings with AAVE and the experiences of the participants with AAVE. It is important for the researcher of a heuristic study to self-reflect regularly/daily throughout the process (Patton, 2002).

Background of the Researcher

The researcher is instrumental in the analysis and findings of a qualitative study. Considering the researcher plays such an important role in qualitative inquiry, it is only fitting that background, biases, and experiences of the researcher are revealed (Patton, 2002).

I am a product of an urban school district of over 100,000 students. I am an African American female who grew up in a middle class family who code-switched quite regularly. I was always curious about why and how my family spoke one way at home and spoke another way in the work place or in other public settings with people of other races besides African American. I was told that there was a proper way to speak and an improper way to speak.

I have been an educator for 12 years. All 12 years have been at public urban secondary schools in a school district located in the southeastern part of the United States. I have worked as an 11th grade English teacher, an Instructional Facilitator, a Track and Field Coach, a Dance Sponsor, a Literacy Coach, and an Instructional Coach. I have a Bachelor's degree in English and a Master's degree in Secondary Education with an endorsement in English. As a classroom teacher, I allowed students to use their home language (AAVE dialect) during classroom discussion, during classroom presentations, and during many writing assignments. I also spoke in AAVE as often as my students. Throughout class discussions I would ask students to give the Mainstream American English (MAE) translation of the AAVE version. I also required students to write persuasive essays in MAE.

My primary job as an Instructional Facilitator was to observe all teachers regularly for strengths and weaknesses in their instructional, environmental, and classroom management practices. As a Literacy Coach, I continued to observe teachers' classroom instructional practices; however, I was more focused on literacy across the curriculum and instructional practices in the language arts and social science classrooms. Currently, as an Instructional

Coach, I continue to fulfill all roles as an Instructional Facilitator and Literacy Coach. I also now complete teacher evaluations and ensure fidelity of all Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in my building. Eleven of my twelve years as an educator have been spent observing teachers, conducting professional development, mentoring novice and veteran teachers, and serving on the administrative team. During these many years of observations, I have too often heard teachers (all content areas) reprimand students for speaking in AAVE. The teachers would refer to it as bad grammar, or slang, and would even ask students to say it the “right way.” Looking at the demeanor of so many students after they have been shut-up for not speaking the “right” way, confirmed my will to study AAVE.

Researcher Bias

Due to my background in urban education and my ability to speak and embrace AAVE, I will bring some bias to the study. I will use the AAVE conventions suggested by researchers Rickford (1999), Orr (2000), and many others to determine what is or is not AAVE, so that my interpretation is limited. In order to limit any assumptions about the ideologies and attitudes of participants, I will use the literature and data from the participants’ focus group interview session, individual interviews, and writing responses. I have a passion for this topic because of my past experiences with AAVE as a child and as an educator. I believe that my passion will give a sincere analysis of the data. I also used a peer debriefer throughout the process of collecting and interpreting data. The peer debriefer read and gave me useful feedback on my work so that researcher bias was limited. The peer debriefer is a professor of English and fellow urban educator, but non-AAVE speaker. The peer debriefer gave a sense of outside (non-AAVE speaker) and inside (urban educator) insight in regards to the collected data.

Institutional Review Board

After defending my prospectus, I obtained approval from my dissertation committee to conduct the study. I then received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Mississippi.

Gaining Access

The first step in gaining access to the participants was to ask fellow urban educators for names of people who may be interested in participating in the study. I then e-mailed those names acquired from the snowball sampling. The e-mail included a brief explanation of the study. All correspondences were via personal e-mail accounts, personal cell/home phone numbers, and home addresses. I scheduled the focus group session at a local facility center in Memphis, Tennessee (public facility), so that the participants were comfortable and so that refreshments could be provided. Providing refreshments will hopefully be an incentive for the participants to attend the focus group session.

Ethical Considerations

Because language can be an emotional and personal issue, I ensured that the confidentiality of the participants and schools were maintained. I used initials and numbers to conceal all names. All forms of data are kept in a secure file cabinet in my home in which I am the only person with access. I will destroy audio recording upon completion of the study.

Data Collection and Recording

In this study, I purposefully selected 16 urban educators through a snowball or network sampling. These 16 educators consisted of men and women of various racial backgrounds (White, Black, and Hispanic). It was necessary that the educators in this sample work with Black/African American urban school children so that I gain insight about the phenomenon under study. The participants include administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, guidance

counselors, and librarians. Administrators include Assistant Principals and Principals. Academic coaches include Math Coaches, Literacy Coaches, and Instructional Facilitators. My participants include four administrators, ten teachers, one academic coach, and one librarian. My reason for choosing administrators, academic coaches, librarians and teachers is because all individuals are decision makers when it comes to what occurs instructionally in the classroom or school. The participants teach/work with urban African American students in the Southeastern part of the United States.

In order to solidify my sample for this study, I needed to speak with educators who are informed or familiar with AAVE and/or African American urban students. As I located my sample, I found out who knew a lot about Black urban students and their language patterns, and who would be interested in participating in my study. From there, I received more names of possibly interested study participants and pursued them to be a part of my sample. Using this procedure, my number of study participants (the snowball) increased, which enabled me to focus on those who were not only mentioned most often, but also those who were highly recommended to participate. This got me closer and closer to the 16 individuals I needed as my sample. Participants can, but do not have to speak the dialect. I audio recorded all individual interview sessions, and audio and video record the focus group session.

Data Types

I used three means of collecting data: one focus group interview, individual interviews, and writing responses. Because I cannot directly observe thought, past events, attitudes, and intentions, I interviewed some participants in groups and others individually. I wanted to gauge the inner thoughts of my participants and gain a deep understanding of their stories (Patton, 2002). I wanted to get “high quality information by talking to people who have information”

(Patton, 2002 p. 341). Eight of the sixteen participants participated in the focus group interviews and the other eight participants participated in the individual interviews. I wanted to see similarities and differences in how individuals responded to the interview questions as opposed to a group of participants responding to similar question in a group setting. All but three study participants completed the writing response. I analyzed all data sources and looked for trends and patterns using a coding system. I studied the transcriptions thoroughly so that I understood and fully involved myself with the information. I used both an interview guide and a standard open-ended interview protocol in the qualitative interview process. The interview questions were formulated after studying other heuristic inquiry designs and qualitative research studies similar to this study. Interview questions included the following:

- How old are you?
- What kind of education did you receive as a child? (Urban, suburban, rural, private, etc.)
- Where are you from?
- How long have you worked in education as a teacher, administrator, or academic coach?
- What is effective teaching? What does it look like? Describe the ideal classroom. What does it look like? What are the students doing? What is the teacher doing?
- Explain your understanding of culturally relevant instruction? Does your school/district embrace culturally relevant instruction? How? Examples?
- How long have you worked with African American or minority students?
- In your opinion, is there a difference between a dialect and a language?
- Why do people speak AAVE?

- Do you consider AAVE a dialect? If not, what is it? How do you know?
- How do you feel about the dialect AAVE? What do you think about using AAVE in the classroom?
- What would you like to see happen with AAVE (impact, culturally relevant/responsive instruction)?
- What is your opinion of using other dialects in the classroom?
- How would you feel if you spoke in a way that was considered incorrect, wrong, etc.?
- How do you feel about a teacher who rejects a student's dialect? Culture? Can you give me an example of how a teacher can reject a student's language or culture?
- When you walk through the doors of a classroom of majority African American students, what do you see? Hear?
- Is using AAVE in the classroom considered culturally relevant instruction? Explain why or why not.
- What are the challenges you face working with your students? Do any of these challenges involve any language barriers?
- How often do you correct students for speaking incorrectly or using bad grammar? Give me some examples of words or phrases you feel are incorrect. How do you correct students?
- How do you think it makes the students feel when you correct them for using different dialects or language systems in the classroom?

My interview questions were not limited because I did not want to limit the comments of my participants. During the focus group interview session, I used an interview guide to help keep the conversations on topic; yet, I still wanted to make room for individual feelings,

opinions, and viewpoints to surface. My interview guide included topics that helped bring meaning to the subject under study. Using an interview guide allowed a sense of freedom to go in any direction that the conversations led as long as they stayed on topic. I followed the guide as closely as possible, but adjusted questions and added questions according to the flow of the discussion (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), focus group interviews are characteristic of groups of similar make-up. The focus group for this study was composed of all urban school educators. Most focus groups include 5-8 participants who respond and/or react to specific issues. The issues of this study were dialect differences. As Patton (2002) suggested, the focus group interviews should last no longer than 1-2 hours each session. There was one focus group interview, which took place during the month of June.

The writing response will ask participants to respond to some of the following questions/statements:

- How would you define AAVE? Provide some examples of AAVE (preferably what you have heard, if any, from the classroom/school environment).
- Can AAVE be used as a tool in the classroom? If so how? If not, why not?
- In your opinion, what is culturally relevant/responsive instruction? How do you know?
- Are AAVE and culturally relevant instruction related in any way? If so, how?

Many of the questions asked during the interview sessions re-surfaced as questions on the writing response because of similar or varied answers; the varied or similar answers provided more strength to all forms of data being collected. The data from each writing response was analyzed and reviewed for trends and common themes.

In the writing response, participants were asked to respond to writing prompts that closely resembled questions asked of them in the interview process. The purpose for this approach is two -fold. 1) The written and oral responses helped determine consistencies across various modes of communication, i.e. writing and speaking. 2) The written and oral responses helped the researcher deduce what participants knew and understood about AAVE and CRI prior to receiving information from the researcher. An interview guide was used for both the individual and focus group interviews to assist with focus. The interview guide was also used to direct the interviews, not hinder new conversations from emerging; new questions and conversations frequented some of the interviews. Although the same interview guide was used during the focus group interview, the focus group took on a more informal data collection piece because of the atmosphere that was created by the participants.

Protecting Data

All written data and transcripts were kept in a secure location. The names of participants will not be attached to any of the data; instead, number codes were used.

Generating Categories/Themes and Coding

During the interview transcript analysis and the writing responses, I coded themes based on trends and frequently mentioned ideas and comments. The transcripts and written samples were coded based on themes. The themes and categories of this study are organized around the five research questions about CRI and AAVE that surfaced in the literature review and during the study. The original research questions were not properly aligned with the purpose of the study. By following this plan, the literature on AAVE could easily be infused into the data collected from the participants. Two categories remained the constant focus throughout the study: Culturally Relevant Instruction and AAVE.

Triangulation

I collected four types of data: the audio recordings, hand written notes from the focus group interviews, the audio recordings from the individual interviews, and the writing responses. These data collection types assisted me in triangulating the information and gave meaning to the study and the phenomenon under study. According to Creswell (2009), triangulating sources can help give more meaning for the themes.

Member-Checking

All participants had the option to review their transcripts for accuracy. They were also allowed to review written samples for appropriate analysis.

Rich, Thick Description

I included direct quotations to give substance to the topic of discussion. I also attempted to embody the tone and feeling portrayed during the interview sessions.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The intent of this heuristic qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of 16 study participants regarding the phenomenon of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as it relates to Culturally Relevant Instruction (CRI). The information from the literature review indicated a need to alter the purpose of this study to have a more intentional focus on CRI, instead of just instruction. The data collected from individual interviews, a focus group, and individual writing responses, revealed common trends and common themes, as well as vast differences as it relates to the research questions.

Findings from this study are discussed and organized around the five research questions which will include relevant literature on AAVE and surrounding topics, as well as supporting statements and thoughts from the participants' writing responses, interviews, and a focus group. Participant responses to the five research questions will be uncovered through all three data sources: writing responses, interview, and focus group. Lastly, conclusions will be explored to pull relevant trends that cross all three data collection tools and all categories uncovered.

Though all study participants revealed their ideals and belief systems about AAVE in general and AAVE as it relates to CRI in the interviews, focus groups and writing responses, very few ideas varied considerably. Because of the interview guides, many themes remained constant throughout the study. The themes in the interview guide, focus group questions, and

writing response questions were used to uncover inner thoughts and belief systems about AAVE as it relates to CRI.

The following identifiers for each study participant are captured in Table 1: gender, racial background, age, years in education, position in education, and completion of a writing response. Focus indicates that they participated in the focus group interview. The 16 study participants who were interviewed have been identified by numerical representation.

Table 1
Demographic Data Collected from Participants

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Yrs. in Education</u>	<u>Position in Education</u>	<u>Writing Response</u>
1	Female	Black	29	4	Teacher (SPED)	Yes
2	Male	White	24	3	Teacher	Yes
3	Female	Black	34	9	Teacher (SPED)	Yes
4	Female	White	36	13	Teacher	Yes
5	Female	Black	31	11	Teacher	Yes
6	Male	Hispanic/	28	3	Teacher (ESL)	Yes
		White				
7	Male	Black	40	16	Principal	No
8	Female	White	25	3	Teacher	Yes
9 (focus)	Female	Black	48	18	Assist. Principal	Yes
10 (focus)	Male	Black	38	18	Assist. Principal	No
11 (focus)	Female	Black	38	17	Teacher	No
12 (focus)	Female	Black	42	17	Principal	Yes
13 (focus)	Female	Black	37	13	Instructional Facilitator	Yes
14 (focus)	Female	White	37	12	Teacher (ESL)	Yes
15 (focus)	Female	Black	24	3	Teacher	Yes
16 (focus)	Female	White	43	8	Librarian	Yes

Research Question 1: What Belief Systems About AAVE Were Already in Place Prior to Any Definitions or Explanations Provided by the Researcher?

How would you define African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Black English, or Ebonics?

Research question one asked the following: What belief systems about AAVE are already in place prior to any definitions or explanations provided by the researcher? This question was answered when the participants were asked questions about AAVE in the writing response prior to the mini presentation and prior to the interview. From the thirteen writing responses, AAVE was called:

- an incorrect version of English;
- a dialect of English;
- a language;
- a way to express;
- a non-academic form of expression;
- a grammatically incorrect form of expression;
- a method of communication;
- a version of Standard English;
- a variation of Standard English;
- a type of slang;
- a way to communicate.

Table 2
AAVE Prior to Interviews and Focus Group

<u>Definition of AAVE</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>
Dialect	2
Language	4
Slang/Colloquial Terms	5

(incorrect form of expression, version, variation)

*Participant 13 referred to AAVE as a language and slang

The data revealed many of the participants lack clarity about AAVE. The data also revealed consistent patterns of misinformation regarding AAVE, one in particular is confusing AAVE with slang. According to Perry (1998), most teachers are prone to have negative attitudes about Ebonics or AAVE and those who speak it because teachers tend to have a small amount of knowledge about the dialect. Of the 13 participants who completed the writing response, five revealed that AAVE was a type of slang or involved slang/colloquial terms. Those five participants include 2, 3, 9, 13, and 16. As stated by Adger, Wolfram, & Christian (2007) people can confuse dialect with slang; slang is a novel vocabulary most often created by young people. Pullman (1999), there are no consistent grammar conventions in slang. Nevertheless, many English speakers insist AAVE is merely English with some slang and grammatical errors (Pullman, 1999).

Participant 6, described AAVE as a “secret language” that is “representative of the local /regional African American culture.” AAVE was also described as a community language understood by those in that community, yet accepted by some other community groups (not exclusively African Americans). The above statement goes against the premise that AAVE is English used in the Black community that is a culturally developed method of communication known in urban areas. AAVE can transcend beyond the Black community. Denning (1989) found that AAVE is converging and diverging concurrently. Escher & Godley (2012) recommend that ELA curricula needs opportunities for both students and teachers to discuss the convergence and divergence perspectives about dialects. AAVE is not a static dialect. On the

other hand, participant 3 stated in her writing response that “AAVE is understood by those in that particular community, but not necessarily those outside of the community.”

Only participant 1 stated that AAVE is how some African Americans “linguistically express themselves.” Participant 1 admitted that she is an advocate and regular speaker of AAVE, even though (not including the examples of AAVE) she did not use any AAVE in her writing sample. Participant 5, another participant who admitted to being a speaker of AAVE, appeared to be very passionate about AAVE in her writing because she said AAVE “captures that essence of Black culture.”

Participants have mixed views about what defines AAVE. Though the majority believe AAVE to be a form of slang or colloquialism, others consider AAVE a language, dialect, or some form of expression.

In the writing responses when the participants were asked to provide examples of AAVE, many responses involved true AAVE conventions; whereas, others were more characteristic of slang. Some of the slang terms and phrases included:

- The Mound
- Whack
- Beef
- Wallin
- Bruh
- You ratchet
- Junkie
- On God (mentioned four times)
- On tomorrow

- He’s extra
- He’s loud
- You green
- That’s petty
- Your hair looks knappy
- He’s so buddy
- That thang fya
- What’s up

Table 3
Examples of AAVE (Many Participants Gave Both Slang and AAVE conventions)

<u>Participant Examples of AAVE</u>	<u>Participant</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>
Actual AAVE	2, 9, 1, 8, 4, 12	6
Slang/Colloquial Terms	2, 9, 13, 1, 14, 3, 5, 6, 16	9

According to Table 3, most participants who completed a writing response qualified both actual AAVE examples and slang terms. Participant 3, who considered AAVE an incorrect form of English, managed to give examples from the previously mentioned list of slang terms.

Participant 3 continued on to say that “the language (AAVE) is most often on a lower level of speech.” This same participant, along with participants 1, 2, 6, 9, 13, 14, and 16 all provided examples of slang terms in their writing responses.

Surprisingly, in the writing responses, some participants were able to deliver solid examples of AAVE conventions. One grammatical feature of AAVE is the zero copula, or using *is* or *are* very differently in sentence structures (Pullman, 1999). Some participants referenced the following as examples of AAVE which happened to be examples of the zero copula:

I'm/We/they is quiet; I'mma go get it; I is so hungry; I weren't thinking like that. The zero copula examples were provided by participants 2, 4, and 8. Another example of where the copula is present and used differently than Mainstream American English (MAE) is when *be* expresses a habitual aspect like, *They be hummin* (Cukor-Avila, 2002). The participants gave the following examples of the habitual *be* characteristic: *She be at home all day; He stay lying; I be; I do be doing my work; He be.* Participants 1, 4, 8, and 12 provided these examples.

Auxiliary absence is a grammatical feature that uses contractible forms of *is* and *are* (e.g. Labov et al. 1968; Rickford 1999). An example of the auxiliary absence is *they acting crazy*, instead of *they are acting crazy*. Examples provided by participants 1 and 8 were *where dey at* and *she finna' get to fighting*. Subject-verb disagreement is a common qualifier of AAVE. Participants 9 and 13 gave examples of *I seen* instead of *I saw*. Special auxiliaries normally set AAVE apart from other English dialects. One key term that frequents this AAVE special auxiliary convention is *finna* or *fixing to*. *Finna/Fixing to* refers to a future event. An example of the term *finna* in an AAVE context would be *I'm finna go in a minute*. Examples that participants 8 and 14 gave that fell into this convention were *she finna' get to fighting* and *fixing to*.

AAVE also uses negation features like multiple negation and negative inversion. An example that participant 1 gave included, *I ain't got no money for that*. Another phonological feature is the replacement of *-th* with *-d*. In some cases, *that* is pronounced *-dat* and the word *them* is pronounced *-dem* (Rickford & Rickford, 2000, p. 151). Examples from participant 1's writing sample include: *I bet not do dat; He rant up da skreet; Where dey at; Can't nobody beat him....*

The last feature that was represented in the writing responses was the distinct way that AAVE speakers form questions. Questions can have a subject auxiliary inversion or it can be non-inverted. Examples include: *What it do; I can have a pencil; What she said; don't it.* Participants 1 and 8 provided the previously mentioned inverted and non-inverted questions. Prior to the interview and mini-presentation, the participants were not provided with any of the various types of AAVE conventions from the researcher. Yet, participants were able to name the examples with no prompting from the researcher. Only participants 2, 5, and 9 gave both slang and AAVE examples in their writing responses.

From experiences in education, people are normally more cognizant of their language usage when writing. People are even afforded the use of spell check through Microsoft Office. Of the 13 writing responses, AAVE was not used in any of them. The only participants who used AAVE during the interviews and writing responses were those who provided what they thought to be examples of AAVE. Some were true examples of AAVE and some were examples of slang. Participant 8 was the only study participant providing only AAVE examples in her writing response. Again the consistent theme of AAVE as slang was evident when participants provided examples of AAVE.

Research Question 2 (a): What is the Essence of AAVE, According to the Study Participants?

How Does AAVE Look, Feel, and Sound?

In order to gain an understanding about how participants view AAVE after the mini-presentation, interview, and/or focus interview, I developed research question number two: What is AAVE, according to the study participants? How does it look, feel, and sound? Some written responses (pre-interview) mirrored the verbal responses (during/post interview), whereas, others did not.

According to participant 1, AAVE is not slang, but related to slang. Students should know when to use it. Participant 1 stated, AAVE “is how you relate to another African American.” This participant was consistent in her definition and understanding of AAVE in both the writing response and interview. The common theme in both the written and verbal interview for participant 1 was that AAVE is a form of expression. In the interview, the participant explains AAVE as an “underlying ‘I get you,’” alluding to a mutual understanding. Participant 1 considers herself an advocate and speaker of AAVE. She said AAVE looks like people hanging out, laughing and relating to one another.

Both participants 2 and 6 commented that AAVE has a sort of rhythm to it. AAVE, when spoken, is active. The gesticulations of AAVE, according to participant 2, include hand gestures and repetition of phrases, and even pairing the same words differently. There was no contradiction to participant 2’s written and verbal responses towards AAVE. Participant 6 said that he is drawn toward the sound of AAVE. As a drummer, participant 6, thinks that AAVE “sounds kind of good sometimes.”

Participant 6- How does it (AAVE) feel?

Researcher- And I ask that because some researchers and people who I have spoken with have said that with AAVE there are gestures involved, hand movements?

Participant 6- It is vibrant and energetic.

Researcher- And I was wondering if you have ever noticed that.

Participant 6- I’ve noticed that. I have noticed that...I feel like in a way—I mean, I spent a little bit of time just in Europe kind of backpacking and Europeans always say we have no culture. Americans, they have no culture. But I think this (AAVE), you know, I think

this says that we do have culture. It is just something unique, it is American, you know, and we should be kind of –we should not see it as a bad thing.

Participant 3 said that AAVE is “uneducated,” and participant 7 said that AAVE is “a miseducation.” According to participant 3, AAVE “looks uneducated and ghetto almost.” In Participant 3’s writing response she described AAVE as “incorrect English.” Her comments about AAVE were negative and complimentary of each other in both her writing response and interview.

I had to prompt participant 4 into responding to the essence of AAVE. Initially she stated that the essence of AAVE reminds her of a rap video in which those in the video “move their bodies and throw their fingers up.” She continued on to say AAVE is when kids are trying to act/sound cool. When I asked her if certain inflections were placed in the voices of student users of AAVE, participant 4 was able to describe the tone of voice.

Participant 4- The tone of the voice, you are going to have this rollercoaster effect.

Sometimes I would consider it dramatic, trying to get someone’s attention to be heard, to have a voice, it may be louder, that incorrect usage may be louder and more definitive than just the standard communication that is going to flow up and down and go back and forth.

In the writing response, participant 4 did not mention the rap video reference; however, she did mention the dropping/omitting of word sounds when describing AAVE.

Similar to participant 3, participant 5 also believes that AAVE should not necessarily be used during classroom instruction. Participant 5 is clearly not against the usage of AAVE. She considers AAVE a “way of life.”

Researcher- What is the essence of AAVE? By that I mean how does it look, feel, or sound? A lot of times with vernaculars or dialects, a language is not something that comes out of the mouth, it is a way of life.

Participant 5- It is truly a way of life because you can't say I have swag and you don't demonstrate that with your body. You know, your body language has to go along with it. It is a lifestyle. It is a life style. You have got to feel it, you have to walk it, you have to talk it, you know, your head movement got to go with it. You know? The tone of your voice has to match it. You know? You can't sound like a little valley girl saying you have swag. Everything has to—so the essence of it is life personified through language.

Participant 5 referred to AAVE as a “completely logical and adaptable language that has an ever evolving beauty.” Her comments emulate that of Rickford (1999) who stated that AAVE is a practiced dialect with systematic rules in which those who speak it merge those features along with unique AAVE words, prosodies, and verbal dramatic styles, to not only inform, refute, attract, praise, celebrate, and entertain, but to also educate, manipulate, mark identity, reflect, persuade, and chastise.

Similar to participant 4, who identified the body movements in rap videos with the essence of AAVE, participant 8 agreed that AAVE has lots of movement involved. She believes the essence of AAVE is linked to “getting your point across and being physically involved with what you are saying.” Participant 8's writing response was consistent with her verbal response in the interview. In the writing response she was asked about a definition of AAVE, she responded that AAVE was a type of Standard English that has grammar patterns that can be considered as complicated as SE. Likewise, in her interview, after asked to explain her

understanding of AAVE as a dialect or other language system, she again used the term complicated.

Researcher- Do you consider AAVE a dialect? Do you think it is a dialect of English?

Participant 8- ...Sort of. Yeah, but I think it is more complicated than that because to me a dialect is more regional and I don't know that I would say AAVE is just regional. I am sure that it varies but I went to school with students from all over and I have African American friends from different parts of the country who also speak similarly, so I don't know if I would say it is a dialect. If a dialect is regional, then no.

Researcher- If a dialect is not regional?

Participant 8: Then I think it is very complicated—it has very complicated structures to it as well.

Participants 9-16 were all a part of the focus group interview; therefore, all participants did not respond to all questions. The focus group was more like a conversation around the research questions asked by the researcher. Participant 9 wrote that AAVE is a culturally developed method of communication i.e. slang. Her definition of AAVE when speaking in the focus group was that “AAVE feels relaxed.” Participant 12 agreed with Participant 9 by stating in the focus group that AAVE does feel relaxed. She went on to say that AAVE is used when you are around common AAVE speakers because it's non-judgmental and everyone is doing it. Nine also stated that she even makes-up terms. Participant 12 wrote that AAVE is English used within the Black community. Neither participants 9 nor 12 had dissimilar or contrasting views in their written and verbal statements about AAVE.

Just as participant 9 referred to AAVE as slang, so did participant 13 in her writing response. Participant 13 also wrote that AAVE is language commonly used by people who

reside in urban areas, in which “subject-verb rules are often broken during conversation.” The urban term was mentioned again when participant 14 wrote that AAVE is “a dialect of the English language that is “commonly found (spoken) in urban areas (with low SES and poverty).” When 14 spoke about AAVE in the focus group she said that AAVE is fluid and loose. She continued on by stating that it flows and the “kids look natural when they do it.” Thirteen wrote about how grammar rules are often broken with AAVE and participant 15 wrote about how AAVE may be considered a non-standard English, or even a way some African Americans choose to communicate with one another. When 15 spoke about AAVE in the interview she stated that “AAVE has its place...as an African American it makes you feel more comfortable.”

Similar to participants 9 and 13, participant 16 also referred to AAVE as “a type of slang.” She also called it an “adaptive part of language.” Sixteen believes that students who speak AAVE like reading novels like Bluford and Underground Reading series because it is familiar to them (it is written in AAVE). “It sounds like them.” When I asked the focus group about the essence of AAVE and how AAVE looks, feels, and sounds, 16 said that “AAVE looks like going back and forth with each other.” Even dogmatic flirting was a characteristic of AAVE. Focus group participants disagreed with 16 and said that what 16 was describing was characteristic of middle school students, not AAVE. Participant 11 stated that there is a confidence in her students when they speak in AAVE. Participants 11 and 14 noticed through their experiences in urban schools that White and Hispanic children also spoke in AAVE. Participant 14 stated that AAVE has expanded because she notices that the Hispanic students who speak in AAVE tend to have more Black friends than the other students. Participant 11 said that in a predominately white classroom, students spoke in AAVE too.

Table 4
How Does AAVE Look, Feel, and Sound?

<u>Indicators</u>	<u>Comments</u>
AAVE <i>Looks</i> like	people hanging out, hand gestures, mis-education, a rap video, movement of the body and throwing fingers up, trying to act cool, language with evolving beauty, lots of movement, physical involvement in what you say, natural, dogmatic flirting
AAVE <i>Feels</i> like	drawn toward the sound, vibrant, energetic, culture, a way of life, a lifestyle, life personified through language, complicated, relaxed, non-judgmental, fluid and loose, flows, comfortable
AAVE <i>Sounds</i> like	laughter, a rhythm, repetition of phrases, pairing similar words differently, “kind of good,” uneducated, ghetto, trying to sound cool, a tone of voice with a roller coaster effect, dramatic, loud, flowing up and down, going back and forth, dropping/omitting word sounds, logical and adaptable language, confidence

Overall comments toward AAVE were positive. Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that AAVE looks energetic with movement involving the hands at times; AAVE feels comfortable and sounds dramatic. Based on the interviews and writing samples, AAVE is an informal form of expression which is similar to slang, but can also be a way of life for some.

Research Question 3: How Do the Study Participants Live Through and Interpret Code-Switching in the School/Classroom?

According to Gumperz (1982), code-switching is using more than one dialect, code, or language during one dialogue experience. “It is quite typical for speakers of AAVE to be able to switch back and forth between their dialect and one much closer to Standard English” (Pullum, 1999, p. 39). According to Ting (2002, 2007), code-switching is a thriving phenomenon that is used daily in home communities, schools, and in professional settings, especially in multilingual communities

With code-switching pedagogy, students use their home language to assist with learning the proper or formal standards for writing and speaking (Adger et al., 1999; Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Teachers do not consider or refer to AAVE

as incorrect or a dialect with errors. Instead of trying to correct students' dialectal differences, students are more receptive when they are asked to translate their AAVE to Standard English (Minor, 1997). Similar to a light switch, AAVE or MAE can be turned on and turned off at one's discretion. Moore (1996) compares changing dialects to changing "outfits for appropriateness" (p.6). But the teachers must prepare the students for when and how to change clothes. One of the teacher's from the literature review incorporated poetry, informal literature responses, writer's notebook, a letter to future self, formal literature response, and district writing assessments to help students explore with their home and formal dialects (Hill, 2009). When teachers use code-switching pedagogy, they help students differentiate the settings that are appropriate for the various dialects (Baker, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Some educators use bidialectal approaches similar to those in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes when attempting to teach SE to students who speak in other dialects (SESD; Wilkinson et al., 2011).

In order for me to gain an understanding of how the study participants live through dialectal differences in the school/classroom, I decided to ask about code-switching. Through the individual and focus groups interviews, I asked how their lives were touched by code-switching.

Both, participants 1 and 4, code-switch regularly. Participant 1 stated that, "code-switching is important to me" because she code-switches often. She teaches students how to code-switch. In the classroom she simply asks students for another way to say it. In the interview, participant 4 commented that her husband thought it strange that she could switch "like a light switch" when referring to her accent. No one taught Participant 4 how to code-switch; she just "picked it up." Participant 4 says that she is auditory and picks up on things very well. She thinks that children can be taught how to pick up on switching.

Code-switching with limitations is acceptable for participants 2, 6 and 8. Participant 2 states code-switching is allowed only when students are expressing themselves. Participant 6 feels that using other dialects or “registers” in the classroom is “great if it helps the students learn and it helps the students really understand the lesson and becomes relevant to them.” However, Participant 6 thinks that students need to be informed about the expectations of the world when deciding upon careers. Participant 8 confessed that she does allow students to code-switch in class. She wants to make them comfortable and gain their attention. Though she allows usage of AAVE via code-switching, she thinks it should be limited. Participant 8 says that, “students should be more educated about the grammatical make up of AAVE.” Yet they should learn that there are times when it is appropriate and times when it is not.

In the focus group, participant 13 referred to using informal dialects or slang with students in order to get the needed attention as, “going there.” “Going there” was coined during the focus group interview by participant 13, and when she used the phrase an 1 hour and 6 minutes into the focus group interview others joined in to also get there point across. “Going there” is a way that participant 13 lives through dialectal differences in her school. Participant 13 said that going there means “coming out of the formal language.” When I asked the participant 13 to “go there” with me so that the other focus group members and I could have a better understanding, she was uncomfortable with the request. She soon decided to provide an example of “going ham” with students as an example of “going there.” “Going ham” is a slang phrase or colloquialism and it is not AAVE.

Participant 12 termed “going there” as code switching, and participant 13 agreed. Once 13 decided to demonstrate an example of “going there,” participant 12 gave another example of going there or living through dialectal differences by stating “being all up in nat.” Participant 12

then said that you must be respected before you “go there” because, “everybody can’t go there.” When participant 12 stated this, many participants agreed harmoniously with an “um hum.” Participant 12 made a statement about how she can’t “go there” with her Hispanic students because “there thing doesn’t translate equally,” meaning that language manipulation works differently with differing cultures. Participant 9 joined in and stated that we (referring to those in the focus group who have voiced their ability to code-switch) code-switch fluently and “we will go there in a minute.” Soon after, she asked a question to the group. “When did we, as educators or professionals, learn that with this group its ok and with that group it’s not; we need to think on that when thinking about the students.” Participant 11 soon after stated that she “goes there” with students to build a relationship with them.

Participant 11- They need to speak vernacular at home and formal language at school.

The conversation of when to use Standard English and when to use informal language needs to happen.

Participant 10 – The way students speak in the neighborhood and at home is not wrong, but this is the Standard we use in public and at school; everyone was kinda taught this and it should be taught.

Participant 10’s mom told him not to “go there” with white people. She told him not to talk like that when going to court or on a job interview. 10 said, “This is what we have to teach the kids! We have to take that negative connotation off of it and just teach it’s fine here, but over here it’s not.”

In the interview, participant 3 was consistent with her writing response. She feels that code switching should not be allowed in the classroom. According to participant 3, “they need to

talk correctly when it has to do with the lesson or instruction;” schools should teach when it is appropriate to speak AAVE.

Participant 5 said that she believes that it is important for kids to know that it is acceptable to use “Ebonics.” She wants students to be bilingual, and she feels that “we don’t do a good job of teaching kids to be bilingual.” She feels, from experience, that the kids she works with either master code-switching or they do not. There is not much in between. Participant 5 said that there is a sense of comfort when speaking AAVE with other AAVE speakers; she even admits to turning on her “sista girl” when needed and going back to “prim and proper.”

Participant 3 mentioned that kids should be taught when it is appropriate to use AAVE or slang. In the interview, participant 5 was asked if students could be taught to code-switch. She said if her students ask her a question in AAVE or an informal dialect she responds by making it a “teachable moment.”

Participant 5- That’s when I make it a teachable moment. So I might respond to them in their own vernacular and then immediately say, ‘Now, do you hear how I am speaking now? This is not the setting for that because I want to be so comfortable with the Standard English language, I want you as comfortable as you are as speaking your own vernacular. And my students and I have had this conversation so many times, so many times.

Participant 7 said that it takes education to code-switch. Kids shouldn’t necessarily be taught how to code-switch.

Participant 7- ...that’s education the fact you know when to turn it on and when to turn it off. And there are articles that talk about that, for example, when I am out with my friends on the weekends, I am not just proper, I am breaking verbs, I am saying ain’t. I

am doing a lot of those things, I'm dropping off consonants on the end of verbs because I am in a calm setting. But if I am on the stage presenting some information to a group of people, I am very cognitive of the fact I am not going to do that and I know the rules and the rules of grammar and it is not just because it is correct because it sounds good, no, there are rules that you are supposed to abide by. And so I think in a relaxed setting that the vernacular does change, you are not going to necessarily, you are not on pins and needles so to speak. So when I am around my friends I am relaxed. I can say what I want to say. I can say "ain't," I can use double negatives, I can do those things, I can use slang as I will because we are just kickin' it.

Researcher- Relaxed Setting.

Participant 7- Kickin' it. Again, slang.

Researcher- Code-Switching?

Participant 7- You know, exactly. And kickin' it without a G on the kickin'. And those are the kinds of things, it takes education to code-switch and turn it on and turn it off. I have friends of mine who are doctors and attorneys, they have tongue rings and earrings, they don't wear them on Monday morning, and they wear them Friday night. And again, you know what is culturally relevant and you know what is professional. And I think that is—that is an education in there that you know that I can do this but I can only do this at certain times.

Researcher- Should students be taught to code-switch or should they be taught to turn it off, period?

Participant 7- I think you are taught to turn it off. I think you know how to code switch on your own. No one has to teach you to lie. You learn it on your own. Babies learn it

automatically. You know there is one child in this room, ‘You know that I told you not to go and get the Skittles. No one got them but you.’ You don’t have to teach a baby to lie. And you go to them and ask, ‘Who got the Skittles?’ ‘I don’t know. I don’t know. Wasn’t me.’ You don’t have to teach that. They will learn it on their own. When I was a restaurant manager, I was big on teaching the cooks how to cook the way the training manual was said, how long on this, how to do this, you will learn the shortcuts on your own. I don’t have to teach that to you. You see, we will learn the wrong way on our own, we will learn the shortcuts on our own. Let me teach you the right way and you do with it what you will. But the thing is the children don’t know the right way and I can say to the cook, ‘How long you supposed to cook that?’ ‘Oh, it is supposed to be seven minutes on one side,’ but you going to cook it your way. At least you know how to because I have taught you the right way. You have chosen to do some shortcuts. But when you ask a child about the linking verb or you ask the child about the double negative. ‘What? There is a rule for that?’ So you never mastered it and you never knew it and so if I teach you the right way, it is up to you to learn code switching on your own. No one taught me to code-switch. I recognize what element I am in and I act accordingly.

Participant 7 said that code-switching is not acceptable in a professional setting like school. Though, it can be acceptable in certain situations like casually joking with a colleague when children are not around.

Participant 14 noticed that her Hispanic students who are learning English get AAVE and slang mixed up. She has to lay down the “language laws” with Hispanic kids to help them become trilingual. She tells her students when it is “proper English time” and when it is not.

She goes on to say that her students understand her expectation. She also notices through observation that her students use “Spanglish” (a mix of English and Spanish words and phrases) when they get stuck.

In the focus group, immediately after participant 14 commented about “proper English time,” participant 15 remembered the way that her teacher addressed language in the classroom. She said that her teacher would sit up straight and display correct posture to demonstrate how students should sit when they speak correct English. This method is very similar to how participant 14 teaches her students about “language laws.” Participant 15 said that her teacher would change her entire demeanor when explaining the proper way for students to speak. 15 said, “Honestly, that made me feel like that wasn’t for me. It made me feel disconnected.”

Participant 15- We need to be conscious of how we invite students into that formal or standard language, so that they don’t feel like it’s out of place where they belong. So that students don’t think these are tendencies for white people or tendencies for people who have degrees.

Participant 15 also spoke of a time when she was in a college study group. During the study group she was the only African American in the group and she decided to speak in AAVE around White people. Some of the group members laughed and asked her was she “going to get her hair did.” Ever since that experience, she doesn’t speak AAVE around White people anymore.

Participants 8, 9, 10, and 11, who are also able to code-switch, all made references to the need for educators to consider students when thinking about code-switching. Participant 11 said that, “something needs to happen.” The participants believe in code-switching, depending on the situation and setting. Some participants were vocal about ensuring Standard English takes

precedence over any informal dialects in the classroom, whereas other participants felt that educators should model speech for students because code-switching isn't necessarily important, and if necessary, will happen on its own.

Language is powerful and must be approached gently because it can have lasting positive and negative effects on students who soon become adults. Participant 15 even stated that her teacher made Standard English feel like "it wasn't for her." If we "go there" or feel the need to "turn on our sista girl," in essence code-switching is one of the many dialectal differences we live through in the classroom and in the outside world.

After listening to and analyzing the focus group interview, I was most amazed by how the comfort level of the group grew throughout the process. Focus group participants easily related to their experiences in the world of urban education. Participants were not comfortable enough to speak in AAVE during the interview. Because an interview is normally labeled as a formality, participants spoke carefully and rarely relaxed. The only instance of participants speaking in AAVE was when giving examples of the dialect. However in the focus group, once participant 13 mentioned "going there", participant 12 spoke in AAVE and many other study participants began to give their examples of "going there" or usage of informal dialects and slang.

Research Question 4: Can AAVE be used as a tool in the classroom? If so how? If not, why not?

The literature review provided evidence through research that AAVE can be used as a tool in the classroom. When asked if AAVE could be used as a tool in the classroom, study participants responded accordingly:

Table 5

Can AAVE Be Used as a Tool in the Classroom?

Yes Participants: 1,2,3, 4, 6,8,9, 10, 11,12,1,15,16

Participant 1- Yes, AAVE can be used as a tool in the classroom. State performance indicators require students to know their audience. Students could use various forms of media and translate the same message for different situations. For example, a student could go from stating a viewpoint via text, speech to the student body, and also a business letter. It is important for students not to be condemned for using AAVE. Rather, they should learn when it is appropriate. Often students who use AAVE appear to have an underdeveloped vocabulary. It would be appropriate to incorporate a lesson to use synonyms/antonyms of common slang terms/sentences to nourish their communication and verbal skills.

Participant 2- Yes. During independent practice, I have found that “shoulder partners” will often use AAVE when reviewing a concept or explaining it to their partner. When sharing out; however, formal English conventions are expected.

Participant 3 – It can be used as a tool in the classroom by someone who had rapport with the students and is able to use language effectively. Sometimes the students may believe an adult is making fun of them by using AAVE especially if they do not have a good relationship with the teacher. While it can be used as a tool it probably should not be used in the classroom. Teachers should try to increase the vocabulary of students and get them out of their comfort zone with speaking and learning. These students will be expected to speak and write correct English in college and career life and if we have a goal of preparing students for these areas then we should begin on our classrooms now.

Participant 4- I fully believe that language, both spoken and written, is a part of culture. I provide alternatives to AAVE, slang, and/or incorrect grammar much the same way a teacher might encourage students to expand their vocabulary beyond the word “good.” Good is a word we could use but is there another option that would perhaps provide a more impactful alternative to what is trying to be conveyed or is the word good sufficient enough? I attempt not to fault the speaker but rather provide an alternative. I can use the “He be...” and make a short, relevant lesson just as I would to show students there are other ways to say what we mean.

Participant 5- Unfortunately, I do not advocate the use of AAVE in the traditional classroom setting. While I think it is a beautiful expression of culture, I do think that it is important for me, as a teacher of English, to teach our children that there is an appropriate time and place to make use of this language. Even more unfortunate, is the fact that many of our students have not mastered Standard English. I strive to help students to understand that the language (AAVE) is even more beautiful when we speak both languages fluently. I love to meet an individual who can sound “as hood as he wanna be” and immediately switch (due to a change in setting or situation) to grammatically correct, vocabulary laden, standard American English. In my mind, that person, who may not be able to speak Spanish, French, German, Italian, or any other spoken language is truly bilingual.

Participant 6- AAVE can definitely be a useful tool in the classroom. It is important for students to know the proper rules and mechanics of the English language, but they should also be aware of the malleability that exists. English is the hardest language to learn for

this reason. If AAVE can be used to clarify a difficult concept in the classroom, I am totally for it.

Participant 8- AAVE is an amazing tool in the classroom; however, it has its limitations. I use AAVE to open a lesson and give examples that “hit home.” I feel strongly that using AAVE should be limited in the classroom in order to ensure that students also learn Standard English. AAVE should be used to reach students but should not be used the majority of the time in a classroom setting. Students will be expected to speak and write using rules of Standard English once they are out of the classroom. Therefore, we must prepare them for expectations of colleges and careers. While discussions in AAVE are acceptable, tests, projects, and classwork should be completed using Standard English.

Participant 9- The only way I would see it used as a tool would be to demonstrate what is grammatically incorrect.

Participant 12 – Yes, AAVE can be used to build relationships with Black students who normally engage in AAVE. Since Standardized test do not usually use AAVE, teachers can build from it to help Black students perform better on such tests.

Participant 13- Honestly, I am unsure. I think that AAVE has become socially acceptable. However, I think it derives from a belief that Blacks (urban) students are not as smart as their counterparts.

Participant 14- AAVE can be found in poetry, fiction, and music. These devices can be used to teach reading comprehension, literary devices, and strategies in the CCSS for ELA.

Participant 15- It could be used as a comparison of standard and non-standard English in an English class. It could also be used in the study of cultures because AAVE is an important part of African American culture.

Participant 16 – Yes, it’s helping students understand language. Language is adaptive, dynamic ever changing. If you gave them the language from their starting point it would help them.

Ironically, participant 5, the participant who described AAVE as a language that “captures the essence of the black culture,” was opposed to using AAVE as a tool in the classroom. She also called AAVE a “completely logical and adaptable language.” She says that it is essential for her to teach students that using AAVE in the classroom is inappropriate.

Participant 5 believes that mastery and fluency of Standard English is crucial before students can delve into AAVE. Similar to participant 5, Filmer (2003) believes that AAVE has no place in the classroom and Standard English should be the major method of teaching in the classroom. Like 5, Filmer (2003) respects and honors AAVE; however, she believes that its place is in the home community not schools.

Participant 13 was “unsure” as to whether or not AAVE could be used as a tool in the classroom. She believes AAVE comes from an idea that Black urban children are not as intelligent as their White counterparts.

Eleven of the thirteen study participants who wrote writing responses felt as though AAVE could be used as a tool in the classroom in some ways. Participant 14 said that since AAVE can be seen in various genres of literature like, poetry, fiction, and music, that it can be used to teach reading comprehension, literacy devices, and strategies in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA). Just as 14 mentioned the relevance of

AAVE involving CCSSS, participant 1 stated that it is a State Performance Indicator for ELA that students know their audience when communicating in written or verbal forms. Standard 4 of the National Council of Teacher of English (NCTE) states that students should be able to “adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.”

Both participants 15 and 4 believe that AAVE is a part of culture. Participant 15 said that it can be used during the study of cultures, considering AAVE is a part of many African American cultures. Participant 4 stated that using teachable moments to provide alternatives to AAVE phrases/words can assist in students’ vocabulary development.

Similar to 15 and 4, participant 12 feels that AAVE can help build relationships with Black students who share the same culture. Participant 12 and 16 believe in using AAVE to scaffold the learning process by using what they know and leading them to the unknown as far as language is concerned. Fisher & Lapp (2013) stated that students are not failing in school due to a lack of knowledge, but instead it is because some students SE is not their primary language. Participant 6, a fluent speaker of Spanish and English, calls English a malleable language because if a student can explain a concept in AAVE that they should “go for it.” But students should also know the rules and mechanics of the English language. Both participants 8 and 2 feel that AAVE can be used as a tool in the classroom, but with limitations. Participant 8 says that AAVE is acceptable during discussions and when trying to get a point across, but when submitting tests, projects, and other assignments, Standard English should be used. Participant 2 says that independent practice and thinking/sharing with partners is acceptable AAVE usage; however, when sharing aloud to the entire class “formal English is expected.” As suggested by experts in the field of literacy and language, students should use their home language to assist

them in learning and using Standard English (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999; Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006), in a way that does not intimidate the student who speaks in a non-Standard dialect (Delpit, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy 2002).

Participant 3, on the other hand, approaches the question about AAVE as a tool from the teacher perspective. Participant 3 views AAVE as a form of incorrect English that can be used by a teacher who has a “rapport” with the students because some students feel that teachers make fun of their informal language (AAVE and slang) if they use it incorrectly or jokingly.

Participant 3 goes on to say that though AAVE can be used as a tool, it should not be used in the classroom because students need to “increase their vocabulary and get out their comfort zone when speaking and learning.” Participant 9 said that AAVE can be used as a tool in the classroom to teach what is incorrect.

Even though participants 7, 10, and 11 did not complete a writing response, the three participants were vocal about their beliefs toward AAVE being used as a tool in the classroom during the interview process. Participant 7 was adamantly against using AAVE as a tool in the classroom. He stated the following:

Researcher- How does it make you feel when students use AAVE in the classroom? I guess if it is during those times (non-instructional) it is okay, but during instruction?

Participant 7- It is not

Researcher – It is not?

Participant 7- If I ask you to explain or answer, I want you to explain it the way I have taught you to speak, and the thing is if I have taught you because see a lot of them have not been taught.

When discussing his beliefs about code-switching, participant 10 stated that language spoken in the neighborhood (which can be AAVE at times) isn't wrong and students should be taught when and when not to use it. At times throughout the focus group interview, "going there" was used synonymously with AAVE usage. Participant 11 stated that she uses "going there" as a tool to build rapport with students.

The responses from the participants about using AAVE in the classroom were all based on the study participants understanding of AAVE whether it was a language, slang, or a dialect. Of all thirteen participants who completed the writing response, only one participant did not advocate using AAVE as a tool in the classroom. Another participant was not sure if it could be used as a tool in the classroom or not. Therefore, 11 participants agreed that AAVE can be used as a tool in the classroom.

Research Question 5: Is using AAVE in the classroom considered Culturally Relevant Instruction? Explain why or why not.

Culturally Relevant Instruction

"Using who I am to teach me what you want me to know." This is Culturally Relevant Instruction (CRI) according to participant 15. In order to gain an understanding of the essence of AAVE according to the study participants, I had to find out the participants' understanding of CRI. According to Hill (2009), CRI is using students' cultural and linguistic abilities to create a non-threatening classroom atmosphere. Ladson- Billings states that CRI can "empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically" by using cultural agents to share information that can include values, beliefs, and skills. In the thirteen writing responses, the participants' understanding of CRI mirrored that of Hill and Ladson- Billings. When the participants were

asked to write about their understanding of culturally relevant instruction, participants, as a whole, viewed CRI as many different things.

Relating to students was a theme mentioned more than once. Participants stated that relating to students across cultures, using prior knowledge to relate to students and using current verbiage that students can relate to was a part of culturally relevant instruction. Another theme that was mentioned more than once to describe culturally relevant instruction was being aware of what's important to students and being aware of the community in which students come.

Other than relating and being aware, no other topic had a consistent thread throughout the writing samples. Other understandings of CRI from the writing samples included:

- maintaining an authenticity with students
- being sensitive toward students
- being able to identify with students
- appreciating students, exposure
- connecting with students
- meeting students where they are
- incorporating who they are in to what you want them to learn
- recognizing the static/dynamic differences amongst all in classroom
- embracing educational equity
- being culturally competent
- creating opportunities to learn more about themselves and others
- using a variety of avenues of expressions
- having collaborative groups
- having a happy medium/understanding between teacher and student

- using relevant lessons
- acknowledging the cultural differences
- using cultural knowledge to help students succeed
- reaching students
- compartmentalizing instruction
- teaching in a way that's important to them, meeting the needs of learners
- making the classroom a place to feel comfortable
- providing opportunities for modeling and practice
- exposing students to rap music
- having discussions and conversations about places/communications/people/groups of people
- addressing diversity within cultures and cultures within cultures

The themes from the interviews for CRI included sympathy, one-on-one conversations, relating to students, relevance, individuality, meeting the needs of learners, and appreciation.

When I asked about CRI during the focus group interview, it was interesting to watch and hear the participants agree and disagree collectively about their beliefs and attitudes about CRI.

The individual interviews and focus group interview provided even more insight into the participants' minds about CRI. When asked in the interview, many participants were not familiar with the term; however, they were able to give information about their thoughts based on the term. Though participant 1 was not familiar with the term, she responded that CRI was knowing that there were a variety of cultures in the classroom. Culture is an individual characteristic rather than a collective one. She stated that, "each student has an individual culture" that is not solely based around race. Participant 1 thinks that CRI is being able to infuse

who the students are, individually, into the classroom experience. Participant 12 said that “you can’t teach who you don’t know.” In both, Participant 1’s writing response and interview, she mentioned that appreciating student cultures is CRI.

Participant 2 responded differently toward CRI in his writing response compared to his interview. Sympathy was mentioned in his interview, but not his writing response; on the other hand “compartmentalizing your instruction,” was the phrase dictated by CRI in his writing response. Participant 2 thinks that you should be able to sympathize with the wide variety of students’ needs and have personal conversations with students to find out what is going on in their lives. When participant 11 spoke about CRI in the focus group she reminisced about how teaching the whole child was an essential part of CRI. She would have to bring deodorant, breakfast, and hair brushes to address students’ needs as a precursor to learning. Participant 4 even spoke on teaching some of her students how to comb their hair and brush their teeth as examples of CRI. In Participant 4’s interview she stated that, “they (students) can’t learn if they don’t have their basic needs met...I clothe children...I help them learn how to wash up in the sink so they are not made fun of. I have helped little girls comb their hair and braid it and pull it back.” These two educators believe that CRI is a part of meeting basic needs of students.

Both Participants 4 and 6 believe that knowing the background of students is crucial when it comes to CRI. When one considers background, one must also consider prior knowledge, which is what they bring to the classroom. Participant 10 believes that using students’ prior knowledge to make learning relevant to students is CRI. Participant 4 must “understand the culture of the students before you teach them.” Participant 6 agrees with 4 in that he feels that knowing the “neighborhood, maybe their friends, and the family” is a part of CRI. In the writing sample of 6, he stated that teachers must bridge the gap between their own lives and the lives of

their students. 6 said that his English Language Learners love Sponge Bob Square pants; therefore, he teaches plot elements and characterization using an episode. “SpongeBob is part of their culture as a fun diversion, but it can also be used to teach.”

Participant 10 believes that schools spend too much time on assessments and standards and not enough time on culture. On the other hand, participant 4 goes on to express that CRI is a pre-assessment or pre-teaching form of instruction that involves meeting the needs of the learner. Understanding culture is a very detailed and involved practice. Participant 4 would drive the streets of her school neighborhood, shop in the stores of her school’s neighborhood, and make home visits in order to gain a full understanding of the culture of the school and community, which are most often very similar. She would observe the following:

Participant 4 – I looked at how many cars were in the driveway; did I see a lot of people walking in the neighborhood versus driving; what did the food in the stores look like; I want to know where I am and feel comfortable here because I know the culture.

Participant 4’s writing response matched her interview responses when discussing CRI. In the writing response she did say that she viewed herself as “culturally responsive” because she makes an effort to provide a place of comfort and opportunities while students learn. Both Participants 4 and 8 used the word “comfortable” when referring to culturally relevant instruction. Even though participant 11 did not use the term comfortable, her response to CRI was very similar to participant 4.

In participant 8’s interview, she stated that culturally relevant instruction means “understanding all the cultural differences of the students that are in your classroom and you use that to make them feel comfortable and also help them achieve academically.” Participant 8’s writing response and interview responses to CRI were very similar in nature.

Similar to participant 8, participant 1 thought that knowing about the cultural differences in the classroom was CRI; yet, participant 5 believed that “appreciating cultural differences in the classroom” was CRI. In participant 5’s writing sample she stated that being able to identify and appreciate characteristics of culture is culturally relevant instruction. Participant 5 explains what she means by CRI:

Participant 5- I am teaching them math or science, what is it in their particular culture, what is it that they see every day that I can use to maybe give an example of what I’m trying to teach them...so culturally relevant I think bringing it to their level without stripping it of any of its academic rigor, without changing it, but presenting it in a way that they can see the relevance of it, they can go back and apply it later even if they don’t, they would have the knowledge of how to do it.

Participant 5 gave a story of a teacher who does not necessarily fit into the culture of the school (racially, socio-economically so), but is very “culturally aware.” This same teacher ironically has academic growth gains and achievement gains each year in his class.

Participant 5- ...he consistently has above 90 percent proficiency in his classes every year. He is a Caucasian teacher. My school is in the top 90 percent African American and Title I. He is one of the funniest, worst, yet best rappers I have ever seen....He does not change the standards, he teaches what is prescribed by the State of Tennessee for U.S. History. However, he recognizes that our children love music and he recognizes that they love rap. Very intelligent, master’s degree, no Ph.D., no doctorate, but just culturally aware.

Participant 16 made the statement that CRI is having the “heart to meet students where they are, and not where you (the teacher) think they should be.” This statement embodies the history

teacher from Participant 5's example. Based on Participant 5's example, teachers can use music as a means to reach and teach students culturally. Music is a form of expression through language and dialect. Participant 5 also uses novels to embrace culturally relevant instruction. She uses novels with different cultures throughout the year because "that allows me to go into different cultures."

Participant 3 was one of the more interesting interviews and writing responses because her understanding of the questions and concepts were somewhat different from the others. According to participant 3, CRI is "teaching to whatever setting that I am in." She believes that rural students and urban students should be taught differently based on the needs of their environment. She even coined the term "environmentally relevant instruction" to describe how people speak and develop their language. Making learning relevant was participant 3's understanding of CRI because relevance was mentioned in both her writing response and interview. CRI is "teaching to students in a way that is relevant to them." Similar to participants 1 and 3, participant 5 also feels that teachers should use the cultural experiences of the students to teach lessons and make learning relevant.

Similar to participant 3, participant 7 understands culturally relevant instruction to be more of an environment factor as well.

Participant 7 - ...so the way you talk and teach children who are in a city may not be the same way you teach suburban children, because their experiences are different. The skill is the same. If you are going to say today we are going to do double digit regrouping, the skill is not going to change but perhaps the way we get children to understand the skill might change. And so you may talk to these children who live in suburbia about going to Macy's, about going to the restaurant this Saturday with their parents... 'And the cash

register does' ...However you may not say anything about Macy's to inner city children because that's not where they go. So you talk about, 'What is the name of the store on the corner? How many of y'all go there?' I'm going to connect this double digit regrouping to what they see every day in the confines of these streets because that is the sum total of their experiences. So I have to make sure that in teaching the skill, that's the same skills they teach in suburbia, but how do I connect it so these children understand it and it is culturally relevant to them.

Although the skill that is being taught is the same for all students, the way that you teach the skills should be based on the cultures of the students. Participant 7 went on to explain what he meant by culturally relevant instruction and gave two very profound examples:

Participant 7-...I saw four guys on the corner and I drove back through and I only saw two—have you ever seen those guys on the corner? So if two are there now, what happened? Two left. So what does that mean? They were what? They were subtracted...I was at Macy's and I saw 16 dresses. I went upstairs and I came back and there were 14 dresses and I saw these two little girls, one with a dress each. What do you think happened to those two dresses?

So based on the written and verbal responses of the participants, CRI is using personal knowledge and experiences about the students to make classroom learning relevant.

Culturally relevant teaching is using students' cultural and linguistic abilities to create a non-threatening classroom atmosphere (Hill, 2009). One way of creating the non-threatening classroom environment is allowing students to code-switch or dialect switch. With making learning relevant, CRI also involves motivating students to express themselves in the dialect of choice before requiring Mainstream American English (MAE) grammatical structures (Baker,

2002). The idea of students expressing themselves in a dialect of choice became a big issue in 1996 with Oakland, California. The controversy in Oakland was whether or not to recognize AAVE (also called Ebonics) as a language. After much debate and media attention, the board developed an Ebonics Resolution which stated that teachers should help and allow student usage of Ebonics while learning Mainstream American English. From this resolution birthed the Standard English Proficiency (SEP) program. With the SEP program, teachers used second-language learning instructional strategies to reach and teach students. The teachers of Prescott, a school in Oakland, CA, explained the view of the SEP program as one in which they are teaching students Standard English (SE) as a second language instead of correcting Ebonics, the language they bring to school from their home communities (Secret, 1998). Secret (1998) explained that the SEP program is based around three areas: culture, language, and literacy. Ladson –Billings (2009) agrees that the construction of literacy is essential in the study of culturally relevant teaching.

Culturally Relevant Instruction and AAVE

In order to allow study participants to fully answer the research questions about AAVE and dialectal differences I had to determine if the participants recognized a relationship between CRI and AAVE or even CRI and dialectal differences. In the writing sample, participants were asked the following question: Are AAVE and culturally relevant instruction related in any way? In the interview, participants were also asked about culturally relevant instruction; however, they were not asked if it was related to AAVE. All questions in the interview about CRI, AAVE, and dialectal differences were asked independently of each other. I wanted to observe if study participants noticed connections between CRI, AAVE, and/or dialectal differences with zero to minimal intrusion from me. Some participants were able to make correlations between CRI,

AAVE, language, and/or dialectal difference with no prompting. Considering only one participant did not see a relationship between CRI and AAVE, the participants who recognized a relationship between CRI, AAVE, or other dialectal differences (explicitly stated or implied) will be explored first.

Participants 1, 2, 9, and 14 all made references to languages, classroom conversations, and/or dialects when defining CRI. In the writing sample, participant 1 was asked if AAVE and CRI were related. Her comments were that AAVE and CRI are related. She believes that the teacher should not ignore it, but should instead recognize and discuss the cultural differences in a respectful way. From the interview, participant 1 stated that AAVE in the classroom is culturally relevant instruction. She stated:

Participant 1- ...using AAVE in the classroom when appropriate is culturally relevant instruction because I think it acknowledges that this is how you kind of like to speak or this is what your culture is about. This is about diversity and I'm showing that that is important. I am not lifting it up or putting it down, I am just acknowledging it and making sure you do that with all of the cultures and all the diverse students that you have and so everybody gets their turn, you know, just relate.

When defining CRI in her writing response, participant 1 wrote that students should be provided with a variety of avenues of expression alongside exchanging outcomes with their peers. Students should also be in collaborative groups that spark conversations about culturally relevant topics.

Similar to participant 1, participant 2 also made references to languages, conversations, and/or dialects when defining CRI in both his writing response and interview. He wrote that CRI involves ensuring that students use formal English conventions during class-wide discussions;

however, independent and group work should be dictated by whatever will yield the best results. In the interview, participant 2 stated that “culturally relevant is, I think, one-on-one conversations are huge and finding times to have those individual check-ins.” He also said that that “AAVE can be CRI and it can be used as a teaching model. When asked if AAVE and CRI were related, participant 2 responded accordingly:

Participant 2- Yes. We must simultaneously prepare our students for the rigid cultural and academic expectations of institutions of higher learning, while not

Participant 9 was another participant who referenced language, discussions, or dialects when defining CRI. She said the CRI “does involve discussion/conversation about places, communications, people, etc. particularly to a specific group of people.” During the focus group, participant 9 said that CRI is cultures within cultures which involves, “speaking differently, dressing differently, and setting the tone and stage for tolerance and diversity.”

When asked if AAVE and CRI were related, participant 9 responded:

Participant 9- They would be in the sense that AAVE is a real form of communication among African Americans and needs to also be understood by other cultures as well.

Participant 14 wrote that “culturally relevant instruction is instruction that utilizes current verbiage that the students can relate to (culturally).” Using relatable verbiage is CRI according to participant 14; therefore, when asked if AAVE and CRI were related she provided insight about related to students through familiarity.

Participant 14- AAVE and culturally relevant instruction are related through the avenues that they are familiar with. African American literature (fiction, poetry) and (rap) music contain AAVE and can be utilized within the classroom through culturally relevant instruction.

According to Orr (2000), African American writers are “bidialectal” (p. 10); they use both AAVE and MAE in their writings and find both dialects “useful tools of expression” (p.10).

Participant 4 stated, “I really believe in the power of language. I believe in the power of students talking to each other to share their creative thoughts, to share their ideas...” When asked if AAVE and CRI were related, participant 4 wrote:

Participant 4 – Yes, we must educate all students regardless of background or ability. I cannot assume students have had adequate exposure to diverse sentence structure and vocabulary and must provide opportunities for practice while modeling alternatives and better examples.

Similar to participant 4, participant 5 was very passionate about her views on AAVE and CRI, and therefore made some very rich statements on the topics. It was no surprise that participant 5 noticed a relationship between AAVE and CRI. She believes that AAVE is “a way of life” that’s “born out of cultural experiences.” Participant 5 also stated that it is necessary for teachers to value AAVE because not doing so is telling students that their “life is wrong.” When stated in that fashion, it makes one very cautious about what’s allowed, judged, and discussed in the classroom. Having students feel like their “life is wrong” will likely cause havoc and a feeling of uncertainty among the teacher and students. Participant 6 agreed with other participants and wrote that, “African American students are definitely keen on AAVE and it is a part of their culture. If a teacher wants to create a culturally relevant lesson for a class of African American students, then they have to consider what they like, the communities they live in, and the language they use. If a teacher truly wants to establish cultural relevance, failing to consider AAVE would result in a half-baked execution of it.”

In the writing response, participant 8 wrote that AAVE and CRI are “absolutely” related.

Participant 8- My African American students view the way they speak as part of their culture. In order to reach them, it is imperative for me to know and use words and phrases that are familiar to them in my instruction. They refer to Standard English as “talking white.” AAVE and culturally relevant instruction are strongly linked because African American identity (in my experience) is largely rooted in AAVE.

Participant 8 was consistent in her interview with her thoughts on AAVE and culturally relevant instruction by stating that AAVE is culturally relevant instruction. As mentioned above, participant 8 stated that her students refer to Standard English as “talking White.” According to Moore (1996) if African American students succeed in MAE, they are labeled as “acting white,” or “Uncle Toms.’ Black students are often teased for performing well academically and speaking in MAE because it is a “White” (p.33) thing (Moore, 1996).

Participant 11 responded that “AAVE can be CRI” because she allows students to write/use raps (AAVE) that are related to Math. Participant 11 said that “AAVE is culturally relevant because students should be able to say information back to you the way they understand it.” Participant 10 added to 11 and said that AAVE is culturally relevant because students should be able to say information back to you the way they understand it. Participant 12 wrote that an awareness/understanding of AAVE is necessary in order for a teacher to engage in culturally relevant instruction. As maintained by participant 15, language is a part of culture; therefore, if teachers are not cognizant of how students communicate, they may not be reached. Just as participant 5 said that not valuing AAVE is telling students “life is wrong,” participant 15 believes that not valuing how students communicate can give way to students who are not reached. As indicated by Delpit (1997), it is crucial that teachers are knowledgeable of the

AAVE features so that they can sufficiently demonstrate and model appropriate AAVE features and MAE features (Baker, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2006).

Participant 16- Yes, a master teacher meets students where they are. You use terms and points of reference to build on their knowledge.

Culture is important and educators must be willing to learn about students on a holistic level. Participant 7 was very detailed about AAVE, CRI, and language. Participant 7 was the only participant who stated that effective teaching was culturally relevant teaching. There must be understanding when one ethnic origin or race is teaching another ethnic origin or race.

Certain characteristics of various cultures are based on nurture, nature, lifestyle, environment, and economic status; therefore, teachers must teach students according characteristics that are understood in their culture. All definitions of CRI provided by the participants mirrored the definitions of effective teaching which were also providing by the participants. The participants stated that effective teaching is:

- having a relationship with your students
- being strong in content to reach students
- student centered instruction
- reaching all students where they are
- data driven
- effective communication
- meeting students where they are
- making students comfortable
- teaching in a way they learn best
- teacher functioning as a facilitator

- meeting the needs of individual students
- reflective practice
- making learning relevant
- reciprocal teaching
- connecting with something they already know
- demonstrating in multiple ways
- engaging students
- having high expectations
- using the power of language

Participant 7 said that “the way you talk to and teach children who are in a city may not be the same way you teach suburban children, because their experiences are different.” Participant 7 made it very clear that talking to and teaching students based on their environment does not imply uses informal dialects, but it does have more to do with word and phrasal choices.

Participant 13 thought that AAVE and CRI were “slightly” related. Though 13 wrote that she was not an “advocate of using incorrect grammar in the classroom,” she knew some slang terms that could be used to relate to students. Based on research, it is alleged that AAVE is some form of slang, or street language that it is considered poorly constructed English, and that it is the cause for so many African American students failing and dropping out of school (Orr, 2000). As many do, slang and AAVE are viewed similarly. Participant 13 was the one who coined the phrase, “going there,” when referencing AAVE.

Participant 3 was the only participant who believed that AAVE and culturally relevant instruction were not related. In her interview, she said that AAVE is not culturally relevant instruction because it’s not a part of a student’s “full culture.” In her individual interview,

participant 3 stated that “environmentally relevant instruction” is really CRI. In her writing response, participant 3 said the following:

Participant 3- AAVE and culturally relevant instruction are not related in my opinion.

AAVE is a way of speaking in a community. Culturally relevant instruction is a way of teaching to students based on life situations, environment and learning styles. Teachers can be effective in the classroom and help their students to grow and learn by using culturally relevant instruction. However, using AAVE is simply a way of speaking and will not necessarily improve student learning. While teachers that use AAVE may have a better rapport with students this may not always correlate to increased learning.

Although only four of the 13 writing responses made references to languages, classroom conversations, or dialects when defining CRI, 15 of the 16 participants believe that AAVE and/or dialectal differences and CRI are related.

Conclusion

“Mama an’ nem came yet? Where dey at? She over Marcus house. Ain’t nobody ever heard of dat befo. I been at that school. Dey ain’t gon never get it right!” The statements mentioned above are normal speech patterns of AAVE and normal speech patterns of me. Considering this study was a heuristic qualitative study by nature, the researcher’s experiences and thoughts about the phenomenon under study were explored and uncovered. AAVE looks like Black people of all ages and all socio-economic statuses. AAVE feels like power, confidence, comfort, and even laziness at times. It sounds like art or even poetry. Being able to code-switch between AAVE and Standard American English (SAE) feels like a secret power. As a child, I just picked up on code-switching, similar to participants 4 and 7. I wasn’t taught how to code-switch; however, my parents modeled it for me (unconsciously) on a daily basis.

They never said, this is how you code-switch. I just observed and noticed the difference in word choice, syntax, inflections, phrasing, and word placement.

After reflecting over the writing responses, interviews, and focus group interview, my thoughts about AAVE have changed constantly throughout this study. At first I thought embracing AAVE through CRI should began at the secondary level of education. Now I feel that the sooner urban educators embrace AAVE through CRI, the better. Participant 5 admitted that she doesn't teach her 5 year old son how to code-switch because she wants to ensure that he is fluent in SAE. I, on the other hand, find myself modeling after my parents. I code-switch with my 6 year old daughter in hopes that she will be able to master the art at a young age, as I did. After speaking with participant 4, I was confused about her comments toward embracing CRI. She stated that teachers must "understand the culture of students you teach." She later stated that she doesn't look at skin color. My rebuttal to that is that skin color, as well as language patterns, is a part of culture; so, if you choose not to look at skin color then you choose not to acknowledge a part of that child's culture. Just as I model code-switching with my daughter, participant 7 believes that modeling SAE only is necessary for the classroom. After this study I feel the dire need to further educate and provide professional development with urban educators on AAVE and the surrounding topics of CRI and code-switching.

The data collected from this study support the claim that AAVE, language patterns, and dialectal differences are a huge part of urban education. With AAVE, CRI and code-switching become essential ingredients in the conversation. Based on the study, there was a bigger concern for dialectal differences and language patterns as a whole rather than AAVE alone. Most participants only have a semblance of what characterizes AAVE. Participant 7 stated that AAVE is mis-education, even though he admitted to being a speaker of the dialect during

informal settings. The majority of the study participants truly believe that students must be taught when to use informal language and when not to.

As I reflect over the research questions, I have gained an incredible amount of insight from this study. These participants' experiences and encounters with what they consider AAVE were both positive and negative but more importantly, relevant. As a whole, the essence of AAVE was very positive and encouraging. The participants in the study want to help students learn by being culturally sensitive to students' language patterns and dialectal differences. However, it's almost a dichotomy in how the study participant live through AAVE and dialectal differences. They feel the need to embrace AAVE and dialectal differences, yet stop them simultaneously. Many of the belief systems about AAVE and CRI captured in the writing sample prior to the mini-presentation remained the same throughout the interview and focus group.

The next chapter includes a discussion on strategies for purposefully including teachers and administrators in the conversation and professional development around embracing AAVE in the classroom and actually teaching students how to code-switch. Implications for further research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate and discover the experiences of the 16 study participants about AAVE as it relates to Culturally Relevant Instruction (CRI). There were some vast misconceptions about AAVE; although, I was surprised on many levels about the insight the participants added to the study about dialectal differences and colloquialisms. Most participants like 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14, and 16 understand AAVE to be slang based on the examples they provided in the study. Participant 5 and 7 were very detailed about language; however, they were against using AAVE in the classroom. Both 5 and 7 speak AAVE in informal settings.

Participants consistently stated that students need to be taught when to speak formal English and when to speak informal English. There was an underlying fear of allowing AAVE in the classroom. I believe this was due to the lack of knowledge about AAVE and CRI. I also believe the fear stems from the inability to use CRI to teach student how and when to code-switch between formal and informal language patterns. Participants have their views about AAVE, but based on the written and verbal evidence captured during the study, many of the ideologies are misguided and erroneous. The mini-presentation was not sufficient enough to properly educate participants on the entire spectrum of AAVE and CRI. Because of this I have used the information from the writing response, interview, and focus group to guide the majority of my conclusive thoughts and implications for further research.

AAVE Strategies: CRI

Most study participants have never heard of culturally relevant instruction. Researchers Au & Jordan (1981), indicate that culturally relevant teaching is also referred to as culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and culturally compatible pedagogy. With culturally appropriate teaching, teachers incorporate characteristics of students' cultural backgrounds into literacy instruction (1981). CRI has been around for decades therefore all teachers should be familiar with the strategy. Professional development on CRI is definitely needed. If students are able to write, speak, and read in their home dialect at school, then it is quite possible that they may be more willing to learn how to write, speak, and read in Mainstream American English (MAE) at school (Moore, 1996). In order to embed CRI, teachers should allow students to write and speak in the dialect that is comfortable for them at some points throughout classroom instruction. Through CRI, Baker (2002) studies the languages that students bring from their communities. She observes the speech patterns, the grammar rules, the vocabulary, and the tone. So Baker, like many other teachers should become students as well and learn from their students. Using the strategy that Baker uses can help students understand significance in informal dialects like AAVE and more appreciation toward code-switching.

AAVE Strategies: Code-Switching

Contrastive analysis is an instructional strategy that supports culturally relevant pedagogy and allows students to code-switch (Delpit, 2012). Contrastive analysis is a method in which students intentionally compare and contrast the phonological and syntactic features of their informal dialects with the formal dialects. As they compare and contrast the two dialects, students note the difference between the audience, the intent of communication, and the wordage. With contrastive analysis, Wheeler et al., (2012) deem it necessary to use a T-Chart to assist students with the comparing and contrasting. Students should begin the process of contrastive analysis by metacognitively recognizing differences in clothing and places of formal

and informal situations. Then students use the same skill set to compare and contrast languages, dialects, and even the linguistic literary elements (Wheeler et al., 2012).

Modeling and using sentence frames are other strategies that have been successful in second language or formal dialect acquisition. With modeling, the teacher models his/her thinking, read alouds, and role playing. The teacher can read aloud in formal and informal dialects and allow students to make a decision about which register is which. Sentence frames provide students with a sentence stem or starter and challenges the students to add more formal language to the sentence starter. Fisher and Lapp coupled contrastive analysis with modeling and sentence frames in order to get the success with students on Standardized tests. Other strategies that support formal dialect development and language development as a whole include: ensuring that students understand why formal dialects are useful, respecting the home dialect, engaging students in language –based social and academic interactions that incorporate real world experiences, scaffolding the language learning process by using student ideas and questions.

According to Kleeck (2014), with the recent adoption of the CCSS, there is a more intentional focus on academic or formal language. Although researchers have begun suggesting ways to directly teach formal language to students at a greater risk for academic underachievement, these strategies have yet to appear into the mainstream of elementary pedagogical practice (Uccelli et al., 2014). Often times, teachers equate students' language differences with low academic abilities (Hill, 2009). According to Ting (2002, 2007), code-switching is a thriving phenomenon that is used daily in home communities, schools, and in professional settings, especially in multilingual communities. One teacher incorporated poetry, informal literature responses, writer's notebook, a letter to future self, formal literature response,

and district writing assessments to help students explore with their home and formal dialects (Hill, 2009).

In order for teachers and administrators to adequately teach using code-switching pedagogy, they must be trained. One way to facilitate training in code-switching pedagogy is to use video clips that demonstrate formal and informal dialects. Educators can use contrastive analysis to differentiate and analyze the two dialects. Teachers must also familiarize themselves with the dialects of their students and the community because this will help teachers decipher between reading mistakes and dialect influences. Teachers should also analyze patterns in pronunciation, verb patterns, noun patterns, as well as phonological, morphological, and syntactic structures (Wheeler et al., 2012). The three strategies used most often in response to dialectal differences in the classroom include correcting students, celebrating dialectal differences, and bidialectalism. Of those three, bidialectalism, using contrastive analysis and celebratory centered literacies, yield the most warranted results.

Recommendations for Further Research

For further research I would like to explore whether educators in the rural, suburban, or private schools deal with similar dialectal differences in the classroom. This same study with a more intense focus on dialectal differences as it relates to instruction needs to take place on a larger scale in the South, Northeast, East, and West with a significant amount of urban areas. I would like to know if urban educators in other areas are familiar with CRI, AAVE, and code-switching.

Oakland, California was the place where Standard English Proficiency programs started due to the Ebonics debate of 1996. Research should be conducted to determine if these programs still exist. If they do, then the success rate should be explored. I need to find out if AAVE is still considered a language there or have any thoughts about it changed.

As a result of this study, I would also like to set up meetings with directors of curriculum and instruction in urban areas to present the research on CRI, AAVE, and code-switching pedagogies so that teachers can receive training in CRI strategies, AAVE conventions, and code-switching strategies. Once the training takes place, with follow up, observations and site visits must take place to collect student academic and non-academic data. The training will include specific step by step strategies on using CRI to incorporate code-switching pedagogy in the classroom.

Conclusion

As a researcher, my goal is to use the experiences of the study participants to share with other urban educators on a larger scale. I want to gain more insight from other urban educators about their experiences with AAVE because I know more experiences are out there. Once these experiences have been uncovered and brought to light, more educators may be willing to share their experiences. The goal is to enhance or multiply the positive experiences and change or abandon the negative ones.

This study has helped shed light on dialectal differences in the urban classroom. It was difficult for many study participants to differentiate between slang and AAVE. Training in AAVE is needed. AAVE is everywhere. It looks like physical movements. It feels like comfort and confidence. It sounds loud at times, dramatic at others, and exclusive most often. It just happens. Every day is AAVE.

Over-usage of AAVE has caused me to be a bit more relaxed in my normally formal settings. Working in an environment where AAVE is not only acceptable, but considered the norm has lead me to believe that the need to actually teach code-switching is imperative. In my experiences as a teacher and an instructional coach, both professionals and students speak very similarly. My colleagues are unable to code-switch; therefore, effectively teaching students and

teachers how to code-switch can be a daunting task. There should be more discussion about dialects and slang. AAVE is too often misinterpreted as slang; therefore, placing a negative stigma on it. As participant 5 mentioned, a teacher should not appear unapproachable to students. But the biggest question is how can a teacher appear approachable, respect informal language patterns, yet teach formal language.

With this study, the participants involved became more aware. Awareness about a topic usually brings a desire for more knowledge. After the focus group interview, four of the eight focus group participants had more thought about the study. Participant 11 texted me soon after and said she “continued the conversation in the car, of course it was in Ebonics.” AAVE is relevant. After the interview, another participant stated the following, “It’s probably just me, but all of my presenter’s Ths sound like Ds. He just said Krogers too, with no possessive. OMG!” Another study participant, after the interview, asked for a copy of my power point presentation on AAVE’s history, background, and conventions. She wants to share it with her students so that they understand that “the way that they speak sometimes is legitimate and not incorrect and has meaning.” I can only imagine if this study was on a larger scale how many urban educators would seek more information about AAVE and want to use it as a type of Culturally Relevant Instruction. Professional Development on using AAVE as a tool in the classroom through Culturally Relevant Instruction is the next step. Educators need specific steps and strategies on how to teach using CRI.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

From: irb@olemiss.edu

Sent: Monday, August 13, 2012 9:07 AM

To: 'mrhines@olemiss.edu'

Cc: ROSEMARY OLIPHANT INGHAM

Subject: IRB approval of protocol 13X-020, "African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the Classroom: An Investigation of the Attitudes and Ideologies of Urban Educators toward AAVE"

Ms. Knapp and Dr. Oliphant-Ingham:

This is to inform you that your application to conduct research with human participants, *African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the Classroom: An Investigation of the Attitudes and Ideologies of Urban Educators toward AAVE (Protocol 13X-020)*, has been approved as Exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Please remember that all of The University of Mississippi's human participant research activities, regardless of whether the research is subject to federal regulations, must be guided by the ethical principles in *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*.

It is especially important for you to keep these points in mind:

- You must protect the rights and welfare of human research participants.
- Any changes to your approved protocol must be reviewed and approved before initiating those changes.
- You must report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at [\(662\) 915-7482](tel:662-915-7482).

Diane W. Lindley

Research Compliance Specialist, Division of Research Integrity and Compliance

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

The University of Mississippi

100 Barr Hall, P.O. Box 907

University, MS 38677

Tel.: [\(662\) 915-7482](tel:662-915-7482) Fax: [\(662\)915-7577](tel:662-915-7577) dlindley@olemiss.edu

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF CONSENT

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT
(Individual Interview & Writing Response)

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title: African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the Classroom: An investigation of the attitudes and ideologies of urban educators toward AAVE

Researcher

Melanie Hines Knapp
School of Education
Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi
901-299-3928

Sponsor

Dr. Rosemary Oliphant Ingham
School of Education
Guyton Hall
The University of Mississippi

Dear Participant,

My name is Melanie Hines Knapp. I am a doctoral student at the University of Mississippi. I am studying to earn a Ph.D. in Secondary Education. As I pursue my doctorate, I am interested in investigating and discovering the experiences of urban educators (study participants) and myself about the dialect African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as it relates to instruction in the urban school.

Description

In this research study, I will use three means of collecting data: focus group interviews, individual interviews, and writing responses. I am requesting your assistance in the completion of an interview session and a writing response. This interview will be used to help me gather vital information about your thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and ideas about culturally relevant instruction as it relates to AAVE. The questions on the interview form will be used as a guide and the interviewer may deviate from the interview questions depending on the direction of the interview session. The purpose of the interview is to provide the researcher with insight and depth about the topic at hand. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

The writing response will ask study participants to respond to four questions. As the interview, the writing response will also help me gather vital information about your thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and ideas about culturally relevant instruction as it relates to AAVE. The purpose of the writing response will be to gather another form of data about the study participants' experiences with culturally relevant instruction as it relates to AAVE. Many of the questions asked during the interview sessions will re-surface as questions on the writing response because of possible similar or varied answers; the varied or similar answer can provide more strength to all forms of data being collected. Completing the writing response should take no longer than 30 – 60 minutes. I will analyze all data sources and look for trends and patterns using a coding system. The data from each writing response will be analyzed and reviewed for trends and common themes. It is important to respond as honestly as possible during the interview and on the writing sample so that all data collected can add to the research that currently exists in

education. If you have any questions concerning this process, you are welcome to ask any questions you have.

Risk and Benefits

Your participation in this research study may contribute to any educator's body of knowledge about the attitudes and ideologies of urban educators about the AAVE dialect or other dialects students may bring into the school setting. By participating in this interview and by completing this writing response, I hope to gain a deeper understanding on how urban educators and I view AAVE. I do not feel that there are any risks involved because there is no right or wrong answer.

Costs or Payments

The administration of this interview and writing response will take about 2 hours. There are no costs or payments required for your participation in this research study. However, there are benefits of participating in this study. The benefits would include giving your perspectives on culturally relevant instruction as it relates to AAVE.

Confidentiality

In order to conceal your identity, I will take the necessary steps to ensure that your identity remains private. Because I will use a pseudonym instead of your real name, I do not feel that your identity will be jeopardized. I will take these steps to ensure that your identity remains confidential.

Right to Withdraw

Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study during the initial phase, you are free to withdraw from the study in the event that you experience stress or anxiety. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you deem are invasive or offensive. In the event that you have questions or choose to withdraw your participation from the study, please contact me or my sponsor at mrhines@go.olemiss.edu or ringham@olemiss.edu respectively.

By signing this letter, you are agreeing to participate in the individual interview and writing response for this research study. Your identity and the data gathered will remain private and confidential. Once you have signed this consent form, I (the researcher) will provide you with a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sincerely,

Melanie Hines Knapp

Statement of Consent

I, _____, will be a participant in the research study on African American English (AAVE) in the Classroom: An Investigation of the Attitudes and Ideologies of Urban Educators Toward AAVE. My signature below indicates that I voluntarily and willingly wish to participate in this research study. I realize the results of this study are for a research study only and my identity will remain confidential throughout the research process and once the results of the research study are disclosed.

APPENDIX C: WRITING RESPONSE ASSIGNMENT

**Writing Response
Pre-Interview**

Study Participant Initials _____

Date: _____

1. How would you define African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Black English, or Ebonics? Provide some examples of AAVE (preferably what you have heard, if any, from the classroom/school environment).

2. Can AAVE be used as a tool in the classroom? If so how? If not, why not?

3. In your opinion, what is culturally relevant instruction? How do you know?

4. Are AAVE and culturally relevant instruction related in any way? If so, how?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide Focus Group and Individual

Project Title: African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the Classroom: An investigation of the attitudes and ideologies of urban educators toward AAVE

Principal Researcher: Melanie Hines Knapp

I will use both an interview guide and a standard open-ended interview protocol in the qualitative interview process. The interview questions were formulated after studying other heuristic inquiry designs and qualitative research studies similar to this study. Interview questions will include but are not limited to the following:

- How old are you?
- What kind of education did you receive as a child? (Urban, suburban, rural, private, etc.)
- Where are you from?
- How long have you worked in education as a teacher, administrator, or academic coach?
- What is effective teaching? What does it look like? Describe the ideal classroom. What does it look like? What are the students doing? What is the teacher doing?
- Explain your understanding of culturally relevant instruction? Does your school/district embrace culturally relevant instruction? How? Examples?
- How long have you worked with African American or minority students?
- Approximately what percentage of your students are African American?

- When you walk through the doors of a classroom of majority African American students, what do you see? Hear?
- What are the challenges you face working with your students? Do any of these challenges involve any language barriers?
- In your opinion, is there a difference between a dialect and a language?
- How often do you correct students for speaking incorrectly or using “bad or incorrect grammar?” Give me some examples of words or phrases you feel are incorrect. How do you correct students?
- How do you think it makes the students feel when you correct them for using different dialects or language systems in the classroom?
- What is your opinion of using other dialects in the classroom?
- Why do people speak AAVE?
- Do you consider AAVE a dialect? If not, what is it? How do you know?
- How do you feel about the dialect AAVE? What do you think about using AAVE in the classroom?
- How does it make you feel when students use AAVE in the classroom?
Hallways? At home?
- What would you like to see happen with AAVE (impact, culturally relevant/responsive instruction)?
- What is the essence of AAVE, according to the participants and researcher? How does AAVE look, feel, and sound? What is the sensory nature of AAVE?
- How would you feel if you spoke in a way that was considered incorrect, wrong, etc.?

- How do you feel about a teacher who rejects a student's dialect? Culture? Can you give me an example of how a teacher can reject a student's language or culture?
- Is using AAVE in the classroom considered culturally relevant instruction? Explain why or why not.

VITA

Melanie Hines Knapp

EDUCATION

Master of Education, May 2003
Vanderbilt University, Peabody College, Nashville, TN
Secondary Education Major, English Endorsement
GPA: 3.78/4.00
Certification: Secondary English 7-12

Bachelor of Arts, *magna cum laude*, May 2001
University of Memphis, Memphis, TN
English Major
GPA: 3.59/4.00

HONORS

Highly Qualified in Reading and Language Arts K-12
“In the Zone” Awarded School, 2012
Achieved TEM 5 Status, 2012
Wrote and Received a School Improvement Grant, 2012
Level 5 status via TVAAS, 2010 & 2014
The National Honor Roll, “Most Influential Teacher,” 2005
Nominated for Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers, 2005

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Curriculum Writer April 2015 - Present
Shelby County Schools

- Analyze the current curriculum units for middle school ELA
- Create instructional units based on curriculum standards
- Ensure alignment of the curriculum maps for ELA
- Develop culturally relevant units to enhance teachers’ practices

Instructional Facilitator/PLC Coach
Raleigh-Egypt Middle School, Memphis, TN July 2011- Present
Hamilton High School, Memphis, TN August 2004 – May 2007

- Train teacher teams and instructional coaches in creating, administering, and analyzing academic data
- Conduct teacher evaluations and provide timely feedback for improvement
- Model and demonstrate effective classroom practices
- Identify, plan, and conduct professional development for teachers
- Responsible for the proper allocation and expenditure of over \$250,00.00 in federal funds
- Amend Reading and Writing Curriculum for grades 6-8
- Disaggregate and analyze school effect and teacher effect data
- Cultivate and Coach teacher leaders

Literacy Coach

Raleigh-Egypt Middle School, Memphis, TN May 2009-2011

Treadwell Middle/High School, Memphis, TN May 2007-2009

- Conducted on-going professional development in the areas of data analysis, literacy instruction, writing instruction, and effective teaching strategies
- Disaggregated and analyzed test scores, school effect data, and teacher effect data
- Monitored the implementation of school-wide writing and reading initiatives
- Conducted weekly observations to ensure effective teaching strategies
- Researched, identified and modeled best teaching practices
- Amended Reading and Writing Curriculum for grades 6-8
- Modeled lessons for novice teachers
- Coached and trained teachers and teacher leaders in effective literacy strategies

English Teacher, August 2003-May 2004

Hamilton High School, Memphis City Schools, Memphis, TN

- Designed and implemented thematic units integrating all areas of the curriculum for eleventh grade standard English III classes
- Facilitated instruction and created lesson plans on a daily basis
- Collaborated with colleagues about the most effective ways to teach the curriculum
- Administered authentic and traditional forms of assessment to the students; provided verbal and written feedback

PUBLICATIONS

Hines, M.R. & Palmer, J.D. (2002). [Review of the book *Ethnicity, Race, and Nationality in Education: A Global Perspective.*] Teachers College Record, 105.

PRESENTATIONS

Knapp, M. (2012). *The Common Core Way- Evidence.* Practitioners Summit. August 1, 2012. Memphis, TN.

- Knapp, M. (2012). *Write Away!* 2012 Institute for Middle Level Leadership July 10, 2012. San Diego, CA.
- Knapp, M. (2011). *Improving Student's Writing Scores... WRITE AWAY!* Practitioners Summit. August 4, 2011. Memphis, TN.
- Brown, J., Hines-Knapp, M., Vasser, R. (2011). *Embracing the extended Hour- 8th Hour of Power.* 2011 Forum for Innovative Leadership. June 7, 2011. Memphis, TN.
- Ahern, E., Hines, M.R. Sowell, S., Waters, S. (2002). *Voices and Visions of Pre-Service Teachers.* 2002 Tennessee Council of Teachers of English State Conference. September 28, 2002. Nashville, TN.