

**Apple Pie and Ebonics:
Language Diversity and Preparation for a Multicultural World**

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Language, also, far more dubiously, is meant to define the other--and, in this case, the other is refusing to be defined by a language that has never been able to recognize him—
James Baldwin

Abstract

All three of us, the authors, are white and do not speak Ebonics, (or African American Language, AAL). How the misperceptions of AAL impact our students inspired our interest in the subject. The title of this piece refers to the ubiquity of AAL, historically, culturally, as an influential cultural wellspring. Although AAL continues to influence Standard English (SE) and popular culture, many do not understand and therefore do not acknowledge it as a legitimate variety of English, but as a deviation of SE. We, as teachers and educational leaders, must work to change these myths, for the well being of our students and our society.

Keywords: Ebonics, African American language, multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, language diversity, cultural mismatch

Introduction

Understanding and navigating diversity is the key to success in our increasingly global and technological workforce, which has serious implications for our educational institutions and for the leaders within said institutions. The proliferation of text-based communication technologies and increasing dependence on intercultural communication both nationally, and internationally point to language as a key area of educational importance. As the U.S. loses its status as the main cultural influence on the world stage, our educational systems are shortchanging many of our students who are attempting to prepare for this new multicultural world. By continuing to teach from a privileged, hegemonic worldview, we are leaving out a wide swath of students from true preparation for success. Access to language resources, as well as the discourses of power, through

multicultural education, is crucial in preparing our students, poised to enter this changing workforce, to successfully navigate the global economy.

As teachers and educational leaders, we must prepare our students to work with increasingly diverse populations in a social and political climate that is increasingly hostile to these endeavors and to forces that are resistant to global change. Although the pre-K-12 student population in the U.S. is becoming increasingly diverse, the teaching force is increasingly hegemonic. According to the National Center for Education Information (2011), 84% of the teaching force in the U.S. is white. Without explicit training about—or at least recognition of—the cultural differences between teachers and students and how they can impact teachers’ attitudes toward diverse student populations (and the languages they bring to school), this culture gap will continue to contribute what is known as the achievement gap.

As teachers and educational leaders, we must recognize that we are doing our students a disservice by not recognizing their languages and cultures. The cultural mismatch between a large portion of the student population and the majority of teachers greatly contributes to the achievement gap, leaving students without access to the discourses of power (Carter & Welner, 2013). The achievement/opportunity gap could realistically be considered a cultural and linguistic gap.

Although we have academic theories, court cases, and resolutions addressing the importance of culturally responsive educational and linguistic practices, the implementation of said practices is far from universal. It seems that a real change will only come about in this area through grassroots, educator-led action. There are many outside (corporate, governmental, societally-ingrained) influences that are working to maintain the status quo—keeping as many students as possible outside of the realm of privilege—that we cannot expect change to come from “above.”

By recognizing the need for multicultural education and encouraging our students to use home languages as a vehicle to learn the power code, teachers are becoming a grassroots force for change in our all-too-hegemonic school systems. Teachers are leading the charge to educate students about the idea that strength comes not from our similarities, but our differences, particularly through their classroom literacy practices. Cultural assumptions play out particularly through language use, and this is especially true in the classroom. Most teachers feel it is their job to prepare students for success in a “standardized” world, where non-standard language will most likely hinder workplace success. But allowing for diversity in language practices in the classroom helps students understand different ways of seeing the world and can only strengthen the ability of our students to succeed in an increasingly diverse workplace. By helping students consciously address differences in language use, we can help them not only in their own success but also to become language activists as well.

Theoretical Framework

According to James Banks (1998), multicultural education encompasses five dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and an empowering school culture and social structure. All of these aspects are necessary to promote a multicultural school or space. The theoretical framework that informs the multicultural goal, and, in fact, this analysis, is best described as an

intersection between culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), Funds of Knowledge (FoK), and critical literacy. All of these bodies of knowledge are essential in embracing the language diversity of students, which is an essential element of multicultural education. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), involves: academic achievement, socio-political consciousness, and cultural competence. Because CRP seeks to identify, problematize, and ultimately transform institutions and society with the goal of ending all forms of oppression, culturally responsive teachers must not only possess the will to end oppression but the *knowledge* to inform their choices and actions. Howard (2006) defines “responsiveness” as dealing with “. . . our capacity as teachers to know and connect with the actual lived experience, personhood, and learning modalities of the students who are in our classroom” (p. 131). Thus, culturally responsive educators take the time needed to learn the experiences, individuality, and learning styles of all of their students in order to better reach them. Additionally, as Milner (2013) argues, CRP demands that teachers “ensure students’ racial backgrounds and interests are not ignored or overlooked in what is required and expected to be covered” (p. 39).

Rodriguez (2013) defines Funds of Knowledge (FoK) as an accumulation of historically developed cultural truths and bodies of knowledge and skill that promote the functioning, development, and well being of individuals and households. This framework reveals inherently culturally responsive practices and dispels the widely held belief that low-income and non-dominant students do not possess home knowledge leading to academic success. FoK is a revolt against the deficit model of education that disproportionately places non-dominant students into special education or alternative programs with heightened disciplinary structures. It encourages questioning of hegemonic teaching and learning traditions in favor of co-creating curriculum and pedagogy utilizing home languages and knowledges by creating “new ways of engaging proactively with critical, voiced involvement at every stage of teaching and learning” (Rodriguez, 2013, p. 108).

The field of critical literacy relates directly to CRP and FoK in that it seeks to investigate and validate marginalized student voices and advocates for the validation of these voices within schools. According to Delpit (1988), non-mainstream students must be “let it on the secret” and be given access to the “power code.” Critical literacy seeks to explain how language and literacy (re)produce subject positions. As Friere (1970) inspires us, literacy can empower when people are encouraged to question the world around them with the goal of advancing social justice. According to Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2011), “. . . by providing all students with situations in which they are encouraged to practice expressing themselves in their home varieties as well as in standardized English, students will develop their linguistic versatility” (p. 87). As critical literacy implores, knowledge consumption alone is inadequate for our students; instead, they must have the opportunity to be critical of their curriculum, to deconstruct and reconstruct it (Freire, 1998), and in fact take an active part in developing it. Freire’s concept of a “humanizing pedagogy” allows for the expression of students using their home languages (1970). In essence, students become co-creators of knowledge through the problem-posing method of local struggles and the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

The Problem

In the U.S., the high school graduation rate is under 70%, the achievement gap has remained relatively stagnant since 1988, and socioeconomic factors greatly affect student outcomes (Carter & Welner, 2013). What Linda Darling-Hammond calls “cultural mismatch,” or the gap between students and teachers in terms of their racial, cultural, ethnic, social, and linguistic identities, readily influences student disconnection from school. Students who speak non-standard forms of English often may feel that their language is devalued in school and thus are more inclined to drop out, losing confidence in schools that make them feel devalued (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). According to Salazar (2013), a “humanizing pedagogy” is needed. Humanizing pedagogies are “additive,” as opposed to focusing on deficits. Such approaches utilize students’ prior knowledge and connect prior knowledge to new learning, thereby legitimizing students’ home languages and cultures; students are viewed as experts in their particular culture and language. The teachers’ role is to impart “insider knowledge” that is necessary to succeed in the academic world.

However, cultural mismatches stemming from language variation between students and teachers contribute to misunderstandings that harm students. For example, differences in intonation when asking questions, responding to questions, and in everyday interactions, may be viewed as a lack of interest and enthusiasm, disrespect, or even lack of ability and can account for the larger percentages of students of color receiving behavioral referrals and referrals for special education services from white teachers (and standard English speakers) than their white counterparts (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). Schools with higher populations of non-dominant or minority students refer more students for special education services; this mislabeling affects African American children twice as much as white children (Carter & Welner, 2013; Smitherman, 2006).

Additionally, teacher perceptions can do much to perpetuate negative self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom. As Howard (2013) argues, “. . . teacher perceptions tend to have a negative effect on Black males more than any other group. . . . they are often viewed as having characteristics more consistent with academic disengagement (lazy, non thinkers, hostile in class, discipline problems) than showing behavioral congruence with academic success” (p. 68). Black males also tend to be victims of “racial microaggressions” (Howard, 2013) such as low expectations, deficit thinking, heightened surveillance, and stiffer discipline penalties.

In sum, the assertion of cultural identity in speech is a salient issue for many students that some hegemonic teachers are unaware of; this lack of (multi)cultural understanding and awareness may lead to the silencing of some and the mislabeling of others. Some educators rate African American English speaking students as less intelligent, confident, and successful (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). This misperception can lead to differential expectations in behavior, prejudice, and less tolerance for perceived misbehavior. Thus, students who speak in non-standard English may be predisposed to receive more behavior referrals and suspensions, as well as more referrals for special education services, such as speech pathology.

So What Do We Call It? It's a Matter of Terminology

Black English (BE), Ebonics, African American English (AAE), African American Language (AAL), African American Vernacular (AAV) are just some of the scholarly terms used to describe the dialect patterns brought from home for many African-American children (thought not necessarily limited to this specific set of individuals: Godley & Minnici, 2008). The problems in defining an agreed-upon term are contentious at best. Every time one uses a term it has the potential to be disparaged; as each new and improved version is coined, some way is found to condemn or taint it. Many educators, as well as students themselves, often refer to any non-standard language use as “slang,” and do not recognize the common grammatical patterns of AAL as a distinct rule-governed dialect (Godley & Mannici, 2008). In an attempt to draw attention to the cultural aspects of AAL, and combat the negativity associated with it, terms have been coined such as “Soul talk,” “black talk,” and “heritage language.” But until attitudes about the language itself change, agreement on what to call it will continue to be impossible. And this typifies why it is difficult to engage with this issue: because of the negative connotations and misunderstandings surrounding the issue of language and dialect use, many non-scholars are reluctant to acknowledge or do not possess enough linguistic information to engage with any part of the issue (Godley & Minnici, 2008).

Background of AAL: The King Case, 1979

AAL was brought into the national spotlight in the 1979 court case, *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*, where suit was brought against the Ann Arbor School District by the parents of African American students in a predominantly white school (ironically named for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.). The contention was that these students in particular, and AAL-speaking children in general, were being systematically placed in special education programs and were generally seen by their teachers as uneducable because of their perceived lack of language skills.

Geneva Smitherman, a University of Michigan professor, linguist, and consultant for the plaintiffs in the case, notes that the case was the “first test of the applicability of 1703(f), the language provision of the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunity Act, to Black English speakers” (1999, p. 132). The case was also a crucible for the notion that the language African American children acquire before they go to school constitutes a “home language” that is different enough from Standard English (SE) that it can be a barrier to their educational achievement. On July 12, 1979, the court found that the Ann Arbor School District violated the students’ right to equal educational opportunity. The institutional response to Black English was found to be the main barrier (Smitherman, 1999). Smitherman (1999) continues:

The trial proceedings established that the school district had failed to recognize the existence and legitimacy of the children’s language, Black English. This failure of the teachers to recognize the language as legitimate and the corresponding negative attitudes toward the children’s language led to negative expectations of the children which turned into self-fulfilling prophecies. One critical consequence was that the children were not being taught to read. (p. 135)

By not understanding the language these students brought with them to school, (AAL), because it did not conform to their Standard English (SE) expectations, these teachers were “writing off” the students as ignorant or uneducable. Instead of attempting to bridge the language divide, teachers were robbing the students of the education that they came to school to attain and cutting off students when they most needed to be reached.

Background of AAL: Oakland, CA, 1996

The “Ebonics Issue” was revisited in the mainstream media in 1996, when the Oakland, California School Board, in an effort to address the achievement gap between their white and black students, focused on the issue of language. Smitherman (1999) again honed in on the situation, “Oakland’s contention was that the students’ dismal levels of educational achievement were attributable, in great measure, to the significant linguistic mismatch between the home and school communication systems. To reduce this mismatch and its consequent impact on literacy and academic performance, Oakland proposed to implement a bilingual/bicultural language pedagogy” (p. 150). This pedagogy, influenced by a number of leading scholars on the subject of AAL, emphasized that students whose home language was not Standard English should be able to use their home languages in school, while teachers helped to form a linguistic bridge toward the use of Standard English.

The resulting media firestorm, instead of focusing on how best to help these students learn, instead took off on the use of the word Ebonics (Ebony + phonics or “black sounds”) as a descriptor for AAL, and led many to believe that the Board called for teachers to teach Ebonics to students, when the intent of the resolution was to acknowledge that Ebonics was these students’ first language (they therefore already knew how to speak it). This skewed media take-away only highlighted the controversy surrounding the issue of AAL home languages, increased racial tensions, and effectively fractured the already-small community of those focused on the role of home languages as a barrier to educational success. Now, twenty years later, scholars who are interested in multicultural Englishes are isolated pockets, speaking different theoretical languages, using different terms about the same issues, while fighting an uphill battle against a privileged idea of what constitutes “proper” English.

While these cases highlight the linguistic differences between AAL and Standard English, their best use is to draw attention to the fact that Ebonics is a legitimate—not a “broken” or “lazy”—variety of English. There are features of AAL (both grammatical and rhetorical) that, without specific knowledge of, white teachers will be likely to negatively misinterpret, the results of which can have longstanding consequences not only in the communication between these teachers and their students, but on the esteem and engagement of the students themselves. The language breakdown, then, becomes a gateway into the disengagement of students from the school environment, giving them the impression that school is not for them.

Addressing the Cultural and Linguistic Mismatch

We know that when white teachers, however well intentioned, avoid addressing topics pertaining to race, it only serves to “stifle” the voices of students of color (Sue,

Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009). Even as teachers attempt to treat all of their students equally, they can unknowingly overlook the disparities in cultural capital between standard and non-standard speaking students, undervaluing the languages that some students bring with them to the classroom (Goldenberg, 2014). Because many white teachers, as members of the dominant discourse community, have been culturally influenced to profess that race makes no difference (colorblind ideology), many do not naturally realize that, in fact, it does. Instead of ignoring these differences in an effort to treat students “the same no matter what their color,” we need to overtly acknowledge that cultural differences exist and that they can have an effect on how learning and teaching happens and should happen. As Delpit (1988) maintains, “it is impossible to create a model for the good teacher without taking issues of culture and community context into account” (p. 291). The assertion, “I do not see color,” is a culturally irresponsible position to take and does not serve our students well. Educational leaders must insist that teachers recognize cultural capital and to use the concept in their teaching in ways that contribute to the learning of all students (Goldenberg, 2014).

Colorblind and colormute ideologies condemn any words or language that may relate, signify, or give meaning to race; in reality, they perpetuate racism, the myth of meritocracy, and denials of institutional or structural inequality. According to Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2011), “Most people would find it difficult to accept a message, even an indirect message, that they have to suppress part of their linguistic identity to operate within mainstream culture. African Americans, with their specific social and cultural history, often live this reality every day” (p. 74). Teachers who have not been trained in critical literacy practices, and/or are a part of the hegemonic majority and have not questioned issues of power and authority and their impact on literacy and students, may not feel they are doing anything wrong when they perceive home languages to be deficient and deem them as subordinate, something to be disciplined, corrected, altered. In fact, this type of disciplinary knowledge, a “pedagogy of telling” (Sizer, 1984), deems knowledge as a direct transfer from teacher to student, with no exchange, no inter-play, no struggle for common ground, no joint knowledge construction.

Even those teachers who are questioning their hegemonic worldviews and training struggle with their own internalization of the dominant cultural assumptions and how to “pedagogically utilize it in the classroom in ways that enhance student learning” (Goldenberg, 2014, p.117). According to Brock, Parks, and Moore (2004), teachers possessing dominant ideologies must find ways to assist students to attain multiple literacies by utilizing both their home literacies as well as the literacy practices of the dominant culture; because, as Goldenberg (2014) argues, “regardless of White teachers’ backgrounds and potential passion for social justice, students are critical of the dominant school culture that teachers are inherently members of” (p. 120). Goldenberg (2014) explicitly acknowledges that the process of monitoring one’s own affinity with the dominant culture is difficult, and providing more training for educators to examine their own attitudes about culture and diversity is crucial to facilitate change (Diller, 2004). Pre-service teachers must be given the opportunity to question their attitudes and be exposed to the ideas of multicultural education. Educators must have a “safe space” in which to learn how to help their students who are unlike them culturally before they are faced with it in the classroom: the information, vocabulary, and the opportunity to discuss stereotypes and cultural attributes, enough so as to be able to get over any initial

uncomfortable feelings that will probably arise in our current environment of professed colorblindness. The inclusion of critical pedagogical practices is crucial for effective teacher preparation programs and professional development for current educators, and one way to address potential cultural mismatch based upon language (Godley & Minnici, 2008).

And while organizations like the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) have drafted and passed multiple resolutions on the importance of teachers addressing differences in multicultural home languages that students bring to class, and the research documenting the great need for this work to be done continues to be published, the disconnect between theory and practice continues, to the detriment of students. Widespread effort must be made to educate teachers and educational leaders from the beginning of their careers about the impact that culture has on language and learning and the need to take it into consideration when working with students not well versed in Standard English. According to Smitherman (2000), “Language is the foundation stone of education and the medium of instruction in all subjects and disciplines throughout schooling. It is critical that teachers have an understanding of and appreciation for the language students bring to school” (p. 119). Recognizing the existence and value of students’ home languages is a relatively simple place “where teachers can identify students’ cultural capital inside the classroom” (Goldenberg, 2014, p.122). By acknowledging and engaging language differences, we can truly begin to educate all of our students.

The linguistic differences between AAL and Standard English are not so great as to be insurmountable (though they can be complex), but without the acknowledgement of the systematic, rule-governed nature of AAL (and therefore its acknowledgment as a legitimate variety of English), combined with the recognition of the cultural differences (and consequent learning implications) between white middle-class teachers and their students who do not share the same subject position, the language barrier appears to be the problem, not the symptom of larger ones. Recognizing the differences in the language and culture that their students bring from home (whether it is an English variety or not) and how these differences will affect the expectations that both the teacher and students will have in the classroom is an important first step. And when teachers can give as much leeway and respectful assistance to students who are coming from cultures where their language is a non-standard variety of English as they (presumably) would do to an ESL student, then we might start to see significant changes in the “achievement gap.” Some teachers, though, have begun to implement changes in their own thoughts, attitudes, and practices being spread by word-of-mouth that may yet save the day.

When language and cultural differences are taken into consideration, both teachers and students can find psychologically healthy “middle ground” on which to build a true education. More often than not, students know that they are coming into foreign territory at school. When teachers can recognize it, as well, and acknowledge the culturally influenced language constructions that students bring with them into the classroom, those constructions can be used, respected, and built upon.

Case Study: Dr. Arthur Palacas, University of Akron

The University of Akron Professor Dr. Arthur Palacas has been working to combat language discrimination since the mid-1970s. With an undergraduate degree from Harvard in Linguistics and Applied Math and a doctorate in Linguistics from Indiana University, Dr. Palacas first became acquainted with language diversity, specifically with what at the time was deemed “Black English,” in the late 1960s through the work of William Labov. When he began teaching at The University of Akron, an urban, open enrollment institution, in 1976, every full-time faculty member in English was required to teach freshman composition. He noticed that groups of students whose English was not Standard, such as Black students and Appalachian students, had more academic difficulty, higher dropout rates, and lower graduation rates. Because of his linguistics training and familiarity with English varieties, he was able to recognize many of the consistent grammatical constructions in his nonstandard-speaking students’ language. This reinvigorated and informed his previous study in nonstandard dialects. He then started giving workshops about language difference for teachers in local K-12 schools; he felt that his knowledge could translate into culturally responsive literacy practices in K-12 schools.

Although Dr. Palacas enjoyed the experience, the knowledge imparted in the workshops did not transform into the culturally responsive classroom practices he hoped for. So in 1993, Dr. Palacas took his linguistic understanding into his own composition classroom, creating a unique curriculum with the backing of the director of composition to specifically address the needs of AAL-speaking students within the composition requirement: “African American Language and Culture: College Composition.” His curriculum was devoted to the discussion of the interaction of language and culture issues: editorials on Ebonics cases were debated; students discussed the power of naming, and current slang terms, what they mean, and when it is appropriate to use them; students wrote papers about these contested spaces, such as what it means to be a person of a certain race or ethnicity. Their final paper was an ethnographic approach to examining attitudes toward Ebonics—the students would go out into the community and interview people. The course was transformational for many students, particularly for Black students who had previously expressed shame at using their home language in an academic context. As one student indicated, “My grandmother always said it was a language, not just mistakes.” This student was finally able to acknowledge that her grandmother was correct, once she learned about the rule-governed nature of Ebonics.

Dr. Palacas argues that without a radical transformation within the community of teachers, especially in the areas of language and writing, the negative effects on native AAL speakers’ overall learning and feelings of worth will continue to contribute to their disengagement from school life. This leads all too often to a population of students who are not ready for the work world in many ways. With no acknowledgement in the larger society of the value of diverse forms of English and their legitimacy, language discrimination continues to have a negative effect on the ability of many to attain and/or maintain good jobs. This then becomes a vicious cycle of pushing out segments of the population from the mainstream, leading to even more ghettoization and segregation, and accelerating linguistic differences in multicultural Englishes.

Unfortunately, the future of his specialized composition course is in doubt; often sections get cancelled because of low enrollment because advisors do not realize the important role that these classes fill for students who, many times, are already starting college “behind.” There are colleges and departments within the university that do not accept the course as fulfilling the University’s writing requirement, although Dr. Palacas gained state approval for his course as legitimate first-year composition replacements. While he is often able to change minds about the course once he can personally address individual professors and administrators, he continues to struggle to affect a larger change—to educate administrators of the goals and achievements of the course—even within his own university. At the same time, his goal is still to institute a policy that will affect the whole educational system so that teachers who come out of our schools of education really understand that AAL is truly a language. Then teachers can use that understanding to teach with sympathetic and empathetic attention for their non-dominant English speaking students.

While many in the field of education can acknowledge the importance of language and the role that language prejudice plays in the achievement gap, it is more difficult to educate educators as to the legitimacy of multicultural English dialects, like AAL. This is where Dr. Palacas’ work as a linguist most especially runs into trouble with administrators. It is not so difficult to get a consensus that language is an important part of multicultural education, and even the acknowledgement that language and culture are connected is becoming more widespread. The strongest resistance usually comes from the attempt to demonstrate that Ebonics has a long lineage that only partly shares its history with American English, and in fact has some of its linguistic roots in West African language structures. Like Dr. Palacas’ student who was amazed that her grandmother was right about their “heritage language,” once students can be affirmed in this deep, personal, and powerful way—through their home language—their relationship with the icons of hegemonic power (i.e. teachers) can change in a dramatic and positive way.

Delpit (2002) expresses this idea that even when educators have children’s best interests at heart, if we continue to demean students via their mother tongue, we only continue to maintain the status quo:

Despite any good intentions, if we cannot understand and even celebrate the wonders of the language these children bring with them to school—the language forged on African soil, tempered by two hundred years of love, laughter, and survival in the harshest of conditions—then we have little hope of convincing them that we hold their best interests at heart. . . . We must make them feel welcomed and invited by allowing their interests, culture, and history into the classroom. (pp. 47-8)

As Dr. Palacas teaches everyone he talks to about Ebonics, “language and culture are inextricably intertwined”; a person’s language *carries* her culture, and because language is embedded in the mind and heart, to demean a person’s language is to demean her.

Conclusions and Recommendations

If we truly want to help our students succeed, we “must take the responsibility to teach, to provide for students who do not already possess them, the additional codes of

power” (Delpit, 1988, p. 293). We must follow in the footsteps of “scholars who have engaged in this groundbreaking work [and who] have laid a blueprint—no matter how rough—for teachers to better engage students” (Goldenberg, 2014, p. 132), like Dr. Palacas. An important first step is recognizing that language and learning are culturally influenced; we must take this into account when interacting with our students who are coming from all walks of life, all ages and levels of educational background, from all socioeconomic walks of life, all ethnicities, nationalities, and colors.

As Rose (2012) makes clear, students depend on us, as educators, to create the conditions to succeed, “teaching is more than transmitting a body of knowledge and set of skills but also involves providing entry to the knowledge and skill . . . necessary for fuller participation in learning” (p. 161). Teachers can make the difference both for non-dominant students by promoting an atmosphere where they can succeed and standard speakers by helping them recognize their own culturally influenced language assumptions. We have seen how AAL speaking students are too often held back by the attitudes and preconceptions of their teachers to their language. It is our job, then, as shepherds of the written word for our students, to help instead of hinder them in as many ways as we are able, to give them the best possible chance at succeeding when others around them are expecting their failure.

Brock (2004) can pinpoint where we need to go:

Our goal is to emphasize that we, as educators, must (1) identify our own assumptions about students who speak varieties of English that may differ from our own, and (2) exercise caution when we interpret the varieties of languages that our children speak. . . . [and] realize that our job should be about helping children to learn the discourse of power, in addition to the varieties of language that they speak. (p. 28)

In order to best help our students achieve the success that they deserve both in and beyond school, we first need to examine our socially-influenced assumptions about varieties of English that do not match our own. When we can recognize that any unexamined, culturally influenced beliefs about language will get in the way of the best education we can give our students, we can adjust our ways of thinking about our students who do not come to school speaking Standard English. Then, “moving from theory to practice in actually utilizing students’ cultural capital in the classroom” will be a significant step in helping to close the achievement/opportunity gap (Goldenberg, 2014, p. 125). Only then will we be more equipped to give students the best platform from which to engage with the world.

In order to make these changes in the education system, we must educate both teachers and leaders of the importance of embracing linguistic diversity; however, in the field of education, many aspiring and practicing leaders attain their training and worldview from the restrictive assemblage of literature within the field of educational leadership (Hess, 2013) and not within the diverse field of multicultural studies. Hess claims that we must have “cage-busting” leaders seeking understanding about school culture development from the literature outside the realm of school leadership. Since most of the literature in the field of school leadership is based on the problem-solving methodology, Hess’s interpretation seems desirable and wise when swirling with the complexity of how to increase cultural competence. Learning outside of the field of education can help teachers and leaders to broaden their horizons, increase their

readership from other disciplines, and engage in critical inquiry in the field of multicultural studies.

Problem-solving methodology in school leadership literature takes the learner through a strategic set of steps in order to resolve a dilemma and offer solutions, but this approach does not always work when the problem is complex and ever changing. Although the phases vary across fields of literature in other disciplines, similarity rests in the idea of a *problem* moving to a *solution* and strategic form throughout the process. Fortunately, the field of education can renew its commitment to educating culturally competent teachers and leaders by pushing past the limits of utilizing the standardized problem-solving approach.

One way that teachers and educational leaders can embrace this type of artistry and grow the cultural competence in their environment is by accepting the challenge to become a public intellectual. Giroux (1988) would seemingly agree that this notion of intellectual labor helps with issues of oppression and cultural understanding. The concept of public intellectualism for cultural competency necessitates personnel to embrace ambiguity, become outsiders to dominant ideas, be advocates for social justice in theory and practice, remain transparent, and become open minded in developing their cultural knowledge. Through some of these components, teachers and educational leaders can move beyond their inheritance of ideas, biases, and understandings and begin to understand the dynamics of difference in the classroom.

This movement is a more sophisticated map than the identification of a problem and its corresponding solution. Strategic planning, usually, works with the problem-solving methodology; yet, when it comes to working with overcoming cultural incompetence, a more fluid and artistic methodology is needed. Although public intellectualism is not a methodology, it is a good start to an artistic approach of valuing diversity, understanding dynamics of difference in the workplace, and developing cultural knowledge and competency.

Confronting one's own culturally influenced beliefs and assumptions about other cultures and languages is difficult, but that alone is truly inadequate. By learning about the rule-governed, systematic grammar of other varieties of English, we all can recognize the history, beauty, legacy, and legitimacy of them. The key to building student confidence with standard forms of literacy is by valuing their native linguistic forms, whether they represent non-traditional dialects, informal English, African American Language, or non-standard oral and written forms of expression. Because "it is in school that negative language attitudes are reinscribed and reaffirmed," that is also where "education about language diversity has to start early on—with *all* children" (Smitherman, 2006, p.138). Students' cultures must be reflected in the classroom; teachers must seek literature reflecting a variety of diverse perspectives. This way students from all backgrounds can begin to experience the beauty of different forms of language and cultures, and a bridge can be built from students' home languages to the standard forms that they will need as they go out into the world.

We must value students' cultures and work together with our youth to determine how to teach and write our lives. We must, as Elkins and Luke (1999) suggest, not expect all of our students to be fully literate in Standard English when they arrive at our schools, but, instead, all teachers of all subjects must work with students and with their home cultures and languages to develop collaborative literacy practices that engage

students in critical literacy. By showing students that their culture is valued and that they as language users are appreciated instead of being demeaned, teachers can give non-dominant students a reason to engage with standardized dialect. As Delpit (2002) points out, by respecting students we gain their trust and only then will they be able to open up enough to embrace a new code.

In sum, teachers must be prepared to teach students who are racially, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically different from them, in order to prepare both teachers and their students for the workforce in this global economy, for, as Nieto argues (2013), “. . . how young people in our increasingly diverse population are treated says a great deal about our values as a nation” (p. 106). If we do not value diversity, the U.S. will shrink from the global stage with rapidity. The assimilationist myth, where student success is only possible if students leave their languages and cultures at the school door in exchange for “The American Dream,” does not take into account the structural exclusion minority students will experience even after they are “assimilated” (Banks, 2013).

It is our job as teachers and educational leaders to help our students attain the knowledge and skills necessary for success in a knowledge-based global economy. Banks (2013) argues that what is necessary in today’s schools is “transformative citizenship education” which includes: challenging mainstream knowledge for the purpose of improving the human condition, recognizing and valuing diversity and social/community activism with the goal of producing a multicultural democracy, and developing cosmopolitan values. According to Appiah (2006), cosmopolitanism is a universal trait of humankind and an ethic that is both binding and commonsensical. Appiah views cosmopolitanism as a “rethink” of how we view the world and a moralistic interpretation of shared values (good and bad). However, this ethic of understanding and enacting in the cosmopolitan world requires a particular type of charge to its inhabitants. Although intended for all, cosmopolitans require sophisticated intelligence, critical and creative thinking skills, caring dispositions for self and others, and the need to look beyond tribal entities. While many students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds will have a critical view of the dominant cultural system, they need help expressing those ideas in a useful way. And teachers must learn how to critically view their own cultural assumptions and help students’ learn how to address the problems that result. We believe wholeheartedly that critical pedagogical approaches to literacy instruction can help us all: students, teachers, educational leaders, to understand how language can reproduce or challenge existing social power structures that can serve to disempower non-dominant or marginalized communities (Godley & Mannici, 2008).

Darling-Hammond (2013) argues that to meet the demands of the 21st century, we must establish equitable schools in order to prepare our students for this knowledge-based, global, and multicultural world economy. In order to do this, we must view diversity as a strength and not as a deficit to be eliminated through cultural homogenization (Apple, 2013). We must develop and nurture all students with the intention of embracing the ideal of global citizenship, and it begins with language.

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