Turning It On and Off: Finding Middle Ground between Home and School Discourses

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Abstract

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has been a controversial topic when it comes to African American children learning in the classroom. AAVE has been linked to African American children's low performance scores in reading and writing. However, research has shown that this may not be the case. Although AAVE may not be the accepted form of English, or language in American society when it comes to academia, the difference in the dialect does not change the meaning's context. This study examines whether African American children were able to code switch between AAVE and Standard English (SE). It includes four African American participants: two males and two females. Data analysis included dialogue scripts created from authentic conversations, formal and informal writing assignments, and observation notes. Findings indicate that students do know how and when to code switch between AAVE and SE. Teachers must make sure that they immerse their African American students in both of the dialects. Therefore, students’ cultural identities will not be lost in AAVE, and they will learn how to continue to code switching to SE when appropriate.

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Turning It On and Off: Finding Middle Ground between Home and School Discourses

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

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African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has been a controversial topic when it comes to African American children learning in the classroom. AAVE has been linked to African American children’s low performance scores in reading and writing. However, research has shown that this may not be the case. Although AAVE may not be the accepted form of English, or language in American society when it comes to academia, the difference in the dialect does not change the meaning’s context. This study examines whether African American children were able to code switch between AAVE and Standard English (SE). It includes four African American participants: two males and two females. Data analysis included dialogue scripts created from authentic conversations, formal and informal writing assignments, and observation notes. Findings indicate that students do know how and when to codeswitch between AAVE and SE. Teachers must make sure that they immerse their African American students in both of the dialects. Therefore, students’ cultural identities will not be lost in AAVE, and they will learn how to continue to code switching to SE when appropriate.
Turning It On and Off: Finding Middle Ground between Home and School

Discourses

The use of language is essential for survival with humans. However, not every human speaks the same language, or dialect. In America, we have a “melting pot” of various races, and backgrounds, and it appears, that based on the political hierarchy that our country stands upon, a common, or standard language has been given for all Americans to speak. According to Wolfram (1999), “Speakers of the standard dialect, especially when in positions of power, may be unwilling to adapt to nonstandard forms of English” (p. 77).

This language I am speaking of is known as Standard English (SE). However, even Standard English was created from a mixture of other languages and dialects. Wolfram (1999) asserts that “…there is no English language that currently or historically exists, or existed in a pure, unadulterated form, one uncontaminated by the uneducated or misinformed masses. The English language is more accurately understood to be the sum total of all its dialects or variations (p.68). The problem is that some of the languages and dialects of all Americans are not represented, or not accepted in that Standard form of English.

Most Americans, whose language is not accepted or included in Standard English, are those of minorities. It is said that minorities speak Broken English, and it is considered to be the wrong way to speak. This is more apparent in African-Americans, than in any other minority group. There is a different Vernacular, or style in which some African-Americans speak. Although that may be, I believe it is necessary for African-Americans to understand and learn the “speaking tool” of Standard English in order to
not only be successful in the American society, but also as a way to communicate and comprehend other variations of the English language.

Some African-Americans do this well, in vary settings, known as code-switching. However, there are some who still need to learn it. Because language acquisition begins early in childhood development, it is necessary that the Standard English form is acquired at an early age. Therefore, African-Americans need to model or expose their children to Standard English as they would if they were to teach their child a secondary or foreign language. As long as students know when and where to “turn on and off” their home language is most important. It is not that students are losing their identities for choosing to speak in SE, but students are becoming linguistically diverse.

**Theoretical Framework**

Defining literacy requires a task of uncovering numerous layers of complexities that assist in defining the word. Although literacy is often defined through reading and writing, there are other major components that help make up the word as a whole, such as speaking, listening, and the culture of life. Gee (2008) explains that literacy is defined as how one’s culture, in how he or she may live within a discourse, or the various communities he or she may belong to. He continues to argue that literacy is much more than reading and writing, but is part of a larger political entity called a discourse, or “identity kit” that is ways of saying, doing, being, writing, valuing and believing (pg. 153). Gee maintains that there are primary discourses, which are learned in the home and secondary discourses which are learned and are socially dominant (pg. 153). Kucer (2005) discusses how oral and written language systems are dual structures and rule governed systems. Although written language extends and builds on oral language, (pg.
52) it is often noted that people write the same way they speak, however the two expressions of language can be used interchangeably, with each expression being particularly useful for particular types of communication in particular circumstances. Writers are able to spend the time necessary for the selection of words to vary their discourse, whereas during spoken language, thoughts need to be immediately produced (pg. 52). Kucer (2005) also discusses how language has a dual structure system that has a deep and surface structure that only the individual can bring out. Writing is simply not speech written down, and does not fully reflect any individual’s language patterns (pg. 67). Some children have been identified as writing as they speak, and therefore, since African-American children are said to be speaking in a vernacular, instead of Standard English, then some people would have a different opinion than Kucer. Farr (1991) asserts that dialects are simply differences in the way that the systems of language are represented in a particular language or discourse community (pg. 68). What is known as Standard English is, in fact, not a single form but rather Standard English is a collection of socially preferred dialects. However, there is a single written language system that is functional across spoken dialects. People who share cultural, social, and regional characteristics speak similarly (pg. 69). Therefore dialects are not a result of neither verbal nor cognitive deficits; rather they are a result from group membership and isolation from other groups within society (pg. 74). All readers and writers show the influence of their oral language when interacting with print; both shift their use of dialect in the direction of the standard form when engaged in written discourse. (pg. 75). As literacy proficiency increases, impact of spoken language on their written language decreases because they are surrounded by the standard form on the radio, television,
movies, and other print materials. According to Kuc (2005), speakers of the standard form, especially those in positions of power, may be unwilling to adapt to nonstandard forms on English, therefore survival depends on the understanding of the standard form (pg. 77) Students need to learn that writing has the power to change their views of the world and to use writing to see beyond what they currently know (pg.173).

According to Delpit (1995), young children are often aware of the different codes we all use in our everyday lives. They have the ability to discern and identify them in different settings (pg. 48). Delpit (1995) asserts that learning a secondary language after acquiring a native language comes with exposure, comfort level, motivation, familiarity, and practice in real command communicative contexts (pg. 49) “If learners of new dialects or language are corrected or drilled in the new dialect, may not acquire it as quickly and easily as if it were learned by being placed in a given setting” (Delpit, 1995, pg. 50). Krashen (1991) suggest that second language is distinguished in two ways: conscious learning and unconscious acquisition. Affective filter brings more consciousness to speech, making talking more difficult. (pg. 50) Forcing speakers to monitor their language for rules while speaking typically produces silence and affects students’ attitudes toward teachers. Students become aware of group membership and its importance to their well being, and this realization was produced through their language. Surprisingly, it was found that some students choose to speak in their native language as a way of showing what community they wanted to belong to. However, since children are able to discern what is deemed the negative attitudes towards their native language, they may eventually choose to speak differently (pg. 52) Students whom do not get exposure to the popular dialect are at a disadvantage. Role-playing in the classroom has helped
with this (pg.53). Children can learn through books that there are many ways of saying the same thing by the use of varying dialects.

Heath (1982) explains that “the culture children learn as they grow up is, in fact, ways of taking meaning from the environment around them, which is often interpreted as natural, rather than learned” (pg. 49). Heath focuses on the interaction between children and their parents regarding their language acquisition through bedtime stories. According to Heath (1982), “this familiar ritual has been advertised in many places and in several ways because children are able to relate their experiences to events that happen in books, which produces a conversation between the parent and child” (pg. 78-79). Therefore, children who are read to and surrounded by a literate environment (pictures, print, discussions, etc.) are able to adapt to the school Discourse easier than children who do not receive any of this at home. “Between the ages of two and six, children can imitate the walk and talk of others, such as how to converse with others” (Heath, 1982, pg. 87). As children grow, they are observing, learning, and beginning to practice the behaviors demonstrated that they see and hear in their environments. Whatever is being practiced comes into the classroom.

**Research Questions**

1. Do children know and understand the difference between African American Vernacular English and Standard English?

2. Given that most African American children speak African American Vernacular English at home, do they write in African American Vernacular English or Standard English on school assignments?
Finding Middle Round 9

3. Given a different audience of people (family, friends, community members, etc.)
to speak to, do African American children codeswitch between the African
American Vernacular English and Standard English?

**Literature Review**

The research literature on how linguistic diversity informs literacy development
indicates that students who speak a different language than that which is valued in the
classroom struggle. Laman and Van Sluys (2009) found that non-English speaking
students struggled in an English language classroom both as speakers and writers. The
authors found that students began to experience success when allowed to bring their
native languages into the classroom and teach their classmates something of their
language. Similarly, Hughes and Wineman (2008) found that multilingual learners were
able to succeed in the classroom if they were given opportunities to use writing and
drawing to build social relationships within the classroom. In both studies, success came
about when the children were able to use language and literacy to interact with one
another. These studies, however, leave the question of how to build language and literacy
skills among students who all speak the same vernacular but who may not be familiar
with the type of language and literacy expected in school.

The research literature on how linguistic diversity informs literacy development
indicates that students who speak a different language than that which is valued in the
classroom struggle academically, especially in reading and writing. This issue is
primarily known as the Black-White achievement gap. Thompson, Craig, and
Washington (2004) found that some African American children speak African American
Vernacular English at the time of school entry. Children who speak a variety of
Finding Middle Round 10

nonstandard Standard American English potentially are a disadvantage when compared to their majority peers because standardized assessment instruments, curriculum, and instruction are based on Standard American English vocabulary and linguistic rules. The authors found that failure of African American students to learn Standard American English grammatical rules have been attributed to delayed development in Standard American English reading and writing. Authors found that the ability to dialect shift contributes to achievement outcomes in positive ways when African American students with low African American Vernacular English outperformed students who had more of the vernacular. Craig et al. (2009) found that the Black-White achievement gap indicates two factors contributing to the gap are the type of home literacy practices and the nature of early reading instruction. The authors found that, compared to their mainstream peers, most African American students are less likely read to daily, have fewer books, and less exposure to literacy materials similarly, they found that students between first and fifth grades, who spoke less African American Vernacular English scored higher on academic assessments than their peers who spoke more. Therefore, African American students learn to shift away from dialect forms to SAE equivalents across the elementary grades.

The research literature on African American code switching, or dialect change within the classroom indicates that there is a decline in the amount of African American Vernacular English and an increase in the amount of Standard American English beginning in the third grade on up According to Thompson, Craig, and Washington (2004), during the early elementary grades, students who speak a nonstandard dialect have a gradual shift that reflects the language of the majority culture, and this is generally apparent in seven to eight year olds. There was also a downward shift during oral reading
from second to fifth grades. Although African Americans may enter school with more of their dialect, there is a dramatic decline in the amount of it that they use throughout their schooling.

The research literature on how African American students feel isolated and that they are wrong because of their dialect difference indicates that students often have to compromise their identity in order to be successful. Hill (2009) found that in academic writing, students had to compromise their voice and sense of identity. The author found that when the African American students’ paper were corrected, or edited, by their English teacher, those students felt violated, singled out, and offended that they were being asked to change how they had written a paper because they were the only ones who spoke a deviation from Standard English. The article explained that the teacher did value his students’ home language and provides a space for students when writing informally for students to recognize their dialectal differences. In the school being attended, there is a minority of teachers who welcome the nature of discourse. Therefore, when a cultural mismatch occurs, teachers often assume a deficit when students’ linguistic and cultural differences do not align with school. It was mentioned that teachers need to affirm their own culturally identities and that of their students, so that they are being culturally relevant.

Florio-Ruane (2001) explained that the lack of cultural understanding reinforces that European American teachers sense of “us” as normal and “them” as abnormal. Weinstein (2004) suggests the importance of maintaining a commitment to building caring classroom communities, for students respond better upon knowing that teachers treat them like people and care about them personally and educationally.
Similarly, Pasour (2004) found that although black and white educational discourses have intersected with each other, the dominant (white) discourse is overpowering. She asserts that teachers are the power figures of the classroom, but the power is not about competition, it is about connection, construction, and caring. The author found that African American teachers, specifically women, become nurturers and advocates for their students. These studies, however, pose the question of how can teachers become more culturally relevant to African American students to allow them to maintain their identity while having it compromised at times.

**Method**

**Context**
Heart Academy is a public school in the Rochester City School District. It is an expeditionary learning school that endorses Inquiry Based Learning as its primary mode of instruction, which focuses on a learning process that is interactive and exploratory. Learning occurs through planned Learning Expeditions. Each grade level plans two Learning Expeditions a year, culminating in an Exhibition Celebration. Along with having high standards of academic excellence, students’ character is just as important. Each classroom has a morning meeting, as it is designed to set the tone for the classroom environment and the school. Once a week the entire school community gathers for a school wide Morning Meeting. This is our time to celebrate our learning as a whole school and share our successes and wonderful ideas.

Heart Academy is considered a citywide school primarily because it is located near downtown Rochester. Enrollment of students is based on a lottery system. There are two classrooms per grade level: a general education classroom and an inclusive classroom. Since 2006, enrollment has decreased due to honoring smaller class sizes.
However, the enrollment number is beginning to increase with the school’s recent addition of the seventh grade. Each year, the school plans to add a new grade, and will eventually become a kindergarten through twelfth grade building. Current enrollment is approximately 450 students. The average class size has remained consistent in the mid-twenties. Most students receive free or reduced lunch. The school consists of primarily African-American students, followed by Hispanic students, to Caucasian, to Asian. The attendance rate is at an all time high and over the years, suspensions has always been at an all time low to eventually none. The Rochester City School District practices zero tolerance for suspensions for elementary schools, and if a student is need of suspension, he or she has in-school suspension.

Heart Academy has a model citizen’s pledge, which is said over the morning announcements after the pledge. All students are expected to say it. In the pledge, the ten design principles that the school promotes are elaborated. They include Diversity and Inclusion, Responsibility for Learning, Empathy and Caring, Solitude and Reflection, Self-Discovery, The Having of Wonderful Ideas, Natural World, Collaboration and Competition, and Success and Failure. Students are expected to follow these life long principles as they learn throughout their day. Students play a major role in how things are ran in the school, because they are the ones who run it. Some of the extracurricular activities include Game Club, Post Office Crew, Supply City Crew, Poetry Crew, Docent Crew, Safety Crew, Step Team, etc. For the seventh graders, each core and special subject has a club that meets after school on different days.

Participants
For this study, I selected four participants. There are two African-American females, one African-American male, and one biracial male. When recruiting participants for this study, I selected students who were interested in being part of it, as well as are responsible for completing work. The selected students are in two of my highest reading groups, based on the Developmental Reading Assessment, however these students do not work to their full potential.

**Ian** is an African-American male, who lives with his mother and father. He is an only child and is ten years old. He reads at a medium sixth grade reading level. Ian is a very polished young man, and comes from a very supportive and polished family.

**Elise** is a ten year old girl, who has great potential to go far in life. She enjoys reading and uses often as an outlet to release stress. Elise enjoys learning and reads at a seventh grade reading level. Elise has a lot of bottled up anger and often seeks help for releasing it. I am hoping she will consider writing as an option.

**Kayle** is also an African-American ten year old girl. She enjoys reading and writing, but does not like to work much. She lives with both of her parents, who are involved in the school, and she is involved in several extracurricular activities in the school. She is very quiet, and has an older brother who attends the same school. Kayle reads at a high seventh grade reading level.

**Javion** is a ten year old boy. He is biracial, in that he is both African-American and Caucasian. He lives with his mom and four older and younger brothers. His mom is very supportive and involved in the school. Javion is involved in several extracurricular activities in the school and he reads at a high eighth grade reading level.

*Researcher Stance*
After graduating from high school in the Rochester City School District, I pursued my Liberal Arts in Sciences degree at Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York in 2003, where I focused primarily on psychology and education. After which, I attended Nazareth College of Rochester, where I obtained my Bachelor of Arts degree in 2007. While attending Nazareth, I majored in English and minored in Education. Through Nazareth’s Quad Inclusive education program, I received certification in the following areas: General Education grades 1-6, General Education grades 7-9, Special Education Grades 1-6, and Special Education grades 7-9, and am considered a Content Specialist in English. Subsequently, I enrolled in Saint John Fisher’s Graduate Literacy program in 2008, where I will receive certification from birth to grade twelve. I am a member of the Rochester Area Literacy Council, the International Reading Association, Council for Exceptional Children, and recently became a member of the National Council for English Teachers. This is my second year of teaching fifth grade in the Rochester City School District.

The issue of Ebonics plays an integral role as to why I decided to study this concept. I became shocked as this rising phenomena became controversial across the states because it directly affects my culture. I believe that several things are systematically done, and when I found out that the way I talk was being studied, I thought this was just another one of those ways that the government wanted to find out more about the African American culture in order to marginalization of our culture. Of course that was my naïve response to something I was not educated about until later. And therefore, as an educator, my opinion has differed. Some researchers say that the study of Ebonics, or African-American Vernacular, or African-American Dialect, or Broken
English, is a way of others in society to understand the meaning behind the talk. There were translators provided on websites, which shocked me. As I reflected on the dialogues in my household when I was growing up, I do not remember a time where I was taught how to speak “correctly,” nor do I remember teachers telling me how to do so. I feel like talking to different audiences was something I learned through observation, especially being the youngest in my family, and through exposure to different environments.

However, my mother’s upbringing was with Standard English and she did like to correct her children whenever something was said and pronounced “wrong,” but her main point was to get her children to articulate, as well as speak correct grammar. Therefore, my upbringing consisted of code-switching between the vernacular and the Standard.

While growing up, and still today, I often hear African-American children say that when another African-American person may be speaking with emphasis, articulation, and in the “standard” way, that type of talk is considered talking “white.” However, I believe that the children saying that may have not been exposed to the various Discourses, or maybe the audiences that different Discourses are used. My goal is to help students understand that the different Discourses do exist in the world, and that they need to learn them and use them when necessary. Often, people write the way they talk as well. If I can allow the participants to record and write down their conversations in their dialects, and see if they can change it as if they were speaking to someone else, then a seed has grown.

**Method**

I will be observing the participants behavior, as far as body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and Discourse used in varying audiences, such as with myself, their
parent(s)/guardian(s), the principal, their friends, teachers whom they like or don’t like, younger children within the school. I will be observing this on a daily basis, every other week, and for 10 minutes for each child. I will be trying different teaching methods, such as the participants observing my behavior with others I encounter during the day, such as other teachers, the principal, parents, students (younger and older), my friends, and my family. I will record conversations with my friends and family members, and expect the participants to do the same. Students will analyze their own work first by looking for any similarities or differences in the way they talk to different people. If there are any similarities or differences, students need to infer why that is. We will look at reader’s theatre scripts so students can have an example of how to scribe their recorded conversations. Conversations can be recorded up to 5 minutes, and only three conversations will be reviewed. The teaching setting will be will vary from entire group, to one to one conference.

Informed Consent

Prior to working with my selected participants, I gave each parent a letter explaining what I was doing for my project. If they were interested in having their child a part of this experience, they needed to sign a permission slip attached and schedule a meeting time to meet with me one on one, so that I could clarify anything, answer any questions, etc. I spoke with each of their parents individually. I wanted parents to know what my objective was, and that it was not to find out any personal business. I explained how I wanted the conversations to be as natural as possible in order to receive accurate data, and to not do or say anything different because they are being recorded. I explained
the confidentiality involved and how the information obtained is being used for research purposes only, and actual names will be replaced with anonymous ones.

**Data Collection**

In order to answer my question, I began by giving my students a questionnaire that asked them several questions about language (Appendix A). I wanted to know if my students knew that they may subconsciously change something in their language when talking to different people. I created an assignment for students to audio record three different people: someone they live with (family member), a friend, and another adult in the community (church member, coach, librarian, etc). Students were required to record their conversation for at least five minutes, and then transpose their conversations into dialogue scripts that they could use during a Reader’s Theatre center. After rehearsing each other’s scripts, students were given the opportunity to try to put each other’s scripts in the Standard English, in the event that a dialect was used. For example, looking at a script that someone wrote from a dialogue with a friend, would be rewritten as if the person was speaking to the principal.

As a fifth grade teacher, I am required to teach verb tense and agreement. My students are given a state exam that includes an editing section. This particular data was something I assessed throughout the school year through benchmarks and baseline exams.

Finally, I collected my students’ reader response journals. The response journals were teacher created responses/questions (Appendix B) and modeled since the beginning of the school year. There are twelve different responses, and within those responses, students are required to read from a chapter book on their reading level and respond to
one of the response question assigned or chosen by themselves. It is in this journal that I can critique, or assess student writing. A rubric was created for students to evaluate themselves on how they respond to the question. Lastly, because fifth graders have to take a New York State English Language Arts exam where they have to correct editing errors, I used some of that information to figure out whether the participants were able to make the necessary corrections or not.

**Limitations**

The authenticity of the assignment was very limited. One of the main limitations came from the dialogue scripts. In the beginning of the study, I discussed ways of how to record an authentic conversation. I advised students to allow their potential conversationalists that they might be recorded some time soon for a study they were doing for their teacher. I explained that their parents already gave their consent by signing the permission forms. I suggested the best times to do a recording and to not reveal the audio device being used. I informed the students to try to record a conversation without the other person knowing.

After reviewing the dialogue scripts, I noticed a couple of them ending with, “Ask Miss Simmons if this is enough.” That statement informs me that the participants were aware of being recorded at the time of the conversation, which means that the authenticity of the conversation was absent since participants knew they were being recorded. Also, I noticed that students did not record their conversations for at least five minutes. When using the dialogue scripts for role playing, I noticed that some of the conversations lasted for only 1-2 minutes. Although, I was able to use the amount of conversation that was provided, I believe that if given more, I would have been able to
find out more information. Therefore, I do not believe that I received much information to use about how a dialect may change.

Other limitation to this study was that I had to use other unintended resources due to student’s lack of returning the given assignments in a timely fashion. Students would tell me that they forgot to bring it in, or did not have time to write out their scripts, although class time was provided for this. As a courtesy, I did not assign homework any other homework in order to help them complete the assignments.

**Data Analysis**

Based on the literature on AAVE I coded the data for two concepts; verb agreement and the use of “be.” I selected these two concepts because the literature indicated that verb Agreement plays a major role in the African-American Vernacular English. In this dialectal form, verb agreement is usually used opposite from Standard English and the use of the word “be” is a common word identified in AAVE. Furthermore, the school requires that I teach verb agreement. Coding for these two grammatical patterns allowed me to see how common discourse patterns from every day talk appeared in writing.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Verb Agreement**

Verb Agreement plays a major role in the African-American Vernacular English. In this dialectal form, verb agreement is usually used opposite from Standard English. I found that the boys had a harder time with this than the girls. When looking over their reader response journals, I found that the boys would write, “There is a couple of things I
wished in this section. One of them is I wish the boys father wasn’t in the army.” The boys wrote is, where they should have written are to make it plural. In a different response, the one of the boys wrote, “Chris and Greg wants a girl for the school dance because they never got a girl in their life!” The male does not realize that he does not need to make the word want plural in this case. Another response from one of the male journals indicates, “One of my favorite parts is that Muhammad trying”….;” instead it should be written that Muhammad is trying. The absence of the word “is” is displaying the African American Vernacular in the writing. Although the AAVE was present, it was only present in some of the responses. This was also apparent for the males on the practice editing tasks. I noticed that when given the editing assignment to do on their own, one of the boys would skip over the incorrect verb agreement, and therefore would lose a point.

**The Use of “Be”**

The use of the word “be” is a common word identified in AAVE. This was apparent in conversations with friends during lunch time. This was seen more in the boys than in the girls. Some of the phrases included: “I don’t be doing that!” “She be like you gonna call me?” “Where they be going anyway?,“ He be calling me all late.” Then I text him like “Where you be at?” These are only some of the common phrases I noticed during my observations.

In my weekly observations, the girls still used Standard English when speaking with their friends. While conversing with friends, if one of the friends spoke in AAVE, Elise would inform her friend how to say the same thing in Standard English versus
Kayle, who would not say anything at all. Kayle would simply speak in Standard English at all times.

**Awareness of AAVE Use**

Based on the transcripts of the dialogues, students are fully aware of differences in the way they talk to other audiences. When given the questionnaire, all students answered no to knowing what a dialect was. They all answered yes to speaking differently when speaking to their friends or other adults. They all believe that they write the same way that they speak. Out of all of the participants, only one of the girls said she knew what code-switching is. Which I later found out that she mistook it for something else. All of the participants agreed to know what talking “white” meant, and their explanations gave similarities of speaking correct grammar.

Based on my daily observations, I noticed that the boys did not speak much to others. If they did speak, it was usually to other boys during lunch time. I tried to observe them more closely during the lunch period since they sit in the room with the teachers, and since this is the time to be with friends, they might speak in the language more comfortable or acceptable to their group of belonging. What I found was that the boys did use AAVE when conversing with their friends, and slang as well. For the girls I noticed that one of them consistently spoke in Standard English, while the other code switched between the two. However, she would also correct her friends, who were speaking in AAVE to Standard English when they spoke it.

When conversing with me, I found most students speaking in Standard English. I noticed that some students would speak in AAVE with me, and others would code switch
by speaking in AAVE, and then changing or restating what they said to Standard English. I found it interesting that those students who would change their AAVE to Standard English when conversing with me, because I wonder if they assumed that was the “correct” or acceptable way for students to speak to their teacher. Or if they thought that was what I wanted to hear, or at least prove they could speak in Standard English. I found myself at times, “correcting” their speech actively or passively. For example, if a student would say, “me and my friends,” I would say, “You mean my friends and I?” and the student would correct themselves. Or I would simply repeat a sentence spoken in AAVE to Standard English. For example, if a student said, “When we going to gym?” I would say, “When are we going to gym?”

Based on my findings, these students are aware that they speak a dialect. The dialect is spoken more with their friends versus an adult in oral and written conversations. Students seem to write the same way they talk. Interestingly enough, out of the four participants, only two of them did not use AAVE in his or her writing or during conversations. The two that did this were the girls. Although the literature review (Wheeler, 2004) indicates that as students move up in grades, from primary grades to intermediate grades, they lose much of their dialect and gradually use more of the Standard English, this seems to be more apparent in the girls’ oral language and writing than in the boys.

After reviewing Kayle’s and Elise’s writing journals, they both have mastered how to use Standard English in their academic writing. However, when it comes to having a written conversation, or free write, I noticed that Kayle continues to write in Standard English, whereas Elise will use more of the African American Vernacular
English or at least code switch between the two dialects. This is similar in the boys as well.

Ian writes and speaks in Standard English form whether he is being formal or informal. Although he has friends who accept him, some of the boys have questioned. “Why does he talk like that?” Meaning, why does Ian use Standard English instead of AAVE. Javion, on the other hand, does not write in Standard English whether it is informal or not. He has had much trouble writing in Standard English. And although the literature review indicates that people do not speak the same way they talk, and vice versa, Ian shows that some people do. Because of this analysis, I believe that the two participants, who stay consistent in speaking Standard English, have Standard English as the primary English in their home settings because these students write that way whether it is formal or informal. Whenever speaking with parents at a conference, school event, or over the phone, I noticed that most speak in Standard English, and one of them would code switch. The assumption made is that the two students who speak Standard English with no problem probably have parents and other guardians who primarily speak Standard English in the home more than African American Vernacular because it is the exposure and being immersed into the language that allows for the Standard English to be more prevalent in their daily interactions. The participants, who may only hear their home language at home, do have the ability to code-switch between African American Vernacular and Standard English.

In the reading response journals, I gave a grade based on the rubric after each response and made comments that celebrated what they did correctly and told them how to improve on the next response. One of my recurring comments was to review the
teacher models at the beginning of their books. The teacher modeled Standard English and correct grammar usage. Overtime, as indicated in previous research, the males eventually grew out of using the incorrect verb agreement. Also, the more I referred students to use the teacher models in helping them to achieve a high score on their response, may have influenced the use of Standard English form.

One thing I did not notice was whether or not the students felt a loss of their identity when code switching to Standard English. I believe that the students feel comfortable knowing Standard English because they have a purpose for using it at any given time. They have to refine speaking in that dialect, as it is secondary to their home dialect.

Implications

Just like a foreign language, children learn more, and pick up quickly on other languages, or dialects, when they are immersed in it. Because many of the students who live in urban areas may not receive exposure to the Standard English language, it is the job of the teacher to model this language in the classroom to give students that exposure. By immersing students into the language on a daily basis, students will eventually begin to speak it themselves. If not, students will continue to speak in their own dialect, as well as whatever form of English is being spoken in the classroom, whether it is AAVE or not. Based on the literature review, students learn to speak Standard English better when the teacher teaches it passively, through modeling, instead of actively, by stopping the student as soon as they say something in their dialect and make them say it in Standard English (Wheeler, 2004). When teachers attempt to actively teach students how to speak Standard English, they are rejecting that particular student’s home language and
culture in the classroom, leaving students to feel inferior, isolated, and not accepted (Hill, 2009).

Teachers need to create time for students to socialize in different audiences in order to get practice of using their dialect and using Standard English. Students already socialize daily with their peers. One way to make it authentic and fun would be to provide role playing. Teachers need to also provide informal and formal conversations within their writer’s workshop in the classroom. Teachers need to make sure that they allow students the opportunity for free writing as a way to acknowledge their students’ dialects and culture. That way, students get practice in how to make their sentences academically correct. Having more practice with writing in Standard English may help students understand verb agreement. Students can collaborate on writing reader theatre scripts and write scripts in their dialect and Standard English.

Teachers need to teach or explain to students the purpose of knowing Standard English, and why it is the dominant language used among various audiences. That will provide students with a purpose of getting to learn it, rather than not accepting it as their own and classifying it with only one race of people.

Most books that students are exposed to are written in Standard English, however there are several books that are written in other dialects as well. Teachers can expose their students to these particular books through read aloud, literature circles, silent sustained readings, etc. Allowing students to see the differences in how books are written will provide them with a visual of dialects, where they might compare and contrast the differences with a book written in Standard English.
Although I wonder how these implications will help male students? One rising issue continues to be how some boys are becoming reluctant readers and writers. Will these suggestions help to minimize that curve for boys? I wonder how many students, females or males, would find themselves wanting to read more books written in dialects rather than books written in Standard English? I wonder if it would be easier or become more difficult to read and/or write in dialect for speakers of the African American Vernacular English? If students are growing out of speaking in their dialects between third and fifth grades, will students want to maintain doing things in Standard English? Since the participants explained in their own word that talking “white” is speaking correct grammar, then do they automatically believe that they are talking “wrong?” However, is it all about survival through the means of communication in academia, or in the American society, or is it leaving your culture behind?

Conclusions

It is necessary for African American students to be able to code switch between their dialect and Standard English. It appears that at this age level, students are already aware about changing the way they talk to friends, as being different from how they talk to adults. Students also know that there is a difference between their formal and informal writing assignments. As long as students know when and where to “turn on and off” their home language is most important. It is not that students are losing their identities, but students are becoming linguistically diverse.
References


Delpit, L. (1995). Other People’s Children” Cultural Conflict in the Classroom.


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**Appendix A**

**Questionnaire**

1. Do you know what a dialect is?
2. Is the way you speak to your friends different from the way you speak to an adult (parents, teachers, coach, etc.)?

   YES               NO

3. Do you write the same way you speak?

   YES               NO

4. Do you know what it means to code-switch?

   YES               NO

5. Do you know what it means to talk "white?" If yes, what does it mean?

   YES               NO

6. Do you think people change the way they talk to certain people or do they talk the same no matter who it is? Explain.
Appendix B

Reading Response Journal Questions and Rubric
Reading Response Journal

The PURPOSE of the Reading Response Journal is to record your personal thoughts, ideas, and questions as you read. It is also to help you learn how to support all of your thoughts and ideas with details from the story AND your own experiences.

1. What did you like and/or dislike? Give several examples and explain why using details from the text.

2. What do you wish had happened? Explain why using details from the text.


4. How did you feel as you read? Give several examples and explain in detail what happened in the story to make you feel this way.

5. Explain the connections you had as you read the chapter. What kind are they: T-t, T-s, and/or T-w? Explain exactly what in the book you are connecting to AND what in your experiences, another text, and/or the world you are connecting it with.

6. What questions did you have before, during, and after you read? Explain which ones were answered and how. If they were not answered, explain what you think the answer may be.

7. If you were in the character's shoes, what would you have done? Explain what happens in the text AND why and how you would have done it differently.

8. Would you want the main character as your bff? Explain why or why not using details from the text.


10. What ideas/principles does this chapter reflect? Explain using details from the text.

11. Compare two or more characters in the book and compare the character with yourself. Explain your answer using details from the text AND your experiences.

12. Summarize the chapter you read in your own words. Think of the beginning, middle, and end.
Appendix C

Samples of Reader Responses
Bud Not Buddy 2.24.10
PG 4
11, ch. 18 Christopher P. Curtis

10 year old man who owned his own club
(Pg 246) entrepreneur

pg 11
There are many characters to comp.

in chapter 18 the two characters I'm going to compare are Herman and Bud.

Herman is mean, bossy, has a very short temper, and nosy.

Bud is kind hearted, has patience, and never gives up.

Herman is bossy because he demanded that Bud hands over his rocks to him instead of asking politely. He showed his short temper and nosiness by threatening Bud to tell him where he got the rocks from and asking him questions.
Clariﬁcations:
1. sergeant (pg. 190) - noncommissioned ofﬁcer in the army or marine corps
2. desked (pg. 190) - unannounced person
3. mortar (pg. 171) - a building material

Response #9

Perry is the main character in chapter 6. I would not want to have him as my bff because he would not tell me everything that happened and he is in the war. I would not want Perry as my bff because he would not tell me everything in a letter.
Finding Middle Round 36

(Figure B.continued)

if I wanted him to. Bffs are supposed to tell each other everything. When Perry was writing a letter to Kenny, he was going to tell him about the killing but he didn't. Also, I wouldn't want to have him as my bff because he is in the war and I would be so sad if he got killed. It would be as sad as when Miss Nina got killed.

These are the reasons I would not want Perry as my bff. I wouldn't want him as my bff because he wouldn't tell me everything and because he is in the war.
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Mildred D. Taylor

Chapter 6, Response #4

Classifications:
- suled (pg. 112): To remain silent
- wuy (pg 130): twisted or perverted as in meaning
- cimmon (pg 131): a large smooth twist, roller knot of hair worn by women at the nape of the neck or back of head.

Reader Response #4

There are several ways I felt while reading chapter 6. Some of the ways I felt were happy, scared, and sad.

I felt happy because Uncle Hammer stuck up for Cassie and was happy that she told the
Finding Middle Round 38

(Figure C. continued)
(Figure C. continued)
There are a couple things I wanted in this text. One of them was
I wish the boys were doing the only
that sometimes I wish the boys
grandmother was always in the house.
I wished the boys father
wasn't in the army because he barely ever gets to see them.
Rather, I wished the boys great
mother wasn't always in the house because she is always bored.
These are my wishes in this
text.

(Figure D.)
There is one thing I will do if I were the boy. If I were the boy, I would wake up early to see my grandma. I would wake up and be happy to see my grandma because I love my grandma. This is one thing I will do if I were the boy. I would wake up and be happy to see my grandma.

(Figure D. continued)
Appendix D

Literature Review Process

Years Searched: 1990-2010

Databases Searched in Lorette Wilmot Library

* Eric
* Ebscohost
* Education Abstract

Terms Searched:

* Writing
* Codeswitching
* African American Vernacular English
* Ebonics
* Standard English
* African American children
* Black children
* Dialects
* Discourses
* Foreign Language
* Oral and Written Languages