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**INCLUSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH
IN THE CLASSROOM**

by
Chris Roye-Gill

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
July 24, 2011

Dissertation Chair: James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.

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Dedication

To my late grandmother Mildred Wright-Roye (Mum), and my mother Rosa Virginia - Roye (Gin), who taught me the importance of discerning when to be satisfied with the way life is and when to take action to change it.

To my friend, partner and enthusiast, Charles Gill Junior, who together we have possibly spent more time 'waiting' than one life time should have to endure.

Thankfully, the waiting has always been worth it.

To my daughter Christi Danielle Gill, who began teaching me what it was to be patient and focused in pursuit of my dreams as she pursued her own; I look forward to calling her Dr. Gill.

To my daughter Chaz Macy Gill, who always said "It's okay, keep working" and really meant it. She is gifted and talented beyond all expectation.

To my sister Marsha, who knows what is sometimes hidden behind the smile; I love you.

And, to Terri-Lynne who is nothing short of inspirational.

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Much love, thanks and appreciation to my cohort members in the educational doctoral program, who made it okay to laugh with and at each other. I want to particularly thank Althea Kelsey-Chism who was the iron in my blood and always just a phone call away.

Abstract

Chris Roye-Gill
INCLUSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH
IN THE CLASSROOM
2010/2011
James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.
Doctorate in Educational Leadership

A plethora of research exists citing the poor academic performance of African American children in this country (D'Angiulli, Siegel, & Maggi, 2004; Labov, 1971, 1995; Miranda, Webb, Brigman, & Peluso, 2007). A large amount of the research is specific to reading deficits identified with African American students. Students who are successful readers are also successful in the other content areas. Lytel and Botel (1990) along with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE, 2009) contend that literacy encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and understanding. They go further to say that if one is to acquire these skills, learning has to be relevant.

Sword and Wheeler (2004) contend that the traditional pedagogical practices create barriers for the child who struggles to learn mainstream American English as these methods are exclusionary and say his language is error-filled or incorrect. If teachers are to be effective in the classroom, they must create a way to overcome these linguistic barriers. A welcoming culture is crucial to the promotion of human learning, and only when we invite the "whole" child into our classroom will we be contributing to this element of school culture (Barth, 2002). When we include the students' home language we are including his culture thereby helping him make meaning from and connect to the instruction. To include African American Vernacular English in the classroom validates the language and culture of those students who possess it as their primary language.

Additionally, to include African American Vernacular can provide teachers with the tool they need to be more effective.

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Chapter I

Introduction

With the onset of the national “No Child Left Behind” legislation, student achievement has been viewed from the perspective of standardized testing, teacher quality, parental involvement, reading, and study skills as well as after-school programming and school choice as areas of concern. Often strategies have been tried in combination with one another to improve achievement. However, despite some recent gains among African American students, data from statewide and national tests show that reading achievement gaps by race still persist. According to Perie, Grigg, and Donahue (2005) the average reading score for African American eighth graders was 243, while the average for White eighth graders was 271. While studying the achievement gap issue, researchers have identified several factors as pertinent in this disparity between African American students and their White peers. Hoy, Hannum, and Tschannen-Moran (1998), when discussing organizational climate found that teacher professionalism was positively related to student achievement. Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht (2003) emphasize the effects of stereotype threat on the test taking performance of African Americans.

In addition to the disparity in achievement, research has also identified that those students who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups drop out at higher rates than White students (Rumberger, 2000) (Lee & Burkam,2000). Adding to this disturbing data is the idea that the exact moment when students actually leave school and the process of disengaging from the teaching learning process often begins well before students arrive at the decision to leave. Scholars such as Entwistle, Alexander, and Olson

(1997) (as cited in Lee and Burkam, 2000) suggest that the snowballing progression of school disengagement may begin as early as the first grade. Clearly, there are far too many minority students who are not connected to the teaching/ learning process; the process that currently excludes their culture (Wheeler & Swords, 2004). Teachers are not teaching if students are not learning.

Background to the Study

The two days I spent at the Urban Educators Summit in Atlantic City, New Jersey in the summer of 2005 did not mimic that of other retreats. My curriculum support teacher and I always approached professional development workshops optimistically waiting for what we were going to see or hear. We were very similar in that way; not at all engaging in the disgruntled conversations that seasoned teachers tend to have. These are the kinds of conversations that Kegan and Lahey (2001) indicate occur when people are in the default mode. They further state within this dialogue mode are common themes of complaint, disappointment, and criticism running throughout. Instead, even after nearly 20 years of teaching, we each looked forward to obtaining information that promised to help us to be more effective in our jobs.

The subject matter was specifically African American and Latino education and while I could not fathom how the educators present would feasibly discuss the instruction of these two groups without including their White counterparts; they did. Culture made the difference. It is not to say that the presenters did not elaborate on topics such as classroom management, parental involvement, or student achievement the way many other workshops had; they absolutely did. It was how they discussed these topics. At very relevant junctures comments were included that referenced the culture of the students.

For example, the discussion about parental involvement offered many suggested strategies with research from pertinent authors to support it. However, in addition to the written facts were the experiences of the educator/presenters themselves sharing with us how the approach would benefit the Hispanic father when “machismo” virtually embodies the Latino male. The same was true about the discussion on classroom management provided by two small-framed White women who acknowledged the continuous emasculation of the Black male and the importance of responding differently in the classroom to behaviors that may erupt. Each workshop continued with discourse like this.

This Workshop was amazingly different for my colleague and I. To begin, we had never participated in professional development that was specific to these two groups. We had often been present when, to make a point, the facilitator expressed statistics on the achievement levels of these two groups. It was typical to hear results of mathematics and writing assessments of African Americans (AA) and Hispanics compared to White students. These results, for example, showed a lower average scale score for African Americans and Hispanics in math than Whites, and an 18-21% difference for Blacks and Hispanics scoring below basic in writing performance (Powell & Arriola, 2003). But nothing that spoke about viable instructional strategies that may connect the students’ culture in the classroom. Bolman and Deal (2003) provide the definition of culture from Hofstede (1984) as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (p. 248). The presenters were taking typically known, research-based strategies and discussing their uses, but making a distinction between how to utilize them with African Americans and Latinos specifically.

Additionally, the presenters were clearly comfortable speaking about the cultural aspects of these two groups or their pertinence to educating children. There were African American, Latino, and White presenters who were both male and female, who were each equally comfortable speaking about the cultural considerations of these two groups. Obviously discussions of this type were not new to this district. Clearly they had made a point of dialoging about the cultural lives of their students more frequently than others of us; specifically those of us at the 58th Street Middle School. Obviously culture mattered.

I did not know what other educators would say if asked about the inclusion of the culture of their students in the classroom or building, but prior to those two days I would have answered in the affirmative. Until that day it was satisfactory to purchase materials that were diverse and simply plan activities around African American culture. However, as identified by Danielson (2004), while discussing reflective teaching practices, activities that are not connected to the objective have little to no effect on student achievement. We had had little effect on our students. The same feelings were spawned in my curriculum support teacher as well. We spoke later at great length about our desired plans to address the current practices of our teachers that exclude culture at the 58th Street Middle School. The facilitators of the African American/Latino Summit had a clear understanding of what distinguishes their students from others and therefore how to more effectively program for them. It could be beneficial to our students academically if the teachers took culture, specifically language, into consideration when planning instruction.

As educators we have experienced dozens of professional development hours learning new strategies that we are told will raise test scores and boost student

achievement. However, the problem continues to exist in much the same way as it always has. Through the literature that Collier (1989) shared, they suggest that the lack of continuing first language (L1) cognitive development during second language acquisition may lead to lowered proficiency levels in the second language and in cognitive academic growth. The synthesis of the research collected now forced me to search for ways the vernacular of some African Americans, and thereby the culture, could be taken into consideration the same way Spanish is taken into account for Hispanic students. To include the culture by including the language would be an attempt to improve achievement in schools through more effective instructional practices that are most closely aligned to the needs of the students; this would require a willingness to think outside of the box.

A Conversation About Culture

The term Ebonics was catapulted onto the worldwide stage through the media as it gained the attention of linguists, sociologists, legislators, educators, and even laymen during the 1998 Oakland California debate in which federal tax dollars were sought to support Limited English Proficiency (LEP) classes for African American students much the way Hispanic students received additional instructional supports. This debate grew specifically out of the December 18, 1996 resolution in which the Oakland, California school board defined Ebonics as the native language of the 28,000 African American students in the district (Baugh, 2000).

Unfortunately, many in the field of linguistics have argued repeatedly over a concise and precise term or definition that encompass the understanding of the deviations from Mainstream American English made by some descendents of the African slave.

Along with himself, Baugh (2000) identifies Smith (1992), and Williams (1997) as proponent of the term Ebonics, which Williams (1997) categorized as Ebony language to reference the communication patterns of this population. In that respect Baugh (2000) is opposed to the term Black English, or African American Vernacular English, which McWhorter (1998) referenced simply as one of the many “dialects” that developed through language change that occurred over the decades. Dialect, according to Pearson, Velleman, Bryant, and Charko (2009), is defined as a regional variety of a language, with differences in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Language, according to Craig, Zhang, Hensel, and Quinn (2009) is defined as communication with words, the speech of a country, region, or group of people, including its vocabulary, syntax, and grammar. As an educator I feel enough similarities exist between these definitions to ignore linguists’ arguments and instead simply move to address the deviations from Mainstream American English as they plague some students’ speaking and writing.

While I have opted to utilize one term over another for the purposes of my research, as an educator I am not apt to be held to the same constraints of defining the term as the aforementioned socio-linguists. Simply put, it need not be an espoused definition of the cultural language system our children bring that my K-12 colleagues and I seek. Educators should be in search of methods that improve teacher effectiveness by including the language system of some who are descendants of the African slave, for the purpose of improving student achievement. Further, it is this same argument over which term more clearly defined the language that caused the confusion in Oakland, grew throughout America, and diverted the attention away from the needs of the students.

Whether the term chosen is Black English, Ebonics, or African American Vernacular English (AAVE) the one concept these scholars agree on is their criticisms of the earlier research conducted by Berenstein (1961), Bereiter and Engleman (1966), and Jensen (1969) (as cited in Baugh, 2000) that presumes cognitive deficits of some racial groups based on language use versus the cognitive superiority of others. The perception was that any language deviating from the standard was substandard and due at least in part to intelligence. Undoubtedly this manner of thought comes with its own controversies, as it suggests inferiority of some ethnic groups by inferring the superiority of others. However, what is prevalent and in receipt of attention from all related professions is the disparity that exists in the achievement of African American students in America versus their White counterparts and what role language may play.

Educators such as Collier (1989) propose that language is connected to cognitive ability and with performance in academic subjects; therefore, I believe we should begin to look at language as a root cause of the lack of achievement in many of our students who are descendents of the African slave. Wheeler and Swords (2004) contend that beyond linguistic structure, cultural conflict lies at the heart of why schools fail African Americans. The present exclusionary instructional practices embedded within many K-12 curriculums are examples of this continued failure. How do we justify continuing to ignore culture when looking at the acquisition of Mainstream American English? More to the point is whether teachers are as effective as they presume to be when excluding their students' culture.

This project could have easily been an exercise in the demonstration of language acquisition and a student's ability to successfully acquire a second language.

Conceivably, to some degree, it was just that. However, it was also more than language acquisition; it was a willingness to accept the history and culture of a group of people whose ancestry is that of the African slave and the efficacy of teachers when practicing inclusion versus exclusion of the students' culture. In doing so, there had to be an identification of the perceptions of teachers, as well as parents, on the use of African American Vernacular English by their students. Additionally, there needed to be discussion surrounding the probable effects on pedagogical practices that these perceptions may cause in the classroom.

We had to be willing to openly consider the perceptions of Americans when they hear variations in the English language at any level – pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, discourse style – because it often evokes comments. People may be curious, pleased, or disapproving of others' ways of speaking depending on which variety of English is being used in what setting (Taylor, 1989). Once perceptions were openly discussed, then perhaps we would move to the point of acceptance of African American Vernacular English as the primary language of many of the students who are of African descent. In doing so we would thereby bring what Wheeler and Swords (2004) describe as a pluralistic vantage to the classroom. This pluralistic or bidialectic vantage is a more effective method of teaching and is obtained by adding to the child's linguistic repertoire more than one language variety; his home language and the standard (Godley & Minnici, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

In this action research study, as a leader I worked with teachers who implemented a curriculum that included African American Vernacular English in the classroom, which could be the tool teachers needed to improve their effectiveness with African American

students. When we began to include the language, we accepted the culture and thereby began the process of looking at what worked to instruct the entire student. This allowed the classroom to be a more respectful and comfortable place to learn for the African American student.

Impetus for the Study

The work done by Rickford, in early 1997 in California, and the work by Labov, (1972) in Philadelphia between 1969 through 1971, set the premise for my interest and actions in the area of African American Vernacular English. While both cited the egregious failure of school systems to educate African American (AA) students, Rickford (1997) presented his report as direct opposition to the California State Assembly Bill 1206 that prohibited school districts from utilizing, as part of a bilingual education program, state funds or resources for the purposes of recognition of, or instruction in, any dialect, idiom, or language derived from English. In doing so the Standard English Proficiency Program (SEP) was eliminated.

This SEP program in Oakland and throughout California was designed as instructional support of the Standard English skills of Ebonics or African American Vernacular English speakers. It had been adopted in the wake of the “black English trial” in 1979 where Judge Charles Joiner ruled that the defending school district demanded Standard English proficiency of its African American students, however made no provisions to acknowledge the legitimate language barriers imposed by the native nonstandard vernacular English of the plaintiff (Baugh, 2000).

According to Rickford (1998), this program began in 1981, and was beginning to look at utilizing the vernacular to teach the standard when the negative media coverage

emerged. Oakland was considering three different alternatives to teaching the standard; the linguistically informed approach, in which the teacher distinguishes between mistakes in reading and differences in pronunciation based on patterns of dialect. This approach was taken from the suggestions made by Labov (2001).

The next alternative was the contrastive analysis approach in which teachers draw the students' attention specifically to the differences between the vernacular and the standard language. Rickford (1998) derives this thinking from Taylor (1989) in her work in Chicago where she divided her students into two groups. One group was taught in the traditional manner while the other was taught using contrastive analysis. After 11 weeks she found an 8.5% increase in the students' use of Ebonics in their writing from the traditional teaching and 59% decrease from the contrastive analysis group.

The final approach was to introduce reading in the vernacular then switch to the standard. Rickford (1998) reports the work done by Simpkins and Simpkins (1981) where after four months of using "Bridge" readers, African American students gained 6.2 months in reading while those taught with conventional methods gained only 1.6 months in reading. It is methods such as these that Oakland was expecting to use to expand the already existing Standard English Proficiency Program (SEP). However none of these attempts were able to come to fruition due to passing of the Assembly Bill 1206.

William Labov (1972) began his research in the Philadelphia school system in 1971 where he, like Rickford (1998), was concerned with the achievement gap between African American students and their White counterparts. He looked at the language patterns of third graders in the Cook Elementary School. It was this early work of Labov that postulated the linguistically informed approach Rickford considered in Oakland.

According to Labov (2001), teachers should make attempts at distinguishing between mistakes in reading and differences in pronunciation. An example of this from Labov (2001) is the child who may read, “I missed him” as “I miss him.”

Instead of these statements being viewed as a reproduction of its meaning through the pronunciation pattern of the students’ vernacular in which the final consonant is dropped, they are instead viewed by teachers as miscues and mistakes. In this same light Labov (1972), as cited in Rickford (1998), also found that once the students pass through the contraction stage, Ebonics is likely to proceed to a deletion (“he tall,” “he be there”). Here again this could be viewed as part of the vernacular instead of a mistake in reading. He suggests avoiding contractions in favor of using the full forms of auxiliary verbs (i.e., “he will be here”). Lastly, Labov (1972) found that Standard English sounds place more emphasis on the ends of words where African American Vernacular English may place less modification on the beginning of words.

The work of both of these men began with identification of educational concerns despite neither of them being teachers. Each was willing to view the achievement issues of African American children, from Pennsylvania to California, from a linguistic perspective indicating that there is a direct correlation between dialect and language acquisition. We know that language is very closely connected to cognitive ability and therefore performance in school. We also know that the current instructional practice using the “interrupting approach” which requires students to repeat words read in their dialect, which tells students their reading is wrong, is not working. Another consideration related to telling the student his language is wrong is the teacher’s response; this too is

crucial to student achievement. It is this question of the achievement gap that should continue to drive further studies.

Purpose of the Study

I was the principal of an urban middle school in Southwest Philadelphia, delimited in a community reported as having had the highest crime rate by the Philadelphia Inquirer in 2007 and had been described as having the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS. The student population was predominantly African American (90%) with 8% African/Haitian or Jamaican, 1% Asian, and 1% Caucasian. Although we have made the adequate yearly progress each year as required by the state, the test scores were far below that of the Pennsylvania average. The overall school scores for reading at both the proficient and advanced level on the Pennsylvania State System Assessment for the 2007-2008 school year was 27% for fifth grade and 27% for eighth; while the district wide average is 54%. Similarly, the proficient math scores for the same year were 29% in fifth grade and 28% in the eighth grade compared to the district wide average of 45%. Additionally we, like any urban middle school, have spent countless hours training, planning, and implementing intervention strategies that are marketed to improve instruction in reading and math. However, despite all of our efforts our students continued to struggle.

Those of us who have made a career within the K-12 arena, specifically that of urban education, can attest to the hours of professional development that is provided for the sake of addressing instructional practices. We must take a long look at why the amount of time and money spent on these hours has yet to impact the achievement experienced by our children. I have begun to ask the question and seek answers.

I drew on the work done with contrastive analysis and code switching by Wheeler and Swords (2004) in the third grade classroom. The intervention here was the idea of presenting to the students variations of contexts for the purpose of them gaining an understanding of how context drives the relevance of anything from clothing worn to language used. For example, Sword began by very simplistically discussing with her students the difference between the uniform worn for school versus clothing worn for church, or to play outside; she emphasized context. She then progressed into discussing why one outfit would be more appropriate than another in a specific setting or for a certain audience. This opened the door to viewing writing and speaking in context. This is the essence of contrastive analysis and code switching.

Later as her students were asked to write narratives they were more apt to give their characters a variety of language styles as well as identify and edit informal language to formal language. In this realm the writing process is less frustrating for the students who are told “re-do because you used the wrong language” and less time consuming for the teacher when making multiple revisions (corrections) to students’ work. It also makes students more responsible for their own education, which is a more effective method than just relying on the teacher.

Labov (1972), like Goodman and Goodman (2000) (as cited in Wheeler & Swords, 2004) could not find significance in the semantic and structural differences between African American Vernacular English and other dialects to conclude that these were the primary causes of reading failure in African American students. However, others such as Alim (2002), found that dialect is a source of reading interference. While there may be ambivalence to whether the variability in speech is responsible for academic

difficulties, I believe strongly that there is enough data to question the pertinence of this research within this school community.

Let us consider, for example, what Wolfram (1999) describes as the “widespread destructive myths” about language variations that teachers develop in the presence of exclusionary practices such as the traditional corrective method so widely used. These myths exist whether the teacher is White or Black and often emanate from a cultural disconnect to pedagogical practice(s) that can be destructive. Baugh (2000) refers to this as “dialect prejudice” and suggests this can reduce the expectations of teachers, thereby diminishing the child’s potential.

I explored the idea of improving teacher effectiveness through the inclusion of African American Vernacular with five teachers. To include the vernacular to teach standard language skills may increase the child’s linguistic toolbox, reduce the frustrations associated with current culturally exclusionary practices that impact teacher perceptions, and possibly improve performance and expectations of the students. To measure this, I utilized a checklist of teacher and student behaviors during my observations of the lessons as well as weekly interviews with the teachers, and a teacher survey for the participants. I was also in search of a greater understanding of my espoused transformational leadership as I looked to develop a sense of a shared responsibility between content area teachers and language arts teachers for the literacy needs of the students and secondly in building teacher leaders.

The curriculum was implemented as mini-lessons used within the Writer’s Workshop portion of the literacy program and during the test preparation period for content area teachers. These mini-lessons were presented to the students at a minimum of

one time weekly. Instruction was examined for effectiveness through the reflective process during individual and group interview sessions with each teacher, and the teacher evaluation process. The content area teachers utilized the test preparation period for instruction and class time for students' independent practice. This process had the potential to aid teachers as they (1) structured lessons that would reach more students recognizing that each had a different schema, (2) meet children where they were by understanding where they were coming from, and (3) develop lessons that were more diverse (a form of differentiation), understanding that what is germane to one may not be to another.

Research Questions

At the 58th Street Middle School we were fighting to minimize the disparity between the chronological age of our students and their reading performance. Each year teachers, administrators, and parents attempt to place culpability for the reasons why students read and performed below their expected levels; 68% of fifth graders, 62% of sixth graders, 64% of seventh graders, and 48% of the eighth graders all scored basic or below on the Pennsylvania State Systems of Assessment (PSSA) in 2009. While we were struggling to improve upon this deficit our efforts were incremental at best. We were not making the gains we needed to reach the state minimum. Given the fact that literacy encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and understanding, which are all facets of language, I believe the research demonstrated a rationale for why educators should question whether the primary language of some African American students is African American Vernacular English or Mainstream American English.

The multitude of new knowledge gained through research and the constant desire to increase the academic success of the students under my charge led me to ponder a number of significant thoughts to which I sought to find responses. For example: the true feelings of teachers about students who use African American Vernacular English in the classroom, whether teachers' pedagogical practices were impeded by their feelings about the use of AAVE by the students, and whether an environment of mutual respect between students and teacher exists if culture is negated. These are the research questions that guided my study:

- (1) How do educators currently address African American Vernacular English in their present instructional practices?
- (2) What are the perspectives of teachers and parents on African American Vernacular English and its use by students?
- (3) What supports do teachers need to deliver effective instruction that is inclusive of culture in the classroom?
- (4) What impact does the inclusion of African American Vernacular English in the classroom have on teacher effectiveness?
- (5) How can I use my leadership to develop a sense of shared responsibility among the content area teachers for the literacy needs of students and secondly, to develop teachers into teacher leaders for the purpose of transforming the organization?

Significance of Study

In my literature review I attempted to synthesize the multitude of research articles associated with the notion that the achievement of African American and Hispanic

students is consistent with the acquisition of the language learning process for each as English Language Learners. My initial hope was to provide the reader with enough information to clearly understand why it is necessary to view African American Vernacular English as the primary language of some who are descendents of the African slave brought to this country under duress and without a formal language that they could use. These circumstances created for the people the need to form their own language out of an expectation to comprehend the slave owner as well as to be able to communicate with one another. I used the work of Labov (1972), Alim (2004), and Ball (2005) along with texts from Rickford (1998) and Edgerson (2007) to provide the much needed background of AAVE. Flowers (2007) suggested that to improve the problem of African American student achievement, educators have looked at the problem through many different lenses.

This study included teacher effectiveness as one of the lenses to view achievement of the African American student. If the teacher is effective he is the primary adult for the student to turn to for academic support (Marshall, 2001). How teachers view the home language of African American students and their families plays a significant role in the expectations of teachers as well as the respect shown for the students' cultures. High expectation is considered one of the sociological factors Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht (2003) connect to effective teaching. In this light, to view AAVE for the sake of improving student achievement also becomes a look at teacher effectiveness

Conclusion

A plethora of research exists citing the poor academic performance of African American children in this country (D'Angiulli, Siegel, & Maggi, 2004; Labov, 1972,

2001; Miranda, Webb, Brigman, & Peluso, 2007), much of which is specific to the reading deficits of African American students recognizing that students who are successful in reading are also successful in the other subject areas as well. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), literacy encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and understanding, and if one is to acquire these skills learning has to be meaning-centered (Lytel & Botel, 1990).

As the child struggles to learn Mainstream American English through traditionally exclusionary methods that say his language is error-filled or incorrect, we create barriers (Wheeler & Sword, 2004). In order to be more effective in the classroom, teachers must devise a plan to take action to overcome linguistic barriers. When we include the student's home language we are including his culture and therefore are helping him make meaning from and connection to the instruction. Barth (2000) states that when we invite the "whole" child into our classrooms, we are contributing to the most crucial element of school culture – "an ethos hospitable to the promotion of human learning" (p. 11). To include African American Vernacular English in the classroom validates the language and culture of those students who have it as their primary language while providing teachers with the tool they need to be more effective. Given the current research indicating the failure of many school systems to educate African American students, one could expect that becoming more effective in the classroom would be a first priority for educators.

Chapter II

Leadership Platform

Introduction

I was raised in a matriarchal family, where neither my mother nor grandmother ever initiated conversation with each other, but lived in the same home. While I realize how incredibly strange that sounds (it was just as strange to live it), lately I have grown to view their behavior as that of two very determined women who refused to abandon their points of view no matter how much pain one caused the other. After my mother and father separated due to his physical abuse, it was my grandmother who decided we should leave Maryland, as there was nothing there for us but “agriculture.”

My grandmother wanted more for her grandchildren than the family farm could provide. She despised working in the homes on the main line, but constantly reminded us that she did so for us. Education, we were told was the key to having more and doing better. My mother had been sent to live with relatives in Philadelphia to finish high school. She later attended Bryn Mawr nursing school, however, instead of reaching the goal; she ended up pregnant with my brother by the end of her second year.

My grandmother was well read, but her formal education only extended as far as the eighth grade. I can still see the embarrassment in her face as she shared her reality with me. She did so while perusing through her box of personal treasures. In her box were yellowed newspaper articles, faded envelopes and what I took to look like tear-stained letters, all depicting the accounts down South of the hoses, sit-ins, violence, and dog attacks on her friends and family members who simply wanted more. It was out of

the “box” that she continuously reminded us that we were obligated to become educated.

I think it is very possible that without having ever discussed Dewey (1916/1944), my grandmother recognized, as did he, that the purpose of education was for the intellectual, moral, and emotional growth of the individual and, consequently, the evolution of a democratic society (Rogers, 2002). Once I became a mother I had the overwhelming feeling to “fix the world” and make it right for my children to exist in. I think it is possible that my grandmother wanted education to level our playing field as she waited for the “of the people,” “for the people,” and “by the people” to mean all of us. She was looking at the evolution of a democratic society in action and wanted to be sure that we understood our place in the process. Education was, and I feel still is, the key.

Going further, I felt a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment when I became an undergraduate. After all, this is what came out of “the box” and my responsibility to my grandmother’s dream was being satisfied. I was a biology major aspiring to be a doctor. How much farther could I go to demonstrate my commitment to my grandmother and those who fought for democracy? It fell upon me like a brick wall when sophomore year my advisor strongly suggested that I pick up a few education courses because “after all your parents aren’t going to have the money for graduate school, are they?” I could take my love for science and “teach it.” I was so naïve that I believed that this man was giving me what he thought was sound advice for my own best interest. Instead, it was undoubtedly his way of putting the lid on the box. I followed his advice and nonchalantly picked up the education courses. I was completely aware of how much of a failure I had felt but never once discussed it with my family. For years I have wrestled with feeling

that being in education has meant being an underachiever, maybe not to society, but to myself, which is in direct contrast to what we were raised to think about ourselves. I am guessing that the income involved in education coupled with the amount of work and emotion that go into what the children need tends to be unbalanced causing personal struggles. Or just the fact that I feel like I let down my grandmother and all the subjects of her newspaper clippings and letters; after they all worked so hard for me to have an opportunity at being educated. I allowed myself to be duped.

This could have easily led to what Dewey (1916/1944) referred to as a “mis-educative” experience (Rogers, 2002) in which my growth was distorted and I could have allowed myself to be lead in a “callous, insensitive and generally immoral direction” (Dewey, 1916/1944) if it were not for that spring day at the track. I am speaking about the day when a dorm party resulted in my friends and I having to do community service at the Special Olympics. Those kids and adults were a determined lot who were not strangers to hard work. They worked hard and were determined to complete simple tasks such as walk a few extra steps, hold a ball, or roll their chair independently. They were so pleased with the little accomplishments. I was in awe of them. That moment in the advisor’s office had just been re-defined for me. It had actually led me in a constructive direction (Rogers, 2002) toward “intelligent actions” (Dewey, 1916/1944). Without any thought or real planning I **became** a teacher. I selfishly enjoyed each accomplishment my students made, drove myself to look for ways to improve their lives through their educational experiences in my classroom, and made sure that I could have a good time doing it. I recall the objective at the top of my resume stating that I was “seeking a teaching position where my education and employment experiences could be utilized to

assist students in reaching their optimum level of social competence.” I said it, I meant it, and I lived it. I did not recognize myself. The thoughts and fears of being a failure crept through from time to time, however, I continued to work hard as I was taught to do by my family. I stopped resisting and left matters in God’s hands.

Spiritually, I have been raised to know that there is a higher power directing and guiding our path. In line with that thinking I also am a true believer that our steps are ordered for us simply requiring our acute awareness of what is occurring that helps connect us to what is happening at the time that it is happening so as to live out the established plan. It may be referenced as manifest destiny for some, prophecy for others and more recently, synchronicity. This is being able to be in tuned with the environment and everything around you, oneness with the environment (Jaworski, 1998). Nothing is by accident and that includes the people who enter our lives. We simply must make a conscious effort to learn from each experience as a building block to the next. This is what Dewey (1916/1944) meant when he spoke about reflection as a meaning making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding (Rogers, 2002).

Somewhere cocooned in the rearing, growing, and developing, a leader was emerging. Initially I was a leader within my social sector, then a teacher leader, and now a school leader. However, I do not recall being particularly aware of the leader in me as a child telling a group of friends, “c’mon lets go...” and having them follow. Nor did I notice in college being president of our chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. And the same was true when I stepped out of the classroom to take on teacher leadership roles such as special education liaison or dean of students. Whether there is an innate presence

of leadership or whether it is a learned behavior does not matter; it is a matter of “stepping up” for the purpose of getting the job done.

My espoused theories of leadership include transformational, servant leadership with a feminist style, democratic leadership, and social justice leadership. Each of which is further discussed for their relevance to my current position and organization context.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is almost a given theory of leadership in my experience in the charter school movement. Despite charter schools being public schools, there are a few distinct factors that distinguish them from each other. Rooted in these differences is the rationale for accepting transformational as a theory to guide my leadership. According to Burns (1978) and discussed by Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2005), a transformational leader functions to develop the “we” in an organization, which is exactly what is needed in charter schools and exactly what I hope I bring to the 58th Street Middle School. Collaboration is essential to improve the organization and move it forward. It is appropriate in this case to always be considered a work in progress as the leader is creating problem solvers in those who are being led. One of the differences between charter schools and traditional public schools is the concept of being mission driven. According to Act 22 (Charter School Law) each charter is written based on this specific mission and the board of trustees, administration, faculty, and families all must be in agreement in order to work toward this mission. This is where it is imperative that “fit” and “buy-in” matter. A faculty member must understand his individual role in translating the mission each term. This is where team building becomes a must. While creating leaders it is imperative that egos not come into play, as it is clearly a dysfunction

that would affect the organization. The leadership must be willing and able to clearly articulate the mission and how it is to be worked toward each school term as staff members and students may change. It is understood in the charter school movement that change is a constant.

Another difference in charter schools is the most obvious: the money. Charter schools operate on less per child dollars than do our host districts. This has a profound effect on staffing issues. Staffing issues have a direct correlation to student issues. Student issues often translate back to the school's success in its mission. Consequently the role of leadership is paramount in our school. It is for this reason that I have to agree with Bass and Avolio (1994), and Leithwood (1994) when their discussion included leaders having to be prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century and needing the four I's of transformational leadership to do it (Sosik & Dionne, 1997). The four I's are: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Individual consideration is characterized by giving "personal attention to members who seem neglected" (Bass, 1990, p. 218). Intellectual stimulation is characterized by enabling "followers to think of old problems in new ways" (Bass, 1990, p. 218). Inspirational motivation is characterized by communicating "high performance expectations" (Bass, 1990, p. 218). Lastly, idealized influence is characterized by modeling behavior through exemplary personal achievements, character, and behavior (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005). I will need to demonstrate how I characterize these behaviors in my leadership. For me, the idea of individual consideration allows the other three characteristics to exist. I say this because the fact that we cannot offer large salaries means that we are plagued with teachers with minimal experience. We are unable

to attract seasoned teachers who have successes and failures to draw from, therefore being able to give that personal attention to our teachers as individuals helps them to develop in the experiences they are getting along the way. For example, I have a young woman on my faculty who as a single mother is pursuing her Master's degree. She is extremely quiet and rarely shares when in faculty meetings. Knowing this about her I make it a point to see her ahead of time to let her know what ideas I am considering and get her perspective on it as I know she has a lot to offer intellectually. Then I am able to reference our conversation during the faculty meeting, which presents her ideas to the staff, whereas she would not in that setting. This way she is given the respect from her colleagues that her ideas deserve instead of being lost in her shyness. When it is time to form small committees others of similar thinking gravitate to her for the purpose of carrying out an idea.

Intellectual stimulation is another critical piece to my transformational leadership. Different than when I began in the profession, teachers now often possess the Master's degree despite only having minimal years in the field. They come with fresh ideas to the same struggles we have faced over the years. As the transformational leader I simply give them the opportunity to explore their ideas while building their knowledge of pedagogy. Transformational leaders should not be afraid to learn from those who are considered their followers, as the understanding must be that the organization should exist in an atmosphere of mutual stimulation recognizing that they have the opportunity to convert followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents (Burns, 1978).

Referencing the hierarchy of increasing forms of altruism adapted from Krebs and Hesteren (2006), often the challenge for me as a leader is how to move the faculty from

where they are ethically, into the moral beings capable of engaging in the collaboration process, which is needed for the success of the organization. This “Generation X” faculty of 20 somethings is made up of individually good people, however, they are clearly accustomed to the focus still being on them. While I continue to respect them for possessing the knowledge and energy needed to be leaders in their classrooms, the fact that they are at different stages of altruism can take on the appearance of some being more engaged than others in the work of the organization. It is not my intent to point this out as shortcomings; however I, like Hestersen (2006), view altruism as the heart of transformational leadership, therefore I continue to model the acceptable behavior and hope that caring as a process will cause the needed transformation in the others.

Servant Leadership with a Feminist Style

For weeks during the Leadership course I pondered the information put forth in the readings as well as the class discussions when I became aware of an overwhelming effort on my part to suppress the likelihood of possessing a feminist style of leadership. Despite being raised primarily by two very strong women, it was during an era where much of the studies on male/female roles in organizations were based on male models of organizational behaviors (Astin, 1969; Bernard, 1964, as cited by Sergiovanni, 2007). The examples were of women in male-dominated professions. How were we as girls to envision ourselves in the professional world if the research was misrepresenting us? How our mothers and grandmothers understood the research and presented it to us is what drove us to make certain decisions and choices in our lives. O’Leary (1974) reported that the career aspirations of women were influenced by societal sex-role stereotypes. Bem and Bem (1975) found that one-third of all working women were secretaries, sales clerks,

domestics, waitresses, nurses, or teachers. These were jobs that called for taking care or serving others. My friends and I had mothers and grandmothers who were in these same jobs, but they talked often with us about doing “whatever we wanted to do in life; you’ll be able to take care of someone when you get home from being the boss somewhere.” As encouraging as they tried to be, many of us still internalized society’s sex-role stereotypes and attitudes (based on experiences outside of the home such as television, school, etc.). I believe myself to be a classic example of the fear of failure and low self-esteem Horner (1987) and O’Leary (1974) presented as an attitude and result of role conflict. This is possibly why I felt the need to pursue medicine, but have felt natural in education. We were pushing away from certain careers in an attempt to avoid falling back into the stereotypical roles that had been applied to us. The difference now is that we are able to make the conscious decision to accept these roles/careers if we so choose. I pose this thinking as I embrace my female style of leadership that is associated with the servant leadership theory.

The work of Robert Greenleaf (1970), on the concept of servant leadership grew out of the 1970s. This was an era in which conversations about feminism, gender, and sex role-stereotypes were gaining a great deal of attention. Greenleaf (1970), believed then as I do today that effective leadership comes from a desire to help others: to serve. This I believe should be neither male nor female. Yet I am not surprised by the argument made by Hampel (1988) in which she suggests that the concept of servant leadership is not likely to be valued in male-dominated institutions or professions. Despite not wanting to accept it, I saw myself in the research of Shakeshaft (1987). She points out the female world of schooling as three specifics: (1) relationships with others are central to all

actions of women administrators, (2) teaching and learning are the major foci of women administrators, and (3) building community is an essential part of a woman administrator's style. While this alone does not have a negative association, the statement made by Joyce Miller (1986) is. She said, "In our culture serving others is for losers, it is low-level stuff. Yet serving others is a basic principle around which women's lives are organized; it is far from such for men" (p. 18). I do not know why it is even after all the years of accomplishments that being female can still sound like it is not enough. Possibly a less degrading view of servant leadership is that offered by Marzano, McNulty, & Waters (2005) when they describe the servant leader in the center of the organization implying that the servant leader is in contact with all aspects of the organization and the individuals. In this light the leader is pictured as more of the wagon wheel with spokes extending out from it, however, all are still connected to each other by way of the center. They go further to describe the characteristics of the servant leader as understanding and nurturing as demonstrated by healing conflicts, being a steward of resources, as well as an effective listener.

When I initially took on the role as administrator of the charter school it was literally after having just walked out of my classroom. I was afraid, but could not show it, and the job did not come with a manual of do's and don'ts. I thought that my experience had been teaching not leading. In actuality I had been serving. Consistent with what Marzano, McNulty, & Waters (2005) described in a servant leader, I had been doing as the servant leader in my classroom. Beck (1994) suggests relying on instinct to inform and support a logical direction. Therefore the first days and weeks of my leadership I found myself doing what I was used to doing. I was a listener when I taught; I listened as

an administrator. I made a point of engaging teachers in discourse at various moments throughout the day. This way I learned what they were feeling, what they felt they needed, and what they felt about the organization in general. Given the fact that I came aboard at a time when chaos ruled, it absolutely served the organization to serve the teachers. When Sergiovanni (1992) discussed servant leadership he referenced a “legitimacy to lead” (p. 80). I understood this and equated it to what Greenleaf (1977) meant when he explained leadership as being a need to gain their confidence by showing myself to be competent to teachers if they were going to allow me to lead them. Looking back that is exactly what I did. I attempted to demonstrate to them that I knew what the organization and they needed to improve the present operating conditions. For the weeks to come, whatever it appeared the teachers/organization needed, I attempted to provide. If disruptive students needed to be removed, I removed them. If prep teachers were absent, I taught lessons; if parents needed to be shown how to parent, I demonstrated. You name it, I did it, to serve the need. Sergiovanni (2007) identified three practices that he felt showed how servant leadership worked; purposing, empowerment, and leadership by outrage. When Vaill (1984) defined purposing, he said it was “that continuous stream of action by an organization’s formal leadership which has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus and commitment regarding the organization’s basic purposes” (p. 91). Consistent with this thinking was the natural flow of energy that yielded positive results as referenced in *Synchronicity* (Jaworski, 1998). Whether it is the feminist style or servant leadership, if it works to move the organization forward in its quest to become better, I am resolved to accept my role in it.

Democratic Leadership

As a democratic leader my first hope would be to develop within the school community the understanding that education is a lifelong endeavor. One should commit to being a lifelong learner recognizing that education is empowering and freeing. Second to that is the understanding that leadership that is democratic is a paradigm shift away from the time when a single person was the one responsible for the leadership in the school community. There is the acceptance that all individuals in the school community have knowledge and can contribute to the school. This is not always the first reaction for some, however I believe acceptance can be demonstrated in small acts that allow the process to begin. I had an irate parent first thing one morning, however the secretary was not yet in to handle the acclamation of the substitute teacher. She needed to be instructed on how to read the roster, map of the building, etc. One of the last teachers to sign in that morning guided the substitute out of the main office with the materials without my having to ask her to do so. This allowed me to address the parent quickly without further escalation. Dewey (1916/1944) said that it is necessary to move beyond inquiry and study to action and service. In a democratic community the leader must commit to the understanding that he/she is a facilitator in the collaboration and participation of shared decision making.

There are possible struggles that can arise from using democratic leadership just as much as there is from creating a democratic school community. The most prominent concern in my opinion is the possibility of being viewed as weak or as Reitzug and O'Hara (1994) discuss, apathetic. First, I believe that governments or political leaders may have the same goal in mind as educators have and that is to create children who can

grow up to become influential citizens with a meaningful stake in economic and civic life (Fuller & Rasiah, 2006). However what seems to be missing is the critical piece stated, “to create the conditions” under which these children are to learn. This may be identified as the democratic school community. Within the words democratic education, I see actions being formed. As should be mentioned the “democracy” portion includes diverse groups with common vision(s) or purposes functioning together in a process or processes, while the word education denotes imparting knowledge. These thoughts in and of themselves may not appear worthy of debate. However, when we as leaders attempt to move in the direction that these teamed words will carry us, we are hampered by the changes and shifts needed in the thinking of policy leaders. Democratic education has recently been characterized as a respect for teacher and student knowledge, a collective sense of responsibility for teacher and student learning and shared leadership (Furman & Starratt, 2002). However, like Fuller and Rasiah (2006) attest, “the extent to which the school truly advances democratizing ideals is constrained by the extent to which a society’s underlying political economy is committed to being inclusive and participatory” (p. 101). This is true in the United States where there exist such inequalities of spending on education where economics and class remain an issue.

Democratic leadership is more than just the thinking outside of the box as illustrated in the video, *Dead Poet’s Society* (Kleinbaum, 1989), although that is at minimum a place to begin. Democratic leadership consists of identifying a need within the instructional community (the classroom of a teacher, a school for those who are principals) and addressing that need in a manner that gives validity to prior experiences/knowledge that the individual members of the group (community) bring. A

democratic leader is one who postulates democratic education for her learning environment. Democratic education is the opportunity to analyze and synthesize tasks using inquiry as a skill and strategy. Democratic education involves individually determined cognitive growth and development for the purpose of reaching one's optimum level of social competence and thereby being of increased benefit to the society at large.

Unfortunately, I agree with the thinking of Louis and Kruse (1995), along with Newmann and Wehlage (1995), when they mention the fact that educators probably agree with the idea of democracy and community in principle but are unclear as to how to bring it into practice. The same is true for democratic education; there are many instances in which we can identify what we should be doing to move us beyond these dysfunctional systems that are dull and meaningless (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000) into ones that are more personal, collaborative, and participatory (Furman, 2002). As leaders we want to know that we are creating a community in which discourse occurs between teachers for the good of those they serve. Consistent with this is the ideal that teachers need to feel that the curriculum they are presenting is benefiting those in their charge. My hope is that as long as we continue to ponder the notions of democratic education, democratic community, or democracy in education, we are moving in the right direction.

Social Justice Leadership

Lastly, and most recently, I have begun to take on a social justice component to my leadership. Social justice leadership is also known as civil justice in some venues where the concept of a just society is achieved in every aspect of society (Smith, 2008). Fair treatment of individuals or groups should not be based solely on the presentations of

laws. We as a society must be willing to change and take risks as they relate to the impartial treatment of groups or individuals. I have begun to recognize that we cannot stand by while inequities in education continue to exist even if only passively. A teacher's minimal performance based on unconscious perceptions of her students is unfair treatment whether it is meant to be or not.

Theoretically, this side of me has become more apparent with the more time I spend in leadership. The change initiative which involved the process of reflective teaching practices was addressed through the strategies identified by Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) and had become the vehicle of transformational leadership for the purpose of evoking a second order change in my organization. It was critical that teachers realize the impact their actions had on students, as they were the direct link to student success. Additionally, using the five steps to change identified by Fullan (1996) aided my look at the need for instructional strategies that bridged a possible language barrier and increased achievement of a group whose language had not traditionally been considered a barrier; a critical step also, in the acceptance of a culture (Wheeler & Swords, 2004). The purpose of taking on each of the concepts was due to the needs of the stakeholders. As I grow as a leader, I continue to aggressively attack the complacency I observe in educators, whether it comes in the form of weak instructional practices, narrow minded thinking that places limitations on an already marginalized group, or the eradication of culture through curriculum. The question of whether this social-justice viewpoint is because of the most recent innovations or if the innovations are due to a social justice leadership platform is still not clear. Like the chicken and the egg theory I do not think that one thought

supersedes the other as much as there is a connection between them that allows one to support the other.

Conclusion

To summarize, I believe it is realistic to presume that no one theory can account for the many facets of leadership in today's educational arena. There are a multitude of hats to be worn, needs to address, and much that goes into the culmination of the person of a leader. That being so I have had to assess first that which has made me who I am as a person. It is the experiences, the feelings, the lessons learned and those ignored which have made me, me. Adding to this is the ability to simply be in the state of consciousness enough to learn from each experience that has occurred.

I have identified four theories that I feel make my experience as an educational leader complete. First, transformational leadership theory provides a theory for the challenges of the 21st century. The four I's of transformational leadership provide the leader with the blueprint for creating and continuing in the powerfulness of the collaboration process. The four I's are individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Bass, 1990). Transformational leadership puts the organization at the center of the focus and takes into account the need for the acceptance of change if it is for the benefit of the organization.

My second theory is servant leadership with a feminist style. The identification of the strength of two women in my life was not strong enough to fend off the attitudes and feelings of failure that were by-products of the sex-role stereotyping that was prevalent in the 1970s. Robert Greenleaf (1970) correlated effective leadership with the desire to help others, which is serving others. The work of Hample (1988) was not particularly

flattering as it regarded servant leadership as less likely to be valued in a male dominated profession. However, as it was identified by Shakeshaft (1987), that which is female is also servant. Is it a particularly bad thing to be associated with the very real possibility that there is something inherent in females that causes us to be successful at serving others? I suppose not. After all, I have read various writings about education that strive to either consider the feelings of others, perform in more relational manner, and respond to the needs of others. Just because one sounds political while the other more feminine does not mean it is any less of a desire to serve.

Next, as an espoused theory, is democratic leadership theory. As previously mentioned there is much here that could be equated with the desire to serve others, such as being collaborative and personally involved as the leader of a community of various groups for the purpose of coming together for a common mission. The larger objective than just to serve is the understanding that the democratic leader is to promote personal growth among the members of the community and provide the opportunity for communication to occur. The democratic leader understands the value of communication to the growth of the members within the community. He/she also accepts that everyone affected by the decisions has a value in the decision making process and their participation should be encouraged.

Lastly, is my attention to the social justice side of my leadership; to attack the wrongs and make them right. I struggled against being viewed as the “angry, Black woman” who for the luck of the draw could have remained a member of the sub-groups that suffer at the hand of “the haves,” because I did not feel that was the most beneficial way to create change. However, as I endeavored to find methods and opportunities to

address the need for change in the African American student in this educational system, I question whether I have kept silent for too long. As a practitioner who is also a researcher, I am grateful for the leadership tools and knowledge required to aggressively seek change for the underrepresented.

With the marriage of each of these theories and possibly others at different times, I hope to be the leader that promotes learning over a lifetime, shares the decision-making, and facilitates collaboration for the purpose of transforming the organization. I can move forward with confidence that wherever and whenever there becomes the need to improve the organization, I have the ability to lead effectively with change strategies that respect the human factor.

Chapter III

Literature Review

Introduction

Growing pressure from both the teaching profession and federal legislation is forcing the reexamination of instructional practices as a means of improving the academic achievement of students who do not perform at grade level. African Americans and Hispanics are receiving increased attention and are often examples of such students. A growing body of research documents that African Americans and Hispanics as non-standard English Speakers or English Language Learners are two groups of students whose overall performance on standardized state tests is far below that of their White counterparts (D'Angiulli, Siegel, & Maggi, 2004). Despite the significant documentation of poor performance, there is little to no research comparing and contrasting the two groups that could identify purposeful knowledge about the learning process experienced by both groups. For example, most of the documented research that currently exists simply shows the disparity in the achievement gap that prevails for both groups with little documentation hypothesizing any possible reasons for the poor performance of either group (Miranda, Webb, Brigman, & Peluso, 2007). Other than socioeconomic status, what might be the reasons for the existing gaps between these two groups and their White peers? How much of the gap can be explained by instructional practice and not just socioeconomic status? As a K-12 educator in an urban school setting, most of my career has been plagued by these very questions. There has been countless professional development hours spent looking for the cure to this “condition” education is in.

I was no more dubious in my thinking that the professional development hours spent at the African American/Latino Urban Educators Summit would yield any different outcomes than the others over the years. However, what I feel was uncovered for me was a new and innovative way of thinking about the African American and Hispanic achievement experience. It is clear from the research I have uncovered that this thinking has been a consideration for some time. The idea that the poor achievement of these two groups is based on the fact that they are both non-standard English speakers and that their instruction should include their native language instead of denying its presence in Standard English speaking classrooms was new to me (Miranda, Webb, Brigman & Peluso, 2007). Perhaps it has been more intently thought about since the Ebonics bill issue during the late 1990s in Oakland California. The reasons and timing are not issues, what is the issue is whether there is merit to the discussion and what the implications for teaching are, particularly in the K-12 realm. The concept of viewing the education of an African American student in the same light as a student who has English as his second language began to make sense immediately when it was initially presented to me at the African American/Latino Urban Educators Summit. Naturally this presentation was only a brief overview and the main purpose was to sell a specific curricular package, but the thinking made sense. It connected. As I have learned recently, this is not the first time this issue has been considered. The issue of African American Vernacular English has been studied for over 35 years in several disciplines including education, linguistics, and even psychology. In each science the underlying motivation for the research has been the lack of progress or the achievement gap between African American students and majority students. What is most disappointing is that there does not appear to be a marriage of

research between those in the educational arena and those linguistic experts who have compiled the present data (Ball, 2005). Ideally, a marriage of the two disciplines would entail a broader acceptance by educators of the idea that English is a second language for African Americans and then an identification of instructional practices that address the process of learning a new language.

The linguistic community clearly recognizes the importance of research on the efforts to improve reading. In this review I intend to (1) demonstrate the necessity of viewing African American Vernacular English as the first language of many African American students; (2) look at the achievement of African American and English Language Learner (ELL) students in comparison to their White counterparts with Mainstream American English (MAE) as the first encounter with reading; and (3) suggest the instructional implications for K12 educators to continue to chip away at the existing achievement gap.

Is English the First Language of African Americans?

I believe that whether we are referring to vernacular, dialect, slang, or Ebonics, we must agree the manner by which some African Americans speak differs from that of Mainstream American English (MAE). To go further, educators must recognize this as a “tongue” and not work to strip individuals of this tongue or imply that it is in some way inadequate. If America is the melting pot, then to embrace Black English is to accept the cultural differences of a group of people. To not embrace this as a language belonging to a people is a failure to embrace multiculturalism. According to Edgerson (2006), it does not matter if one prefers to be called Black American or African American; the origin of the people and the language has its roots in the West African, as well as Niger Congo

languages and are not simply extensions of English. This language began out of a need to be able to understand the slave traders as well as the need to be able to communicate with each other during the Middle Passage. It must be understood that these language patterns required a period of time to develop and did so with constant struggle of the African people. Once a basic understanding grew, it extended because of the need to communicate in code so as to not alert the slave owners of any pending plans for escape. Much of this code has come to be known as the Negro Spirituals; songs sung in code. This evolution of a language system did not stop there. It progressed through the Reconstruction Era and the Jim Crow Movement. It continued to travel through the Harlem Renaissance Era, the Civil Rights Movement, and continues in these current times. This is reinforced through the ethnographic research conducted by Alim (2004) as he references the Hip Hop Nation Speech Community.

This is the history of a group of people that should not and cannot be ignored when we begin to look at the acquisition of the English language. According to Taylor (1989) the debates of the 1960s involved the thinking that African influences on the language of some African Americans was cause for a devaluation of the group's social status. This thinking went further to suggest that this influence stopped African Americans from assimilating into the dominant culture, thereby stopping them from elevating to a higher social status. In this sense we must also fight to eliminate the negative stereotype associated with African American Vernacular English. Taylor (1989) highlights the manner by which the dominant culture marginalized African American language as deviating from that, which is normal, and even equated with buffoonery during the 19th and 20th centuries. This reaffirms the thinking that many of us have always

known existed, and that is the fact that language is often used as a gauge by which many in the dominant culture judge the intelligence of others. As a prime example, but on a smaller scale, how many times has society viewed members of the southern community as less intelligent simply due to their dialect? There may not be a need to research this specifically, but if we were to do a survey or questionnaire I would expect responses to be painfully honest, but just as judgmental and prejudicial in nature. We all know that language is a critical part of each group's culture; it would seem to me that accepting another's language is a huge step in accepting that group and simultaneously closing some of the gap that divides this nation.

Since language is so closely connected to perceived cognitive ability and performance in school subjects, why is it that we educators would not begin to look at language as a root cause of the lack of achievement in African American students? As we are aware, students who do well in English often do well in the content areas as well.

Achievement of Non-Standard English Speakers

Flowers (2007) suggested that to improve the problem of African American student achievement, educators have looked at the problem through many different lenses. Standardized testing, teacher quality, parental involvement, reading, and study skills have been viewed as areas of concern for the lack of student achievement particularly with the continuous discussion of "No Child Left Behind" (Flowers, 2007). Many strategies have been tried in isolation or in combination with one another to improve achievement. Although there have been some recent gains among African American students, data show that reading achievement gaps by race still continue. Perie, Grigg, and Donahue (2005) indicate the average reading score for African

American eighth graders was 243, while the average for White eighth graders was 271. Researchers have identified several factors as pertinent in this disparity between African American students and their White peers.

For Hoy, Hannum, and Tschannen-Moran (1998), teacher performance has been viewed and accepted as a cause of the continuous gap. Walpole (2003) identified Socioeconomic Status (SES) as another factor that has been explored particularly when discussing the question of acquisition and retention of high school students entering and completing four year colleges. These outcomes have an overwhelming effect on not just a race of people, but society as a whole. It has been long understood that the attainment of a college degree could relieve one of one's current SES replacing it with a higher one, placing a person in a position of greater benefit to a community.

Flowers (2007) found little debate among researchers, policymakers, and educational stakeholders that achievement particularly reading achievement, among African American students is an important issue. Despite decades of national concern, recent data suggest that the disparities are not likely to disappear soon (Flowers, 2007). Indeed, the gap in high school grade point average (GPA) between Black and White students actually increased in 2002 according to Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht (2003). Additionally, Black students still obtain lower scores on standardized tests of reading, math, and science, which are the primary factor in college admissions. Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht, (2003) go further to identify that due to this performance, Blacks make up only 10% of those admitted to four year colleges, with Hispanics fairing slightly better, but still far less than White students.

Further research (Powell & Arriola, 2003) reported Black and Hispanic students have had lower average mathematics scale scores than White students at ages 9, 13, and 17 for the past three decades. Additionally, the writing performance of students in Grades 4, 8, and 12 indicated that 31% of Blacks, 28 % of Hispanics, and 10% of Whites were below the basic National Assessment of Educational Progress writing assessment achievement level in 1998. Furthermore, data from the National Center for Education Statistics in 1997 indicated that 59% of Hispanics aged 18-24 completed the requirements for a high school diploma, as did 72% of Black non-Hispanic individuals, and 81% of White non-Hispanic individuals (Powell & Arriola, 2003).

The socioeconomic status of the community has always been a strong predictor of student achievement. Most high SES communities also have positive student achievement. Conversely, communities where joblessness, single-parent families, low average annual income, and crime as issues often have lower achieving schools (Pew Charitable Trust, 2009). When is the last time someone discussed the achievement of students of high socioeconomic status and found major pitfalls in their rates of achievement? In a study by Doyle (2001) about school leadership, the middle school students used in that study were described as “racially and economically diverse and educationally challenging.” At the same time the schools were described as having a reputation for excellence with student achievement on the rise.

Oddly, this research was not conducted to explore concerns over standardized test scores, as is the case with communities of low SES. This community was diverse and achievement on the rise. The point could be made that the SES of this community was high enough to not effect student achievement, but I felt there was another factor worth

exploring. Students viewed their teachers as genuine leaders when they made learning fun, controlled their classrooms, and helped the students learn. Doyle (2001) presented the children's perspective on these matters. The point is that achievement in education is reliant on a number of factors, and while SES is one of them, so are teachers. Ultimately, only teachers can impact instruction; they have to decide that they want to improve their students' educational circumstances before it will happen (Hoy, Hannum, & Tschennen-Moran, 1998). Student achievement is more than mastery of basic skills. Higher order thinking and problem solving skills are also important student outcomes. I know from having found success as a classroom teacher and now observing teachers in their instructional practices that this level of instruction comes from good teacher preparation and planning. Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht, (2003) report the conclusions of psychological and educational research looking at the various factors presumed to be the basis of the race gap are sociological in nature. One factor they often presented as associated with student achievement, and of particular concern, was teacher expectations and attitudes. In this matter the expectation of the teacher is also tied to the views of the teacher whose students use non-standard English such as African American Vernacular English versus Standard English.

The importance of teacher expectations and attitudes toward the use of non-standard English were identified as relevant in the 1979 ruling of Justice Joiner. In this case it was decided that the Ann Arbor, Michigan school district had failed to take proper measures to overcome the obstacles to an equal education created by the language of the African American children at Martin Luther King Jr. elementary school (Rickford, 1998). I found this to be overwhelmingly applicable to the research presented about the

achievement of students for whom English is not the first language. If a teacher does not possess high expectations for her students then what will become her motivation for teaching? A lack of motivation could very quickly translate into doing less for a population of children who require more. We as educators must remain cognizant of the impact we have on students' lives and not allow our own views to hinder us from doing the job we were hired to do. The issue of poor performance on the part of non-standard English speakers, namely African American and Hispanic students, has an overarching effect on all of society, not simply these ethnic groups alone. First, because ethnic and racial minorities in the United States are disproportionately poor, the statistics that represent gaps in achievement naturally involve gaps in income as well. To address the gaps in income, individuals have long looked at the attainment of a college education as a means of moving out of one socioeconomic class into another, however if poor academic achievement spans throughout the K-12 experience, then getting into college and remaining in college until degree completion is as much an issue as the achievement issue.

According to Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, and Toliver, (2005), African American and Latinos students historically and currently score lower on standardized tests, including the SATs than their White peers. African Americans and Latinos continue to lag considerably behind Whites and Asian Americans in college enrollment, academic achievement and degree attainment (Walpole et al.). The college going rate for African Americans is 26.9% while for Whites it is 40.7% (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2002). The percentages of non-Standard English speaking students who remain in college until degree completion are even lower. In essence, to continue to allow poor

achievement in these groups is essentially creating a permanent underclass that is currently and will continue to contribute less to the general society due to a lack of upward mobility that has its roots in an inadequate public school system that knowingly failed to take into account the language needs of these groups. Labov (2001), in his study of inner city schools in Philadelphia, called the failure of the public school system to teach reading to its children one of the most serious social problems of the United States.

Present Practices Aimed at Closing the Achievement Gap of Non-Standard English Speakers

Much of the research world has spent time looking at the achievement gap of African American and Hispanic students through the socioeconomic lens, and therefore has attempted programming that would address sociological and psychological issues around this lens. In this sense the schools have created programming that involves counseling, mentoring, teacher effectiveness, classroom/curricular rigor, and the enhancement of educational opportunities for all students. The longitudinal study conducted by Miranda, Webb, Brigman, and Peluso (2007) looked at the Student Success Skills (SSS) program. This program is conducted by school counselors trained in the SSS program and is a structured format. The SSS program involved creating a caring supportive environment, goal setting, progress monitoring, and success sharing, cognitive and memory skills, managing test anxiety, and building healthy optimism. The data from four studies were aggregated for the purposes of identifying the effectiveness of the program. The study used data from 1,123 students in fifth, sixth, eighth, and ninth grades who had participated in the original SSS program studies. The ethnic composition of the participants was 718 White, 279 African American, and 126 Latino students. While the study did find the SSS program effective in increasing and sustaining the academic

achievement of lower performing students, it did not show success in bridging the gap between the African American and Hispanic non-standard English speakers and White Standard English speakers.

It is evident that more than anything else the effectiveness of this program is centered on addressing the sociological and psychological variables associated with low academic achievement, not the achievement gap. These same variables are addressed in a study by Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht, (2003), as they provided data on the improvement of adolescents' standardized test scores through interventions to reduce stereotype threat. They implemented a program with junior high school students who were taught one of two educational messages provided by a college mentor. A second group was also provided mentors for the purpose of discussing typical academic difficulties faced by anyone during the junior high school transition. And the third group was provided mentors to provide a combination of these messages. Their intervention significantly boosted the performance of minority, and low-income students by attending to the psychological impact of the standardized assessment.

While conducting this research I uncovered a significant number of similar studies where addressing the psychological and sociological implications of standardized assessments increased achievement. I recognize the relevance of these studies in the attempts to close the achievement gap that exists in education. However, whether related to socio-economic status or minority achievement, these studies or programs do not provide the practitioner with ideas for classroom work. The magnitude of these studies and programs in providing important information on socioeconomic status as a variable in need of consideration is endless. However, we in education know that despite the

demographic and economic status of our children, we are still faced with the daunting task of having to improve achievement and raise test scores.

Something to Consider Other than Socioeconomic Status: the Teacher

There certainly has been no shortage of calls to improve teaching in recent years. The No Child Left Behind Act mandates that states ensure that all public school students meet standards of proficiency in math and reading by 2014 (Fry, 2007). It goes further to require that teachers must be identified as highly qualified to teach in America's public schools. However, there are varying degrees of highly qualified. In some instances being highly qualified means acquiring specific certification(s), a particular number of years teaching a specific subject, or possessing a specific number of college credits in a given content area (Polk, 2006). The Educational Testing Service (ETS) suggests that board certification is the highest level of qualification and a prime way to determine teacher effectiveness (Little, Goe, & Bell, 2008). However, for Hill and Cohen (2005), the hub for effective teaching comes from professional development training that focuses on teaching teachers how students learn and this is a means of being highly qualified. There appears to be a litany of definitions, expectations, and opinions that attempt to critique what teachers do.

I am in agreement with Little, Goe, and Bell (2008), who tell us the manner by which teacher effectiveness is defined impacts how it is conceived and measured. In schools effectiveness is generally gauged by an evaluation tool that varies from state to state, district to district, and perhaps even from school to school. The problem with this is that there are numerous different characteristics and when combined with the various methods that teachers use to achieve the desired result, the pool is endless. Researchers

have taken time to identify some qualitative characteristics of an effective teacher. Marshall (2001) suggests that to be effective a teacher must create an environment of mutual respect. Polk (2006) indicates that teachers who are effective provide clarity, address student's prerequisite knowledge, plan well, and they provide feedback that requires students to reflect, evaluate, and connect. Walker (2008) identifies 12 characteristics that take on the presentation of personal traits, such as: caring, fairness, creativity, and positive attitude. As an administrator I am familiar with each of these characteristics as they embody many of the evaluation tools I have used. Teachers often fair well using these tools, yet standardized test scores remain dissatisfying.

Student Achievement, Student Learning, Teacher Effectiveness

Teachers are constantly under pressure to produce results in the form of student achievement. But if student learning is only defined as that which is measured on standardized tests, we are operating out of a very narrow scope. Little, Goe, and Bell (2008) offer four reasons why problems exist when defining teacher effectiveness solely from student achievement on standardized test.

First, they offer that idea that teachers are not exclusively responsible for students' learning. There are examples in which students had been in dysfunctional living arrangements and performing poorly in school, but once the living arrangement changed they began to excel in school. Administrators and teachers are not expected to rest on the difficulties of the home situation when we are struggling to help the student learn, but clearly there is a correlation. Secondly, Little, Goe, and Bell (2008) postulate that test scores are limited in the information they can provide. Test scores do not take into account co-teaching situations, non-tested areas (music and art), and out-of-class

contributions made by the teacher, and social/emotional and behavioral success with at-risk students.

The next problem with defining teacher effectiveness by way of student achievement scores is the idea that it is completely possible researchers have designed measurement tools that only link teacher effectiveness with student test scores. Mintzberg (1989), as referenced in Little, Goe, and Bell (2008), called this “the rule of the tool.” It is not totally out of the question that we have begun to place so much emphasis on test scores that we are now limiting ourselves on the type of research being done. As previously noted, there is not yet consensus as to what characterizes effectiveness, so how is it that we have so emphatically selected the tool to measure it?

The last problem with using student achievement scores alone to determine teacher effectiveness is identified by Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs, and Robinson (2004), and Brophy and Good (1986). They hypothesize that learning is more than just average achievement gains. Student learning and teacher effectiveness should include social development along with formal academic growth. In low achieving, low socio-economic schools where we are educating the underrepresented, improving students’ attitudes, motivation, and confidence should also be taken into consideration when discussing learning. I would not doubt that, if asked, teachers would crown this thinking as the most pertinent from their perspective.

Implications for Instruction

With the synthesis of the data collected we must now ask ourselves how the vernacular of African Americans could be taken into account the same way Spanish is taken into account for Hispanic students in an attempt to improve their achievement in

schools. Educators could use the research initially conducted by Labov (2001) in Philadelphia area schools where he suggested that teachers should distinguish between the mistakes in reading versus possible differences in pronunciations. For example, if a student reads, “I missed him” as “I miss him” it should not automatically be assumed that this is a misread. The reason behind this thinking, according to Labov (2001), is the idea that consonant cluster sounds such as (st) are simplified to (s) in African American vernacular and that Standard English or Mainstream American English gives more attention to the ends of words than Ebonics. Labov (2001) also suggested using the full forms of words and avoid using contractions, because it is much more likely in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Ebonics that once speakers go through a contraction stage, they will go right into deletion. For example, “he’s tall” will become “he tall.” A second strategy for instruction is that of “chunking” and questioning aloud (CQA). While Barrera, Liu, Thurlow, and Chamberlain (2006) present this strategy related to English Language Learners with disabilities, I found the premise behind it to be relevant to this subject. First it is relevant because I am presenting African American students as English Language Learners with AAVE as the primary language, and next, according to Ford and Harris (1996), Black students represent 16% of public school population, but one fourth of these students are at least evaluated for Special Education services while comprising only 8% of the gifted programs. CQA is defined as the process of reading a story aloud to students and stopping after certain blocks to ask specific question about their comprehension of the story. I know from experience that this is especially useful given the idea that many students are not reading on grade level and

therefore unable to successfully navigate through some material, but can comprehend through making predictions and finding evidence to support their predictions.

Barrera, Chamberlain, Liu, and Thurlow, (2006) conducted a study using six participants: two teachers and four students identified with disabilities and limited literacy proficiency in English. The first student was Somali and living in Minnesota. The other three students were Mexican-American in a southern Texas urban school district. Pre-assessment and post-assessment data were collected on each. A teacher made rubric was developed to measure progress in acquiring the CQA strategy. As a result of the use of the CQA strategy, three of the four students demonstrated steady progress, however the researchers admit that few empirical studies have been conducted to validate their findings. Conversely, Vann and Abraham (2009) conducted research on the strategies used by unsuccessful language learners. Their purpose was to analyze the behaviors that learners engage in to learn a second/foreign language while remediating the strategies of unsuccessful language learners. The data collection for this research relied primarily on what the actual learner reported as his strategy as identified on questionnaires. The most significant strategies were for activities surrounding vocabulary learning and pronunciation versus analysis or interference. The study focused on two unsuccessful learners and the data were gathered by interview, a verb exercise, a cloze activity, and a composition assignment. The results in this study were found to be inconclusive, identifying variations in strengths and weaknesses of the individual participants as the reasons for a lack of reliable data (Vann & Abraham, 2009).

Oxford and Crookall (1989) developed a much more useful list of strategies for language learning. They defined strategies as behaviors used by learners to aid the

acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information. The strategies identified in their study included interviews and think-alouds, as previously mentioned, but go further to look at the effects of cognitive strategies such as note taking; memory strategies; communication strategies; meta-cognitive strategies, which is the planning and evaluating one's learning; affective strategies, including techniques like self-reinforcement and positive talk; and social strategies, such as actions involving other people in the language learning process as cooperative learning. Oxford and Crookall (1989) conducted a separate study for each of the strategies, which yielded separate outcomes. Like the study by Vann and Abraham (2009), it is too difficult to determine the strength of one strategy over another when specific individual abilities or strengths and weaknesses play a role. What their research is able to demonstrate is that (1) language learners at all levels use strategies, (2) some or most learners are relatively unaware of the strategies they use, (3) more proficient learners appear to have a wider range of strategies in more situations, and (4) motivation (in type and intensity) appear to be related to language learning strategies.

This outcome can present less significance to African American Vernacular students if we consider the phenomenon Labov (2001) identifies as “functional interference.” Functional interference is the refusal to learn Mainstream American English (MAE) because it is viewed as “white folk talk” (p. 306). If this is true, then the motivation to become more proficient in MAE is not always present in African American students. However, there are a number of additional strategies these students can adopt to assist in the process of language learning.

Another approach to instruction comes from the work identified by Rickford (1998) in his presentation at California State University. Rickford (1998) presents

Contrastive Analysis as a useful approach. This is when a teacher purposely draws the students' attention to the differences between the vernacular they use and that of standard language. Rickford (1998) references several studies that have used this approach, however conducted no research of his own.

According to Connor (1996), contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Contrastive analysis was most often used by behaviorists in the area of second language acquisition (SLA) as early as the 1960s and 70s to help explain the difficulties in acquiring a target language. The behaviorists looked at habit formation as the prevailing theory of language learning. Mastering certain structures in a second language (L2) depended on the difference between the learner's primary language (L1) and the language they were trying to learn (Connor, 2006). Contrastive analysis has generally been used in comparing English language to that of another country. Contrastive analysis has looked at the errors the students made in an attempt to then predict how specific forms from learners' native language would be reflected when speakers learn another language (Sridhar, 1981). The criticism(s) found by Ellis (1994) and Stern (1983) presented by Connor (1996) were similar to those identified by the study conducted by Sridhar (1981). They agree that empirically, there was little evidence to sustain that all errors made in L2 were a result of the interference by L1.

While contrastive analysis may not be as useful as hoped in its ability to predict errors, it does remain highly practical in its ability to provide the learner with more autonomy in the self-correction of his errors. If we then include code-switching, where the student chooses the language variety appropriate for a specific context (Wheeler &

Swords, 2004), then perhaps we are also able to determine whether the concept of “error” is the appropriate concept to use when attempting to transform the literacy classroom to a more diverse environment for students.

The work of D’Angiulli, Siegel, and Maggi (2004) provided a slightly different outlook on English Language Learners and children with English as a first language. Like many researchers who have gone ahead and behind them, they cited socioeconomic status as having a negative effect on the achievement of children within a given community. I agree with their explanation that the success of a community is partially related to how well its youth can read, as I believe this is the magnitude of the task of urban education. D’Angiulli, Siegel, and Maggi (2004) presented the thinking that the development of reading skills in these two groups is very similar and therefore no special type of programming was involved to eliminate the effects of SES. Instead they focused specifically on the skill of word-reading achievement. They discussed the Early Literacy Program as a more feasible plan for instructional support as opposed to attempting to improve or stabilize families and SES. The Literacy-Intensive curriculum was done district-wide in North Vancouver and involved two main modules: (1) instructional activities with an explicit emphasis on sound-symbol relationship; (2) six reading components: Guided reading, Shared reading, Reading/Writing Connection, Home Reading Program, Independent Reading, and Read Aloud and Respond. The method used by D’Angiulli, Siegel, and Maggi (2004) was to obtain the word-reading achievement scores from 1,108 students in all 30 schools in the North Vancouver district from kindergarten through 5th grade. Participation was contingent upon parental consent and the child’s agreement. Absences caused some children to be eliminated, which was about

23% of the total. The classroom teacher presented each of the aforementioned modules, three times a week for 20 minutes in kindergarten, and four times a week in the other grades. The main purpose for D'Angiulli, Siegel, and Maggi (2004) was to investigate whether the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and the development of word-reading achievement is similar among English Language Learners (ELL) and first language (L1) children, and whether a literacy-intensive program may be associated with a differential effect on the development of word-reading skills of ELL and L1 children. The results in kindergarten showed the relationship between SES and word-reading was significant in two out of three sub-gradients identified in ELL and in only one gradient identified with L1 children. With more instruction, SES effects slowly disappeared and ELL and L1 gradients became identical. I have two specific thoughts related to this research. Firstly, I agree that any attempts to improve achievement will need to begin in the very early stages of the child's educational experiences. This is consistent with the thinking in Philadelphia with early intervention programs and the use of all day kindergarten. Additionally, the components of the literacy program are the same ones used by our charter school and the host school district (Philadelphia). However, as I have indicated previously, language acquisition as well as student achievement is more than simply mastery of basic facts, which I feel is more indicative of these findings. To reach a level of proficiency or advanced on the standardized assessments requires higher order thinking and problem solving skills. I again agree that word-reading achievement is important, but there must be more involved to determine whether these learners are making the same strides in reading achievement without giving attention to the primary language.

Conclusion

I have attempted to synthesize a great deal of data associated with the idea that the achievement of African American and Hispanic students is consistent with the acquisition of the language learning process for each as English Language Learners. My initial hope was to provide the reader with enough information to clearly understand why it is necessary to view African American Vernacular English as the primary language of many who are descendents of the African slaves brought to this country under duress and without a formal language they could call their own. These circumstances created for the people the need to form their own language out of an expectation to comprehend the slave owner as well as to be able to communicate with one another. I used the qualitative data gathered from the work of Labov (2001), Alim (2002), and Ball (2005) along with texts from Rickford and Edgerson (2007) to provide the much needed background of AAVE. I felt that it was necessary to extol on the process of moving from African to African American as the culture is rooted in the language. I also hoped to convey the importance of the development of this language as it took place over a long period of time, and did so often without any formal education in the language of the dominant culture. Given its development, this language, whether referred to as African-American Vernacular English, Black English, Ebonics, and in specific cases Gullah, is a language associated with the culture of a group of people, not simply an extension of Mainstream American English (MAE). Furthermore this language, whether it is vernacular, dialect, or slang is not an indicator of the intelligence of a group of people as has been presented at other times.

Secondly, my purpose in this literature review went further by looking for relationships between the low achievement levels of the African American and Hispanic as both are non-standard English speakers. There was a multitude of data identifying studies that addressed the achievement of non-standard English speakers. Studies conducted by Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, and Toliver (2005), Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht (2003), Hoy, Hannum, and Tschannen-Moran (1998), as well as Perie, Grigg, and Donahue (2005) provided in-depth views of the achievement concerns of non-standard English speaking students. Together their studies spanned the entire educational pipeline from K-12 to college entrance. In some instances the studies included socioeconomic status as the basis for understanding the educational condition of these two groups. Much of the discussions regarding SES and the disparity in the achievement gap between these two groups and their White counterparts simply presented the facts about the condition of low achievement. These data found that whenever low SES was present among these two groups, so was low academic achievement. Numerous characteristics of low SES were presented to aid in supporting the studies and their data. For example single parent homes, low-income level, unemployment rates within the communities, and dwellings were some of the typical characteristics associated with the studies on achievement. I began extending my thinking about the possibility of further research in this area, but as a comparative study of “the achievement of non-standard English speakers then and now.” Growing up we were that low SES family who met each of the criteria above, but something separated us from the low-achievement. I am aware that in any subject there are the exceptions found during the process; however, I am unsure whether I am ready as a K-12 educator to accept the

circumstances of SES for low-achievement. The facts formed the foundation for my literature review, as within them are additional questions that could guide further research.

Lastly, I felt it was purposeful to identify data for the practitioner. What does knowing this mean to those of us who have to work daily at bridging the achievement gap? Part of the reason why I equated African Americans and Hispanics as two non-standard English speaking groups was because of the current instructional practices associated with both. The fact that school districts see the need to plan a different course of practice with any students whose first language is not English means the thinking is that the student is not expected to perform adequately without these measures put in place. Therefore it is safe to understand those school districts that offer ELL or ESL programs are attempting to meet the needs of students by first agreeing that without these measures the students will not perform well.

I included several strategies for the K-12 teacher to ponder while keeping in mind that English is not the primary language of many African American or Hispanic students. These strategies entailed anything from chunking to questioning aloud to contrastive analysis and balanced literacy as a curriculum. I am familiar with most of these strategies from first hand involvement and can say with confidence that with them the achievement rate of the non-standard English speaking African American children I taught was not as low as other students. This information comes from reviewing the standardized test scores of those students who were once in my classroom when I taught, as well as the writing scores for the school I currently manage. Inclusive in this information is the need to ask pertinent questions to linguists about the process of language acquisition. Perhaps

if educators could conduct research together with that of sociolinguists, further insights may be gained. Deeper insight could allow us to fine tune the way we teach non-standard English speakers and in turn have a more positive effect on the achievement gap.

Chapter IV

Methodology

Introduction

The idea of a linguistic barrier existing within the confines of our American classrooms where African American students attempt to learn has been discussed for a number of years by sociolinguists such as Labov (2001), Rickford (1998), and Wolfram (1998). Some, like Baugh (2000) and Wolfram (1999), have strongly suggested that as educators attempt to instruct African American students in Mainstream American English using only the traditional corrective methods, they are creating a deleterious effect on the environment instead of a harmonious one. Additionally, even if dialect alone is not found to significantly impede student performance, the teachers' expectations, and perspectives on dialect, culture, and vernacular speakers affects their performance and student achievement (Wheeler & Sword, 2004). The question becomes why do we continue to do the same thing the same way if we are yielding the same results, particularly if the results are poor?

For many years there has been research conducted based on the achievement differences between minority and majority students (Labov, 1972, 2001; Rickford, 1998). From the research most recently presented by Labov (2001), there still remains a 30-40 point difference between the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading levels of African American and Latino students and their White counterparts. The gap alone is a big issue, but the fact that it remains outside of the main focus of reading research is just as concerning. Those teachers in the K-12 educational arena must begin to be proactive in the search for solutions and supports that may meet the needs of our

struggling students. I began pondering this issue more intently after attending a workshop for teachers of African American and Latino students in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 2005. The organizers of the conference indicated that the academic achievement of these two minority groups compared to the majority is what led to the planning of the conference.

After having synthesized the multitude of research on minority achievement that currently exists, I concluded opportunities exist which allow educators to have a greater impact on student achievement when they endeavor to include aspects of the culture of students in their classrooms. To include African American Vernacular English instead of excluding it would demonstrate to children that a variety of dialects exists despite only one, Mainstream American English, being identified as the socially accepted standard. The purpose of my study is to help teachers be more effective in their instructional practice by including the African American Vernacular English demonstrated in many students' speaking and writing.

The AAVE has long been identified as “wrong” and in many cases viewed as a lack of intelligence, because it violates many grammatical rules found in Mainstream American English (MAE) or Standard English (SE) (Baugh, 2000). The student who has been reared on this language and hears it daily in the home and in the community as part of the culture, is left to question the validity of his culture, his place in society, and unfortunately his own ability to learn. It is difficult for a child to want to take risks in a classroom where all that he knows is his culture is not being accepted. Additionally, the urban teacher who feels she has adequately taught grammar lessons in the “appropriate” language that the student should now be able to emulate through speaking and writing,

becomes frustrated and dumbfounded when the child does not live up to her academic expectation. Education becomes an unpleasant interaction for all involved because of the imposition of one language over another.

Educators must remain cognizant of the manner by which this language has been presented over history. Edgeron (2006) shows us that despite the variations of titles, the people and the language have their roots in the West and Niger Congo languages. Taylor (1998) reminds us that during the 1960s debates occurred that involved the argument that African influences on the language of African Americans was just cause for the devaluation of the social status of the group. I would like to see teachers use African American Vernacular English in the literacy classroom by comparing it with Mainstream American English to demonstrate to students that despite the dialectical differences in the languages the meaning is not altered.

Research Design

The action research approach described by Glense (2006) is both collaborative and inclusive of the major stakeholders of the organization, while the researcher functions as the facilitator. The aim of action research is to improve practice through cycles that include gathering information, analysis, and reflection (Hinchey, 2008). Often the issues that cause one to seek action research are not particularly unique to any one organization or the other. What makes for uniqueness is how these issues appear in a specific setting.

I chose a mixed methods design for my action research project. The mixed method includes both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative approach was designed with the intention of making generalizations about some social phenomena

(Glesne, 2006). I chose to provide a survey to the entire faculty as I was very interested in gaining their perspective on the use of African American Vernacular English spoken and written by many of our students.

The qualitative method involved gaining meaning as an essential concern in the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I chose to observe the classrooms of the participants as they employed the vernacular in their instruction to assist them in furthering their own reflection and interpret their experiences. In this light, as the researcher I was the main research instrument, therefore my observations, questions, and interactions are pertinent to making meaning (Glesne, 2006).

Lastly, I decided to include elements of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002), because it allowed for the connection of the lives of the people with context, temporality, actions, and certainty of the people. Adding narrative inquiry to the research permits those of us inside the organization, as a community who are responsible for conducting the research, to also be a part of the research because we have had some influence or effect on the culture of the organization and therefore its context. Narrative inquiry will help to bring understanding to the experiences of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This form of research clearly lends itself to a sense of individuality of the organization and its stakeholders as subjects. This I believe is the context of which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) speak.

Data Collection Strategies

I used my observations from both literacy professional development meetings and grade group meetings where discussions of instructional strategies occurred. Although I am an administrator, it was difficult to separate myself completely from the research,

therefore, the role of participant-observer described by Glense (2006) was a very useful tool in the data collection process. It did not take long for me to empathize with the plight of the literacy teachers recalling my years as a teacher. I suspected the role would follow across the continuum from mostly observer to mostly participant (Glense, 2006). It was vital to see how participants' actions correspond to their words. I recorded the experiences gained from the observations as field notes. It is important that these field notes be rich in description so as to help the reader connect information to other settings (Cladinin & Connelly, 2000).

I utilized a checklist of effective teaching behaviors during my observations of the instruction using the vernacular. Additionally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the teachers about both their experiences with the vernacular, and their leadership (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I also provided a survey instrument at the conclusion of a professional development to assess patterns, recurring themes, any similarities or differences in attitudes that may develop during the study (Glense, 2006). Hinchey (2008) informs us that surveys can be an efficient way to gather larger amounts of information.

A focus group interview with parents was added to the research primarily because I am aware of the importance of keeping parents connected to what is happening at school. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) present this form of data collection as pertinent in narrative inquiry assuming that there will undoubtedly be a sharing of personal stories shaped by the knowledge, experiences, values, and feelings of the parents that deserve to be told in an authentic voice. I chose this format to gain information from parents as I wanted to provide them with a level of comfort that would be conducive to them sharing. While it is not at all my intention to be condescending, from my experiences with parents

from our community I find them easily intimidated by school personnel. Glense (2006) references children needing company to be emboldened to talk; I considered the same for parents.

For the purpose of minimizing ambiguity I triangulated the participant observation checklists, with the field notes from literacy meetings, and participant interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hinchey, 2008). Qualitative data presented includes dialogues from faculty and participants, however, pseudonyms are used to identify them. I reviewed previously collected documents that provided baseline data on students' current levels within the genres of writing and areas in need of reinforcement and refinement in the teachers' instructional practices. During this entire process I maintained a journal to document my own leadership and my personal reactions.

Context/Participants

As an urban, public, middle school we serve grades 5 through 8. Our student body is 90 percent African American; eight percent African, Haitian, or Jamaican; one percent Caucasian; and one percent Asian. Our school is situated in Southwest Philadelphia, which has been identified as having both the highest crime rate and the highest incidence of HIV and AIDS. The faculty consists of 16 grade teachers, two Master and two mentor teachers, four expressive arts teachers, two Special Education teachers, and three paraprofessionals. The supportive services team is made up of a reading specialist, social worker, a dean, and an assistant dean of students.

After having completed an examination of my organization, I assess the dominant frame emerging from the 58th Street Middle School is the human resource frame. The obvious reason why this frame is dominant rests on the fact that the organizations' goals

are to satisfy the human needs of its stakeholders. The students as stakeholders must not only have their academic needs met, but also their social and emotional needs as well, which has become the basis for many urban schools' existence. According to Wallis (2008), urban education has become more than just the reading, writing, and arithmetic of years past. It has developed into an extension of, and in some cases, a stand-in for the family where the student's primary needs are expected to be met.

Our care for and of the students' needs is easily evidenced in deeds carried out by many faculty members that range from buying lunches while on field trips because there was nothing at home for the child to pack, to providing haircuts to alleviate excessive teasing from peers, and even purchasing suits and dresses for eighth graders to attend the dinner dance with classmates because grandparents parenting for the second time do not receive the same level of state support as foster parents. The main inspiration or motivation responsible for these actions is found in the culture that begins with the espoused belief that we are responsible for the whole student and ends with an ethic of care (Beck, 1994) that permeates the environment. This is consistent with the definition of culture offered by Schein (2004). He asserts culture to be a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems. In all instances these actions or gestures are not an attitude of entitlement from the students, but instead a response of the faculty to that espoused belief and the ethic of care.

In addition to students' needs being taken into account is the understanding that the teachers' needs must also be given consideration. Charter schools generally have a fairly young faculty. The reason for this is primarily the limitations brought on by fiscal dollars, which are unable to span beyond the scope of the number of students written into

the original charter. Our salaries cannot compete with those of the surrounding districts. These fiscal limitations often mean that administrators are continuously concerning themselves with a young, less experienced professional, and consequently a lower level of selflessness.

In some cases these young teachers were in their first career positions and perhaps still living at home with their parents. In other instances they are living with another young professional who may exhibit a similarly low level of altruism (Hesteren, 2006), and although they are able to verbalize the espoused values of the organization, the underlying presumption of their own needs and desires is at times in direct conflict with the needs of the students. It is at these times that the organization is at its most vulnerable point because the principle of the appropriate “fit” between individual and organization that Bolman and Deal (2003) reference is in question. Schein (2004) tells us that the basic assumptions known as a group’s culture develops in response to the way it solves its own problems. That culture is then taught to new members as the expected way to address those problems. Many of the young teachers grow into the culture of the organization; others must be lead.

A first year social studies teacher calls out sick on the first day, creating a loss of continuity for the students. She calls out sick on the second day citing an illness in the family; indicating that her boyfriend was also sick. As a feminist leader, Noddings (1990) proposes that I am within my right to embrace the qualities associated with women, but I must also be concerned with professionalism that rises through a hierarchical power structure. This was not an elderly parent, grandparent, or child. So, I called her and strongly suggested that she reconsider the desire to take care of her boyfriend in exchange

for her professional duties to provide a continuity of instruction for our seventh graders. She was at work within the hour. I did not want to force a fit; just mold an individual.

A secondary frame emerging from the organizational scan I conducted is the political frame. This frame exists in both the external and internal forms of politics with power being the underlying issue (Bolman & Deal, 2003). To begin, associated with the charter school movement is a certain degree of political nuance that is simply unavoidable; a power struggle of sorts. Found within the host school districts is the position that charter schools are competing against them and are depleting them of much needed federal dollars for the students who have chosen to attend a charter school over a traditional public school. Host districts have no immediate governing power over charter schools, but the fact that charter schools must re-apply to that host district for renewal every five years is pertinent. Essentially, while there is no direct decision making power over charter schools by the host districts, our very existence rests in the hands of those who view us as competition to be gotten rid of. I have come to know these as the external politics (Bolman & Deal, 2003) that tend to spill into our internal operations.

I do not get directly involved in the external political arena as it does not affect my position. Conversely the chief executive officer seems to thrive on the political banter that occurs at meetings with the school reform commission, so much so, that he has added another position to his resume. He is also the president of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Charter Schools (PCCS). Just as Bolman and Deal (2003) indicate, this association grew out of the charter schools in Pennsylvania interdependence on each other because of the relationships with host school districts. Responsibilities for his position include annually bringing together all of the charters for both regional and state

conferences, meeting at the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) in Harrisburg twice a month with lobbyists and attorneys representing the coalition, working on getting relevant legislation passed that relates to the charter school movement, as well as meeting with the Philadelphia School Reform Commission to discuss issues that may arise between the Philadelphia School District and area charter schools. He then meets regularly with the CEOs of the charter schools to relay all of what has occurred at the various meetings in a given month. This is a monumental position with great responsibility and positional power.

Bolman and Deal (2003) indicate that coalitions form because groups have common interests and feel more can be accomplished together than alone. This is the premise behind the charter schools coalition; the schools operate as independent school districts of one with individual missions, but must unify to survive among the host districts. While it is true that 58th Street Middle School is part of a coalition, we continue to function from within as a top-down hierarchy. Mr. James wanted the organization to be politically connected to safeguard against the school district being able to impact us. But what the members of the organization (teachers, students, and myself) need is not rooted in politics.

The affect this has internally on our organization is somewhat complex. It affects from within because teachers join the organization with the traditional view of the principal as the leadership within the building. Instead of them having to vie for a scarcity of resources, which Bolman and Deal (2003) indicate as one of the five political assumptions, they are instead vying for follow through and consistency in leadership from the CEO. His office is in the school building, often causing a degree of confusion

for some teachers and conflict for others, including myself. Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest that conflict grows out of a scarcity of resources within the political frame; here power is actually the underlining source. He has attempted to delineate our roles verbally by stressing to faculty that his is a position of finance, human resources, and policy, while my position encompasses day-to-day operations and instruction. However, when matters of an operational nature arise that I feel require immediate attention he prefers that they wait to be addressed by him whenever he returns to the building.

For example, a student made an unauthorized phone call causing her parent to descend upon the school. She approached a staff member with profanity and threats. At my direction she was immediately escorted out and the police called. The next day the same student was observed again using her cell phone to call her mother without permission. She refused to hand it over when directed, therefore, I had her suspended as per the code of conduct. The CEO was outwardly displeased with me, while the faculty felt supported. Calling the police and multiple suspensions do not fit the political agenda created for the school; it does not look good. To the teachers this is often translated as looseness in the power hierarchy as well as a lack of support for what they are experiencing. For the CEO and I, this is a power struggle from within based on differing political agendas. This dichotomy is the foundation of our political frame.

Ironically, that which continues to be at the fore despite the ambiguity in our power structure is the teachers' deliberations on improvement efforts and increased collaboration in attempts to continue to meet students' needs. During grade group and faculty meetings, discussions have occurred in which teachers are presenting their own ideas and hoping for occasions to explore them. Therefore, I find myself repeatedly

bargaining with the CEO for opportunities that provide the teachers with occasions to collaborate on and lead projects. I agree with Fullan (2001), that showing trust in teachers to guide projects functions as the mechanism to motivate them to reach beyond themselves, add to their present level of selflessness, and to be more efficient and beneficial to the students. What becomes vital to this process, however, is my capacity to continue to negotiate power with the CEO to share in the decision-making so that goals are set not by an authorization at the top, but through a joint process (Bolman & Deal, 2003). If I am successful in doing so, I will create an atmosphere conducive to my project; if I am not I will be putting my leadership on the line.

Change Framework

The nature of this change is what I view as an improvement in the manner by which the organization has been striving for teacher effectiveness. Instead of another instructional strategy that could resemble the ornament on the tree syndrome (Evans, 1996), this process of including the child's home language is paying homage to the students' culture. In doing so we will provide an atmosphere of inclusivity and respect between teacher and student that is more conducive to learning than the exclusionary practices now being used. Including the vernacular of our students' culture could create a deeper understanding of their needs, thereby allowing the teachers to be more effective in planning and delivering instruction. Charlotte Danielson (2004) tells teachers that adding activities into a lesson without connecting them to the objective does not help students learn; doing and learning are different. As a school we often plan activities around the African American culture, however, this does not provide the depth needed for teachers to "know" about their students. For this reason I view this initiative as a second order

change, because we are attempting to address the behavior, norms, and beliefs of the teachers (Evans, 1996), and the way we as an organization address culture.

Additionally, as a faculty we will be altering the method by which we support instruction. It is necessary for the content area teachers to involve themselves with the literacy needs of the students with a more visible approach. Using content area teachers as pilot teachers in my project showcases them as experts, because they are at the forefront of the initiative and will be evidence for other content teachers, demonstrating that together we make a change, while providing the pilot teachers with opportunities to be leader among their peers. Being consistent as a school with what we are expecting from students will enhance our literacy efforts.

I am aware of the magnitude of this undertaking, as in many instances this type of investigation brings many beliefs systems into question, and may take some of the participants out of their immediate comfort zone. I am confident using the six-step change strategy identified by Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector (1990) to initiate this as a second order change innovation that evokes the greatest degree of improvement in teacher efficacy. Second order change, according to Fullan (2001) is the type of change that embeds itself into the culture and fabric of the organization. It challenges the thinking and beliefs of the members of the organization. Beer et al. (1990) contend that this is a means of drawing out ideas from the bottom up.

During the time I met with the literacy teachers individually and as a group, I began empathizing with their story (ies). They appeared weighted down with the responsibilities of the students' shortcomings. The initial step of the Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector (1990) six-step plan, mobilizing commitment through joint diagnosis, was

evidenced in my positioning of the literacy teachers as additional casualties in this painful achievement issue. Drawing from the previously identified ethic of care, I presented their feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and being overwhelmed to their colleagues. They were given forums to share about the amount of planning needed to form guided reading groups, navigate the writer's workshop, and keep up with learning stations; all while celebrating student and teacher victories. This helped create an atmosphere of empathy for the faculty to consider a different approach to our problem of low student achievement.

Also, during the concluding portion of Cycle I, I began including content area teachers in the literacy professional development workshops. This absolutely helped with step two of the six-step change initiative, which is to develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage the school's instructional methods (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector 1990). Until this point, content area teachers had not made an effort to acquire any of the strategies common to literacy; although they should. We began slowly by reaching consensus as to where and how in content instruction literacy skills could be addressed and strategies used. I observed a less than enthusiastic sentiment from some of the middle years teachers that I was confident would be addressed later by requiring that the reading and writing skills be integrated into all areas of instruction. The students in science and social studies classes should be expected to utilize Mainstream American English in their writing of essays or short answers on quizzes. This is actually in line with the latter step five; to institutionalize the revitalization through formal policies, systems, and structures. We will continue to provide professional development on integrating reading.

To assist with step three, spreading revitalization throughout the organization without pushing it from the top down, I provided opportunities for the teachers in this study to present their experiences with the inclusion of the vernacular as a teaching tool to their colleagues in both a formal and an informal manner. The formal manner was by participating in the weekly faculty meetings along with me. The first meeting functioned at the beginning of Cycle III as a reminder to those who were part of the faculty last term, and secondly to allow the new faculty to embrace this idea. These continued through the end of Cycle III where we present their conclusions to the faculty. This will satisfy steps four and five of the Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector (1990) change framework to spread revitalization throughout the organization without pushing from the top down, and institutionalize revitalization through formal policies. Opportunities to monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems (step six) will be on-going during scheduled teacher meetings.

The informal methods of presenting experiences evolved from the formal meetings. As colleagues began demonstrating increased interest in the study, collaboration with participants often required the need for me to provide common planning time. From this collaboration came the confidence for content teachers to approach the literacy strategies with their students. We were sure to celebrate small victories and strategize for any options needed.

Using content area teachers along with literacy teachers as participants brought a deeper understanding of the literacy needs of the students than just speaking about it in terms of percentages. Therefore, when the faculty convenes to diagram and organize the school improvement plan at the conclusion of the school term, input can come from the

experiences of others, not just math and reading teachers, simply because these are areas found on the high stakes test. From there committees can be formed, with teachers leading them, sharing in the management of the needs of the organization. I am of the strong opinion that teachers desperately want and need to feel that they are making a positive impact on students' lives.

Overview of Action Research Project

My action research project consisted of five cycles. I first presented a professional development workshop to all teachers during our grade group meetings, which provided them with an overview of the research. I distributed an attitude survey (Appendix A) to gain insight and assess teacher perceptions of the use of African American Vernacular. This showed the common themes aligned with the field notes captured from discussions that followed the professional development. During the same time period I conducted participant observations of the literacy teacher meetings. The purpose of this was to gain insight into the current literacy instructional experience with African American Vernacular English, specifically how teachers address it when the students use it, including teachers' behaviors, vocabulary, etc. I conducted a focus group for parents to (1) gain their perspective on the use of AAVE (Appendix B) and (2) to address their willingness to assist their student at home with code switching. From the data gathered from the focus groups, teacher surveys, and field notes as well as journal entries I reflected significantly on the direction for Cycle II of the action plan.

Cycle II consisted of a review of pertinent documents and the collaborative creation of a curriculum that included the use of African American Vernacular English as a tool, so that teachers could deliver more effective instruction in the classroom by

including the culture of the student versus the present practice of exclusion. It was necessary to develop a team of participants who collaborated on the development of the curriculum. The team consisted of a literacy teacher, a reading specialist, a coach/mentor, and an administrator. As a team we shared the data collected in Cycle I as well as reviewed documents including student writing folders, and writing scores to determine what supports teachers needed to include AAVE in the classroom.

Specific supports teachers needed included the support of a scope and sequence for instruction, aligned to the data from the writing tests, and the identification of any instructional strategies deemed useful, and of course the curriculum itself. It should be noted that the curriculum team was inclusive of those with experience in the area of instructional leadership, not the teachers who later implemented it. Selection of the five participants for the study was identified through a voluntary process at the onset of Cycle III. It had been my experience that teachers were often more comfortable with new initiatives when they were given clear guidelines, goals, and direction for their instruction. This is also consistent with Evans (1996) when he suggests that key to the success of an innovation is participants knowing its “why, what, and how.” Included in the curriculum was instruction in understanding culture, context, and formal versus informal; this made the idea of code-switching an unambiguous concept later put into practice.

Cycle III was the actual implementation of the curriculum in five pilot classrooms at a minimum of two days per week. This took place during the first and part of the second marking periods; approximately 80 to 85 days from October to February 2009. The content area teacher determined his preference for the student group to use as he

taught multiple sections of students. Literacy teachers utilized the group of students to whom they taught writing. Despite the necessity of allowing the teachers to manage the instructional process in their classrooms, I expected to meet with them at the close of each week to discourse about the process, specifically their perceptions about their effectiveness as they included the African American Vernacular English in the classroom. Additionally, I followed the pre and post conference dialogues that were part of the teacher evaluation process with the content area teachers as they began to utilize the literacy strategies.

It became a viable option to look at the impact the curriculum of Inclusion of African American Vernacular English had on the culture of the building as a fourth cycle. I provided the participants with the venue to experience teacher leadership. Each week participants were given time at the faculty meetings to present their experiences to the remaining faculty. This awarded my leadership the true essence of servitude through the building of community (Greenleaf, 2002). I became a colleague of the participants when we shared the faculty meeting agendas, but also kept the emphasis on academics and a well structured learning environment led to an atmosphere of trust which is an ingredient of collegiality (Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998).

Cycle V provided me with knowledge of my leadership, as it related to building capacity in others. I continued to keep a journal as a record to assess my effectiveness and the communication process between myself and the pilot teachers. Additionally, I conducted individual interviews with each teacher to gain insight into sharing in the culture of our students and a focus group that assessed their experience as newly identified leaders within the organization. It was potentially beneficial to the organization

to develop individuals as teacher leaders and would help spread the revitalization throughout the organization as stated by Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector (1990). Lastly, it was necessary to reflect on the course of action during Cycle III to assess the direction for Cycle IV.

Cycle I

The purpose of this cycle specifically was to collect data on the perceptions of teachers and parents on the use of African American Vernacular English and the current manner, if any, by which teachers included AAVE in the classroom. I began with participant observation of the literacy teachers at four content area meetings, each two hours in length. At these meetings issues and perspectives on student achievement were often examined by way of student work samples as additional data. The grade group meetings during the week of April 1, 2009 were each used for professional development and I presented data and research on African American Vernacular English to the general faculty. Code switching and contrastive analysis were also introduced for their consideration. I collected field notes from my observations of each of these interactions. I concluded with a survey (Appendix A) to gather their perspective on AAVE, its relationship to the curriculum and their teaching. This directly related to understanding the teachers' perspective on this topic. I feel that gaining awareness and understanding of the teachers' perspective greatly impacted my leadership, as it was necessary for me to consider the human side of this change initiative in order to embed it into the culture of the school. This impact was best assessed through my own journal entries.

At the monthly parent meeting on May 5, 2009 I introduced the project as a workshop and asked for volunteers to act as a focus group. The focus group took place

immediately following the workshop using the focus group questions (Appendix B). Nearly half of the 43 people in attendance raised their hand to volunteer when requested. Glesne (2006) suggests small samplings work best, however, once the number of volunteers became too large I randomly selected them based on a drawing. The action in Cycle I also included the development of the outline of the Cycle II plan, which took place over the summer of 2009 (June–July). During this first action phase I also developed the parameters of the pilot. This included the faculty needed to collaborate on the curriculum, the probable teachers to use for the pilot, and changes in materials. Unfortunately, a major limitation for any project is the uncertainty of the faculty members returning for the following school year. Contracts for charter school employees are from year to year, which can gravely hinder any planning process.

Cycle II

The purpose of Cycle II was to determine what supports teachers needed to include African American Vernacular English in the classroom after analyzing the data collected in Cycle I regarding perceptions. To respond to this we analyzed documents such as the teacher evaluation outcomes to determine where the instructional strengths and weaknesses were for teachers. The last set of student benchmarks and the Pennsylvania State Systems of Assessment (PSSA) writing and reading scores identified which genre of writing demonstrated the greater need and the students' strengths in reading. For example, we had to determine whether the first genre of writing should be narrative, persuasive, expository, biographical, or research. It was also necessary to again reflect on the data collected in Cycle I and translate it into the action stage.

The action of cycle II included a team of teachers identifying what supports were needed for colleagues to take the student's culture into consideration during with African American Vernacular English in the classroom. Generally, a scope-and-sequence would help teachers determine what they should be teaching and at what points. However, to go further and specifically support the shared sense of responsibility for literacy, we also developed an implementation calendar, which included the time frame for content area teachers to consider utilizing what has traditionally been known as reading strategies. To add to the calendar and assess teachers sharing in the literacy responsibility, an implementation form was created as a deliverable (Appendix C).

From this we developed the lesson plans, which incorporated African American Vernacular English in the classroom. These lessons were used as mini-lessons during the Writers' Workshop for literacy teachers and during the test prep period for content area teachers. We developed 10 to 12 mini-lessons that were used for each genre of writing expected to be covered during the first and second marking periods. We used contrastive analysis and code switching with the reiteration of context, infused in the instruction presented to the students at suggested points in the lesson. It was necessary to plan the mini-lessons to be specific as each equated to only 15 minutes of the Writer's Workshop 72-minute period.

The data collected during this cycle heavily examined my leadership abilities as they related to precise and authentic communication. This communication had to move beyond the "downloading" stage that Scharmer (2009) discusses. The extent to which I was able to transfer my vision of this project to the other participants while building their capacity to take the lead on a project (specifically the pilot teachers) was evident in their

desire, willingness, and ability to extend many of the lessons themselves. My journaling played a major role for the purpose of the self- reflection process.

Cycle III

As a result of Cycle II, teachers implemented the proposed curriculum of mini-lessons derived and viewed its impact on teacher effectiveness. The literacy teachers provided this instruction to their writing classes while content area teachers used the daily test preparation periods to provide this instruction that was reiterated later during regular class periods. The literacy teachers used the writing process to assess the effectiveness of a bi-dialectic approach that includes the use of African American Vernacular English in their instruction. Given that teacher effectiveness is generally determined by an evaluation tool that embodies the characteristics of good teachers as identified by researchers (Danielson, 2004; Marshall, 2001; Polk, 2006; Walker, 2008), I used a checklist derived from our current walkthrough protocol (Appendix D).

The lessons included examples of role-play, compare and contrast, and class discussions to move students' knowledge from the abstract to the concrete. Since I espoused to be a servant leader, I identified opportunities for the participants to facilitate discussions with additional faculty members to promote the teachers who participated in the study as empowered agents of change (Fullan, 2001). I provided opportunities during faculty meetings and grade group meetings for them to perform turnaround training as individuals and teams. This provided the participants with the much-deserved recognition for their efforts to improve student achievement and evoke change. I met with

participants weekly to debrief from their experiences the week before and I continued to journal my leadership experiences.

Action research pursues improvement or a better understanding in some area of importance (Hinchey, 2008). As an outcome of this study I expected to improve the effectiveness of teacher instruction and develop a sense of a shared responsibility among unlikely teams of teachers through the inclusion of African American Vernacular English; the cultural language of some of our students.

Cycle IV- Impact of the Curriculum

To examine the impact of the curriculum to include African American Vernacular English, and to supplement my observations I used the implementation calendar (Appendix E). The calendar assessed the number of content area teachers who were attempting to include the reading strategies in their instruction and how many were used. Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran (1998) in their discussion of effective organizational climates, indicate that when teachers are supported by their principals and their colleagues, they are likely to experiment and take risks to improve the quality of instruction. I also conducted interviews (Appendix F) of the participants as they reflected on the experience with students. The AAVE curriculum served as the vehicle to create the collaboration among teachers that did not previously exist.

Cycle V- Leadership Study

My initial plan for studying my leadership theory was through the use of the reflective journal and a leadership survey. The Lewin Leadership Survey (Lewin, 1939), was chosen and implemented by the members of the support staff. It was intended to be anonymous, however, a small number of faculty chose to identify themselves on the

form. This shows a level of transparency may be equated to the openness of a school climate that is spoken about by Hoy, Hannum, Tschannen-Moran (1998). Through the pages of the journal I reflected on the events of the day including individuals who were significant and then concluded with the theory of leadership identified in parenthesis as a written reminder (feminist, transactional, etc.). However, moving forward as emphasized by Sharmar (2009), I accentuated the need to assess the level(s) of conversation in which I engaged. I analyzed the progression or even a lack of progression through the fields of conversation. Whichever occurred, I wanted to remain cognizant of how I engaged in dialogue without making any assumptions. I also interviewed (Appendix F) each participant to gain an understanding from them of how they experience my leadership as I endeavor to transform them into teacher leaders.

Data Analysis

According to Powell and Renner (2002), qualitative analysis is a cyclical and iterative process with many rounds of investigating evidence, modifying hypothesis, and revisiting the data from a new light. For this reason I realized that I would need to reexamine data repeatedly as new questions arose and connections emerged.

Throughout the process of examining and reexamining the data I was sure to concentrate on identifying patterns, themes, similarities, and differences. This was evidenced by certain word, phrases, or patterns of behaviors of the subjects that repeated or stood out. These words and phrases acted as coding categories, which was a means of sorting the descriptive data collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It was necessary to develop a coding system where I highlighted for myself the ways in which these patterns

actually answered any of my research questions. This was specifically needed where the field notes from observations of teacher meetings were the data.

In addition to the above analysis process I looked for any deviations from these found patterns and any possible explanations that emerged from them. At the same time I aligned any interesting narratives that helped bring clarity to the data or the study on a whole. This became visible from the open-ended questions used with the parent focus group. The fact that there were variations to the types of families we served, undoubtedly lent itself to the differences in experiences. In the same light and extremely important in the data was any specific language or terminology the participants used to describe their experience; which may be specific to context as well and should be noted.

This process was extremely time consuming and had to be done before the data got “cold” despite the difficulty the researcher experienced. According to Glense (2006), good ideas contribute the most to the science of human behavior; findings are soon forgotten but not ideas. This is why we as researchers must progress on in the process despite the weightiness of the task.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that this study took on arguments and provided data regarding language acquisition as it presented African American Vernacular English as a first language versus Mainstream American English (MAE) for some African Americans, it evolved from the perceptions of some very important stakeholders: teachers and parents. Their acceptance of this concept, and high expectations prompted teachers to consider a more effective method of instructing students to utilize MAE when it was not their primary language.

Successful language acquisition comes at a much earlier age than middle school, therefore making it impossible to formulate it as the only argument in this study. It is instead the premise behind a possible reading strategy that may provide supports for students whose primary language is not Mainstream American English; specifically those of African descent. Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages for the purpose of identifying their structural similarities and differences (Connor, 1996). Using contrastive analysis to demonstrate to middle school students what the dialogue looks like and sounds like in both languages along with a discussion of context to help determine when and where either language is more appropriately affixed, provided students with the understanding of code-switching. Code switching is the movement between two or more languages based on context (Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

Teaching the students to code switch proved to be a more effective method of prompting them to demonstrate the more socially accepted Mainstream American English when required, while maintaining the sanctity of the home language. High school and college applications are minimal times when MAE is expected. Standardized tests that rate student performance become critical time when MAE is required if the student is to demonstrate competence.

While I have considered the nature of this type of project, one that questions belief systems, examines cultural awareness and acceptance, I view the limitations as few but significant. However, I believe that each participant, teacher, parent, and student will gain a great deal of valuable and useful information and insight making the limitations worth the effort.

Chapter V

Cycle I - Where It Began

Introduction

To help bring clarity and understanding to the persistence of the achievement gap between African American (AA) students and their White counterparts (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005), researchers have looked at the matter from several perspectives. Ford and Harris (1996) looked at the attitudes and perceptions of African American students toward school. Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, & Toliver (2005) examined the relevance of socio-economic status, particularly as it related to the achievement of minority high school students entering college. There have also been increased cries for language and literacy instruction that meet the needs of students who speak African American Vernacular English. I chose to look at the inclusion of African American Vernacular English as a tool to assist teachers in their instruction.

The purpose for Cycle I of my research was to gather qualitative and quantitative data from participants (faculty and parents) that would inform my cycles to come. Through participant observations of the five literacy teachers during Cycle I, I sought answers to the question of how teachers currently addressed the use of African American Vernacular English in their classrooms. Additionally, I hoped to acquire an understanding of the perceptions of teachers and parents on the use of AAVE, in and out of the classroom. To do so, I facilitated workshops for each grade group set of teachers and followed with a survey. I also facilitated a similar workshop for parents, which concluded with a focus group. Through it all I examined my espoused leadership theory (ies) specifically as they relate to creating change within an organization.

While it is understood that as the principal I possess positional power to impose an idea on the teachers, this project required humility and an understanding of “power to” if it was going to be successful (Sernak, 1998). I needed to become one of the participants and not a facilitator, therefore, it was necessary to immerse myself as a participant observer in the literacy teachers’ meetings. While doing so, as the leader I had to remain cognizant of the issues of loss associated with letting go of doing things the way they had always been done and the feelings of confusion and conflict that were being raised during this probe (Evans, 1996). At the end of any curricular modification or change initiative has to be a teacher who possesses high expectations and sound pedagogical practice for the student to achieve (Hoy, Hannum, Tschannen-Moran, 1998). McKinley (2007) identifies the social context for learning to be a key determinant for teacher success in increasing achievement of African American students where 40 of the 49 respondents attributed teacher success with African American students to their efficacy in building positive relationships.

I focused on identifying the issues most specific to the needs of the stakeholders in my organization and how to most effectively evoke change. I knew I wanted to present the experiences of the individuals involved as part of the context to add understanding and clarity to the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). There are a multitude of stories associated with urban education, but few that will allow the voices of the participating individuals to be heard and told as their own; not assumed about them.

Being a Literacy Teacher

I became a participant observer in seven of the bi-weekly meetings of the literacy teachers from February 2009 to the beginning of May 2009. From these meetings I kept

meaningful field notes of my observations for the purpose of identifying how teachers currently address African American Vernacular English in the classroom. The purpose of these regular meetings was to provide on-going professional development to support teacher instruction in the Reader and Writer's Workshop.

The literacy coaches checked in with individual literacy teachers each week as part of the cognitive reflective coaching adopted by the school. They also met twice a month with them as a group, and while I generally walked through these sessions, I was now becoming a participant observer much like Lencioni's (2002) fictional character Kathryn. I was now examining body language, listening for biases, supportive statements, criticisms, and more. Beyond the listening, I was trying to determine what lay beneath the words (Kegan & Lahey, 2001).

I planned ahead by visiting each literacy teacher on February 18, 2009 to inform him/her of my intention to participate in future meetings. With the coaches there was the culture of including food at the professional developments and despite my own eating habits I brought items that I knew the teachers would prefer to nibble on. This awareness of their likes and dislikes was a demonstration of my espoused feminine leadership to build a sense of community (Greenleaf, 1977). I knew I needed to put them at ease, not only because I was now sitting in for the entire time, but also at some points, being more vocal. I believe there was a certain degree of safety to be expressive with the literacy coaches differently than with me as administration. I had to make them connect with me, in this context, if I was to get them to really share their feelings about the students' writing, their experiences with the vernacular, and the possible residual effects on their own pedagogical practices. This was especially true as I hoped for second order change

that would alter the assumptions, goals, norms, and structure of the organization (Evans, 1996). We cannot go on thinking that literacy instruction is the sole responsibility of the literacy teachers when the students' needs are so great.

Developing Understanding

The subject of writing was the last portion on the agenda at the February 20th meeting. This was good for me as the teachers were already relaxed and open. At the onset of the discussion a few glances were shot my way, although I was unsure whether they were glances for me to begin this dialogue or a sudden expression of apprehension due to my presence. The same silence that began the reading strategy portion of the professional development had returned. The discussion included what was working and what was not. For a few teachers it became a "gripe session" until someone reeled them back in.

I heard one teacher say, "It's like pulling teeth to get the kids to write with any substance" and "It takes me so long to go through the conferencing with every child." I asked the last person speaking why she thought this was the case. Silence. Either no one wanted to say what they thought, or they simply did not know. For Dennis, a fifth grade teacher desperately trying to move to a higher grade, the students lack the maturity to care about how their writing comes across. Eventually the floodgates opened with someone stating their first drafts are such a mess. One of the coaches inquired about the teachers' use of the graphic organizers to help focus students' writing. Ms. Canter told her the graphic organizers help them organize their thoughts, but she still had so much editing to do.

The coaches continued discussing instructional strategies such as “TAG IT a 3” and “TAG” as a means of addressing the concerns outlined by the teachers, as well as the possible outcomes of using them. When teachers feel they have done everything asked of them, everything in their repertoire; they begin to lean on those issues over which they have little or no control. There came a point in this discussion that the “blame game” entered in citing student preparedness and parental responsibility as substantial hindrances to making progress. Ms. Di Simone interjected that when parents do not help children revise the first draft for homework, she then had to waste class time doing it. Mr. Rhoades agreed and went further to suggest that it would be nice if students came to school prepared with the pens and pencils they needed to write.

Listening to the teachers reminded me of the BMW and NBC described by Kegan and Lahey (2001) as they describe the language of complaint. It is not unusual to experience teachers engaged in this form of discussion. I would go further to say that it is almost the uniformly accepted language generally found in that dreaded dungeon we refer to as the teacher’s lounge. Teachers often began meetings this way but eventually move past it; at least until the next time.

Each meeting progressed similarly as the February 20, 2009 meeting. As I attempted to define how teachers currently attended to the vernacular in their instructional practice, I saw the literacy coaches promote strategies that were expected to be implemented for the sake of improving student performance and assist teachers be more effective. However, I questioned the authenticity of the implementation as for some it was often enveloped in frustration. The frustration of teachers erupted from a lack of parental involvement and the excessive amount of time required editing students’ work.

There was frustration, more specifically, over having to re-teach grammatical lessons they felt have been learned by now, but then accepted as possibly not taught by last year's teacher. This was chimed by Ms. Harris and echoed by Ms. Canter.

At the March 4, 2009 meeting I observed a different form of frustration when Ms. Washington actually accused students of appearing to write using the wrong language on purpose. After all, she stated, the process almost always includes self editing, peer editing, and teacher editing. How can you still have mistakes with all of that support? And the self editing includes taking it home to get help from an adult. What she did not say was each of these steps essentially meant taking the vernacular out of the original writing and putting in the required Mainstream American English. Frustration mounted between the teacher and the student when the child was told he had to re-do the piece, on average of three times, because it did not reflect the "right" language. This very well could be an example of the interference that Labov (2001) spoke about in his study. He suggested that the students' desire to not sound White may account for an unconscious resistance to using MAE.

Now, according to accounts provided by the teachers, it is also the children who may be experiencing frustration. I was fearful of the presence of frustration appearing so frequently. When it represents a large extent of the relationship between the student and teacher the learning environment is strained. It has a dismantling effect on the homeostasis of the classroom, which is critical for teaching and learning to occur with fidelity (Wheeler & Sword, 2004). The classroom has to be a safe place for children to take risks and feel accepted. A typical instructional strategy may not stand a chance when it is enshrouded in this type of unrest.

Time Waits for No One

By the third and fourth meeting we were moving closer to the deadline for the start of Pennsylvania State Systems of Assessment. The first scheduled assessment was writing, then two weeks later math, reading, and science would follow. The goals of the coaches to this point had been to help the teachers effectively arm the students with an arsenal of strategies and graphic organizers at their fingertips to utilize on the PSSA. As the coaches attempted to focus the eight literacy teachers on the objectives from the previous weeks they appeared more preoccupied than usual. The closer it got to the testing dates, the more the literacy teachers seemed to lose confidence in any of the strategies.

At one point in the fourth meeting, Ms. DiSimone blurted that she did not feel adequate in her understanding of the process. “I don’t know that I fully understand the connection(s) between the mini-lesson and the objective and how to carry it into the students’ independent writing.” Someone in fifth grade said they agreed with that and another simply said, “Yeah.” Ms. Lynn, as the usual voice of reason countered that the process really has to be worked at because it does not come easily. She admitted not being new to it, yet still having to work at it. She shared further that our schedule did not really fit Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop. We needed the 90-minute blocks that the program calls for instead of fitting it into our 72 minutes (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). More nods and grunts in agreement. A change in schedule is something that I had been lobbying for over the last two years, but received no movement from the CEO. Taking this dialogue into consideration, it is conceivable that the loose-coupling between literacy and student achievement could be attributed to fragmented programming on the part of

the organization. This was worth looking into and taking into consideration. I wrote in my leadership journal:

A main point I always appreciated from my teaching experience was the amount and depth of the professional development I received. If we are in some way not providing the teachers with enough of what they need or the degree of the subject matter then we are wrong to expect them to perform at the level our students need. I was glad to hear Ms. DiSimone be honest and clear in her observations of her own instruction; that was brave and I missed an opportunity to tell her so there with the others present. This could have shown them that I was able to take responsibility if there was something lacking in our professional development program and that there was no punitive damage to her honesty. I have to make a point of connecting with her tomorrow. (Leadership journal, March 11, 2009)

It May Not Be As Bad As It Seems

Each of the literacy meetings began with the coaches asking about the plus and minuses of using the strategies previously identified. This generally led to one teacher or the other interjecting his experiences while implementing the strategy with his students. This was often followed by shared testimonials by the remaining teachers of either what was or was not successful with children and why. The process was meant to be reflective, diagnostic, and prescriptive for the teachers. I believe I initially entered the meetings expecting to hear negative comments thereby causing me to center my attention on them. By the fifth literacy meeting I was able to allow myself to hear beyond my administrator range. I had to realize even in this situation I could benefit from being on the balcony (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

When I allowed myself to visualize the classrooms and students of which the teachers spoke, the teacher in me also felt some of the frustration. Moreover, I was also able to hear more from them than simply complaints. Underpinned with these statements was also a sense ownership of individuals and groups of students as characterized by statements such as, “my David wants to include his family in all of his writing” and “my babies worked hard for me this week.” Then there was also the look of despair on their faces when Ms. Canter stated how she feared not providing them with everything they need to be ready and having next year’s teacher assume she did not teach well. The eighth grade teacher added he was concerned that high school teachers were not going to spend time sitting with them the way we do. The look of despair remained as the discussion again turned to time.

In an attempt to accommodate the needs of their students, teachers extended lessons beyond the designated time frame provided. In doing so, frustration mounted as they were then concerned about how administration would view them relative to due dates for grades, benchmark exams, and the high stakes test. Much of the dialogue and behaviors displayed could be misconstrued as typical griping from teachers. Kegan and Lahey (2001) suggest viewing the conversation that includes complaints to be a conversation of passion. Often people do not complain about something that they do not care about. I was very familiar with these conversations.

I recalled how some of my days in the classroom felt when I was so desperate to make things “click” for the students that I pushed them to the point of mutual frustration. But then I thought for a moment how many better lessons came out of my desperation to connect with students because I reflected and planned more effectively. Teachers are

often opinionated and critical of their students; it could be considered part of the reality of the relationship. I think to a large extent teachers become almost desperate for students to do well as it is absolutely a reflection on the teacher. Is there that point when we begin to perceive our rhetoric as truth or is it put out there and then left alone to die? Whichever is the case, I sensed honesty from this group. Each week the discussions often moved from downloading to deeper dialogue (Scharmer, 2009). I wrote in my leadership journal:

Where do our perceptions begin and end? When do they become our realities; do they always become reality? Watching and listening to these teachers and knowing how effective they are in their classrooms I wonder if they realize how they sound. No one would want to sound that disappointed in children. I think it is the situation that they are disappointed in but the complaining makes it sound like it is the children. I am aware that the moaning and groaning functions as release of some kind. Middle school teachers are faced with an incredibly difficult task, particularly in an urban environment where so many other factors play a role. These are caring teachers who need validating also; that the efforts they are displaying are beneficial to someone. Doesn't everyone need that validation? Is validation the equivalent of support? (Leadership Journal, March, 2009)

As it happened, the sixth literacy meeting I observed fell a week before the start of the spring break and just after the PSSA testing window ended. As a feminist leader I was concerned about the morale of the literacy teachers and their care for each other now that the test had ended (Noddings, 2005). I wanted to send them off to break with something to consider at home. I contacted the coaches to ask to have time on the agenda. They agreed. As the teachers filed in, I handed them a piece of blank paper. Before the

literacy meetings proceed the coaches always reviewed the agenda. As soon as they mentioned that I would be using a portion of the meeting time, I quickly clarified that I was not presenting anything; just sharing a new form of self-reflection that I thought would be helpful.

Just as Danielson (2004) suggests whenever introducing a new concept it is more effective for it to be modeled for the learner and its expectations clearly identified. Therefore as I described the steps to creating the commitment map outlined by Kegan and Lahey (2001), I acted as the model the teachers would need to fulfill the objective. I asked them to follow me as I folded the paper the long way into four columns and label the first one “commitment” and include the prompt: “I am committed to the value or importance of...” I promised the coaches that I was not going to take up much time, but instead would be interjecting at what I thought would be good times to fill in my map.

When a point in the discussion of benchmark scores, first on reading then writing, appeared to become a matter of complaint; I asked teachers and coaches to complete the prompt in the first column. Although I did not intend this to be an exercise to share, I felt it necessary to share my response, again more for the sake of modeling the expectation than to divulge any feelings. To my surprise each of the coaches read their statements. It only required a few moments engaged in this process to remind them of their purpose. One coach told them very softly that the key was work together to improve children’s lives; whatever it took.

Teacher Perceptions One Grade at a Time

My data collection experience for this cycle also included an anonymous survey (Appendix A) on the perceptions of African American Vernacular English. The survey was expected to be presented to the staff during the regular Wednesday faculty meeting

on February 25, 2009. However, after careful consideration as well as some initial conversations, I chose to separate the workshop presentation by using each of the two-hour grade group meeting periods instead of the faculty meeting time. The rationale for this was straightforward; there may be less trepidation to speak openly in a small, intimate setting versus a larger open forum. I had to concern myself with the fact that race and culture were at the heart of this topic, which could spark any number of feelings.

I informed teachers the week prior that we would be discussing the new initiative associated with my research. I felt they would appreciate knowing ahead of time what to expect as opposed to being ambushed by the principal to force a reaction from them. While we normally do not eat through grade group meetings, however, at professional developments it is the culture to snack. So, again acting on the feminist part of my leadership I provided snacks to help nurture the collaborative environment. Somehow I believed chips and pretzels had magical ingredients that ignited urges to be participatory. However, more to the point, these meetings come at the end of what could have been an exhausting day; it seemed useful to provide snacks.

The meeting was also planned to act as a workshop that provided information to staff on African American Vernacular English. I recorded field notes as my observations of the natural discussion that followed each presentation. The purpose of the workshop was to expose the faculty to the background on African American Vernacular English, the instructional strategies of contrastive analysis and code switching by way of a power point presentation. I felt it would be beneficial in helping the faculty build coherence out of knowledge creation (Fullan, 2001). This would later help with the selection of participants, as they would be fully informed before volunteering.

Twenty four of the 29 faculty members were included in the trainings. The break down was as follows: four teachers from each of the four grades, two special education teachers, two expressive arts teachers, two counselors, and the two deans. I was unable to include the three paraprofessionals, simply due to timing and prior duty commitments. The sessions each consisted of six faculty members. Each workshop began the same way as the grade group meetings, with each teacher sharing his story of “success and sorries” from the last time we met. I then opened up by reminding them that I was considering an instructional strategy as a part of my research study and wanted very much to have each of them included in the process.

Fifth Grade. Through this process I discovered the individuality of each team member and feel it useful to identify the configuration of each of the grade group. The fifth grade team, one special education teacher, and two expressive arts teachers connected to that team. The racial configuration of the team consists of five African Americans and one White with the ratio of male to female being two to four. Just as relevant to each group’s discussion were the age levels within the groups. This fifth grade team of teachers is made up of a 22 year old (White female) with one full year of experience, one 24 year old AA female with two years of experience, two AA males 35 or over with five or more years, and two AA females whose ages fall between 30 and 35 and experience levels upward of eight years.

At the close of the last slide I opened asking what anyone thought of viewing the vernacular as part of the culture of our students. Everyone was immediately in agreement. Dennis went further to claim it as part of all of our culture because we all use this relaxed form of communication. Ms. Harris, a mid 30-year-old African American female, with 10

years of teaching experience, was raised outside of an urban area and referenced that she was not allowed to speak in the vernacular in her home growing up. She feels strongly that for those students who use African American Vernacular English exclusively also struggle with comprehension in other content areas. She was clear to make the point that it was not all of her students that used the vernacular so intently. “I think some of them do talk differently at least when they talk to me, the teacher. So I think they must know that there’s a difference.”

Ms. Forman, a 30-year-old, African American single mother of one asked, “Do we expect them to talk White?” And there came the proverbial opening of the floodgates. “Why is it considered talking White if someone Black puts endings on their words or uses a “th” instead of an ‘f’?” Mr. Rhoades responded almost as the devil’s advocate, by asking the question to the group not specifically to Ms. Forman. Ms. Harris asked Ms. Forman if her son talked like any of our students. The heads of the others who were parents began to shake with slight smirks on their faces recognizing the question was almost rhetorical in nature. Ms. Canter indicated that she could never take her daughter to visit her mother if her daughter spoke the way our students spoke.

Mr. Rhoades is an African American male in his mid-30s, with five years teaching experience. He stated that the vernacular is so much of who they are that they write the way they talk and that is the problem he had. This caused a reaction from Ms. Canter; the 24-year-old single mother with two years of teaching experience stated:

Yeah, that’s the worse part; when you have to edit all of their papers and they have so many mistakes in them because they write the way they talk. I think it’s getting worse with the texting because now I’m seeing signs of that in their formal

writing, too. You tell them that they can't use that kind of writing in the papers they want me to grade and they get upset and don't want to re-write the piece.

What I was hearing from this group appeared to be almost a denouncing of the vernacular. It felt like the negative view of the language that had been instilled in some African Americans coming out in this exchange. Could any of them put these views aside to contemplate the progression of the language in a population of people whose existence in this country was forced? I was beginning to worry. I felt that I had to move the meeting forward before time ran out, but to do so without compromising the richness of the exchange or the integrity of the study. I asked the group why or how it is that some of us use the vernacular while others do not; or at least not all of the time? Mr. Rhoades felt that the answers lay in what we are taught. I then needed to know the origin of that particular education.

The next 20 minutes passed with the discussion going back from the historical perspective of the communication of the African slave to the possibilities of interference in language acquisition. Ms. Harris referenced the powerpoint presentation that trailed the language from the slave to the current hip hop generation with an affirmation of sorts. She stated that she was glad to have a clearer understanding of the language. She also said she really had not considered the issue as anything more than something that they did not learn from the last teacher. At this point she was smiling perhaps out of receipt of a new revelation or the discomfort of it having to be "new." Mr. Rhoades and Ms. Canter, both of whom taught literacy, joined her in her observations. Rhoades asked about the possibility that education has been going about teaching Blacks incorrectly for all these years. They then shared the manner by which they were each taught and in turn how they

now taught “grammar.” Mr. Rhoades spoke about knowing when to use it and when not to which seemed to satisfy Ms. Forman.

I interjected asking why anyone felt we were having this discussion. Why is there this major discussion about our children speaking and writing in their vernacular? The silence was reminiscent of a teacher asking the class a question to which they had not been taught the answer. Then the Spanish teacher, a 28-year-old, African American female, single mother of one said: “It is just not socially acceptable. I am from Jamaica and have an accent but my accent does not cause me to use improper grammar or the wrong forms of English. People would not see me as educated.”

Much of the dialogue that took place, while in and of itself was pleasing to me, it was centralized between the African American teachers and one White special education teacher. One could surmise that her comfort level was due in part to her repeated relationships with the African American males she has dated. Differently than the art teacher, and the physical education teacher who limited their involvement to nodding their heads, smiling, or an occasional “yeah” demonstrating either a lack of interest or perhaps some degree of discomfort. Neither of those thoughts was particularly satisfying to me as each came with its own set of concerns.

Sixth Grade. The workshop with the sixth grade team also included the two counselors. The configuration of this group is as follows: five females and one male; all but two are African American with between two and five years of teaching experience. Although the mean age for this team is 26, none of them is a parent. Somewhat different from the fifth grade team where five out of six are parents and the mean age is 30 years.

Their discussion began with each of them affirming the research presented. The 22-year-old psychology intern (counselor) was first to admit that she as a “White girl from the mid-west” knows that she speaks with a dialect that is relevant to where she is from. But it is also for that reason that she felt comfortable conversing with students while correcting their grammar. She admits however, in doing so she could remember seeing frustration on the faces of some children in their efforts to comply. She now felt the frustration displayed by some could be equated with a “barrier” between what they live everyday and what we are asking from them. She wondered what feelings the students could actually voice in terms of being corrected.

Ms. Washington joined our school community five years ago and had impressed administration with her demonstrated commitment to her students. More recently, however, as she attempts to become known as the “rigorous” teacher, more and more students fail her literacy classes. Whenever asked to be reflective of her teaching process, she defends that it is not her, but the students who need to adapt. In response to Ms. Barker, Ms. Washington interjected that she made a rule for her students that they are not allowed to use “street talk” in her classroom. When asked to describe what she meant by the term she included anything from poor grammar to the slang words they use to talk about each other. She felt that so much of the students’ conversation is negative toward each other that she did not want them using any of it in my room.

Ms. Washington went further to say that while she could concur with the notion of African American Vernacular English originating from the slaves, she questions whether “there should have been enough movement past that point by now.” Her view is that education should have made enough of a difference over the years. The group

seemed to accept her view but both counselors were very vocal in reminding the teachers the importance of children being able to feel accepted. The second counselor, Ms. Grimes, made an additional point that none of what is being discussed is absolute. The use of the vernacular is not used by every African American and for some, education has and does make a difference.

Ms. DiSimone, a 25-year-old of Haitian decent, jokingly interjects that Ms. Washington “must not have anyone talking in her room because for many children the talk she is referring to is first nature to them.” She referenced the segment of the presentation that identified the way in which African American Vernacular English had been viewed over time as buffoonery by some. She agreed that there are undoubtedly many who continue to view users of the vernacular as less than intelligent despite the efforts of something like the “Cosby Show” when there are more examples of the former provided by the media. I asked whether we as teachers should be concerned by how the language is viewed and whether they felt our children were concerned. All agreed that as educators we should be and are concerned. However no one thought that our children knew enough about the bigger picture of life to concern themselves with perceptions. Ms. DiSimone felt that she could agree with the usefulness of efforts to “teach” the children context but she was also concerned about educated adults who are not the examples for our children here at school.

Ms. Lynn is a 27-year-old African American female with four years of teaching experience Ms. Lynn can be found supporting many of the school’s programs. Ms. Lynn was often the voice of reason at the team meetings, where others may show frustration,

she looks for positivity. She fosters the collegial dialogue and collaboration for the team. She also happens to be one of the literacy teachers.

Ms. Lynn suggested that we teach context along with code switching feeling it could prove to be the right combination to provide students with the understanding that has been lacking. She understood the premise behind Ms. Washington point of “drawing a line” as teachers for what we should accept in the classroom but was adamant that children must feel comfortable being themselves. She also added that she surmised that many educated African Americans are ourselves unsure of how we feel about the use of the different languages. I asked what she meant. Others wanted to know as well. “Well, you know Mrs. Gill, you have some that would say you’re talking White just because you use the other.” I wanted to see where this was going.

Ms. Lynn clarified her statement by suggesting that in truth many African Americans possess the ability to code switch and do it every day depending on how comfortable we are or who we are talking to. “It’s really only Grimes and DiSimone who sound the same way all the time.” “And maybe a few others,” someone added. Laughter ensued. Each of the women seemed to know exactly what was being talked about but Mr. Trotter offered no input. Ms. Barker agreed that she could identify times when the teachers had been out together that many of them use “that down talk.” More laughter occurred. I sat silently jotting down notes and thinking how complex this all sounded. I wondered whether the students felt the ambiguity experienced by their teachers. How certain are we as adults about our own experiences and feelings about African American Vernacular? Is anyone to believe that these inconsistencies about AAVE and MAE do not transfer into actions, specifically pedagogical practices?

This is the group that I felt confident would create the supportive atmosphere for each other to discourse therefore it did not come as a surprise when they reached this point much earlier than the first. Ms. DiSimone reminded us that to merely be a role model of “appropriate English” has not been beneficial to her students; she has to spend a great deal more instructional time than allotted during Writer’s Workshop providing lessons on grammar that she is sure had been taught before. This occurs during the identified conferencing time, which is supposed to be one on one. However, when there are so many language errors in one piece the teacher tends to spend a great deal more time with each student. A spiraling effect to this additional time spent, according to Ms. DiSimone, is either teaching fewer skills or, being late to administration with the deliverable writing pieces, or both. She posed the possibility of contrastive analysis and code switching being taught by each teacher, that way, she continued, “it isn’t just in literacy that the students get this strategy.”

Seventh Grade. The seventh grade team had what I considered to be a unique configuration. The two deans are middle-aged women with grandchildren and 20 plus years of experience. One is African American and the other White. The content teachers are each 23-years-old or younger, have two years, or less, of actual teaching practice and are graduates of Ivy League universities. Three are White Americans while the other is African American. Neither of them possesses any tangible experience with the urban environment aside from their current months of teaching. Yet they appeared to be more knowledgeable about this topic than any of the other teams. As I began showing slides during the workshop they immediately affirmed that this had been part of the education they received in their teaching programs. They had actually been exposed to the history

of African American Vernacular English. They referenced some of the same articles, authors and titles familiar to my research. I could hardly contain myself. I wrote about my encounter with these young people that night in my leadership journal:

It appeared that these young people are light years ahead of the others in their understanding of the topic I was thrown to hear them tell me the name of the course(s) and the professor(s) that shared with them that it is “wrong” to correct the students’ grammar because it is a form of a “put down of their culture.” It is unfortunate that despite the universities being willing and able to teach about the culture of the urban African American, it is not always any more useful in being able to connect with the individual student. Knowing the history of the child and being able to build a relationship with him still remains something that has to grow out of the individual teacher; no college can teach that. But still the Generation X’ers are more conscious of the culture than some whose foundations were similar to our students. (Leadership journal, March 2009)

Through the dialog that followed a number of comments were made as well as a number of questions posed. While the group as a whole felt knowledgeable of the language, it was evident that they shared concerns about the students’ futures. Alan, the 22-year-old math teacher spoke about his students being able to make the right impression on an employer or to a high school panel or at a college interview. He admitted that many in this country do not view the AA language as a form of cultural expression. He continued:

It’s like when I say y’all because I’m from the south; people pause out of surprise but because nothing else strikes them any differently they simply go on with their

interaction with me. I would be concerned for our students because there is that perception of them not because of the language per se but because of the other stuff that is misrepresented out there about urban culture and I think AAVE is possibly included in that.

Alan was speaking about the mental models of those narrow minded people who refuse to make a distinction between characteristics of urban life and the African American culture. He was referencing the mental models of some very small-minded people while I wondered about those ingrained assumptions and generalizations of our teachers (Senge, 2006).

I felt the exchange between the participants of this team was as open and honest as any I could have hoped for. One of the social studies teachers joined in by saying that she did not make an issue of the manner by which the students spoke or wrote for school because as long as it contained the right content knowledge it was acceptable to her. The second social studies teacher was in agreement. Sally went further to add, “I don’t think that as a blonde haired, blue eyed person I should go around telling any of these guys what they should sound like.” Again, some of this thinking was aligned to what they were taught at the university in their teacher preparation program but perhaps some of it was something else. I asked her, as a teacher whose responsibility she thought it was to prepare students’ language for their emergence into the world. She fumbled around her words, initially leaving it to the literacy teachers, then to the parents; just not herself.

I thought it disappointing that some teacher(s) did not readily see themselves as responsible for teaching the whole student not just the social studies, science, or math part of the child. In fact they felt the parents are the ones who should teach the language.

This notion from the social studies teachers of assessing content only could be a fair way to assess the students as long as it could be done consistently from one content area to the other. And as long as the high stakes test mirrored that thinking. However, that is not our reality.

I wondered what the literacy teacher thought about this. Could she, in her content area, feel the same way about the writing that included the vernacular? So I asked her, if she was able to overlook any use of the vernacular in the students' writing as long as it contains the correct content like the ladies in social studies? She responded slowly:

“Well... no not really.” Then suddenly but quietly she added,

But I agree that the way some students speak is part of a culture and even though as an AA I didn't grow up speaking that way I recognize it as a language that is related to a culture...but as a teacher I don't like it.

She further added, “It gets in the way of them making progress.” She stated that she felt that she could be honest and say that without being judgmental. “I can't grade them on content because the content is English in Readers'/ Writers' Workshop and therefore they're supposed to be graded on their use of English, right?”

She was very right. Some of our students whose primary language of use is African American Vernacular English are being assessed on a language that is being presented to them as though it were their first language. The knowledge that the test was not going to change meant that we had to change; do something that could provide our students with a more level playing field.

By allowing these smaller group sessions, I was not only creating a more conducive social environment but also taking into account the four characteristics of

curricular change that (Fullan, 2001) speaks about. The focus and clarity began to show through with each groups' discussion. The scope and complexity was evident in many participants' inability to come to terms with their own feelings on the subject. The feasibility was answered by Ms. DiSimone with the notion that the test preparation period be utilized. It does not require adding onto anything and it is inclusive of all teachers. The desirability remained the point of question. This was not coming from some management; it was coming from the cries of the literacy teachers.

Eighth Grade. The eighth grade team session provided me with less stimulation and information than either of the other groups. This team tends to be more laissez faire in their performance, which is also visible through their participation at professional development meetings. The team consisted of three African Americans; two were female. There were two White males and one African American male. The average age is 30 and the average years of experience are five. The parents in the group happen to be the African American teachers and they are beyond the 30-year average age as well.

I began by asking how they addressed the vernacular in their classrooms. Raymond, the math teacher smiled, almost out of relief to be able to say that he does not address it at all. He acknowledged hearing it but felt that since it was math why bother. Mr. Barnes, the special education teacher, also smiled and agreed that if it was math why worry. However, he turned to Mr. Bernhart whose students he co-teaches and asked him what "they" do. Mr. Bernhart, who is the literacy teacher, posed another question to the group. He asked, "Why we would even concern ourselves with the students' use of the vernacular. If America is supposed to be a melting pot of cultures why would we want our children to abandon their culture just to fit in?"

Ms. Bower felt that while Bernhart had a point the larger point remains that not everyone in society is viewing our culture in the same light as other cultures. She suggested there had always been a different standard for Blacks than other ethnic groups. That statement did not cause any reaction from either of the White teachers. Ms. Browning went further to reference the plight of the African American male and suggested that from this alone should warrant his willingness to conceive the necessity to arm our students with the tools that are specific to their fight.

Although Mr. Bernhart's sentiment was somewhat unexpected I am not unfamiliar with an adverse type of thinking on this topic. Much of what McWhorter (2002) suggests about the sabotage of the African American is hinged on the thinking that ideologies such as affirmative action and the Ebonics controversy are mere demonstrations of Victimology, Separatism, and Anti-intellectualism. It is a perspective that deserves consideration. However, McWhorter (2002) also espouses "that the chosen standard becomes perceived as 'the Language' thereby rendering the others sloppy variations" (p. 187). I am unclear how, on the one hand, we are accused of sabotaging ourselves because we ascribed to the reality of American school systems failing to adequately support our children in language acquisition that translates to academic success; yet, when within that same system other languages can be referred to as sloppy variations.

I wanted to revisit Mr. Bernhart's use of the word abandon when he referenced code switching. Is it to be understood that the many African Americans who use mainstream English are abandoning their culture? The two women continued on with the premise that our students do not venture into society at large and therefore have little

perspective of what the world expects from them. Ms. Bower was adamant that it is the role of the school to at least minimally help bridge the cultural divide that exists between low socio-economic status and high socio-economic status. According to her, “a first impression is a lasting one.” It was Ms. Browning who now equated the role of the school with her role as a parent. The fact that all parents expect their children’s schools to give them everything they need to be successful.

Bernhart continued to explore the possibility that we are devaluing the African American Vernacular to ask students to “put it on the back burner.” While he is often cynical as he references aspects of teaching, this is not necessarily a perspective that I had considered previously and I appreciated him for conceptualizing it for the group. However, I could not fully enjoy the discourse once I realized that it did not involve the two White male teachers. The two of them had been operating out of what Scharmer (2009) refers to as the downloading field of attention feeling that this was going to be more of something they had already heard. During the presentation I am sure there had been interaction from each of them however, once the workshop concluded and the dialoging began I am unsure if they provided any input. There was nothing in my notes. Did I miss something? The two of them had completely disengaged. I hope to make no assumptions. I suggested early on that these may not be easy conversations to have. Is AAVE the proverbial elephant in the room where everyone knows it is there but no one is willing to acknowledge its presence? Does the silence from some represent unwillingness or an inability to address it? What do the numbers say?

The Survey

I distributed the survey (Appendix A) on teacher perceptions of African American Vernacular English at the close of each workshop. I directed the groups to leave it anonymous and when done put them in the envelope. I then thanked everyone and exited the room. The results of the survey demonstrated that most of the faculty agreed they were aware of African American Vernacular English as a language form as indicated by 91% strongly agreeing and 4% agreeing. Likewise, 99 % of the faculty surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed their students utilized the vernacular in their daily speaking and writing. Yet with such high percentages of teachers being aware of the vernacular and their students' use of it, it remains only the literacy teachers who seem to acknowledge its presence. Despite their acknowledgment being an attempt to eradicate it, they are at least acknowledging it by not ignoring it exists.

The fact of the matter is that Ms. Wynn was not alone in her thinking that the vernacular “gets in the way” of her teaching. The literacy teachers had already expressed the amount of time required to edit the vernacular out of student writing and replace it with MAE as required by the curriculum. Moreover, 91% of the faculty either agreed or strongly agreed that the students' use of AAVE in their speaking and writing in school was unacceptable unless they were speaking to each other. In this same light, the survey yielded 100% of the faculty agreeing or strongly agreeing that students' using the vernacular while interacting with each other was acceptable.

According to the survey, 91% of the faculty disagreed that African American Vernacular English was acceptable to use in the students' speaking and writing but only literacy teachers took the time to address it in any way in the classrooms. Therefore it is

accurate to say that only 25% of the faculty was assisting students with their inconsistencies with speaking and writing, despite there being such disparity in their writing scores and the state standard. As a school we should at least find a consistent method of addressing writing with our students. Either we were all going to ignore it or we were all going to address it. The most salient argument for including the vernacular, using strategies such as context, contrastive analysis, and code switching was the plight of the literacy teachers and the fact that 88% of the faculty agreed or strongly agreed that they would be useful tools to encourage students to use Mainstream American English.

Parent Focus Group

The parent focus group did not occur until May 5, 2009 primarily due to working from the existing schedule. At a typical parent enrollment meeting I presented a workshop on the Inclusion of African American Vernacular English in the Classroom. As with the teachers it contained a power point portion as well as the interactive portion. I informed them of my research desires and assured them as a large group that none of what is being discussed would impede their student's instruction in any way. I told them how very interested I am to hear their viewpoints at the close of the presentation but also concluded that there would be a need to continue in a smaller venue using only a few volunteers. At the close of the workshop many were still chattering from the interactive point of restating the phrase either in the vernacular or in mainstream English but I had to move forward. I asked for five or six volunteers but to my astonishment several raised their hands.

Having to be more democratic than I anticipated from the interest level, I asked the administrative assistants to use the numbers given out earlier to select six parents for

me while I stepped out of the room. The six selected chattered the entire way from the multipurpose room to the library. Again recognizing that food places many at a level of comfort I had already prepared light snacks, juice, and water. They seemed pleased as identified literally by “oohs and ahs.” I do not think they expected to be so well received. We often have refreshments at our parent meetings but I took time to decorate the table we were using. It was May and fresh cut flowers were an easy added attraction. The group was even with three men and three women; all appeared to be African American but were not. One male and one female were African.

I began by reiterating the fact that this focus group was strictly voluntary and nothing they said was going to be used against their child(ren). I read the informed consent form aloud, asked if anyone had questions, and then collected the signed forms. We sat intimately around a rectangular instruction table in the library and I felt a different presence. The parents in urban schools are often criticized for what is perceived as low levels of participation and even caring. Statements are made by teachers, administrators, and mainstreamers, who feel that the conditions of the community are a result of the parents. Perhaps to a degree some of that could be true; but not these parents, they care. As they spoke I realized how much bigger this initiative could be. These people want everything good for their children just as a more affluent parent would and that means our being willing and able to provide them with the best tools to present themselves to society. Some of their comments follow:

To at least expose our children to the understanding of this context and code switching will give them a better chance to succeed in society now and later on in life. Like you said, reading, writing, and speaking are all forms of literacy. It's

important for the children to show they are not illiterate. (Monae, May Focus Group)

Yes, the importance of reading, writing, and understanding are the key components of education. If the teachers think this is an easier way to teach my daughter to speak and write well, then I would like them to do it. (Herbert, May Focus Group)

I would like the children to learn more about our heritage. I am the grandmother and I have similar experiences going on in my home. I do not expect the children to sound with me like they do with the friends. I understand that they want to have friends. Perhaps I am wrong for telling them that they are making mistakes in their grammar and trying to correct them. I learned today that there may be two types of English language; one for friends and another. (Kenta, Parent Focus Group)

I gained a better understanding of the difference between mainstream English and African American linguistics that I couldn't have explained to my kids. This is a new way to help the problem of 1st and 2nd language. I hope the school will be able to do something to present this to the children; it's not the same if I tell my son about it. (Patricia, Parent Focus Group)

I think this contrastive analysis and code switching is important for children and adults to learn that there is a certain language to speak at a certain time. We have to know that in the work world because it could be the difference between getting

a job or keeping a job. You can talk that other talk when you get around your friends or your family. (Monet, Parent Focus Group)

I believe I heard some of this emerge during the teacher meetings but not with as much clarity. The teachers seemed to have a number of issues enveloping their desires for the students to do well. But to the parents there is nothing else.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this cycle unearthed trends and actions identified through the field notes and observations of the literacy teachers as well as those of the content area teachers, and parents during exchanges after the workshop. At some point I began to feel it imperative that the configuration of each of the grade group teams be identified for clarity and point. I discovered that in many instances it was not simply race but also age, and years of experience that determined the participant's willingness to accept a new concept – African American Vernacular English as a primary language.

From the perspective of the literacy teachers, common themes come down to frustration, time constraints, and even a fear of appearing inadequate in the eyes of their peers. There were times when their care for the children was distorted by the amount of frustration demonstrated by the feelings of inadequacy. The pressure they seemed to feel was undoubtedly imposed as much by outside factors such as time and magnitude of task, as it was a strong desire for students to perform well.

A consistent theme gained was the level of inconsistency the organization had demonstrated regarding its view of African American Vernacular English. We had not created any opportunities where culture, specifically language, was addressed or a place identified for it in school policy. I found that to be true after speaking with the seventh

grade team of teachers. Their professional training programs made a point of referencing its presence in urban schools but failed to take matters further by aiding teachers in respecting its existence as a form of culture while preparing students for the standardized elements of instruction. Ms. Wynn said it well as she talked about not having the luxury of being able to ignore it because it is the standard and what is being tested.

I felt the amount of frustration mounted in many of the literacy teachers also speaks to the failures of the organization for having not found a means of creating a school wide expectation for students' use of language. However, it is critical that if the adults are made uncertain by one conversation about culture, then we must develop a more enveloping way to bring students into this same conversation. From what is heard from parents, it is clear that they continue to have high expectations and desires for their students. Additionally, they feel confident that the school echoes these same thoughts. They are not aware that anything about effectively teaching language escapes the responsibility of the school. It is safe to say that parents are willing to help.

I needed to empower the teachers to provide the students with the tools to be successful in life as the parents expected of them: the use of legitimate power based on mutual agreement, not coercive power (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). Nurturing the possible feelings and emotions that were likely to emerge challenged my espoused servant and feminist leadership style; I needed to create a more collaborative environment for the literacy teachers to feel they belonged.

Chapter VI

Cycle II

Introduction

A challenge to my leadership and the African American Vernacular English research came in early May, 2009 which began Cycle II. We were notified that the results of the Pennsylvania Systems of School Assessment (PSSA) for that year would be made available before school closed. Word of testing results always lent a sense of anxiety and expectation to the school climate, but even more then, as we were participants in the Teacher Advancement Program Grant. This was an initiative of in-house cognitive coaching and mentoring that lead to performance-based pay incentives for the faculty. This performance pay was hinged upon specific outcomes of the high stakes test as well as value-added assessment, which included teacher observations.

I planned my cycles purposefully, knowing that we would need to begin Cycle II in May 2009 prior to school closing and end well enough ahead of the reorganization period which began in early August 2009. The plan was to have Cycle II completed so that its results could be taken into account during the reorganizational period. I feared having the test results so soon could skew my plans for the research; and it did. Not having made the gains we had expected caused the CEO to be hyper vigilant about curriculum. However, what he generally spoke of was the “cookie cutter” type of curriculum that often only appeared to take into account the differences in student ability or issues of demographics, but in actuality did not. What would Leonard, the CEO, do about the fact that we had not made the double digit gains we expected, how the change would occur and who would be affected was on everyone’s mind.

As a last point, there was the usual stress associated with the speculation around which teachers would return for the upcoming school year and which would not, as charter school contracts were simply year-to-year. This always involved the process of teachers first expressing an interest to return, then being invited back, and lastly signing a contract. The outcomes of this process were particularly relevant to my study as I needed to know what faculty I could depend on for the development of the supports for teachers, what team of teachers would make themselves available as participants in the study, and what curricular/operational amendments would occur as a result of test scores and faculty changes. I felt less in sync with the process but was not able to pinpoint why.

Getting on the Same Page

The research conducted during Cycle II was specifically for the purpose of assessing what supports teachers would need in order to become more effective in including African American Vernacular English in their classrooms. The cycle began during the week of May 5, 2009 and lasted through July 29, 2009. As a first step, I initially elicited the support of my instructional support team, as it was this team that generally assisted with the data analysis, curriculum development, and classroom observations through the cognitive reflective practice. The team consisted of Ms. Mallory and Ms. Finer the Master and Lead Teachers for reflective practices; Mrs. Martin, our Reading Specialist; Ms. DiSimone, one of our higher achieving literacy teachers; and myself. The last month of school always consisted of committee development, initial planning, and typical close out procedures. During the meeting the team and I met and created an outline for Cycle II.

Mrs. Martin's, the reading specialist, first question was about the test scores. "Do we have the disaggregated PSSA results yet?" I told her I had not seen them but those results would only be a portion of what we needed to look at as we moved forward. I did not want us to get weighted down with a discussion about test scores. At this point these committee meetings were only allotted an hour in length because we each had additional duties afterward. The coach, who at times presented herself as the guardian of our teachers asked about other forms of data that would be used. She and I were together during the numerous training hours, in July and August of 2008, for the performance based pay program that emphasized the need for value-added assessments to be in place to assess teacher performance.

I used this conversation as segue into my research that would look at teacher efficacy. Ms. Finer said, "I thought your research had to do with the way the kids talk and write; I've heard a few discussions about it around the building." I told her that was part of it but as an extension of that was the question of how effective were we at getting the students to proficiently use Mainstream American English when they need to? "Oh...I get that," said Ms. DiSimone. I told them they would get greater understanding of how it all connects when we actually begin talking about the supports for the teachers. "Today we should backward map just to develop a timeline to work from then when we get together we will have to allow the information we have help us to decide what that support was going to be." I understood that for them it may have felt like working from a blank slate. If so, it was not something everyone had experience with and there was going to be the need to take things one step at a time. I was confident I had an able group but did not want to scare them off from being a willing one.

There were a total of 16 meetings, however, I have chosen to speak about specific ones, as some were more productive than others. The second committee meeting was not until June 10, 2009. This meeting was somewhat brief because the CEO, Mr. Leonard James spoke first identifying the process for participation on committees. He instructed participants on the number of hours available, whether there was a stipend available, and other logistical matters such as these. Therefore, we used the balance of this meeting to simply identify which documents we felt would be valuable to review in an attempt to move us forward, and who would be responsible for gathering specific pieces. For example, Mrs. Martin felt it important to view samples of students' work. She said, "I can't help feeling like we'd be unfairly judging the students if we only looked at test scores but I realize that we can't ignore that piece of data." Ms. DiSimone agreed by saying, "I think you're right Ms. Martin; its more authentic to look at what comes directly from instruction." My mind began to wander as I pictured the possible mounds of papers that we could be rummaging through when Ms. DiSimone continued, "We'll have to keep it manageable, though. Ms. Martin, how about if you and I talk about that more and we can be responsible for student work?"

The Master teacher and coach, Ms. Mallory and Ms. Finer both agreed to gather and disaggregate the students' scores on the Pennsylvania State Systems Assessment (PSSA) for reading, writing, and math. They would begin with the most current and work back to previous years. "We'll decide how far back to go when we start looking at it and finding the trends that come out of it, if that's ok?" They were asking this of the team but in reality they knew no one else would be as good with the data as the two of them. We all smiled and agreed.

I suggested I would bring the results of the teachers' observations from this year. The looks that came over their faces were telling. I have yet to find a teacher that is willing to be critical of a colleague. The idea of sharing each others' scores made them all uncomfortable until I followed with, "I'll blacken out the names and just assign a number for identification purposes." I continued, "And depending on when we meet again, I will have it broken down to just the real scores in each of the domains." Although there were no actual sighs of relief, there was relief. Ms. Mallory added, "Well if we're going to look at student work then it makes sense to look at teachers' proficiency in teaching, right?" It was rhetorical.

Dialoging About African American Vernacular English

We continued on July 6, 2009 with our third meeting. As a team we decided to work only four days per week from July 2009 until the work was done. Although half days were suggested, we sometimes worked longer the further we progressed in the process. I remained cognizant of the fact that neither Ms. Martin nor the two lead teachers had attended any of the professional development workshops during the last cycle. The workshops took place during grade group meetings when they had other duties to perform. Therefore neither of them had a background into why I was looking at this information. They needed a framework by which to base their work.

I again introduced to our current teammates the powerpoint presentation used during Cycle I as the overview on African American Vernacular English. As the slides passed the conversation seemed easy flowing and natural. Ms. Finer chuckled when she asked if this was "real." I asked if what was real? She went on, "I mean I kind of knew a lot of this stuff like the history and definitely the achievement issues but I never thought

of it altogether. What made you start to look at all of this together?” I shared with her the process of my initially looking at the achievement gap between African Americans and their White counterparts in the hopes of finding a solution to the low achievement of our students at 58th Street Charter School. Despite what seemed to be a comfortable dialogue they seemed unsure of what any of this could mean to our students.

I went further by sharing the results of the survey presented during Cycle I, which spoke to the perceptions of some teachers about the students’ use of AAVE. “I learned from the research that 99% of our teachers agreed our students use AAVE and 91% feel that it is unacceptable to use in their speaking and writing while in school.”

“Unacceptable?” asked Mrs. Martin. She seemed almost insulted by my use of the word. “Yes,” I responded. I asked the question, “How do you think we demonstrate to students that their language is unacceptable?” “But I don’t think unacceptable is necessarily the best word,” said Mrs. Martin.

Ms. DiSimone reiterated the AAVE power point and engaged individuals. “Ms. Martin you know our kids don’t use the best grammar, right?” Ms. Finer added, “And they write the way they talk.” The children make a point of telling me that I speak proper but I always tell them it’s because I’m from England.” Ms. DiSimone replied, “It’s not just that you have an accent; they tell me that too.” Ms. Mallory asked, “You mean you really never noticed how the students talk and write?” I feared Mrs. Martin was avoiding commenting on our students’ obvious use of African American Vernacular, which would have been disappointing to me. Instead she countered with, “I realize there are a lot of grammatical errors in their writing and I agree the children write the way they

speak.” She continued, “I just thought that was the challenge of working with a group that had a different dialect.” Wow, I thought, where did that come from?

I wondered whether Mrs. Martin’s perspective was due in part to being educated outside of the United States, being a Reading Specialist, or something else, but it was clear that her input would add something special to the team. I told her that she had a unique perspective because as teachers we have often told African American students that the way they talk and write is wrong. I was looking forward to the subsequent meetings now more than ever. I had hoped we as a team would benefit from the strength of each member’s viewpoint as it would aid our work to provide the teachers with what they need to more effectively teach the students.

Despite my study being the vehicle for this adaptive change (Heifitz, 1994) the fact was that the data collection process had to be a give and take with the teachers; I was not looking to delve into this innovation by way of a standard operating procedure or one that would require the expertise of the authority figure only. The faculty had to be willing to be open and honest while I had to resist sounding in any way judgmental. I was reminded of what Stowell and Mead (2007) said about teamwork, that it only exists if the desire is voluntary and not a form of a forced servitude situation. The organization and I needed things to move in this collaborative direction if we were to possess the atmosphere for a systems way of thinking and behaving, recognizing that our usual way of functioning had not been successful.

Test Scores and More

It was not until the July 8th meeting that we reviewed the preliminary results of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) for reading and writing, as well

as multiple samples of students' writing from the close of the term. Though the numbers were not yet disaggregated and remained below the state standard, we were nonetheless relieved to see that the school continued to move students out of the below basic category while also increasing the number of students in the proficient and advanced categories for both reading and math. For example, the math scores in 2008-2009 showed a decrease of 23 percent in the below basic category and an increase of 12 percent in the advanced/proficient category. Likewise, in reading from 2008-2009 there was a decrease of 13 percent of students in the below basic category while the advanced/proficient group increased by eight percent. Figure 1 shows the percent by grade of proficient and advanced students for the 2008-2009 school year. Writing is identified for grades five and eight.

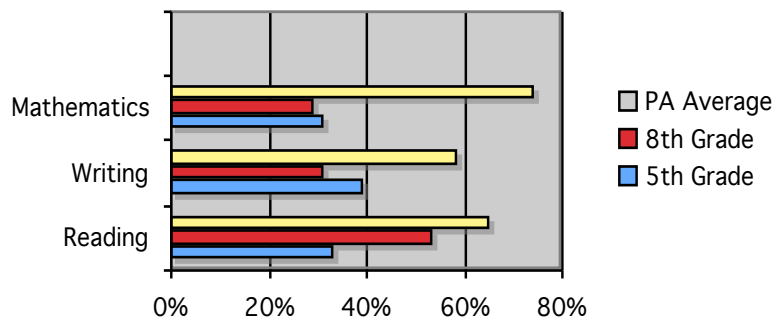


Figure 1. PSSA Outcomes for 2008-2009

I noticed the look on the faces of the reading specialist and the literacy teachers as well as the coaches/mentors; they were all disappointed that there was not a larger increase. “Oh my God is that all we did?” was the first comment from Ms. Finer, the literacy coach. Then flatly, “Wow,” from Mrs. DiSimone, while Ms. Mallory remained silent. In reality I was also disappointed but had become accustomed to feeling this way

year after year. I suspect their disposition resulted from feeling that the gain was not significant enough compared to the amount of work they each supplied during the course of the school year. I can agree but perhaps it is because I have a different vantage point (observing the entire school not just one classroom) that I felt that these numbers in reality represented an incremental growth that was actually consistent with our efforts. In fact, this growth was absolutely due to everyone's efforts and in spite of other essential variables. I felt that I possessed a big piece of the puzzle with which they were grappling. They wanted to know how so much work could yield only incremental gains. I did not want them to begin this process feeling disheartened but felt it important that they be aware of the significance of assessing the entire picture and then determining what is needed for our organization given its context.

I shared with the team an issue that plagued me routinely which was the fact that each year the 58th Street Middle School experienced a 50 percent deficit. The deficit, however, was not within the budget, which is often the case with other districts. Our deficit was with both the student body and faculty. For instance, the students returning for the 2007-2008 school year were 193; meaning 52 percent of the students entering the 2008-2009 school term were new. Likewise, 40 percent of the faculty was new. This revelation had meaning on multiple levels.

For example, with so many new teachers we would have to start over with the same entry-level professional development for our preferred best practices in reading and writing instead of moving forward to the next level. The same thought was true for the students. Only half of them were privy to the instructional practices we prescribed to as a school, therefore we would have to start at a beginning level with them. In this manner

we were not working with a consistent population of students or teachers by which we could base the benefits of our instruction.

As it related to instruction, the idea that whatever instructional best practices we felt beneficial to students' achievement promised minimal long term effect on the school's report card because little more than half of them returned each year to demonstrate its benefit. In the same light was the degree of professional development we provided teachers to aid them in improving their instruction. Next, having to begin new with 11 incoming teachers to train in the instructional methods we felt confident about would be an important variable in student achievement. With such a revolving door of students and staff incremental gains was perhaps all that could be expected. The numbers of returning students and faculty were similar for the 2006-2007 school term; 199 and 14 respectively.

I knew conclusively that what was causal was as much an organizational matter as an instructional one; however, one that had a major impact on the experiences of the teaching faculty. In my estimation this limitation was a part of the landscape of our organization that helped shape our story in much the way Michael understood Ming Fang's life was shaped by the time and place she wrote about as shared by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). However, as germane as it was to the landscape of our organization; the fact was, it had to change.

Ms. Mallory questioned, "Are we supposed to be doing something about teacher retention this summer, too?" "Not just teacher retention but students coming back are an issue too," was stated by Ms. Finer. I assured them that I did not expect our attempts at supporting teachers as they began to include the students' culture was going to be a cure

for everything that ailed the 58th Street school. “But,” I began, “if we can increase teacher leadership and the student teacher connection as we attempt to improve efficacy then we may see a spiraling of sorts.” This I believed was a meaningful direction to move the organization.

Unfortunately it is not with an ease of the tongue that I say this because it means convincing the CEO that what we had worked to put in place as policies, procedures, and rules may very well be the cause of our dissatisfaction with student achievement. As Heifetz and Linsky (2002) point out, even dysfunctional habits become part of one’s identity. Therefore, it is safe to assume that he would react or respond as someone experiencing a loss. I needed a plan to communicate this information to him by way of my own personal responsibilities and not through a language of blame that would block either of our commitment to the much needed transformation.

I know Mallory and Finer feel attacked anytime there is a discussion about teacher performance because they are the support for teachers. What I want them to realize is that (1) As the instructional leader I am also a form of support for teachers, and (2) with that support available there is also a degree of culpability on the part of the teachers for their own success with students. That has to be made clear to them while we are in this process. I presented the issue of retention to them to show my desire for open communication, and participation. Ms. Martin and DiSimone seemed to get it because they just flowed with it and Ms. Mallory next. I’ve always known Finer isn’t comfortable with sharing; she uses sarcasm to communicate her feelings. She isn’t resistant just unfamiliar; so it’s up to this

forum of shared decision making to help her with that. (Democratic Leadership- Leadership journal July 9, 2009)

Why Teacher Effectiveness Matters

We continued reviewing documents as agreed. It had been decided previously that I would be responsible for providing documents related to the teachers: the observations. At the July 13th meeting I shared with the team the average scores of our teachers for the 2008-2009 on the observation tool. This observational tool was provided to us as part of the requirements for participation in the TAP (Teacher Advancement Program) grant. The Master Teacher, the Coach, and myself utilized the same tool for observations. For me it was for the purpose of rating teacher performance while they used it to enhance reflective practices of each teacher.

Though the rubric included a score of one to five, the first year of the program required use of only a one through three score where one meant unsatisfactory, two below basic, and three was satisfactory. There were three categories with a total of 19 descriptors among the three areas: Designing and Planning Instruction, the Learning Environment, and Instruction.

Ms. Finer, who again functions from the thinking that the teachers are doing all that they can do each day asked, “Why are we worried about the scores from the teachers’ observations? How could that help us?” I replied, “How else are we going to talk about the supports teachers need without looking at their efficacy with what they have had?” I responded almost out of dissatisfaction that she would ask and continued by saying, “You cannot look at improving instruction without being clear about where everyone was.” Mrs. Martin added, “We’ve looked at the students’ scores so it’s only fair

that we look at the teacher numbers too, don't you think?" I assured them that the names were blacked out so there was not a personal attack on anyone, even on Ms. Mallory or Ms. Finer as coaches.

Assessing the areas on the observation tool, the average score for Designing and Planning was 2.1 of 3. The average score for Learning Environment was 2.06, and average score for Instruction was 1.8 (see Figure 2). The 19 descriptors included on our evaluation form are consistent with the assessment of teacher effectiveness given by researchers. Polk (2006) indicates that teachers who are effective provide clarity, address students' prerequisite knowledge, plan well, and they provide feedback that requires students to reflect, evaluate, and connect. The word connect stood out for some of us. Students and teachers were not connecting to each other. Students were not connecting to the curriculum, which is what needed to change.

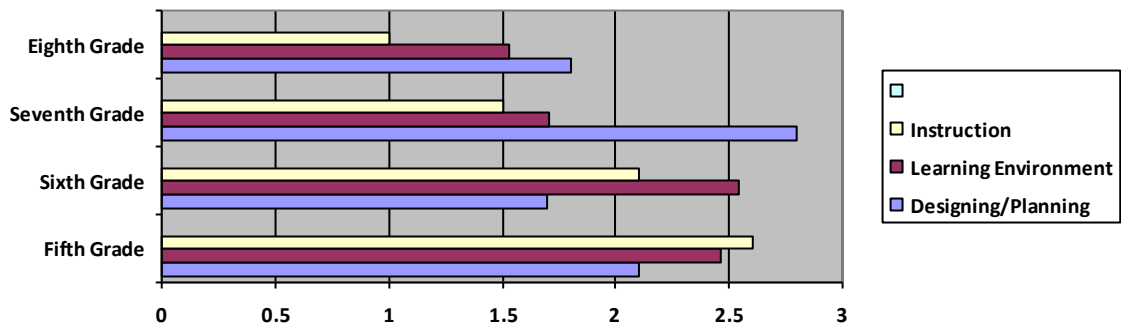


Figure 2. 2008-2009 Average Teacher Observation Score by Grade

Ms. Finer wanted to know if anyone scored a three in anything and I was able to tell her so. However, going back to the 50 percent deficit in retention identified earlier, it would be difficult to expect many to score higher when there is the question of the

amount and degree of professional development, experience, and training possessed by the new faculty each year. Ms. DiSimone made the point needed, “We’ll need to find something that will help all teachers connect with the students.” “Yes,” said Ms. Mallory, “because the bottom line is that it doesn’t matter how well they know the Writer’s Workshop; the point becomes how much the kids want to hear from you.” I agreed with this from experience. “When I was still in the classroom once I built a respectful relationship with my students they were open to anything I said; they didn’t know how much PD I had.” Ms. DiSimone added to my statement, “That’s right it’s just you and them.”

“So what do you think we should do for the teachers to give them that kind of relationship with the children?” asked Mrs. Martin who genuinely wanted to know. I told her, “Whatever we do I will need to assess the teachers as often as we assess the students.” Ms. Finer identified a checklist of sorts that had been distributed at one of the coach’s training sessions. “It’s already aligned to the observation tool; that way we’re not presenting something additional to the participating teachers.” To use this teaching/learning checklist (Appendix D) throughout the upcoming cycle could be a quick method of collecting data; the same way I conducted my 10-minute walkthroughs. According to Little et al. (2009) some walk-through visits are simply to collect data and are non-evaluative. The researchers go further to say administrators need to look for patterns of instruction to improve teacher effectiveness, to encourage discussion of the instructional process and to allow more reflection on the process of instruction. All of which was exactly what I needed teachers to get from this experience.

Ms. Finer's idea to use the checklist was almost a breakthrough in her participation. She maintained her support of teachers by not adding something new to their plates. At the same time she stayed faithful to the project recognizing that there had to be multiple forms of data collection. I think the communication we've begun to experience is due in part the norm of valued communication and from Mrs. Martin's willingness to participate. She has often remained quiet at faculty meetings or sabotages her contributions by beginning with "I know I've never taught but..." The fact that she works with small groups of students and does not teach classes gives her a unique perspective. When this group is at a point where teacher needs issues are conflicting with student issues, I turn to her for input. (Democratic, Leadership Journal July 13, 2009)

Connecting, Coordinating, and Collaborating the Data

By the end of the second week of meetings we were still debating about curricular modifications that would possibly complement our current literacy curriculum and not be an addition to it. The principle of our curriculum was based on the work of Calkins (1989), who presents several ways that the teaching of writing influences the teaching of reading. Part of my plan for the 2009-2010 school term and the project was to integrate reading strategies into the other content areas to present a more comprehensive approach to literacy for the students. Initially the teacher coach balked at giving content area teachers some responsibility in literacy instruction. Her view included, "When I work with teachers they're overwhelmed and concerned about their subject and differentiating the instruction to meet the students' ability levels...Now, we're going to ask them to learn about literacy, too."

Mrs. Martin countered, “It shouldn’t be a matter of them learning about literacy as something extra; simply asking them to be more attentive to literacy from within their content.” I added, “Teachers are proficient with the English language so why not ask them to address it if and when it comes up in their content?” Ms. Mallory seemed to waffle when she said, “Yes, but are they supposed to be proficient in how to teach literacy; is that a fair expectation?” My thoughts were, “Yes.”

It appeared that Ms. DiSimone felt the same as I because she was slightly annoyed when she countered, “Do you really see it as asking them to TEACH literacy because I don’t.” She continued,

No matter how deep into their content teachers are, they would have to know when sentences are written using the Standard English; all they have to do is stop ignoring it when it’s not; stop ignoring what the kids need but talk about them later.

Ms. Mallory asked for clarity from Mrs. DiSimone regarding her allegation of students’ needs being ignored and later talked about. Ms. DiSimone initially declined further comment.

I instead asked, “Are we ever going to be able to move forward on matters if we aren’t willing to discuss them?” I felt I knew what Ms. DiSimone was alleging and from where it was coming, but I needed her to express it. We were able to tap into it at the sixth grade meeting earlier in the year. Ms. DiSimone spoke, “Everyone sits around laughing and joking with each other about how low the students are.” Ms. Mallory defended, “I don’t do that.” “Everyone does it but no one takes responsibility for making it better,” stated Ms. DiSimone, who was clearly angry. Ms. Mallory reiterated that she

was only asking whether we should expect content area teachers to know how to teach literacy, “I don’t know why you’re acting like that with me?” “Because you keep protecting the teachers from what you think is extra work; when it’s their job to educate these Black kids.” There it was; the proverbial elephant in the room.

I felt the need to enter into the dialog but could not. The other two women sat idle for most of the exchange. Ms. Mallory countered,

This is not a race issue for me, Ms. DiSimone; it’s about doing what’s right for everyone. I don’t sit in the teachers’ lounge and berate the students but I am aware that there are some who do. But I don’t see it as a race issue because it’s Black teachers and White teachers doing it.

Ms. Mallory stopped. It was not an awkward silence but more of a poetic pause. “I think that’s a fair observation,” stated Ms. Finer. “We should admit that it’s done and it’s done by almost everyone.” “But...,” she continued, “Does that mean it’s about race?”

Ms. DiSimone responded, “Everything is about race whether any of us wants to admit it or not.” Ms. Mallory chimed in, “I get what you’re saying but only because race is always present; it doesn’t mean it’s a negative motivator for all of us.” “I agree,” I stated entering the discussion knowing I had to tread lightly but quickly before the moment was lost.

I asked Ms. DiSimone if she heard Ms. Mallory indicate that both Whites and Blacks had participated in the teasing and joking about our students’ level of performance from time to time. She affirmed. I questioned her further about her knowledge of either Ms. Mallory or Ms. Finer’s personal lives as one performed missionary work in Africa

while the other was married to a Jamaican man. She sighed and said she was aware. I stated,

It doesn't mean that to some extent your point doesn't involve race, I just don't know if it means we're racist if we'd participated in this line of conversation. It would be unprofessional and unfortunate and we need to call each other on it because it may be indicative of how we're all possibly accepting something less from this group of students.

I sat back and let them marinate on that thinking. Mrs. Martin began, "So we're all in agreement that the content area teachers are capable of taking responsibility for some of the literacy needs of the children."

At this point in the development we were still establishing the effective process to identify our "It" the joint strategy associated with working together that Stowell and Meade (2007) speak of. This level of discussion led to some hints of tension, but just as Stowell and Meade point out, when teams are collaborative the players must understand that conflict and differences, when handled constructively, are the fuel for creative breakthroughs. These were healthy debates by knowledgeable professionals and nothing more.

I'm not quite sure of what to call today's session. Therapeutic, progressive or what. I believe it was risky but I also believe that it was necessary. I thought Ms. Mallory stood up well to what Ms. DiSimone was attempting to put on her. I don't know whether Ms. DiSimone expected her to give in and become apologetic but for what?

I have always felt that there was too much emphasis on not rocking the teachers' boats while the students get what's left. We all knew that urban education was challenging and its not fair to not continue to work at making it better while we're each choosing to stay in it. (Leadership Journal, July 15, 2009)

Mrs. Martin Becomes the Voice of Reason

Mrs. Martin, the reading specialist, brought lists of the skill areas for reading and the entire July 21st session was spent connecting the reading skills with specific writing genres. Although this sounds like it should have been simplistic, the fact that there was often overlap from a skill to its writing connection meant we needed to allow for continued discussion. Mrs. Martin suggested beginning with expository writing first. "I think that makes sense because it will connect the content area teachers with main idea and much of what they use is informational text." Ms. DiSimone agreed, "And that way the graphic organizers needed would be the same across the board." The coaches clearly wanted as much ease as possible for teachers. Ms. Finer interjected, "We need to start with whatever skills are going to help the content teachers make sense of their roles with literacy."

Mrs. Martin focused on what was most beneficial for students. "We need to be sure whatever we design will help the teachers make sense for the students, if not we'll just be doing the same thing over again." I reminded everyone, "Including the African American Vernacular was our focus not only to make literacy part of content areas." Also, to keep doing things the same way and getting the same results is the definition of insanity. Ms. DiSimone asked, "How does expository sound coming from our students versus how it sounds in the text that's given by the science teacher?" Ms. Mallory

questioned, “Are you asking us about what they say or how they say it?” Ms. Finer turned to me asking, “Isn’t that the comparing part you were talking about in the powerpoint?” It was exactly. We seemed to be getting closer and it helped to ease the divide of teacher needs versus students’ needs that had once developed. I had an idea that would push us forward. We were doing a good job of viewing our organizational needs but we would benefit from seeing how another classroom addressed inclusion of the vernacular given their set of circumstances.

Clarifying Our Objective

We were beginning to run into the last week of July, a time when personal vacations would have to be considered, but we were making progress. Keeping with one of the last thoughts we parted on I came to the next session, July 27, 2009, with copies of the article by Wheeler and Swords (2004). I used the same instructional strategy with them that was used with students – SQ3R as taken from Robinson (as cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Here the reader is expected to survey the text, identify questions, and read, recite, and review what was read. This article was written from the perspective of the teacher and although it felt uncomfortable sitting quietly in a conference room reading silently I felt it would help move our thinking from the abstract to more concrete; and it did. This was an article by a teacher, about her students and their need to improve their writing. The team of educators would make a text-to-self connection as we often required students to do.

In the article, Rebecca Wheeler introduced her third grade students to the idea of context. Ms. Mallory spoke first, “What if we simply created scenarios that were specific to context for the participating teachers to begin getting kids to know when and where

AAVE can be used?” “Then the understanding of context could also immediately be connected to author’s purpose and audience which are part of the reading and writing instruction,” was added by Mrs. Martin. Mrs. DiSimone asked about a timeline for the study. I assured her at this point there was none; we needed to make our point with teachers above all else and then concern ourselves with how long it would take us to do so. Ms. Finer, now more excited, asked:

Would we be able to write these scenarios as lessons? That way the teachers wouldn’t have to spend additional time creating ways to include AAVE we would do it for them; they would just have to put themselves into it.

I asked if they felt it beneficial to only focus on context. Ms. DiSimone suggested, “Let’s think about those 3rd graders. They were successful because the teacher taught them about context, contrastive analysis, and code switching.” “I don’t think we should move away from this plan at all.” Ms. Mallory agreed, “Our students are older and that could mean needing to work more intensely to break old habits. Presenting lessons around all three areas would be better.” I suggested that we look at creating a thematic unit where there were a few lessons for each area and that would give us our time frame for the study. Ms. Finer, still concerned about my additional change for the content area teachers, wanted to know what I had in mind when requiring them to infuse literacy. Honestly, at this point I still was not sure of what this meant for content area teachers, but we all agreed that this thematic unit would be the supports literacy teachers needed to include the African American Vernacular English in the classroom.

Before I could respond, Mrs. Martin suggested that we simply revisit the scope and sequence that identified specific instructional, or comprehension strategies to be

introduced monthly. “It worked for the literacy teachers I’m sure it will work with the content area teachers.” With this we discussed the importance of professional development as a vital means of teaching teachers how students learn (Hill & Cohen, 2005). I declared the importance of content teachers participating with literacy teachers in professional development. The coaches agreed. Mrs. Martin volunteered to fine-tune that instrument.

Ms. Mallory went to the white board and wrote context, contrastive analysis, and code-switching on the board in column form. We all waited to see what she was going to do next. “Sooo...?” Ms. Finer asked. “Let’s talk about how we would see bringing each of these to our middle school students based on what they did in the article.” “Whatever we do let’s make sure that it’s fun because that will help some teachers step outside their own little boxes,” came from Ms. DiSimone who is known for having a lighthearted relationship with her students. Ms. Martin stated, “I don’t know if I can add anything fun but I think I know when the students are enjoying themselves.”

“What we’ll need to do is be really over the top with a role play that they can visualize imagine,” said Ms. Finer. I agreed with her. “So whoever decides to work on context should keep ‘fun’ in mind. What does anyone think should we consider about contrastive analysis?” Ms. Martin spoke up rather quickly to say, “I feel it’s important that the students realize that no matter how the words they read may differ in sound from the ones they speak, the meaning doesn’t change.” Ms. Mallory asked for clarity.

Well, if what any of us has said here recently about the way the students write being cultural and really not connected with what is asked of them in school, then

I feel like we have to show them that there is a connection in terms of the content of what is being said.

This was critical as it could be the next point in helping students move more fluently through the reading texts on standardized tests.

“So what do we do?” asked Ms. Finer. Ms. Mallory and I had ideas. She started scribbling hers on the white board. Give students texts that are in different forms and have them assess them for meaning. “I like that,” I told her, “but even before that we need to use their own dialogues and assess it for meaning then...” Ms. DiSimone finished my thoughts, “Have them re-write their conversations in Mainstream American English.” “So how often do we do this?” I asked. Ms. Finer answered, “As often as we need to?” She was almost asking the question because to some extent it was rhetorical as some classes may need more while others will benefit from whatever we provide depending on the level of teacher involvement.

We took an earlier suggestion from Ms. DiSimone to work in dyads to complete lessons around the three areas of context, contrastive analysis, and code-switching to include the vernacular into the classroom. “This way there wouldn’t be too many voices at one time.” We all agreed. Ms. Martin and I agreed to work together on context because she wanted to see how the humor could unfold. Ms. Mallory and Ms. Finer agreed to work on lessons around contrastive analysis based on what we had already discussed as a whole. Ms. DiSimone felt confident that she knew a good way of going about teaching the children about code-switching. “Why don’t we take tomorrow off to work on these areas outside of school and agree to e-mail everyone by tomorrow evening; is that do-

able?” I asked. Heads nodded and as we exited, the sounds of deciding where others were going to meet for lunch or breakfast lead us out.

Once the team viewed the study from the classroom connection the curriculum almost wrote itself. We broke the whole down to manageable pieces. E-mail discussions about word walls, writers’ notebooks, and comparing and contrasting were being used along with African American Vernacular, Mainstream American English, formal and informal language. When we came back together on Wednesday, July 29 2009, we only had to fine tune the vocabulary, view a clip Ms. DiSimone found on YouTube, and look at Time For Kids articles from Ms. Finer and Ms. Mallory for contrastive analysis. “I’m very pleased with what we have created; how does anyone else feel?” I asked.

Ms. DiSimone spoke first. Smiling she said, “I am too but not just the product but the way we went about it was good.” Ms. Mallory interjected, “The process.” She continued, “We discovered an issue in our school and we addressed it.”

We had it. It clicked and fit. We were able to develop 10 basic lessons that allowed for flexibility and teacher autonomy yet moved the students through the process of including AAVE in the classrooms by role playing, responding to scenarios, and analyzing meaning. The lessons progressed from learning about context to connecting with language through contrastive analysis and code-switching. “I hope the teachers are able to see its benefit and really embrace it,” stated Ms. Martin. That was what remained to be seen.

Conclusion

The purpose of Cycle II was to look at data that would help determine what supports teachers needed to include African American Vernacular English in their

classroom(s). I elicited the collaboration of a team of individuals that first, knew effective instruction, and second, would not hesitate to share their viewpoint throughout the process. I began by sharing the data collected during Cycle I. I kept in the back of my mind the fact that support can come in varying appearances depending on the individual. For that reason it made sense to find points on which we could all agree.

The teacher data presented from Cycle I showed us that teachers agreed overwhelmingly on viewing the African American Vernacular as a language form; that their students use the vernacular in school and that they do not feel it acceptable to do so with anyone other than their peers. Surprising was the idea that as educators, 91% of them felt they should address it, but 25% actually made an effort to address it; however, it was in the form of correcting students or telling them its use was wrong. This 25% was inclusive of the literacy teachers who were themselves very frustrated by the magnitude of the task to instruct in the use of Mainstream American English while African American Vernacular is the prevailing language.

We also reviewed documents that would help us to determine what the instructional needs of the students were in terms of writing. We reviewed student work, and the results of PSSA scores in Reading and Writing to help validate any current practices. We reviewed the teacher evaluation forms to assess where the areas of refinement lie for those we expect to improve literacy. We also agreed that in an attempt to support literacy teachers, instructional and comprehension strategies would be utilized by all teachers and identified each month to be included in lesson plans (Appendix E). From this document review, we developed a thematic unit of 10 lessons that would include African American Vernacular English in the classrooms. It was at this juncture in

the action research process that the cycle revealed for me the true purpose was to assist teachers in becoming more effective in their instruction. The data from the teacher observations revealed teachers performed at inconsistent levels in each category: Designing and Planning, Instruction, and Learning Environment. This solidified for us the need to focus on teacher efficacy.

The objective for the first three lessons was to help students understand context. The purpose of these lessons was to clarify for students that an acceptable time, place, and audience existed for their writing and speaking in much the same way it did for other experiences in daily life. Most of the lessons included role playing that Ms. Martin and I felt would allow students to visualize as well as be kinesthetic with teachers' instruction. From this process discussions would be formed, where teachers and students would have fun doing it.

The next set of lessons developed by Ms. Mallory and Ms. Finer was established for the purpose of helping the students understand that in most cases the meaning of what they want to say using African American Vernacular English was not lost when restated in the required Mainstream American English. This process of comparing and contrasting, called contrastive analysis, had the potential to be less frustrating than the typical repeated revision process currently used in schools. Just as important, as Ms. Martin pointed out, was for students to transfer their new understanding of contrastive analysis use with the passages on high stakes tests. In other words the hope was that students would become so comfortable with the strategy of comparing and contrasting the two languages that they would use it on standardized tests and therefore navigate the reading with stronger understanding of it, possibly improving performance.

The last set of lessons contained in the unit was worked on by Ms. DiSimone alone. Her goal was for the teachers to use code-switching with the students to develop the automaticity in their writing and speaking. She felt it would be beneficial for them to be able to move from the less formal to the more formal when the situation arose. She was aware during Cycle I of the discussions among some teachers that questioned our students' inability to be more flexible in their speaking and writing given more formal situations. We want our students to be able to effectively present themselves during a high school interview.

The team and I viewed each of these sets of lessons as one complete thematic unit to support teachers as they create a more inclusive atmosphere for students' culture. We additionally thought the unit would assist them be more effective in their instruction by reducing behavioral concerns through building better relationships with students, thereby allowing for more time on task (Mendler, 2000). We were now anxious to see what the outcomes would be for the 58th Street Middle School.

I saw my leadership during this period of the project waiver between servant and transformational but with the purpose of building capacity in the others that would then transform the organization.

The teachers have rarely seemed so reluctant to share their opinions when in a one-on-one situation in my office but once I put them in one room there was hesitation. Mrs. Martin qualified her perceptions as lacking because she does not have direct classroom experience; just small group. I will continue to divert her away from that thinking by promoting her experiencing as a refreshing view from outside the classroom. This is much like Bass (1990) speaks of leadership that

takes into account the individual consideration of others by providing supports and encouragement to employees for their efforts. Ms. DiSimone will be more than willing to assist in making sure Ms. Martin is heard; they work very nicely together. I will need to foster communication throughout this cycle because everyone will be affected by the decisions made here. (Leadership journal July 7, 2009. Transformational)

The brief conflict between the Master and Lead teachers and the others could have been costly. Had I not already built a degree of trust by accepting that the organization was responsible for some shortcomings then they may not have realized my hope was in making the organization the center of our efforts.

(Transformational) That is why I have to continue to move the group from the downloading level communication Scharmer (2009) notes, to the more critical levels that may make some a bit uncomfortable. After all, each of them is called on to perform her role with the teachers, they have to be willing to inspire their motivation. (Leadership journal, July 9, 2009)

The blending of transformational and servant leadership styles appeared in a free flowing exchange where one ended and the other emerged (Jaworski, 1996). The reason for this free flowing exchange, I believed was due to my commitment for the work. It is possible that this team found that commitment to serve the needs of our school community in each other thereby moving them past the discomfort of the conflict. Transformation, according to Evans (1996), begins with trust; perhaps this was evidence that we were moving in the right direction.

Chapter VII

Cycle III

Introduction

During Cycle III, I looked for a determination of what impact the inclusion of African American Vernacular English in the classroom had on teacher effectiveness. In Cycle II the team assessed the question of what supports teachers may need to include the vernacular using the data collected from the review of several documents. We reviewed documents such as the results of the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) for both reading and writing, samples of student writing, and teacher evaluations. These documents as data helped to create a thematic unit we felt would be the support teachers' needed to be more effective through inclusion of African American Vernacular English. Cycle III was now the time to implement the curriculum and determine its value in teacher effectiveness.

Despite having to do a great deal of planning for the upcoming term from home, I felt well prepared to meet the needs of the students. I returned after my surgery on August 17th with the hopes of clarifying questions that remained from a lack of responses from the CEO to my e-mails while out. I needed to know what we were doing as an organization to orientate the new students, what materials had arrived in my absence, whether there had been any other staffing issues, and other logistical issues. However, to my disappointment, I arrived to find Leonard James on vacation for the week.

I discovered that Leonard James and Ms. Fredericks, the new curriculum writer, had restructured the entire literacy curriculum. This meant that together they decided to do away with the current literacy textbook for sixth grade in favor of using the same series as the fifth grade. They decided to combine the fifth and sixth grade as the

elementary portion of the school with the seventh and eighth being viewed as the upper level of the school; which was harmless. Both levels kept the guided reading format of the Readers Workshop, which addressed students' varying reading levels. However, the point was that neither was now following the Writer's Workshop; which was the focus for students' writing needs and the vehicle for my study. I felt myself returning to the balcony, but not just yet. I would table my feelings about this technical change with again, the work being done by those in authority; specifically Leonard James (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). I also needed to look beyond my feelings of being left out of the process to determine the effectiveness of the change for the students.

I recognized many textbooks include a scope and sequence much like the one our team identified as a necessary piece to support the teachers in delivering effective instruction. However, we created a scope and sequence that was aligned to the outcomes of the high stakes test for both reading and writing. It identified those skills that were deemed student strengths and therefore could be addressed earlier in the term versus those the data showed as weaknesses and needed to be taught moving into the next testing window. Teachers were now expected to simply follow the example identified by the publisher of the text whether the students possessed the prerequisites or not, and despite the fact that it was not driven by our data.

There had been no collaboration between myself and the instructional consultants on these decisions, nor was there any input provided by the faculty. However, a few teachers I am told had been made aware of the changes. As they trickled in over the summer to do their classrooms, they were pulled in by Leonard James for conversation. This was a completely top down process and perhaps not beneficial for the

transformation he suggested the organization needed. Initially, these were not my words but Leonard James; I attempted simply to move the words into action. I endeavored to transform the organization from its current minimally effective state to the learning organization that expands our ability to create the results that we desire (Senge, 2006).

And We're Off

School began on August 24th for teachers only. This early start date supplied us with more than a week of professional development of varying degrees as a means of preparing for the students. Mr. James had also returned from vacation with agendas in hand. As a leader operating from the usual sense of duty I too, had prepared agendas for each day of the upcoming professional development week. I watched his mouth as he spoke the words. Looking away from his eyes allowed me the opportunity to find that place on the balcony that provided opportunity to assess the situation (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). He and I ended the year struggling to find common ground; or at least I had. We had not seen each other and communicated minimally in recent weeks. But I quickly recalled identifying Mr. James' recent actions as a response to the loss of our past relationship as he had known it (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). I vowed not to repeat my mistakes.

I quickly noticed on his agendas for the week, opportunities for me to present my plans. My leadership role had not been left out of professionally developing the teachers as I had thought. Therefore I reconciled myself to the idea there was no reason to make an issue about the new curriculum change at this time as I knew very little about it. The representative from the textbook company would not be in until the following week, therefore, I needed to wait until the scheduled workshop occurred to assess for gaps.

Instead, I felt it more advantageous to present myself to the faculty as their leader as early in this professional development process as possible. However, my purpose was not to appear in competition with Leonard James' obvious role of authority, after all, authority is not leadership (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Infused between the logistical workshops on the policy and procedures were the much needed team building workshops. Embedded in these workshops were instructional strategies that all teachers could use with their classes. Where the agenda indicated my name I seized the moment. I repeated the professional development on the Inclusion of African American Vernacular English. As I began doing so I immediately challenged us all as teachers to answer the question posed by Heifetz and Linsky (2002). They ask, "Of all the things we value what is the most precious?" The response was emphatic and resonated through the room; "the students," they echoed. The beginning of a new year is a much energized time for most teachers and I needed to capitalize on that energy. Presenting this information early provided several advantages.

To begin with, it acted as a reminder to the returning teachers the discussions shared as the term was closing. Secondly, it provided the knowledge creation that lends itself to coherence making which Fullan (2001) suggests is vital to building commitment in members. Next, because 50 % of the teachers were new it was important to provide the new staff with a sense of connectedness by increasing their awareness of the change initiative. Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) observe mobilizing commitment through joint diagnosis, developing a shared vision, and fostering concerns, competence, and cohesion for the new vision to be enacted and moved along as their first three steps in

drawing ideas from the bottom up. Lastly, it granted us an opportunity to hear from one another.

I shared with everyone my findings from the previous cycles. The discussion hinged upon the students' academic needs, but scaffolded into the identified frustrations and trepidations of the literacy teachers in their lone efforts to increase student achievement. I shared from the survey that 95% of the faculty at the time agreed or strongly agreed that they were familiar with the use of African American Vernacular English as a form of expression. And 100% agreed or strongly agreed that it occurs in the students' speaking and or writing in school, but 91% disagreed or strongly disagreed that its use in school was acceptable. I went further to show that based on the survey there are 66% of us who, sadly, equate the use of AAVE with a diminished understanding of Mainstream American English.

I also felt it useful of course, to discuss the data. Hoy, Hannum, and Tschannen-Moran (1998) consistently speak of teacher's role in student achievement. For the 66% who feel the child using AAVE has a lower understanding of MAE, the hope is they are not teaching to a lower standard. The fact that according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education 2009 school report, only 39% of our students scored proficient or advanced in reading and 35% in writing indicates that we have to look at what we may be doing or not doing that is contributing to these data. The teacher has to feel the student is capable of achieving if he is going to challenge the student to push himself.

Teachers seemed genuinely concerned at the possibility of colleagues lowering their own expectations of students based on their perception of their language. At hearing this, the meeting on achievement turned to discourse, which included understanding the

culture belonging to our students. As it did I chose to sit down, now not acting as a facilitator, but a participant in a much needed dialogue. I wrote in my leadership journal that day:

I remember from my diversity class with Dr. Coaxum someone saying nothing would change about racism until people were willing to sit down and just talk about it. Our workshop this afternoon showed at least on a minimal level a willingness to grow as people by talking about what we know to be true and asking questions to clarify what we don't know about the culture of another group. Some were quiet but not many. Most said something; and that says something. It's early in the development of this group into a team but I think today was a good beginning. I hope it was. (Leadership Journal, August 26, 2009)

At the conclusion of the workshop I thanked everyone for their interesting comments, letting them know that we would be having further conversations around this matter as the year progressed and asked for willing participants to e-mail me. Interest from the participants occurred via e-mail on a first come first served basis. While I was not sure who would demonstrate an interest, I was completely prepared to stay true to the process. The only stipulation I made was that there was a need for some of the participants to be teachers of literacy at any grade level. Although there were others, the first five participants included; two fifth grade teachers, one sixth grade teacher, and two seventh grade teachers, of which one teaches special education.

At the Starting Gate But Not Exactly Off

The weeks to follow included: opening day for students, debugging the roster system, planning back to school nights, and feeling our way through the new Readers'

Workshop. On September 14, 2009 I met with the participants for the first time to discuss the project. I shared with them the article by Wheeler and Swords (2004) as this was an example of a classroom where language and culture were being included. I was feeling something that I had not felt as I had spoken with them individually about the plan to move forward. Of the participants, all but one were returning teachers; so what was wrong? We were being very informal as it was such a small group; we met in Ms. Canter's classroom and of course I provided snacks. I insisted that we put everything on the table for the success of the initiative.

Ms. Canter spoke up by asking, "Is this just gonna be something that we try once and drop off because if it is then I don't want to do it." Ms. Lynn, who generally keeps a positive outlook, was now appearing apprehensive. No one had yet spoken very many words; they just appeared to lack the enthusiasm as they perused the article. There was not an emergence of the BMW (bitching, moaning, and whining) or (nagging, bitching, and complaining) that I was accustomed to hearing from teachers that we are often able to move beyond (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). They were now acting out of the blind spot that (Scharmer, 2009) speaks of when he says we see what we usually do not see. It would not have served me or the project to go on as though I had not heard them differently.

I closed the article and probed their feelings much like a mother with a pre-teen. When they saw that I was not moving on Ms. Lynn asked, "When are we going to be able to do this now that we don't have Writers' Workshop anymore?" Mr. Rhoades wanted to know how they were expected to address writing at all if there was no Writers' Workshop. Now I was getting it; this was the fear and frustration of the literacy teachers

emerging again. Being a participant observer with the literacy teachers during Cycle I provided me with a fresh set of eyes to “see” what was their reality (Scharmer, 2009). If I was now “sensing” this matter from the whole, as Scharmer suggests, I believe the literacy teachers were again feeling powerless. They had been fed a curriculum initiative in a power over manner despite hearing words like “together we can,” and “team” which operates from a “power to” thinking (Sernak, 1998). They may also be concerned with being again blamed for a lack of achievement. I believe this disconnect could be where low morale begins.

I implored them to speak freely as we now had the attention of our content area teacher participants to help with what they may be going through. I was told that although we now had the full 90 minutes for Readers’ Workshop, there was no longer that level of time allotted to writing. Dennis searched for clarity of point in terms of whether this concern was for the initiative, the students’ writing needs, or both. Both, was the response. As the servant leader I needed to listen to these voices just as Greenleaf (1977) suggests hearing the “prophetic voices of clarity” around us. Mr. Rhoades wondered if they should speak up to the CEO and so did I. Therefore we did.

I am more concerned about appearing as though I am pushing my agenda to Leonard while Dennis and the group get the opportunity to be heard and respected as decision makers for the school community. I need to continue with the Democratic leadership that encourages participation and values communication but if they focus too much on me or the project as opposed to what they really feel students need to be successful then we may never get there. My goal is to remain the facilitator that Dewey (1916/1944) suggests leads to the shared collaboration

and participation of shared decision making. (Leadership journal, September 16, 2009)

Off and Running

It required more than four weeks of insisting they needed Writers' Workshop before Leonard James would acquiesce. By this time he and I had met, he had also met with the literacy coaches, and then attended a meeting with literacy teachers. This was fine with me as it did not require a power struggle between him and me. I took this to mean that I had effectively communicated the need without his viewing as a sign of disloyalty to his leadership (Hiefertz & Linsky, 2002). The week of October 19th was the first week that I was able to tell teachers to include the Writers' Workshop in their instructional plans. The literacy coaches had, as part of their professional development, covered the information and were committed to on-going support for new teachers. I met with the participants to follow my original plan with the article by Wheeler and Swords (2004). The literacy teachers possessed a more positive affect by the time of this meeting. I asked them to peruse only the front page of the article and underline a phrase that stood out for them, circle a word that they would like to have clarity on, and double underline something they agree with. This led us through our discussion phase, which ended with my distribution of the first four lessons that were specific to context. The two content area teachers agreed to use the test preparation period at the end of the day as all faculty was required to provide extra support in math and literacy during this time.

The Process of Seeing and Hearing: Classroom Observations and Weekly Debriefings

During that initial week in October I entered the classrooms with my clipboard in hand; checking off areas on the walk-through protocol (Appendix D) that were expected

in standards driven, student centered classrooms. In the classrooms of the participants I also made informal, narrative observations. We met at the beginning of each week, either Monday or Tuesday, to assess what participants had experienced in the previous week with thematic lessons. I routinely utilized four interview questions (1-4 of Appendix F) that were generic enough to promote healthy discussions yet specific enough to extract useful information. I often added ice-breaking kinds of questions to help initiate the discussions. Hearing from each other may be beneficial in clarifying the mental models each has that may be influencing their view of the event (Senge, 2006).

The text that follows demonstrates the emerging themes from those weekly debriefings and daily observations. Each week as I watched and listened to the participants I found the discussion from Marshall (2004) become more relevant to my leadership. Relying on collaboration rather than coercion developed higher motivation and greater realization of goals for both the individuals and the organization. Capacity building and growth were immediately apparent to me each week as a result of the partnership this study created.

At the first debriefing meeting, the teachers filed into Ms. Canter's classroom appearing somewhat apprehensive. Possibly unsure of what I was going to say. I simply asked, "How was everyone's week?" Generic responses such as, "I think we did alright" and "I had a good week but I don't know if I have much to tell you" spewed out quickly from Mr. Rhoades with Ms. Canter in agreement. I assured the group that I had no set expectations and that any information was good information.

"I'd like to talk first about the strategies connected to this week's lesson if that's ok with everyone." There were nods of agreement. I continued, "Were they in any way

beneficial to your teaching?” Ms. Canter was the first to respond, “My kids got a kick out of the visualizing that the first context lesson created; you know picturing being in the emergency room and someone dressed like a basketball player as the ER doctor made them laugh.” “My kids liked that too,” stated Mr. Rhoades, “even though they thought it was crazy for me to say it.” Daniel entered, “I didn’t know it was called visualizing but it helped make the point I think.” Visualizing is a typical term used in literacy so as a science teacher Daniel was not familiar with it.

Asking the team about the students’ strengths and weaknesses in writing quickly yielded similar energy as in Cycle I when visiting the literacy teacher meetings. “Well they still can’t write; ain’t nothing changed about that,” laughed Mr. Rhoades; “Or spell,” Daniel interjected; more laughter. Ms. Lynn, as the voice of reason stated, “It’s not that bad mine show strength in content even though we’ve only really covered one genre so far.” Almost begrudgingly, Ms. Canter agreed, “Yeah, but that’s not enough.” Ms. Foster appeared dejected to have to admit, “I’m struggling to get a lot from my kids; the behaviors tend to get in the way but it’s really only a few.”

By the second debriefing meeting, which was actually two weeks into the unit, the teachers were discussing the effect the lessons on context had on student behavior. The special education teacher, Ms. Foster, was more vocal, this time as she reported hearing her students redirect each others’ behaviors. “We were returning from lunch when two boys were wrestling as they entered the classroom. I called their names but before I could say anything else one of the girls said, ‘This is not the context for that’.” Ms. Foster felt she may be onto something very useful. “I immediately saw Jamir and others respond.” I thought I would see if I could use that to work on the behaviors.” The other participants

supported her thinking. “It won’t hurt to try; I may try that with my 7th graders too because I think it might give them a better understanding of why they shouldn’t do certain things at certain times.” was Daniel’s thoughts.

In the days to follow as I observed the classrooms what was immediately evident to me was the improved learning environment. Early in the school term is a vital time to gain management over classroom issues. In the past, the two male teachers did not struggle with behavioral issues, however, the female teachers did. According to the Educational Policy Reform Research Institute (2006), a standards based classroom is one where the teacher has designed the learning environment to meet the individual needs of the students. Likewise, Marshall (2001) suggests that the effective teacher is one who creates an environment of mutual respect. This change had become evident not just in the respectful culture, the freedom to exchange ideas and the students’ willingness to take risks, but also in the increased use of cooperative learning groups.

It had always been part of our plan to provide routine professional development to our teachers on the appropriate use of cooperative learning (Lampe, Rooze, & Tallent-Runnels, 1996). It has also been found to promote self-esteem and interpersonal skills in students. The teacher has to plan lessons with specific objectives in place for the use of cooperative learning and, moreover, has to have established a learning environment conducive to learning – strong classroom management. This is often easier to achieve for some groups than for others but I was now seeing it more often.

One Teacher’s Vantage Point

Ms. Foster was new to the school and the students challenged her. After an initial observation by the TAP coaches (Teacher Advancement Program) she found her area of

refinement to be the learning environment. By the time of the informal school observation, October 29, 2009, the Writer's Workshop had recently been re established by the CEO. However, as a participant in the study Ms. Foster made a few previous attempts at broaching the activities of the thematic plan. Therefore in her estimation she was already making progress in that area due to what she attributed to the lessons on context. She shared:

It actually took me two periods to do the one lesson one with the visualization and some role playing because my students were just so...but it made us start talking.”

I noticed them responding to my questions, and writing their responses when asked so I asked them why they couldn't be like this all of the time.

She explained learning of the existence of a duality of responsibility, which the lessons on context helped she and her students identify in their classroom.

During the post observation conference she told the coaches and me; she said:

My students were expecting someone named Ms. Gibes as their teacher therefore I received the impact of their disappointment in the form of noncompliance and disruption. Instead of recognizing and understanding that concept I feel I tried to force myself on them.

She shared openly:

I wasn't new to teaching so my thinking was to keep drilling the rules and a lot of work at them without backing down and eventually they'll get it. But we weren't connecting with each other and that's where the lessons on context helped me.

The manner by which students' prior knowledge was activated using the initial lesson on context allowed for a sharing between she and her students that she had not had

before. Ms. Foster went on to say, “My current take away has to do with being willing to take a step back and think about things differently.”

Despite whether it required additional periods to implement, Ms. Foster learned at the debriefing that she was not alone in her observations. Ms. Canter also agreed that there seemed to be a carryover of the students’ grasp of context to the behavior in the classroom. Mr. Rhoades suggested, “My guys simplified context to be time and place because in part it helped them differentiate this use from the use of context clues as a reading strategy.” I thought this was something that the faculty would benefit from hearing because it spoke to identifying the way students interpret information. So I suggested they share this at the next faculty meeting because I observed this during my walk-throughs as well. Each of these teachers had created learning environments that fostered both adult mediated and peer mediated learning (Educational Policy Reform Research Institute, 2006)

They thought that I was going to speak to the faculty for them because it related to my research. I told them the research means nothing to the faculty except what they make it. They really did not think that anyone wanted to hear from them. This is an example of how desperate the organization was for teacher leadership. Even the participants did not know what to expect. (Leadership Journal, November 4, 2009)

Teacher Leadership in the Making

The team shared their experience with the faculty at the weekly meeting for the first time on November 4th. This was designed to be an introduction to the faculty only; a presentation of them as leaders more than the initiative. My role was clearly like that

identified by Schlechty (2002) to inspire them to do. It did not take long for them to find a comfort zone. The team answered questions that sparked deeper discussions at times about culture, at other times about instruction. Initially, it appeared that Daniel was the elected spokesperson for the group and he did not mind. This was actually great as he could speak specifically to the content area teachers as he demonstrated his desire to support literacy. Ms. Foster made attempts to interject as well, but seemed less emphatic often qualifying her experiences as “the way the special ed. students reacted” or “what I did with the special ed. students.” The others also made their presence known.

Daniel spoke of alerting his 7th graders that they would begin to be graded on “style” on the open-ended questions of his exams and homework. “They told me I was “stepping out of my lane” to begin to teach literacy along with science and I felt like that too but I wasn’t gonna let them know that.” “They had to know that I was ready to go as far as I had to, to help them improve their skills.” The two social studies teachers seemed particularly curious about his interaction with the students. Sally and Shirley, both social studies teachers, raced to remind him that they did not have the same effect on their seventh graders as he. They were young, inexperienced, and struggled with management; one more than the other.

“I could never get my students to do anything extra; I’m not you,” Sally stated. He assured them both that he provided students with an explanation of the necessity for all teachers to help improve students’ skills, but went further to say that he refused to concern himself with whether students “dug it or not because this is the way it is.” I knew she was going to say something along those lines. Fullan (2001) quotes Argyris as saying, “When someone else defines objectives, goals, and the steps to be taken to reach them,

whatever commitment exists will be external” (p. 41). I appreciated what I viewed as Daniel’s attempts to present the group with a sense of urgency. This urgency is most often associated with internal commitment and moral purpose (Fullan, 2001) for which the profession calls.

Shirley had been more successful than Sally in connecting with her students. Her students liked her and performed for her, though they were often talkative. Sally’s management issues were intense with students challenging her authority, talking through her instruction, and repeatedly breaking classroom rules. I concerned myself daily with her effectiveness, as she took no responsibility for the behaviors; it was all the fault of the students. However, she was very knowledgeable of her content, which made students care enough to complete her assignments while enjoying her creativity. I hoped Daniel would take her on as a challenge via this initiative and his newly developed pseudo leadership.

Contrastive Analysis

By the fifth week participants were involved in lessons on contrastive analysis. Just as with context, the teachers had similar experiences of more clearly understanding their students, not just the student more clearly understanding literacy. I observed Daniel’s seventh grade class performing the silent mind map. He modeled the task by writing the phrase ‘ma mom’ and then wrote the MAE version ‘my mom’, ‘my mother’, and ‘my mommy’. Someone said, “what?” but almost more in response to his choice of the words than anything else. Daniel must have thought that because he quickly said,

“You never saw it written before?” It was not even just their questions about the directions, but just the paused looks on their faces made me wonder what was going on.

The lesson called for the teacher to add the word contrastive analysis to the existing word wall by way of definition and example, and then connect it to students’ previous learning as well as its usefulness to new learning; all through meaningful discussion. Following that was the students’ work in small groups on chart paper to develop a “splash of words” in the vernacular with its Mainstream American English connection. I thought once they were given the chart paper they would go for it. But they paused. He told them to get started and began walking around the groups. From Daniel’s description, his 7th grade students fell quickly into listing slang words and the MAE counterpart. I began questioning whether we were clear as we wrote the lesson, or whether he had not been clear enough in his instruction; or both.

At our weekly debriefing for that lesson Ms. Foster, the special education teacher, expressed experiencing something similar. “I’m used to repeating and clarifying with my students so I kinda thought that’s what was happening.” She felt it was a result of a comprehension issue associated with her students or something she may have done incorrectly in the delivery of the instruction. “I just thought it was me or them.” She referenced always needing to repeat material to her students for clarity as part of their cognitive deficits but felt better hearing from Daniel. “Yeah, mine were a little slow moving on it but what was just as interesting was how few they came up with.” Ms Lynn questioned, “Did they even try to come up with the right kind of words like “bafrum” and “birfdy” or did they add slang words after exhausting their thinking?” Ms. Canter said her fifth graders also began adding slang words onto their list, but she used the discussion

period to clarify. “What kind of things did you ask the kids or they ask you during the follow up?” Mr. Rhoades asked. Ms. Canter began, “I told them honestly that I was looking for us to spell the words that we say when we’re talking to each other.” She continued, “I went on to tell them many of us know what a word is when we see it written but don’t always pronounce it that way; then I started giving them examples.”

Mr. Rhoades continued, “We wanted them to write down words that we had just put into a category; African American Vernacular English.” “But for some real reason many of them didn’t see the words they use everyday as the words we were looking for.” Ms. Lynn asked, “Are you saying none of us gave the directions effectively?” “You can’t be saying the task was too hard for them!” Mr. Rhoades responded, “Aum not sayin’ nuthin’ specifically (chuckles); just what I noticed.” It was not strange for teachers collaborate for the purpose of helping students gain a better understanding; it was the topic that was unfamiliar.

Seeing the Language as the Children See It

Mr. Rhoades seemed to have a point that needed to be visited for a moment. I encouraged him to elaborate but he deferred to the others. Ms. Lynn referred to her students’ follow up discussion as surprising. When asked what made it so interesting she said, “because it’s almost as though they don’t know they’re saying things differently than the way I do or the way the book does.” She was speaking with conviction coupled with amazement. Ms. Canter immediately chimed in with agreement; however, she seemed less amazed. “That’s exactly what it is.” She was very confident in her statement. As I re-taught it the kids kept saying, “Oh, so the more examples we went over together the clearer the meaning of African American Vernacular became to them.” She also

identified using the double page strategy instead of the silent mind map as a means of assisting them. Together they were more successful. From there she included an additional lesson where she had them add a page to their “writer’s notebook” to keep this useful list. “To me it’s like them having a thesaurus where there’s the AAVE word and the MAE word right in front of them. I just didn’t know they would need time to realize what African American Vernacular English was.”

When we met for our next debriefing on November 10th Ms. Lynn indicated that after speaking with Ms. Canter she chose to address contrastive analysis using the same process with her sixth grade as did Ms. Foster with her learning support students. Each felt their students walked away with a firmer understanding of the concept as well as the teacher about the students. I was led to this conclusion based on the direction of the discussion and that of the previous week. Mr. Rhoades felt the scope of his students’ world was narrower than he had previously realized. Which he added, was why he asked the teachers to share their discussions during the lesson. “I didn’t want to be the only one that sounded like I didn’t know what I was doing with the kids so I wanted somebody else to say it.” I tried to assure him this was for the point of learning a better way to be effective not judging one another. He went on to ask of the group if anyone felt our students needed to spend more time immersed in MAE than just school called for. When Daniel asked for clarity Mr. Rhoades shared a personal account.

“When people travel to foreign countries for vacation they sometimes carry around a translation dictionary; almost like what Canter is asking her kids to create. But they almost always have a hard time being understood, right?” The rhetorical question was met with nods and verbal agreement none-the-less. “It’s those programs like Rosetta

Stone that immerses you in the language that experts say is more useful. I think we need to do that with our kids.” He further spoke about when and where he grew up in Pittsburgh provided him with the immersion our students do not get. He attended school in a mixed area, but lived in an African American community. He felt this broadened his scope. Then, he ended, “When I went to Choice University of Pennsylvania I had to decide for myself which language form was needed.” Ms. Foster did not immediately get the connection he was inferring. He clarified for her that he had become accustomed to a school language and a “home language.” Attending college, he assumed he would continue using the school language, but soon realized he was often better served to present his “home language.” Some laughter ensued but I was aware of possible contributions peer pressure is said to make on African American student’s attitudes toward achievement (Ford & Harris, 1996).

Daniel, who is often joked with about his use of informal language during school hours, interjected with an additional thought from his experiences with his seventh grade students. He began by reiterating that his students initially rebuked his newfound critique of their writing as part of their science grade on tests and assignments. However, in their minds they may speak the way Daniel demonstrated during his instruction but would never write in that way. He shared using samples of students’ short answer responses as examples to students demonstrating how the vernacular penetrates their academic performance before they could accept his new scoring rubric. With that there was more than one occasion that a seventh grader expressed “talking or sounding White” as an outcome of what he is asking of them. He was at no time dismayed by their statements but felt it was something we as a team needed to be willing to address.

The idea that students used the phrase “sounding White” did not seem to shock anyone present. Each assured they had encountered this to some degree with their students. Ms. Lynn and Ms. Canter agreed the younger children were less concentrated on this but it came up during the lessons on context. Ms. Foster agreed with Daniel that it came up often thereby requiring her to use a full session then having to repeat lesson three. She, like Daniel, teaches the older children and views their level of awareness as the prompting for additional dialogue(s).

The team agreed that at least one reason for this dynamic was due in part to the difference in what the two age groups experienced. The younger children were not yet afflicted with the social mystique that enveloped the seventh graders. Therefore there was a variation in cultural identity associated with the teens that the 10-year-olds had not yet experienced. I shared with them that it was also consistent with the findings of Labov (2001) where he defined the students’ unwillingness to “sound White” as interference. We agreed that it would be worth presenting to the entire faculty as an emerging theme that, according to Mr. Rhoades, everyone should be willing and able to discuss openly.

What We Can Agree Upon

The most pertinent points identified from discussions on contrastive analysis with the participants included the students’ deep connection with the vernacular that appeared to masquerade their knowledge of Mainstream American English. The interactions of the teachers and students with the lessons on contrastive analysis exhibited to teachers that the students are simply not conscious of the differences in the two languages. This was clear when participants shared with students that the vernacular was not necessarily inclusive of slang terms but specifically grammatical displays such as “ama” versus “I am

going to.” In this light, students equated the teacher’s request as an unclear expectation; later meeting the request with “oh, that’s what you mean.” Other clarifying comments from students referenced them being asked to “talk White” when they wrote or spoke in class. This thinking required the teacher to reiterate the terms formal, informal, and context.

An additional thought surfacing from contrastive analysis was the understanding from the teachers that they may be of more benefit to the student if they were to help them work through what Ford and Harris (1996) referenced as the cultural conflict theory. This is the feeling of abandoning one’s own culture to acclimate to another. While Mr. Rhoades presented this thinking from his personal experiences of marrying outside of his race, the remaining participants agreed that they had either experienced it themselves or possessed the same thinking at one time or another. Daniel asked if I would allow them to deviate from the lessons developed, to include some of their own. I assured them that this is what I was hoping they would do.

The last point derived from meetings with the participants about comparing languages was the unanimous view that it would be beneficial to examine ways to help colleagues understand the importance of knowing how their students’ think and make sense of life’s matters. This became explicit when each of us could reference our versions of the cultural conflict Mr. Rhoades took a risk and shared. The agreement was that they would perform turn about training at the next faculty meeting. This would be different than the first time they shared their experience with the initiative. This time they felt the need to get deeper, so I suggested they consider an interactive portion be included in their presentation. I realized no matter how they chose to proceed; I did not need to be a part of

the process. As a servant leader I was committed to the growth of these individuals and the sense of community their teacher leadership could bring to the organization (Greenleaf, 1977).

Lessons on Code Switching

My classroom visits were beginning to be predicated upon my perusal of lesson plans that began taking on a new appearance. I saw the participants including ideas that carried over from the unit into the other content areas. An example of this was Ms. Canter's classroom. I often observed her students, for either Science or Writer's Workshop, before Mr. Rhoades' social studies or literacy class, because it became apparent that I was looking at her ideas in his classroom. He tried to emulate her depth of questioning and her use of academic feedback. Research indicates that teacher proficiency in these areas is critical to student achievement (Danielson, 2004). Therefore I found nothing particularly wrong with this as it was known that she was doing great things in her classroom.

Ms. Lynn shared one of the most unlikely scenarios during these lessons. She told of a new student to the 58th Street Middle School who had been homeschooled until that term.

Quadir is a refreshingly average African American little boy, who lives in the community but doesn't use the African American Vernacular English at all. It is so far removed from his repertoire that at the beginning of the term my other students immediately made it an issue by teasing and taunting him.

In the beginning he was alienated, accused of talking White, and laughed at; to the point where I was frustrated for him. Of course I did things like have community meetings in my room, contact parents and all of that but...

She told us that they began discussing context, she provided material found on You Tube. The website contained several vignettes of African American people discoursing about this very topic; that discourse was just what the doctor ordered for her class. The climate improved for the child.

Her assignment required students to code switch a passage she had written in the vernacular into Mainstream American English. Students in his cooperative group seemed to “turn to Quadir for assurance whether their answer was right or not.” Ms. Lynn presented this activity during science class before having students prepare for oral presentations. “I made him the expert for his peers to turn to; it made them respect what he brought to the classroom.” “It’s not perfect because these kids pick at each other so much but it is dramatically different for him and it allows me to remind them to look at what makes us all valuable to each other.”

I shared an observation from Daniel’s class where he used a scene from *To Kill a Mockingbird* with his students to get them to connect with the context of formal and informal language as well as code switching as he prepared them for the science fair. The teachers were doing a much better job of seeking additional resources to assist students grasp concepts while continuing to use their newfound knowledge of formal and informal language in literacy and other content areas.

The Writer's Workshop

By the close of each marking period, literacy teachers were required to submit samples of student writing. Each piece should be completely graded by the teacher and required to have the rubric attached. In the past, literacy teachers often struggled during the process and with the deadline for submission of the publishable writing. They cited the lengthy revision and editing process as well as the need to re-teach grammar skills. This meant additional instruction was being lost due to repeating prior lessons. Hughes (2001) indicates that student achievement in school is closely related to the amount of time spent actively engaged in appropriate academic tasks. To lose time repeating the editing process hampers movement through the curriculum. When I asked in passing at debriefing meetings, how the writing was coming along, the first response was the expectation of being on time. That was new so I tried getting some one-on-one time just with those participants who taught literacy.

Individually, during stolen preparation moments, each of the three referenced the reduction of student frustration that was normally associated with the repeated editing had improved. Ms. Lynn indicated that when she needed students to revise their friendly letters the peer editing strategy TAG was more effective. She told us, "I heard Devin tell Ciara that he liked how she told her friend about going to the carnival, however, if she was going to use informal talk then she needed to use quotations." Mr. Rhoades said his fifth graders often had a difficult time effectively using that strategy also because they would not know what to say to "G-give advice on how to make the writing better." However, they are now telling each other "just use formal language" and "take out this informal word." During observations I recognized students relating to one another about

their work without being critical. Children appeared to be receptive to one another. This was also evident by the use of cooperative learning occurring in each of the classrooms whether the instruction called for editing or not.

Ms. Canter spoke about being able to carry over the cooperative learning group behavior to help the guided reading groups be more effective. Often teachers struggled to employ the guided reading process with fidelity as it requires a great deal of organization, but more importantly, student cooperation. Each group must work independently on centers while the teacher works with a reading group on skill development. Ms. Canter shared during my interview session with her that she quickly equated the two processes for the students and this mimicking helped with effectiveness. This is absolutely consistent with the balanced literacy practice where the premise is fluent reading will arise out of teacher attention to the oral language. Working these two programs together can help children move up a gradient of difficulty and support fluent and successful reading (Clay, 1993).

Benefit to instructional practice. When asked what benefit to their instructional practice the inclusion of the vernacular may have had, the responses included a variation of thinking from the participants. For example, Ms. Foster felt that it was all beneficial to improving her practice, but felt the lessons on context were the most beneficial because they helped she and the students “move out of a very dissatisfying place.” When asked to elaborate or clarify, she further stated that the classroom management techniques she had previously known had not been yielding positive results; thus, they were ineffective causing her to be ineffective. The lessons on context provided her with a tool to discourse with her students, which led to a better relationship between her and them. This translated

to a better learning environment. Little, Goe, and Bell (2009) provide a 5 point definition of teacher effectiveness that includes the teachers' ability to contribute to the positive attitudinal and social outcomes for students. The fact that Ms. Foster's students had improved their behaviors demonstrated a more positive attitude and social behavior, while also increasing time on task.

Like Ms. Foster, each of the literacy teachers referenced the benefits of the initiative in its entirety. However, the trend was the manner by which students responded to contrastive analysis as a more effective manner of helping them include formal language in the final drafts in each genre of writing by showing the similarities and differences in the two languages. Little, Goe, and Ball (2009) identify effective teachers as those who use diverse resources to structure learning opportunities, and adapt instruction as needed. In Ms. Lynn's view she was more effective in teaching the content of each genre with less frustration experienced by both she and the students. Additionally, Ms. Canter, Mr. Rhoades, and Ms. Lynn felt contrastive analysis was useful in gaining an understanding of the way the students viewed themselves.

Daniel felt he had included more rigor in his planning now that he was requiring students to perform oral reports, as well as, respond to more open-ended items as formative assessments. Extended responses are a form of formative assessment that supports learning during the learning process (Dodge, 2009). McColskey, Stronge, Ward, Tucker, Howard, Lewis, and Hindman (2009) have linked high quality classroom assessment techniques to higher student achievement.

Effects on student work. During the weekly debriefings, I heard Daniel discuss the improvement in his science students' use of MAE when they responded to short answer or essay questions (which he wanted me to see for myself). But it was his discussion of their oral reports that really demonstrated his thoughtfulness as a teacher and the students' responses to this. I wondered if he was aware of how much more effective he had been to ask students to "become" the researcher or scientist assigned versus just reading a report aloud. For me this approach was the vehicle to encouraging students to use Mainstream American English than simply the assignment of an oral report. To support my view I asked him to reflect on his own experience as a student when he was assigned an oral report; what did he feel differed? He spoke extensively about his desire to make this first year of science instruction less boring for his students than he had felt about science. "I wanted them to enjoy it and I enjoy them." He further told me,

I let the class use the same rubric to grade each other that I used to grade them. It is used by literacy teachers, too. I adjusted it to include "creativity in costume" since most of them were dressing the part. That kinda stuff never happened in my science class as a kid.

Enjoyment and fun seemed to be the overarching foundation as teachers discussed students' use of MAE and the effects of the initiative over the weeks. It seems the team had discussed the effectiveness of role playing through lessons in the initiative with their students because most of them had used it again during their content instruction.

Ms. Lynn spoke about how much more useful it was in literacy to have students switch papers with a partner and read the informative essay aloud as a news anchor. Ms. Lynn shared, "That idea grew into creating props to turn our classroom into a newsroom. I plan

to use this again during poetry month and will ask Ms. Welch to video the students.” This level of creativity makes the most significant impact on the lives of students, as the experience tends to be memorable, thereby allowing them to draw from it later. Those researchers who recognize that effective teachers are not gauged through the narrow scope of test scores recognize that motivating students through creativity is just as relevant to the discussion of good teachers (Marshall, 2001; Walker, 2008).

Each week Ms. Foster shared that role playing had become an effective tool for her to differentiate instruction for her learning support students as well. Differentiation has become the tool many researchers feel directly affects our learners of today, because it suggests the teacher take into account the diversity within her classroom (Kameenui & Simmons, 1990).

To add to that, she spoke passionately about the connection she felt with the team of participants as a new teacher. This is what she shared during one debriefing:

Because of the collaboration on this project it was easier for me to find new ideas and support that helped with the students here; I had the participants to go to and ask how something worked or didn't work in their rooms. At my other school I was one of the teachers that others had gone to for help but when I got here I was the new person and the students definitely let me know that. But once I participated with this project I was immediately part of the school. I think the kids even began treating me differently because of the veteran teachers that they saw me connected with; more of them would speak to me in the halls when they saw me. I liked that.

Smith (1987) (as cited in Wong & Wong, 2004) identified effective schools as those that create collegial learning environments for the faculty. He says a collaborative environment is where teachers discuss their practice of teaching with each other for the goal of improving their skills. This had been what had been missing from the 58th Street Middle School, not because the teachers are not willing, but because we as the administration had not provided the opportunity for it.

It was ironic that the two fifth grade teachers both cited the idea of enjoying the level of rigor to which they found their students rise as a result of their involvement in the inclusion of African American Vernacular English in the classroom. In previous school years their passion for preparing their students for the next grade was a common goal for them. It was never clear why they as a team appeared so driven by this thought. However, the assumption could be made of their dissatisfaction with academic levels by which the students entered middle school from elementary school. It is not uncommon for one teacher to blame the previous one for learning gaps of students.

Prior to the winter recess the school's focus turned to differentiation. Like many urban school we needed to meet the needs of the struggling students while continuing to challenge those at the higher level. This was heard throughout all of the recent meetings and the debriefings during December and January were not exempt.

Ms. Canter discussed using guided groups during her science instruction as she had been during literacy in an attempt to differentiate. "I really feel like I know what they are capable of now that I have gotten more out of them." I asked her why she felt that was relevant to discuss at our debriefing. Ms. Canter replied:

I'm not sure; it just seems like we have found a common understanding in my classroom. The discussions about race and society and expectations stay a part of what we are doing. The kids don't seem to fight me when I push to get more out of them. So when I put them into small groups and put leveled work out there to them a few of them want to try for the higher leveled work.

Mr. Rhoades chimed in as usual, "I'm definitely not as well planned as Canter so I haven't necessarily tiered my students' work but I think I have been able to provide the push with the support in other ways which is new for me." Prior critiques of Mr. Rhoades left myself and the Mentor Teachers dissatisfied with his lack of flexibility in his instruction. I asked him to elaborate on how he feels he changed. He added:

When the kids start to act lazy or uninterested, I'm gonna look at me and what I can do to connect them to the learning and then try to make it more fun. I loved the work I got from them this year so far; they've been working hard for me but I'm not letting them off the hook yet.

It had become apparent that Mr. Rhoades rarely spoke unless he was connecting with something stated by someone else, most often Ms. Canter. That is not to say that what he shared was not valuable; it was simply an observation. On the first day with students in his first year with the 58th Street Middle School, Mr. Rhoades spoke in Russian to the students simply to entertain them and keep them on their toes; it would be nice to get back to that kind of creativity from him.

Where does it fit?

Drawing from the six-step change framework from Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990), I wanted to remind the participants that the organization needed to draw ideas from the bottom up if we were to truly transform. I wanted to know from the teachers

involved where they saw the unit fitting into their instruction in the future. Hearing from them would help me with step five; to institutionalize the revitalization through formal policies (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector 1990). I had been asking myself what to put in place and how to go about doing it.

The literacy teachers unanimously agreed that they would no longer approach balanced literacy, specifically writing, without the tool of this unit. Likewise, Ms. Lynn felt adamant the unit was the “appropriate way to teach writing to our students.” Mr. Rhoades felt the exercises caused the students to take a good look at the written text presented to them daily in a different way. He felt the students should feel more comfortable and less intimidated by any text in either content area. Mr. Rhoades explained:

By showing them how to compare and contrast the two languages and equating language with formal and informal settings, I think they’ll stop acting like it doesn’t apply to them. We have to teach them that society expects them to use a formal language that is why we’re expecting them to write the way we tell them to.

I asked him if he felt the difference was the act of including versus excluding. He agreed.

Mr. Rhoades, Ms. Canter, and Ms. Lynn were easy representatives of the view from content teachers because they were also literacy teachers. However, when my thinking turned to how to most effectively spread revitalization for the initiative, I knew I needed to know that specific content area teachers were able to see a fit (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990). I had provided the participants with time to share their experiences at each of the faculty meetings, and had been collecting the Implementation Calendars

(Appendix E) from other content area teachers demonstrating their increased use of literacy skills in their content. But I wanted to hear from Daniel. I wanted to hear him discuss the “fit” of this initiative.

Daniel was not disappointing in his response to the question of how the inclusion of African American Vernacular English fit into the classroom. He had been very vocal throughout the process. He was also the most opinionated with his colleagues during the faculty meetings. He said,

“We should all be doing this, Ms. Mills; as a matter of fact we should all have been doing this.” I asked him what the “doing this” was that he was speaking about. His energy and affect caused me to chuckle. Daniel continued:

We should have been set a standard for the language the students use while they’re with us. I know I’m guilty of not making a point of it but to tell you the truth I didn’t really know it was as deep as this.

I asked him what he meant. “By me as a science teacher having to use some of the literacy teacher’s strategies the kids couldn’t get away with not using the right language in their writing.” “The right language, Daniel?” I asked. “Oh, I mean the appropriate language for school.” I asked if he felt we were on the right track with this initiative. He said, we were and that he felt we would accomplish a great deal more if we made things school-wide. “The literacy teachers shouldn’t be the only teachers who hold our kids to a standard; especially since we know that’s what society is holding them to.”

These are some of the same messages Daniel presented to the faculty as the participants shared their experiences each week. Daniel is one of the reasons why the idea of teacher leadership needs to be explored at the 58th Street Middle School.

What do other teachers need to know?

As I listened to the participants during the debriefing process I realized that the last question was also answered by the teacher-leaders' turnabout trainings during the initiative. Collectively the participants wanted teachers to know that the students are capable of working to a higher level of proficiency than the test scores indicate if teachers require it of them. Ms. Lynn stated, "Our kids can do whatever they put their minds to." I asked her why she felt that was something the teachers needed to know. She said between the survey results, the experience during the faculty meetings, and what she gained during self-reflection, she felt it was necessary to remind ourselves of that.

Both Daniel and Mr. Rhoades felt it was important that their colleagues know that the students' views of matters differ from those of adults. At the time of this debriefing they each referenced the discussion they had as a group during the contrastive analysis phase of the instruction. "We gotta make sure that we plan lessons with them in mind not just the objective," Mr. Rhoades retorted. I asked him why he sounded so intense. He explained the feeling he had when he worked with the students and the discussion with the participants made him question "whether we were doing anything right with kids." It appeared he was grappling with something other than student writing. I recall writing in my leadership journal that evening:

I wish I had conducted these interviews all at one time; I really think some of them would have liked to hear what the others were saying. I think Mr. Rhoades would have benefited from having someone alongside him to pull more of his feelings out. I got the impression there was something he wants to say but for some reason is apprehensive. I wonder if it's because I'm the principal or is he

afraid of there being a wrong answer of sorts as it relates to the project. I have tried to stress to everyone there is no “right answer” when it comes to this project; that we’re all just learning through it. But... (Leadership Journal, March 25, 2010).

Ms. Canter responded with a personal anecdote when asked what she felt teachers needed to know from this unit on the use of African American Vernacular English. Her daughter seemed to be struggling to master the specific amount of sight words consistent with her age group. While Ms. Canter says she was aware of her daughter’s difficulties, she did little herself to improve Kayla’s success. Ms. Canter shared, “The school was telling me what her experiences were and I was seeing it for myself; but I can’t say that short of doing homework did I put myself into the equation.” However, due to collaboration and reflection regarding this project she realized she needed to get more involved. She continued, “We were looking at other ways to help our students find success and I started thinking maybe that’s what Kayla needed.” “Maybe what the teacher was doing wasn’t enough or wasn’t connecting.” She sounded very much like the parents in the focus group who expected the school to “handle that” for she and her daughter.

Ms. Foster reiterated her original feeling of the effects getting to know your students have on your ability to elicit the appropriate response(s) from them. She stressed the fact that once she stopped forcing herself onto them and began trying to understand them she became a more effective instructor. Ms. Foster stated:

The students have to believe you’re in it with them or they will shut you out. I don’t know if it’s the same with suburban middle school students; but I think it’s

true with urban students. We have to know how to get through to them or we're doomed to get the same old results.

Teacher Leadership

Gehrke (1991), Podmostko (2001), and Reeves (2008) suggest that teacher leadership is an essential asset to any organization. The five participants are credited first with becoming more inclusive of the culture of our students through a curricular intervention that moved effectiveness of their instructional practice forward. Each week they provided examples of teacher leadership to their peers through their continued participation in the study. This participation demonstrated to their colleagues a willingness to improve their teaching. While progressing through the thematic unit the participants often had the insight to modify the materials used or extend the lessons thereby helping to develop the curriculum based on the needs of their students. Barth (2001) suggests that shaping curriculum and choosing instructional materials are areas where teacher involvement is essential to the health of a school.

In addition to improving their own instruction and shaping curriculum, the participants demonstrated teacher leadership by encouraging their colleagues to become more effective through the implementation of the literacy strategies our students so desperately needed. The content area teachers began including the Instructional Strategy Calendar (Appendix F) into their lesson plans.

Lastly, our participants lead faculty meetings related to the initiative. When Gehrke (1991) speaks of teacher leadership, he identifies six roles that act as an inclusive list of leadership areas that teachers might be called on to exercise when developing teacher leadership skills. They are: to continue teaching and improve one's own teaching,

curriculum development, participating in school decision making, and leading in-service education and assisting others. Despite this being an area lacking in our organization it now appeared to be more of a possibility.

Conclusion

This cycle was the implementation phase of our curriculum intervention to include African American Vernacular English in the Classroom. A large part of the problem of educational change may not be as much a question of resistance, but more the question of difficulty related to planning and coordinating (Fullan, 2007). This initiative began with challenges to its existence as well as to the creation of the teacher leadership it was to launch. When the CEO and his curriculum writer inadvertently eliminated the Writer's Workshop from our instructional program the teachers, specifically the literacy teachers, feared they would be back on the hamster wheel again. Since the writing block was the planned instructional time for the curriculum intervention to be used, we were in jeopardy of not being able to implement it. The literacy teachers and the participants were dissatisfied and wanted to be heard.

I could only provide them with the CEO's attention; they went further and made the plea, which caused him to reinstitute the writer's block. Fullan (2007) suggests the role of the principal is the key to any change effort. I am inclined however, to agree with Fullan as he further states the principalship itself has become overloaded in a way that makes it impossible to fulfill the promise of widespread, sustained reform. We needed to move beyond the current top-down way of performing and I alone was not effective in getting the CEO to see this. Fullan acknowledges that effective principals develop

leadership among teachers. I did well by simply providing them with the venue and standing back.

Once the curriculum was readjusted, I used classroom observations, weekly debriefing meetings, and teacher interviews with the participants to ascertain my findings of the impact on teacher efficacy when African American Vernacular English is included in the classroom. I also took into account my usual perusal of lesson plans and teacher assessments. As I observed teachers it was evident first that the participants had created classroom environments that were mutually respectful as Marshall (2001) references. Studies suggest that instructional and management processes together were key to effectiveness (Stronge, 2007). This was a major area of concern for Ms. Foster who was new to the school and struggling to connect with her students.

Going further, it was conceivable to assume that teachers responsible for more than one subject were impacted in a positive manner as I saw them carry over their expectations for writing in literacy to an increase in open-ended questions in their other content area(s). This was consistent with Ms. Lynn, Ms. Foster, and Mr. Rhoades. Teachers naturally fell into this as a behavior as they indicated that they were finding less time addressing editing issues and more time spent on task. Hughes (2001) suggests that the time spent on task leads to student achievement. I also saw the teachers putting more effort in the quality of their lesson plans; making use of the additional time available to increase rigor and creativity.

This was especially evident with Mr. Rhoades who taught literacy and social studies. He began mimicking aspects of Ms. Canter's instructional process for literacy as best practices to be implemented with his students. I viewed this as the beginning stage of

confronting the isolationism and privatism that reinforce the status quo and make it impossible attitudinally and physically for teachers to work together in joint planning; observation of one another's practice; and seeking, testing, and revising teaching strategies on a regular basis (Fullan, 2007). Daniel was thrilled with moving to a different grade and subject with the feeling that he had systematically addressed the needs of the whole child through his participation.

I have learned that teacher quality or effectiveness is not a single concept with a single meaning. It, like the children it serves, is multifaceted requiring the teacher to possess multiple and complex mediating variables that influence student achievement over time (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010). Teachers must be willing and able to examine the predispositions, norms, and beliefs that are part of who they are in order to provide nonthreatening environments that are accepting of the "whole child." To do so opens the flood-gates of purposeful collaboration, planning with creativity and rigor, and improved relationships between students and teacher.

My servant leadership supported the collaboration among the participants as well as between them and the faculty. Servant leadership was also instrumental in building capacity in the participants as they became leaders each week for their colleagues to follow during faculty meetings. This was evident as their support extended beyond themselves to meeting with others. In this sense I could see the transformation of the organization beginning through the transformation of the participants and faculty. However, it was too soon to determine what, if anything would be sustained.

Chapter VIII

Cycle IV Impact - How the Inclusion of AAVE Influenced More than Literacy

Teacher Interviews

I reminded participants that, the rationale behind the research remained a literacy initiative, which evolved into teacher effectiveness. I referenced this for fear they would become preoccupied with their own participation in the project thereby making the results artificial. For that reason I built an excessive amount of questions into the interview to be used to get teachers talking and the conversations flowing. The interviews took place during the week of March 15, 2010 in a somewhat unstructured manner where I grabbed participants whenever a free moment would allow. Each participant was asked the questions (Appendix F) in no particular order and scripting was used to record each response. According to Glense (2006), a number of things occur simultaneously during the interviewing but that which is most critical is the listening. The results of all interview questions were recorded but not presented in the text to follow.

Like McColskey, Stronge, Ward, Tucker, Howard, Lewis and Hindman (2009), I looked for indicators such as learning environment, planning, assessment, and curriculum strategies as indicative of effectiveness. Likewise any discussion on student achievement, work samples, or outcomes was considered relevant.

Capacity Building

The curricular modification being pondered was expected to forge new pathways for the teachers' thinking to evolve. We planned to look at culture and have responsible conversations about the manner in which students and teachers were or were not relating. This is in line with what Heifetz and Linsky (2002) reference as adaptive challenges,

because we were experimenting, discovering, and looking at adjustments coming from other areas; specifically something other than the top down.

Many schools rely on teachers to voluntarily and informally lead various efforts within the school (Danielson, 2004). In most cases these teachers are not appointed leaders or even paid for their leadership. Often they take on these roles because they are connected and committed to the initiative. The existence of teacher leadership at the 58th Street Middle School had been a missing factor that had been identified by the organizational scan conducted prior to the onset of Cycle I.

Brought about primarily by servant leadership, my efforts to build capacity in the participants was cultivated through opportunities of turn-around training related to what they were living through the process (Greenleaf, 1977). This turn around training began in a very benign manner with the participants simply “sharing out” their experiences with the project during faculty meetings, just as an update. It then became a lesson in collaboration between colleagues that could not have been planned for, but instead developed as a natural outgrowth of shared decision-making and the identification of personal mastery (Fullan, 2001) as the participants began adding more of themselves into these segments.

Teacher Leadership Looks Like Ownership

There does not appear to be one single definition of teacher leadership; however, researchers feel it to be an essential asset to an educational organization because student learning depends on the quality of teachers (Gehrke, 1991; Podmostko, 2001; Reeves, 2008). Gehrke (1991) identifies six roles that act as an inclusive list of leadership areas that teachers might be called on to exercise when developing teacher leadership skills.

They are: (1) continuing to teach and improve one's own teaching, (2) organizing and leading peer reviews of school practice, (3) providing curriculum development knowledge, (4) participating in school-level decision making, (5) leading in-service education and assisting others, and (6) participating in the performance evaluation of teachers.

With this change initiative and the previous one (Teacher Advancement Program), the 58th Street Middle School was operating on four of the six roles. The first, to continue teaching and improve one's own teaching, was obvious as the participants in each of these efforts continued to utilize what they were learning within the confines of their own classrooms. The second, to provide curriculum development knowledge was evident during Cycle II at the planning stage where the leadership team determined that a thematic unit would enhance the current curriculum as a means of supporting teachers as they included African American Vernacular English in the classroom. Barth (2001) added to this thinking when he suggested shaping the curriculum and choosing instructional materials as areas where teacher involvement is essential to the health of a school.

The peer coaching developed through the cognitive reflective practice included the performance evaluation of teachers by their peers. The organization was now embarking on the fourth role to lead in-service education and assist others. Despite this being an area lacking in our organization, it appeared we were on the right track.

I couldn't even relax today at my principal meeting wondering how the faculty meeting was going. This is the first time that neither myself nor the CEO would be present the entire day for professional development. We were solely relying on the staff to be responsible and professional. I left the planning for the entire day

with the Teacher Leaders with instructions on including the participants as support for the deliverables. They were apprehensive and so was I; all thinking the staff would be rebellious. I checked in throughout the day and found everything on track. The idea of sharing in-service responsibilities is yet another new step for this organization. (Leadership journal, February, 2010)

Impact on the Participants No specific protocol was used to assess teacher leadership through the turn-around trainings. Instead the demonstration of capacity building in this area acted as data. The participants evolved from merely sharing their feelings about including the vernacular to creating agendas and facilitating the faculty meetings without using the principal to guide them or sort their ideas. Beginning November 4, 2009 these participants were given opportunities weekly to present themselves as knowledge creators. Fullan (2001) indicates that people do not initially desire to share information unless there is the existence of a moral commitment.

Handing me an article today, Ms. Bower stated, I wanted to bring you this article I found recently because I thought it was interesting. There are a lot of things I have on my mind to share that I hope we can talk about sometime; our children need a lot and I don't want to be someone who sits back and complains about them or the school. I want to work at this. (Excerpt from a conversation between myself and Ms. Bower- Leadership journal March 12, 2010)

Turn-around training. To develop teacher leadership, I provided time for turn-around training at the weekly faculty meetings for the participants to present their new learning, experiences, and observations beginning November 4, 2009 through March 17, 2010. Turn around training is a process of employee training and development commonly

known in the business sector as “turn-key”, which empowers employees to present new information to colleagues (Gittman & Kurz, 1991). Fullan (2001) suggests information is machines but knowledge is people. In order for information to become knowledge there must be interaction. Initially I expected them to simply “share out” in an attempt to inform their colleagues, however as time went on more interaction occurred.

Ms. Foster shared about the change in classroom management she stated her experience:

I know it probably wasn't the lessons alone that helped me and my students get to a better place because I had been trying other stuff for a while. But I won't stop believing that doing things like role playing, talking about Facebook, using YouTube, and just talking together didn't help us over that hump.

“But you're still Black; the kids don't want to hear about this stuff from me because I'm white. That's why I don't address their writing issues in my Social Studies class,” stated Sally. Ms. Foster went further, “Don't be so sure of that; I was getting my butt kicked in room 112.” This caused smiles and chuckles from the room. Ms. Foster continued to Sally, “I'll be glad to come to your room to make observations then we can talk about starting small; like with one class.” This offer was due in part to the fact that Sally struggled with classroom management issues that did not appear to be improving. Fullan (2001) speaks of the importance of teacher collaboration to foster student achievement, and I believe teacher leadership to be consistent with the level and type of partnership our organization needed to progress.

To aid the participants in building capacity as leaders, I provided them with excerpts from researched-based books on teacher leadership. We discussed them briefly

at our regular meetings, and I simply suggested they share their knowledge with colleagues. This would add to their leadership capacity as it acted as the knowledge creation and sharing that our change initiative required (Fullan, 2001).

Each week when we met to debrief, before closing we would discuss a portion of one of the readings. From the discussion, either one of them or the team decided what would be connected to their message to the faculty. After reading a section from the *Skillful Teacher* (Saphier, Haley-Speca, & Gower, 2008) that gave examples of mediocre teachers, Ms. Lynn interjected saying, “We need to use the Mutha-to-Son lesson with them; take them through reading with expression then have them take it out of the vernacular and put in mainstream language.” Ms. Carter, “Don’t forget the idea of context to see if they can identify how important it was for Langston Hughes to speak that way despite him having the ability to code-switch.” “This is going to be a fun discussion,” stated Mr. Rhoades with a smile on his face and an almost sinister tone.

I observed the format of their presentation to the faculty move from just a “reporting out” kind of approach to meaningful dialoguing to interactive sessions where they required the faculty to sometimes act as the students. At the December 9, 2009 faculty meeting, the team took the faculty through one of the lessons on contrastive analysis the same way they had their students. Numerous questions and genuine conversation about culture were generated. One teacher asked, “How did you approach the students before you started talking about comparing their language with Mainstream language?” This appeared to be very effective for program coherence (Fullan, 2001).

By the week of January 11, 2010, I had received Instructional Strategy Calendars (Appendix E) from four of the eight content teachers, including Ms. Bower, science

teacher, brought me her lesson plan and stated, “I’m going to see if I can work the literacy strategies in these plans; but I’m going to be asking for a lot of help.” Ms. Wynn, literacy teacher, was in the vicinity and added, “I can help clarify how to use it if that will be of any help for you.” They were two teachers who worked in the same small learning community, connected by the same group of students but had never planned together. One could easily avow that this was based on the turnaround training from the weeks before. Fullan (2001) asserts that in learning-enriched schools, principals and teacher leaders actively fostered collegial involvement.

One goal of the inclusion of African American Vernacular English was to impact teacher efficacy using the students’ culture and home language. Another goal was to build teacher leadership in the participants. An additional objective was to share in the literacy instruction of the students for the purpose of supporting the efforts of the literacy teachers, thereby re-energizing their commitment to student achievement. Rosenholtz (as cited in Fullan, 2001) equates teacher certainty with a sense of efficacy. Rosenholtz (as cited in Fullan, 2001) goes further to say that teacher certainty and teacher commitment feed on each other; together they channel energy toward student achievement. Student achievement is why we are all here.

Reflection on teaching style. Common themes expressed by the participants during the interview process demonstrated teaching style, planning efforts, and a general increase in knowledge of students as areas affected during the initiative. Additionally, during the interview process the participants appeared to take ownership for the progress or lack thereof of their students as opposed to surrendering it as part of the students’ destiny despite this not being part of the questioning.

Mr. Rhoades stated, “I made a personal discovery about the modality of my instruction. The initiative showed me I’m a lecturer-style teacher... and that doesn’t help the students connect with the information.” He taught both literacy and social studies to our fifth graders however, often was not inclusive of multiple variations of his instruction. He indicated that in an attempt to meet the students where they are he now found himself adding more projects to his instructional practice. He said, “This need became more apparent to me through one of our weekly discussions on how the students interpreted teacher expectations during contrastive analysis instruction.” Rhoades added, “And I can think of several ways to use role-playing during Social Studies; maybe then the kids won’t look so bored with it.”

I asked him if he could identify any other ways he felt he changed his teaching approach. Mr. Rhoades said:

I don’t think I’ve actually made the complete change yet, but I would like to pay more attention to letting students use each other more like with shoulder partners as a strategy. The lecturer that I am has to be able to let go of the control and let them interact with each other. I think they enjoy that and they can learn from each other. Plus it helps with differentiation.

This revelation is aligned to Marshall (2001) which describes spending time (preparation) understanding their audience is a characteristic of an effective teacher. This time spent planning is also referenced by Danielson (2004) as she discusses the “off stage” areas relevant to improving teaching quality.

Daniel Gray felt he had included more rigor in his planning now that he was requiring students to routinely perform oral reports, as well as respond to more open-

ended items as formative assessments. Extended responses are a form of formative assessment, which supports learning during the learning process (Dodge, 2009).

McColskey, Stronge, Ward, Tucker, Howard, Lewis, and Hindman (2009) have linked high-quality classroom assessment techniques to higher student achievement.

Like Mr. Rhoades, Ms. Canter had a confession about her perceptions of her students. She confessed:

I have to admit I was one of those who blamed the students when a lesson didn't go the way I wanted. I'm glad to admit that I see where most of them are not necessarily deficient in their skills, and I can do a better job of instructing them.

It appeared that she was now planning more effectively, using the new knowledge of her students to direct her instruction. Danielson (2004) references the planning portion of teacher responsibility as "off-stage" because the process does not occur while the teacher is in the act of performing her instruction. Ms. Canter found herself requiring longer periods of time for this planning, and for this reason she had begun to plan at home. She said:

I stopped trying to plan here at school even though all of my materials were here. Last year I had gotten into the habit of carrying home as little as possible, this year I take different stuff each day, based on what I am trying to accomplish with the students.

She said it was fun to feel more organized, as opposed to feeling hurried and overwhelmed, as she had in the previous year.

At one time Mr. Rhoades' idea of fun and enjoyment seemed to include seeing his students moan and groan over the amount of work he was providing. He, and Ms. Canter,

prided themselves on being considered rigorous and in their words, “not letting them get away with just doing the minimum.” On several occasions Mr. Rhoades or Ms. Canter could be heard saying:

They come to us from other schools and we are always concerned with whether they have been taught all of the particulars. The students have no doubt been presented with the information, but how we retrieve it from them that may lead us to perceive there are greater deficits than what actually exists. All these years we do the levels testing for reading and math then, based on the outcome, we begin our instruction. Many students don’t really care about the test because we give it in the summer. But we probably decide how we’re gonna teach all year from that first test; then we never change. But this year I did change.

Planning with creativity. Participants appeared to be so focused on student achievement that when asked to discuss their students’ current use of Standard English, or mainstream American English, each requested to bring samples of students’ work. They all wanted to “show” me how much more satisfied they were with the work their students were producing. It seemed they had completely missed the idea of how the amount of and type of preparation put into lesson planning had caused this productivity. Wong and Wong (2004) speak repeatedly about the necessity of extensive planning to be the efficient and effective teacher all students need. Walker (2008) identifies preparedness as one of 12 characteristics of an effective teacher. They were encouraged to “tell it now and show it later” in an attempt to help them reflect on their role in the experience.

Reflecting back on his apprehensions of teaching science for the first time, I asked Daniel Gray whether there had been a specific point when it had become fun instead of stressful. He responded:

I think the whole idea of me including the literacy initiative gave us a chance to start communicating better; they didn't think I needed to teach writing because I'm a science teacher. When I started using the lessons with role playing and all of that, they became more receptive to what I was trying to show them about life and how they can be more successful in society like the one about the high school entrance interview. After that they would do whatever I asked (almost) without a whole lot of complaining, so I kept looking for ways to make them happy with me.

I listened attentively to Daniel as he discussed the improvement in his science students' use of mainstream English when they responded to short-answer or essay questions (which he wanted me to see for myself). But it was his discussion of their oral reports that really demonstrated his thoughtfulness as a teacher. "It was definitely more effective for me to ask the students to become the researcher or scientist assigned versus just reading a report out loud." He told me the literacy coaches encouraged him to develop a rubric to give students so they would know what was expected of them. "I included materials and language style in the rubric because I wanted them to consider using props in their report and I wanted them to score each other's performance." He smiled widely when questioning where "Shaquille might have gotten his white lab coat" as a prop.

For him, this approach was the vehicle to encouraging students to use mainstream American English rather than simply the assignment of an oral report. Throughout the process Daniel often referenced wanting to give his students a better experience with science than his own had been.

Ms. Lynn also spoke about enjoyment and how much more useful it was in literacy to have students switch papers with a partner and read the informative essay aloud as a news anchor. That idea, she shared, “grew into creating props to turn our classroom into a newsroom. I plan to use this again during poetry month and will ask Ms. Wynn to videotape the students.” This level of creativity has the most significant impact on the lives of students because the experience tends to be memorable, thereby allowing them to draw from it later. Those researchers who recognize that effective teachers are not gauged through the narrow scope of test scores state that motivating students through creativity is just as relevant to the discussion of characteristics of good teachers (Marshall, 2001; Walker, 2008).

Ms. Foster shared that role-playing had become an effective tool for her to differentiate instruction for learning-support students as well. Differentiation has become the tool many researchers feel directly effects our learners of today because it suggests the teacher take into account the diversity within her classroom (Kameenui & Simmons, 1990). As a Special Education teacher Ms. Foster had a variation of cognitive levels within the same classroom that were not consistent with their chronological age.

With the idea of planning in mind, Ms. Foster also said she had begun allowing more time for students to discuss the content, thereby connecting more with it. She said:

I feel I might have underestimated their interest in literacy because I struggled to manage them. But, after making strides in the climate due to the lessons on content, I was able to allow students to direct small portions of the instruction, making the classroom more student-centered.

What Was Learned About Our Students. Each of the literacy teachers, Ms. Canter, Ms. Lynn, and Mr. Rhoades referenced the benefits of the initiative in its entirety. However, the trend emphasized the manner by which students responded to contrastive analysis as a more effective manner of helping them include formal language in the final drafts in each genre of writing by showing the similarities and differences in the two languages. Little, Goe, and Bell (2009) identify effective teachers as those who use diverse resources to structure learning opportunities and adapt instruction as needed. In Ms. Lynn's view, she was more effective in teaching the content of each genre with less frustration experienced by her and the students. Additionally, Ms. Canter, Mr. Rhoades, and Ms. Lynn felt contrastive analysis was useful in gaining an understanding of the way the students viewed themselves. Mr. Rhoades said:

The contrastive analysis exercises caused the students to take a good look at the written text presented to them daily in a different way. To take it apart and look at its message I feel was an effective way for them to own it. He said the students should feel more comfortable and less intimidated by any text in either content area. By showing them how to compare and contrast the two languages, and equating them with formal and informal settings, I think they'll stop acting like it doesn't apply to them. We have to teach them that society expects them to use a

formal language which is why we're expecting them to write the way we tell them to.

I asked him if he felt the difference was the act of including versus excluding. He agreed.

Both Daniel and Mr. Rhoades felt it was important their colleagues know that the students' views of matters differ from those of adults. At the time of my interviews they each referenced the discussion they had as a group during the contrastive analysis phase of the instruction. "We gotta make sure that we plan lessons with them in mind, not just a measurable objective," Mr. Rhoades said. I asked him why he sounded so intense. He explained the feeling he had when he worked with the students, and the discussion with the participants made him question "whether we were doing anything right with kids." It appeared he was grappling with something other than student writing. I recall writing in my leadership journal that evening:

I wish I had conducted these interviews all at one time; I really think some of them would have liked to hear what the others were saying. I think Mr. Rhoades would have benefited from having someone alongside him to pull more of his feelings out. I got the impression there was something he wants to say but for some reason is apprehensive. I wonder if it's because I'm the principal or is he afraid of there being a wrong answer of sorts as it relates to the project. I have tried to stress to everyone there is no "right answer" when it comes to this project, that we're all just learning through it. But... (Leadership Journal, March 25, 2010)

Collectively, the participants wanted teachers to know that the students are capable of working to a higher level of proficiency than the test scores indicate, if

teachers require it of them. Ms. Lynn said,

“Our kids can do whatever they put their minds to.” I asked her why she felt that was something the teachers needed to know. She said between the survey results in Cycle I, the dialogue experienced during the faculty meetings, and what she gained during self-reflection, she felt it was necessary to remind ourselves of that. “I just think that we do so much complaining about what the students aren’t doing that we begin to act as though it means they can’t do.” Educators would have to be work feverishly not to allow pedagogical practice to be effected with this thinking.

Ms. Foster reiterated her original feeling about the effects getting to know her students has had on her ability to elicit the appropriate response(s) from them. She stressed the fact that once she stopped forcing herself onto them and began trying to understand them she became a more effective instructor. In her words:

The students have to believe you’re in it with them or they will shut you out. I don’t know if it’s the same with suburban middle-school students, but I think it’s true with urban students. We have to pay homage to what is important to them in an attempt to get through to them or we’re doomed to repeat the same old results.

Conclusion

The African American Vernacular English curriculum impacted the faculty of the 58th Street Middle School in a number of ways, which can be spoken about as emergent themes. Firstly, the AAVE curriculum served as the vehicle to create the collaboration among teachers that did not previously exist at the school. Smith (as cited in Wong &

Wong, 2004) identified effective schools as those that create collegial learning environments for the faculty. They go on to say collaborative environments are those where teachers discuss their practice of teaching with each other for the goal of improving their skills. The teachers collaborated for several purposes. They collaborated about classroom management, instructional support, and about students' needs. This is what had been missing from the 58th Street Middle School, not because the teachers were not willing but because we, as the administration, had not provided the right opportunity for it.

Secondly, by creating a venue for teacher leadership through the turn-around-trainings, leadership abilities in other individuals was being developed. Alan, one of the secondary math teachers, became one of the first to come to the support of the literacy teachers by including the reading strategies into his math instruction. He simply took the advice of the consultants and added the use of learning logs in his math class. Just like Daniel in his science classroom, Alan's students were now hearing conversation about the "content of their writing" from their math teacher. He shared his experiences with Daniel who asked him to demonstrate the students' work to the faculty as part of the participants' agenda at the faculty meeting. It was the first time Alan (only in his second year as a teacher) had been given "the floor." In this light, Daniel had demonstrated himself worthy of being followed by those whom he was attempting to lead (Greenleaf, 1977).

As an additional benefit, the faculty saw their peers elect to involve themselves in an initiative for the sole purpose of improving the quality of instruction and educational experiences of the students at the 58th Street Middle School. Lastly, it had been evident

that there was a need to require content area teachers to share in the literacy responsibility. However, as the administration moved to identify the formal policies needed to institutionalize the change, as discussed by Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector. (1990), the benefit to the faculty was hearing the participants' experiences with the initiative; made it a much more convincing process than a simple directive alone.

Chapter IX

Cycle V – My Leadership Theories in Use

Introduction

The purpose of this cycle was to develop a more coherent understanding of myself as a leader, and to assess whether my espoused theories of leadership were actually the leadership theories by which I operated. I looked for what challenged my leadership and what, if any, changes were the result of those challenges. My project focused on a curriculum intervention to include African American Vernacular English in the classroom. I focused on the inclusion of the vernacular, as I believed the current exclusionary practices hindered teacher efficacy by causing, among other things, a divide between teacher and student. I also believed home language was a connection to student identity; as language is part of one's culture. Therefore to negate this part of a child's culture is to ignore part of the child's identity.

At the 58th Street Middle School we routinely purchased books that we thought demonstrated cultural diversity, and conducted annual programs to celebrate the African American culture. What was unfortunate was the revelation that we at the 58th Street Middle School had not been including the students' culture into our instructional program despite efforts and planning. This was evidenced by our inability to assist students in utilizing the standard writing conventions in a nonthreatening way. Cochran-Smith (2004) suggests the reason for this is traditional teaching programs prepare teachers for work in White, middle class settings.

Now, as I embark on this chapter of my project I am reminded even more of the purpose and intention of my involvement in education. Each of us has a responsibility to

look beyond our traditions, comforts, and norms to work diligently to empower students with the knowledge and skills needed to participate in a democratic society (Dewey, 1916/1944). Conversely, teachers who function from the thought of teaching culturally homogenized, standardized students, arm themselves with generic teaching skills and often find they are ineffective and ill-prepared to teach culturally diverse learners (Cochran-Smith, 2004). We chose a curricular modification that would allow us to look beyond typical pedagogical practices that are necessary, yet perhaps, not sufficient for effective teaching.

I have opted to present this look into my leadership one cycle at a time as a means of reflecting on what was occurring and what my responses were. In doing so I am hopeful of identifying the more tangible examples that I realized had been either minimal or invisible from my previous experiences in a leadership position. I need to move from simply being in a leadership position to being a leader. It was through this action research project that I learned a difference existed.

Leadership in Cycle I

During my early experience with the Educational Leadership program my espoused leadership theories were transformational, democratic, and feminist based primarily on my desires and minimally on my understanding at the time. As I reflected during this project I realized there had not been many concrete examples of my leadership that allowed me to either confirm or dispel either of the theories. I also came to realize this was undoubtedly due to the hierarchal culture of the organization at the time and my own reluctance to step forward and take risks. I have come to realize that taking risks is part of being a leader.

Cycle I called for the individual grade groups to receive a two-hour workshop as an overview of African American Vernacular English. The major challenge came with the interaction between me and the Chief Education Officer (CEO), Leonard James. While he was not openly opposed to my research project he did, however, demonstrate resistance to my attempts at being transformational. Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2005) suggest creation of the “we” in an organization must be done from the inside out. I aligned this thinking to my desire to move the organization to a systems thinking approach specifically where it meant building shared vision among the staff (Senge, 2006). The mantra often expressed by the CEO was, “People function from what we inspect not what we expect.” This top-down manner of managing the organization may have been useful in the early stage of its development for the purpose of compliance. However, once the core faculty was established I felt we needed to work on identifying a culture where sharing in the future of the organization was everyone’s agenda.

This movement from compliance to commitment is the exact transformation the 58th Street Middle School needed. During the discussions that followed each of the grade group workshops on African American Vernacular English I felt compelled to unleash some of the energy and knowledge our teachers possessed but was hidden by policy. I was able to hear their passionate conversations that included not only personal accounts but also their desires for our students. I was becoming more comfortable with the idea of presenting them with teacher leadership roles as I experienced this young faculty at an increased level of selflessness. Krebs and Hestersen (1994) view altruism as the heart of transformation.

From looking back at field notes and leadership journal reflections, it is accurate to say that my road to becoming a transformational leader began with a feminist style. From the very onset of the research in Cycle I, I concerned myself with each of the three components Shakeshaft (1987) suggests are present in feminist leaders. Feminist leaders are concerned with relationships with others. I discovered a deeper respect for the teachers as colleagues despite the hierarchy involved of manager and employee. I recognized the fact that I needed them as teammates in this project and future ones to grow the organization and impact student achievement.

Also evident in feminist leaders is the necessity to build community. From the beginning I felt it beneficial that the entire school community be aware of and share in the plight of the literacy teachers as they attempted to service the needs of the students. In doing so, faculty was reminded that teaching and learning was, and always should be the major focus of our efforts (Shakeshaft, 1987). This action was consistent not only with feminist leadership but was pertinent as well with the idea of reorganizing the school's instructional methods (Beer, Eisenstat & Spector, 1990). This reorganization was a large part of the transformation that needed to occur within the organization. However, it was also what put my leadership on the line.

Included in Cycle I was a Leadership Survey conducted by the support staff in response to my request. I requested this because each year the Board of Trustees brings in a consultant to survey the faculty on their views however, I was never privy to the results. I felt I had begun to demonstrate who I was as a leader more concretely through the onset project than times past. Therefore, I needed to hear from the staff to first, be sure of what

they were experiencing and secondly, to pay homage to the democratic form of my espoused leadership.

The psychology intern along with the counselor/social worker located a survey they felt was conducive to what I was looking for to learn about myself, placed it in teacher mailboxes with a specific due date, and later collected it. This was a 15-question survey in which the likert scale responses ranged from one through five; almost never true to almost always true of my leadership (Patten, 2001)

The scoring guide which accompanied the survey placed a point value on each response. Every “Almost Always True” response was valued at five points. The “Frequently True” response was worth four points; an “occasionally true” answer was valued at three points; “seldom true” was two points, and “almost never true” was simply one point (see Table 8.1). Each response was then placed into a grid and totaled to determine the leadership style with the highest score (see Table 8.2).

Lewin (1939) designed this survey to indicate autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles of leadership. According to his design the total score of 207 in table 8.2 on items 1, 4, 7,10, and 13 indicated I had tendencies toward Authoritarian leadership. The total score of 212 on items 2, 5, 8, 11, and 14 indicated a person had tendencies toward Democratic leadership. Finally, the total score of 226 on items 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15 indicated I had tendencies toward the Delegative style of leadership.

As is clear from the score totals presented in table 8.2, teachers viewed my leadership tendencies as more Delegative than Authoritative or Democratic. Despite this data being informative in nature, I was engulfed in disappointment as Lewin (1939) defines Delegative leadership as one that offers little or no guidance to its members and

considers this form the least productive of the three. It is also referred to as free reign. Conversely, Bass (2008) spoke about this style as an advanced form of leadership that requires faith and trust in the followers. Successful completion of delegated tasks will not occur without the continuous supervision of the leader until she believes the followers are ready to be independent.

Despite the facelessness of these results, I took solace in knowing that these results may be due, at least in part, to the blur between my attempts to be servant (Greenleaf, 1977) and transformational (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005) with a feminist style in a more transactional culture that was already established by the CEO. Nonetheless, my work was cut out for me to become the leader I viewed the organization needed.

Table 8.1

Likert Scale Responses/Survey

	The Principal ('s)	Almost Always True	Frequently True	Occasionally True	Seldom True	Almost Never True
1	Leadership skills are centered with a need to serve the students with equity	11	11	5	0	0
2	Always includes employees in determining what to do. However, maintains the final decision maker	9	8	9	0	1
3	Desires an environment which allows participation in the decision making process.	14	7	5	1	0
4	Does not consider suggestions made by employees as she does not have the time to listen.	0	1	6	7	13
5	Asks for employees input on upcoming plans and projects.	12	10	5	0	0
6	Delegates tasks in order to implement a new procedure or process.	8	9	8	2	0
7	Likes to utilize her leadership position to help the faculty members grow.	0	19	1	4	3
8	When in need of a strategy, seeks employee's advice.	4	7	9	7	0
9	Communicates information in a timely manner, allowing for staff inquiries.	9	6	10	1	1
10	When someone makes a mistake, the principal tells them not ever do that again and makes a note of it.	4	6	9	4	4
11	It is characteristic of the principal's leadership to support her faculty's committed efforts.	10	11	5	1	0
12	The principal allows the employees to determine what needs to be done and how to do it.	6	8	10	2	1
13	When there are differences in role expectations, principal works with staff to resolve them.	5	9	9	2	2
14	Seeks employees' vision and utilizes it where applicable.	4	8	12	2	1
15	Clearly communicates her expectations to the faculty.	12	6	7	2	0

Table 8.2

Teacher Survey on Leadership Style

Item	Score	Item	Score	Item	Score
1	55	2	45	3	70
4	13	5	60	6	36
7	76	8	27	9	30
10	27	11	44	12	30
13	36	14	36	15	60
TOTAL	207	TOTAL	212	TOTAL	226
Authoritarian		Participative		Delegative	
Autocratic		Democratic		Free reign	

Leadership in Cycle II

During Cycle II I became aware of the importance of emotional intelligence (EI), how I handle myself and my relationships, as a significant part of leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). I believe it grew out of my numerous trips to the balcony to assess the present situation for the most beneficial action (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002) when interacting with the CEO during Cycle I. It had become apparent the mental models possessed by Mr. James did not resonate throughout the organization as it failed to produce an atmosphere of collaboration (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). When the teachers were asked to review documents that lead us to formulate a plan to include African American Vernacular English in the classroom, I found the team too dependent initially on me to engage in real communication. It was not until the second week of our gathering that their energy to create solutions began to present itself. The exercise where I demonstrated a yearly loss of 50 % of the faculty and student body as an organizational shortcoming and not an instructional one was the first time teachers had not been singled out as the only cause of our low student achievement. As a leader, a democratic leader, I had to offer myself to them as an equal participant in the current condition of the

organization. I went further to assure them that moving forward with this initiative all viewpoints would be considered.

During the session on July 15, 2009 where conflict appeared to develop among the team while deciding whether content area teachers should be required to support literacy instruction and to what extent challenged me as a leader. It was challenging because we had so often participated in passive communication that moved in one direction only, where the teachers were generally told what to do and appeared to accept it. Now, however, they were being asked to engage in a more democratic process with communication being a shared activity among equals (Cronin, 1987). As a democratic leader, I had to demonstrate the ability and willingness to make this happen. This required observing deeper than the usual downloading level of cognition of which Scharmer (2009) speaks. There was specifically the question of whether race played an active role in our experiences with students and maybe each other.

Then there was the frustration around which genre of writing should be given more attention for its contribution to cross-curricular instruction. What I noticed was the teachers, whether literacy or otherwise, struggling to get their points across to one another, but not necessarily rejecting what others were saying just layering more information on top of it. That is what made for conflict, as they were all just tossing their individual irons into the fire by talking loudly and not listening. I realized this may have been happening because they were unaccustomed to having a voice in matters for which they felt so passionately. They were now exercising their ability to have a viewpoint that differed from another's but was heard without repercussion. I wondered if there was something about debate that the team began to like.

Like Freire (1998), I viewed this exchange as the democratic dialogue between individuals with opposing views. When it felt that we were stuck I interjected by restating what each presented in an attempt to help them connect each others' ideas. In educational settings opportunities to share are critical to decision making. As would often occur, Mrs. Martin then made a point that moved us forward.

Therefore as the democratic leader I listened attentively to the ideas of others knowing that the dialogue is what creates the change Burns (2003) calls a metamorphosis for the organization. I was at that time, completely dependent upon the communication process that allows deeper knowing to emerge causing the appropriate action to occur at that instant (Scharmer, 2009). It was the beginning of building capacity (Fullan, 2001).

Leadership in Cycle III

Although my leadership during the implementation cycle was somewhat nondescript, at the onset of the cycle I found myself to be functioning from a deliberate social justice style of leadership. I was frustrated thinking that my school was possibly contributing to the creation of a permanent underclass of people if we did not make a change soon. Like Rickford (1998), I believed that success in a reading class led to success in the other content areas. But until this point I could not find others to be willing to take responsibility for the literacy needs other than the Language Arts teachers.

Whenever I'm talking to Sally I am almost made angry because I feel she abdicates responsibility for the children's failures to someone other than herself. She is still someone who says "those kids" instead of "our kids" when speaking about them. After she finished ranting today about what 'our students' cannot do I felt the need to call her out to suggest she be willing to come with a solution and

not just more rhetoric; 50% of the students failed her class this first marking period...Social Justice (Leadership Journal, November 2, 2009)

After nudging the participants into the foreground I felt myself retreat into the background. During the implementation cycle communication continued to improve, both among the participants as they met each week to debrief, and through the participants to the faculty. The communication did not involve the usual complaining about what students did or did not do correctly during a given lesson. Instead it included discussions about specific actions related to instruction and how students interacted with each other and the new learning. As if this were not change enough, there was also the increased collaboration that was naturally born out of genuine, professional conversation among teachers.

Today Mrs. Martin asked me if she could be put on the agenda of the grade group meeting for seventh grade. Seems she thought she could discuss this month's literacy strategy as a whole group instead of answering questions through email. I gave her the floor in hopes of pulling a few additional folks on board. (Leadership Journal, December 10, 2009)

The collaborations were the result of my servant leadership at work to create the nurturing environment that served others (Greenleaf, 1977). My leadership during the formation of the thematic unit allowed followers to be inspired to perform at an increased capacity. I believed in the teachers' desire to make the students successful. When Ms. Bower asked for support to keep students from Sally's class for detention she did not look to me but to her other partner teachers in that small learning community. They

shared these students daily so it was practical that they also share in carrying out their collective expectations for behavior.

I almost feel badly for Sally. She is quickly getting disconnected from her colleagues. Her students continue to be out of control each period. I am not sure whether she is unable or unwilling to connect with them. Mr. Bernhardt losing patience with her today was teetering on disrespect. I stepped in before he went from teasing to being rude. This may not be the population she should be best suited to teach. We may need to have a conversation with her moving forward. There is still time to turn things around. (Feminist; Leadership Journal)

I made a point of providing the participating teachers with a voice by which to present the students' needs. To do so positioned my leadership in the center of the organization placing me in contact with the other aspects of the organization (Marzano et al., 2005). As the participants took advantage of their newfound teacher-leader positions during faculty meetings, some faculty members immediately migrated to them, others needed my prompting to connect and commit.

Research Questions Answered

How do educators currently address African American Vernacular English in their present instructional practices?

During Cycle I, February 2009 through April 2009, I kept field notes of my observations from the meetings of the literacy teachers and provided a survey of the attendees of the typical grade group meetings. The meetings of the literacy teachers were facilitated by the professional development coaches and identified these teachers' frustrations, fears, and disappointments related to students' performance in literacy. The

literacy teachers felt pressured by the degree of work involved in developing the students' reading and writing skills despite the need for these skills in other content areas.

What emerged from my observations of the literacy teachers was the thinking that none of the other content area teachers assisted with readjusting the students' use of the vernacular to fit the instructional environment. It was "the elephant in the room," something that was very present among the teachers but there was a willingness to ignore it. The content area teachers operated out of an "ignore it and it will go away."

What are the perspectives of teachers and parents on African American Vernacular English and its use by students?

Directly related to the frustration experienced by the literacy teachers was the outcome of the survey by the faculty that demonstrated 99% of the teachers recognized the students' use of AAVE as a language form. However 91% of them felt that the use of AAVE was not appropriate in school unless they were interacting with their friends. Only the literacy teachers acknowledged its presence through instruction but did so through the typical exclusionary practice. Teachers continued to harbor the beliefs about the language but no one was willing to openly discuss how to marry that which is the home language for some with the Mainstream American English that they are held accountable for on formal assessments.

The parent focus group met on May 5, 2009 to ascertain parents' perspectives about the use of AAVE by their students. The common theme that emerged during this meeting was the thinking by parents that this language was in opposition of Mainstream American English that is required in school. However, unlike the teachers, parents were clear that while their students utilize this language, the belief was that it was being

addressed or redirected by the teachers in school. Parents unanimously indicated that they wanted the best for their child's future and were clear that this language was not what should be used on applications, or during interviews. It was not surprising to me to hear parents feel this way but it acted as a reminder of the expectations for schools as it relates to preparing their students for the future. Parents feel the school and teachers have the means and skill to do this.

What supports do teachers need to deliver effective instruction that is inclusive of culture in the classroom?

After reviewing relevant documents related to the school's performance and teacher performance during the September 2008 to the June 2009 school term, the committee and I determined it beneficial to provide teachers with a thematic unit: a set of lessons that help them include African American Vernacular English in the classroom. The teacher observation tool indicated teachers' strength was in planning and preparation while their area of refinement was instruction with an average score of 1.8 out of 3. This lead us to understanding the need to direct and guide their instruction; hence the development of the thematic unit.

What impact does the inclusion of African American Vernacular English in the classroom have on teacher effectiveness?

The inclusion of African American Vernacular English in the classroom impacted teachers in various ways. Firstly, according to one of the initial responses from teachers and my own observations, it helped create a classroom that was less stressful, more enjoyable. Marshall (2001) suggests that the effective teacher is one who creates an environment of mutual respect. In low achieving, low socio-economic schools where we

are educating the underrepresented, improving students' attitudes, motivation, and confidence should also be taken into consideration when discussing learning.

The teachers sounded as if the inclusion of African American Vernacular English had begun to help the students self-direct in other areas of the school. They possessed a broader perspective of what was expected of them in a given time and place. This was a result of their interactions with the lessons on context. From the academic perspective, the teachers reported students more effectively utilizing the typical instructional strategies such as peer editing and cooperative learning, because they were now more effectively self-directing. Research suggests that cooperative learning can enhance student achievement through peer social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) identifies intellectual growth as a dynamic social-interactive process that promotes self-esteem.

It is possible that we may have assumed students possessed enough prior knowledge of the AAVE language to understand it as one that deviated in form from that of the standard language in ways other than vocabulary. Reflecting on the lessons on context made me consider whether the feedback students previously received regarding their spoken or written language was clear enough or consistent enough over the years to help them make the needed adjustments for formal use.

An additional impact made by the inclusion of the vernacular on the 58th Street Middle School was the increased effort in planning by teachers. This is evidenced from the teachers engaged in more time planning lessons that were more rigorous, included projects or materials that took into account the interest level of students, and efforts for children to make real world connections. Hill and Cohen (2005) indicate teachers who are

considered highly qualified and effective make an effort to learn to teach the way students learn.

The last point derived from meetings with the participants about comparing languages was the unanimous view of the benefit of examining ways to help colleagues understand the importance of knowing how their students think and make sense of life's matters. This is summed up appropriately by Polk (2006) who indicates that teachers who are effective provide clarity, address student's prerequisite knowledge, plan well, and they provide feedback that requires students to reflect, evaluate, and connect.

How can I use my leadership to develop a sense of shared responsibility among the content area teachers for the literacy needs of students and secondly, to develop teachers into teacher leaders for the purpose of transforming the organization?

Fullan (2001) acknowledges that effective principals develop leadership among teachers. However, teacher leadership was not woven into the fabric of the 58th Street Middle School at all. Until this initiative, our teachers were not engaged in the decision making regarding curriculum, matters of their own professional development, or leading in-service education, and most importantly, assisting others. These are three of the six leadership areas teachers are typically called on to intervene (Gehrke, 1991). From the first time the participants were provided with the venue and opportunity to share with colleagues their experiences with the vernacular the training began. Their energy and their honesty ignited their peers.

Teacher leadership evolved during Cycle III, first with the literacy teachers and the participants' because they were now working more closely and in a collaborative manner. Fullan (2001) speaks of the importance of teacher collaboration to foster student

achievement. Next, the participants' candor during the faculty meetings seemed to quickly remove much of the resistance about discussions of culture listeners may initially have had. They were effective in presenting the materials because it was sensitive, but it was being brought by peers and not an administrator as a directive. They were simply saying "this was my experience; why not try it?" I observed extended conversations following faculty meetings; first just one or two, then more. Also, promises of collaboration among the least likely combinations of colleagues occurred. This indicated to me that the teacher leaders were confident enough in their own efforts to bring peers into it. My attempt as a servant leader was to build capacity in the participants by listening, and building a sense of community (Greenleaf, 1977).

Leadership in Cycle IV

Cycle IV was not one where additional work was done. It is more the point of extending the work in the previous cycle. What was important to determine through this cycle was the extent to which teacher leadership developed in the participants as a result of my leadership and this initiative. For that reason, I thought it apropos to assess my leadership through the same lens as I initially used over a year ago in Cycle I; the Lewin, (1939) survey (Appendix G). At that time I hypothesized the possibility of my leadership being identified by the faculty as Delegative or free reign style was due in part to being overshadowed by that of the CEO. Lewin (1939) speaks of this style of leadership as the least effective as it is often unclear and vague; hence my disappointment.

Despite the styles of leadership not being immediately connected to those of my espoused theories, I looked to make correlations where possible. This survey was the

same 15 question survey used in 2009, again presented by the support staff, and anonymous in nature. It was a scale of 1 though 5; almost never true to almost always true (see Table 8.3). This time there were only 24 faculty members included due to the day and date of the submission. Table 8.4 identifies the frequency of the responses from the faculty members.

Table 8.3

Likert Scale Responses/Survey

		Almost Always True	Frequently True	Occasionally True	Seldom True	Almost Never True
1	Principal's leadership skills are centered with a need to serve the students with equity	14	8	4	1	0
2	Principal always includes employees in determining what to do. However, maintains the final decision maker.	14	9	4	0	0
3	Desires an environment where the employees take ownership; allows participation in the decision making process.	7	10	5	3	2
4	Mrs. Gill does not consider suggestions made by employees as she does not have the time to listen.	1	1	0	5	20
5	Asks for employees input on upcoming plans and projects.	15	8	4	0	0
6	The principal delegates tasks in order to implement a new procedure or process.	8	9	8	2	0
7	The principal likes to utilize her leadership position to help the faculty members grow.	17	8	2	0	0
8	When in need of a strategy, principal seeks employee's advice.	10	9	6	2	0
9	Principal communicates information in a timely manner, allowing for staff inquiries.	10	7	5	2	3
10	When someone makes a mistake, the principal tells them not ever do that again and make a note of it.	8	9	5	3	2
11	It is characteristic of the principal's leadership to support her faculty's committed efforts.	10	11	5	1	0
12	The principal allows the employees to determine what needs to be done and how to do it.	0	12	10	5	0
13	When there are differences in role expectations, principal works with staff to resolve them.	9	10	4	3	1
14	Principal seeks employees' vision and utilizes it where applicable.	12	8	4	3	0
15	Principal clearly communicates her expectations to the faculty.	13	9	4	0	1

Table 8.4

Teacher Survey on Leadership Style

Item	Score	Item	Score	Item	Score
1	70	2	70	3	35
4	20	5	75	6	40
7	85	8	50	9	50
10	40	11	50	12	48
13	45	14	60	15	65
TOTAL	260	TOTAL	305	TOTAL	238
	Authoritarian autocratic		Participative democratic		Delegative free reign

Kurt Lewin and his colleagues identified three generic leadership styles concerning decision-making, which they labeled as Autocratic, Democratic and Delegative (Lewin, 1939). Table 8.3 above demonstrates the frequency of each response on the survey. This occasion surveyed only 24 faculty members due to the day and date of its distribution. According to his design the total score of 260 on items 1, 4, 7, 10, and 13 indicated a person's characteristics were more aligned to the Autocratic leadership style. The total score of 305 on items 2, 5, 8, 11, and 14 were more aligned to the characteristics of a Participative/Democratic leader. Finally, a total score of 238 on items 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15 indicated a person's leadership was more like that of a Delegative leader.

According to Lewin (1939), Participative or Democratic leaders often involve subordinates in the decision making. However, they do reserve the right to have the final say. It is probable that the faculty viewed my work with the participants as collaborative thereby eliciting their response to specific questions that connected to this style. This is, nonetheless, consistent with the view of Dewey (1916) who operated from the concept

that the much needed answers lacking in an organization could lie with someone other than the leader.

Throughout the implementation cycle, and the others, I trusted the participants to be the data that would inform the subsequent actions of the organization. Although the Democratic leadership was one of my espoused leadership theories, I viewed the experience more from the servant leadership lens. It is pertinent for me to align my thinking with what Greenleaf (1977) references as the desire to serve others because it is often what makes educators successful.

Limitations

The limitations experienced during this project were actually extensions of the same organizational shortcomings shared with the teachers during Cycle II. Again, as an organization we suffered with the idea of choice. As a charter school, teacher contracts were only year to year; there was no tenure. Therefore teachers were free to leave at the close of a school term if they so chose. Consistent with this thinking was the idea that the organization was not obligated to retain an employee they did not feel was an appropriate “fit” to the students or school community. This choice was evidenced each term with a 45 to 50 percent retention rate for staff and students.

My study was conducted as a pilot using five teachers’ classrooms. These five teachers make up one fourth of the teaching faculty and the five teachers either taught multiple groups of students or taught more than one subject. For this reason I concluded there was opportunity to clearly view the value of the initiative.

Another shortcoming of the organization was the retention of students as previously noted. It is for this reason that I opted not to include student surveys or

samplings of student work (although these were referred to by the participants often when discussing the initiative). During the application process to the IRB (Institutional Review Board) I was aware of the history of retaining half of the student body and felt getting parent permission of those students who were currently enrolled would ensure me permission at the time the study began. Therefore I opted not to directly include students as participants. These challenges of the 58th Street Middle School manifested themselves as limitations of the study.

Recommendations

Labov (2001) and Rickford (1998) cite the failures of public schools to effectively teach reading to African American students using the current exclusionary practices that do not take the culture of the student into account. While others such as Wolfram (1999) and Baugh (2000) suggest that these traditional methods of teaching Mainstream American English create a learning environment that is less than harmonious. They further state the perceptions and expectations of the teachers regarding the culture and vernacular affects teacher performance.

Teacher performance has been talked about more reverently since the onset of No Child Left Behind Act which identifies the mandated proficiency targets in math and reading by 2014 (Fry, 2007). However, questions surrounding teacher evaluation tools currently used to assess performance were plentiful. According to Little, Goe, and Bell, (2008) the reason for these questions was due to the variations in the tool from state to state, and district to district. Therefore the method to assess teacher performance becomes a quandary. In the context of a school in Southwest Philadelphia, the question became what does the effective teacher do to positively affect the interaction among the African

American students with Mainstream American English that could lead to higher achievement?

The case of the 58th Street Middle School presents an example of teaching emically at the K-12 level in daily practice within a structure unaccustomed to change. For those of us in everyday practice, the following are recommendations for African American Vernacular English speakers: Teachers should include instruction that informs students that nonstandard forms of English are spoken daily by various groups and neither is more right or wrong than the other; teachers should provide opportunities for standard and non-standard contexts for student writing, and teachers must be willing to motivate students through their instruction (Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

Secondly, it is clear that if teachers are to be considered effective they must be willing and able to provide students with a nonthreatening environment where they are able to apply nonstandard and Standard English, as well as recognize that home language is directly related to culture and identity. This thinking is not new and saw strong results by Simpkins and Simpkins (1981), using the Bridge program throughout the United States. Additionally, Rickford (1998) reported positive results from the Standard English Proficiency program (SEP) in Oakland, California until Assembly Bill 1206 ceased to fund the program.

Lastly, it is recommended that teachers in all content areas, regardless of subject, provide students with opportunities to practice the skill of writing in the language for which it will be assessed. This is in line with Rickford (1998), who states that students who do well in English tend to do well in other subjects. Often the literacy needs of an under achieving, urban school is too great to rest with one teacher or to be taught in

isolation. Lastly, administrators should be willing and able to assess the needs of the organization and effectively address those needs by building capacity in those who are currently part of the organization.

Summary/Conclusions

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of attention to language and literacy instruction that meets the needs of students who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Alim, 2005; Baugh, 2000; Rickford, 1998; Wheeler & Swords, 2004). I embarked upon this action research project, to provide clarity to educators surrounding the meaning of including the students' culture, specifically their language, within the classroom. A clearer understanding of the process by which we currently approach the reading and writing process with some African American students excludes their culture, creates interference between them and new learning, and renders the teacher ineffective.

This project began as a look at language acquisition and the necessity for educators, not just linguists, to accept African American Vernacular English as a unique form of language that possesses its own grammatical and syntactical variations (Labov, 2001). It then evolved into the importance of including the culture of the student for the purpose of holistically teaching the child by addressing his social/emotional development to enhance student learning (Little, Goe & Bell, 2009). It is from this point that it developed into a look at teacher effectiveness.

Glense (2006) suggests that when conducting research one of the implications behind the study should be its contribution to the field as a form of knowledge. Many schools in urban areas often struggle with what needs to be done to improve student

achievement. The study to Include African American Vernacular English in the Classroom also demonstrates the importance of understanding the role of the teacher in the instructional process. Hoy, Hannum, Tschannen-Moran (1998) conclude when teachers are committed to students they are likely to spend extra time and effort motivating them.

Glense (2006) also speaks about the contributions made by the study in terms of practice. I contend that as a result of this study, the 58th Street Middle School found itself more immersed in the practice of teacher leadership and collaboration than ever before. In an attempt to build teacher leadership within the organization, participants provided turn-around training to their colleagues. When the faculty had the opportunity to observe the participants' experiences with the study, they became more confident that through its use they could be more successful in reaching their students (Protheroe, 2008).

Additionally, as a contribution to the practice of teaching (Glense, 2006), the participants agreed the study allowed improvement to occur in their instructional planning where they increased the level of rigor presented to students. Lastly, through improved relationships with students, participants suggested there was improvement in the learning environment, which Marshall (2001) viewed as a characteristic of an effective teacher. Although this study demonstrates that the inclusion of African American Vernacular English can help students become more aware of their language choices when they speak and write, and enhance teacher pedagogy, it did not evoke the second order change that was hoped for.

Second order change is that change which embeds itself in the fabric of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003). According to Bergquist (1993), second order

change develops through an informal system and transforms into something different than what currently exists. The change I had hoped for was occurring through the Beer et al. (1990) Six Step Change Model, where the study was the informal system. However, before being able to turn this into policy, the organization again fell prey to its inability to retain a consistent staff. Twelve of the 24 members of the teaching faculty left. That number does not include myself, the counselor/social worker, the Dean of Students, and two Master Teachers, all who acted as members of supportive service. Whether one chose to leave or whether employment was mutually severed may or may not ever change as part of the 58th Street Middle School. The students' test scores in Reading for the 2009-2010 school year were 21% Proficient/Advanced in fifth grade; 39% Proficient/Advanced in sixth grade; 63% Proficient /Advanced in 7th grade, and 74% Proficient/Advance in 8th grade. An anomaly – maybe; a necessity – definitely.

The Inclusion of African American Vernacular English in the Classroom was a study for both literacy and content area teachers to become more effective in their instruction. It was also developed to transform an organization from its current exclusionary practices that lacked teacher leadership to a culture where taking responsibility for the students' literacy needs was a collaborative effort. Perhaps it is acceptable to say that given the continued exodus in faculty, the 58th Street Middle School probably failed to adopt the second order change as previously hoped. However, based on the double-digit gains on test scores, it is conceivable that through the process, students and staff found enough value in the experience that they were in some way transformed.

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Appendix A

Attitude Survey

Thank you for participating in the professional development training on African American Vernacular English and the curricular interventions of contrastive analysis and code-switching. Please complete the following survey to help evaluate the information; the survey will only take

5 minutes. Please read the following carefully first:

- 1. This is a confidential survey; **do not** put your name on it anywhere.*
- 2. Answer each question by placing a (X) in the box that best indicates how you feel.*
- 3. Place the survey in the envelope.*

As a result of participating in the curricular workshop...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am familiar with African American Vernacular English as a form of language					
My students currently use AAVE in their speaking and writing					
I think it is acceptable for students use AAVE in their speaking and writing in school					
I think it is acceptable for students to use AAVE when they are interacting with each other					
As a teacher I feel I should redirect the use of AAVE in my students' speaking and writing in school					
As a teacher I feel AAVE demonstrates a lower understanding of the Mainstream American English					
I feel context is a useful tool to prompt children to use MAE in school					
I feel contrastive analysis is a useful tool to prompt students to use MAE					
I feel code-switching is a useful instructional strategy to prompt students to use MAE					
I am more willing to accept African American Vernacular English as a form of language					

Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in the focus group regarding the inclusion of African American Vernacular English in the literacy classroom being conducted by Chris Roye-Gill in collaboration with the Educational Leadership Department of Rowan University.

The purpose of this focus group is to elicit perspectives of parents whose students may use African American Vernacular English and evaluate the effectiveness of curricular strategies that include the vernacular in educational practices.

I understand that my responses will be confidential and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained during this focus group may be used for planning future curricular modifications or for other educational purposes, provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved with my participation in this focus group, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this focus group, I may contact Dr. James Coaxum at coaxum@rowan.edu or (856) 256-4779.

(Signature of participant) _____ (Date) _____

(Signature of Principal Investigator) _____ (Date) _____

Focus Group Protocol

Parents

- A. Define terms African American Vernacular English and Mainstream American English, Contrastive Analysis, and Code Switching before questions are provided.
- B. Discuss why the topic is relevant to Richard Allen Preparatory Charter School; the actual study.
- C. Open-ended questions for open forum
- D. Discuss the selection process for focus group participation
 1. Which form of dialect do you find yourself using:
 - a. At home/ in the community
 - b. At work/ in business situations
 2. When you speak with your child which style of dialect does he/she use most often?
 3. Describe the importance of your student knowing that both styles of dialects exist?
 4. Which dialect form would you prefer that your child use when, for example, he or she is being interviewed for high school or college?
 5. Would you be willing to assist your child in understanding the difference in context for use of AAVE and MAE?
 6. What do you expect from teachers with regard to AAVE, MAE, contrastive analysis, and code-switching?

Reiterate workshop and discussion for clarity. Thank everyone for coming.

Appendix C

Implementation Form

Name _____

Instructional Strategy

Date(s) of Use

3-2-1 Exit Slip					
4-Question Reflection					
A to Z taxonomy					
Anticipation Guide					
Ask Me About					
Brainstorm and Categorize					
Carousel					
Collapsing Consensus					
Fast Write/Draw					
Jigsaw					
Me Board/ Me Bag					
Medicine Wheel					
One Minute Manager					
Pair Talk					
Pop-Up					
Read, Mark, Discuss					
Response Cards					
Review/Analyze/Connect					
Silent Mind Map					
Standing Ovation					
Venn Diagram					

Appendix D

Checklist for Teaching and Learning

The teaching design

- Is planned using data on students and curriculum.
- Is clearly linked to priority state standards.
- Has an expectation for levels of rigor and relevance.
- Uses appropriate assessments aligned with the rigor and relevance of expectations.
- Is clearly guided by big ideas and essential questions.
- Includes the knowledge and skills necessary for expected student performance.
- Uses authentic performance tasks calling for students to demonstrate their understanding and apply knowledge and skills.
- Uses clear evaluation criteria and performance standards evaluations of student products and performances.
- Uses a variety of resources. The textbook is only one resource among many.

The classroom

- Has student work and essential question as central to classroom activities.
- Has high expectations and incentives for all students to achieve the expected performances.
- Has a culture that treats students and their ideas with dignity and respect.
- Displays evaluation criteria or scoring guides.
- Has samples of high-quality student work on display.

The teacher

- Informs students of the expected performance, essential questions, performance requirements, and assessment criteria at the beginning of the lesson or unit.
- Engages students interest when introducing a lesson.
- Uses a variety of strategies that match the expected level of rigor and relevance and learning styles of students.
- Facilitates students' active construction of meaning (rather than simply telling).
- Effectively uses questioning, and feedback to stimulate student reflection.
- Facilitates student acquisition of basic knowledge and skills necessary for student performance.
- Differentiates instruction to meet individual student needs.

- [] Adjusts instruction as necessary on reflection and feedback from students.
- [] Uses information from ongoing assessments to check for student learning and misconceptions along the way.
- [] Uses a variety of resources to promote understanding.

The students

- [] Can describe the goals (student performance) of the lesson or unit.
- [] Can explain what they are doing and why (i.e., how today's work relates to the larger or course goals).
- [] Are engaged throughout the lesson or unit.
- [] Can describe the criteria by which their work will be evaluated.
- [] Are engaged in activities that help them to apply what they have learned.
- [] Demonstrate that they are learning the background knowledge and skills that support the student performance and essential questions.
- [] Have opportunities to generate relevant questions.
- [] Are able to explain and justify their work and their answers.
- [] Use the criteria or scoring guides to revise their work.

Appendix E

Instructional Strategy Calendar

Cycle I

Week of October 12, 2009: English/ESOL
Week of October 19, 2009: Science
Week of October 26, 2009: Math
Week of November 2, 2009: Social Studies
Week of November 9, 2009: Health/PE, World Languages, Electives

Cycle II

Week of November 16, 2009: English
Week of November 30, 2009: Science
Week of December 7, 2009: Math
Week of December 14, 2009: Social Studies
Week of December 21, 2009: None (Winter break)

Cycle III

Week of January 4, 2010: English
Week of January 11, 2010: Science
Week of January 18, 2010: Math
Week of January 25, 2010: Social Studies

Cycle IV

Week of February 1, 2010: Health/PE, World Languages, Electives
Week of February 8, 2010: English
Week of February 15, 2010: Science
Week of February 22, 2010: Math
Week of March 1, 2010: Social Studies
Week of March 8, 2010: Health/PE, World Languages, Electives

Cycle V

Week of March 15, 2010: NONE (PSSA)
Week of March 22, 2010: NONE (PSSA)
Week of March 29, 2010: English
Week of April 5, 2010: NONE (SPRING BREAK)
Week of April 12, 2010: Science
Week of April 19, 2010: NONE
Week of April 26, 2010: Math
Week of May 3, 2010: Social Studies
Week of May 10, 2010: Health/PE, World Languages, Electives

Cycle VI

Week of May 17, 2010: English

Week of May 24, 2010: Science

Week of May 31, 2010: Math

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Teacher Participant Interview Questions on the Effectiveness of Including AAVE w/ Contrastive Analysis and Code Switching

1. What do you think you have gained from your participation the AAVE training?
2. What were your students' strengths and weaknesses in writing before this unit?
3. What part of the AAVE curriculum strategies did you find most beneficial to your teaching practice? Why?
4. How has your teaching style changed since implementing this unit into your instruction (i.e. delivery, assessment, etc.)?
5. What part of the AAVE curriculum did you find least beneficial to your practice? Why?
6. In what way do you feel contrastive analysis and code-switching fitting into your instruction in the future?
7. Why do you think that contrastive analysis and code-switching were important to learn?
8. Discuss your students' current use of standard or MAE in their speaking and writing?
9. How would you describe your students' awareness of a bi-dialectic existence in their classroom, school, or home?
10. What would you tell another teacher about the effects the curricular strategies of contrastive analysis and code- switching had on you or your instructional practice?

Appendix G

Leadership Style Survey

Directions

The questionnaire contains statements about leadership style beliefs. Next to each statement, circle the number that represents how strongly you feel about the statement by using the following scoring system:

- Almost Always True - 5
- Frequently True - 4
- Occasionally True – 3
- Seldom True – 2
- Almost Never True – 1

Be honest about your choices as there are no right or wrong answers.

Leadership Style Survey

