STUDENTS' "WRITE" TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE: TEACHING THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN VERBAL TRADITION AS A RHETORICALLY EFFECTIVE WRITING SKILL

By

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ABSTRACT

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The 1972 Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) resolution declaring "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (SRTOL) defends the rights of students and all other writers to use different varieties of English. In addition, the 1988 CCCC adoption of the *National Language Policy (NLP), which responds to the "English-Only" Movement, boldly asserts that English-Only is educationally unsound.* However progressive these policies may be, there still remains a request from teachers on how to identify and develop effective pedagogies that advance language diversity in the classroom. The present research study offers one solution by introducing a comparative approach to writing instruction that recognizes African and African American contributions to standardized American written communication structures. Using culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy as theoretical frames, I explore the effects of a "comparative approach" to African American Language and Literacy instruction, which makes clear that African American Verbal Tradition (AVT) may be incorporated into expected conventions for academic writing. This research study takes place in two first-year writing courses at a major Midwestern university in which students are introduced to AVT. AVT is a broad linguistic tradition, therefore I have selected five features of AVT to investigate: repetition, signifyin[g] and indirection, call & response, narrativizing, and sounding. My project uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as analytical methods to help me make sense of my data from students' written work, my field notes on our classroom experiences, and my audio taped transcriptions of students' reflective discussions. CRT helped

me describe and understand the effects race had on students' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions when exposed to anti-racist pedagogy that challenges negative assumptions about people of color in relation to education. I perform a close textual analysis of select transcripts using CDA and to examined how dominance and hegemony were reproduced or resisted in the students' text (essays) and talk (student directed conversations).

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BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD: INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO AAL IN

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"Failure to know [the factual studies of language] and what they mean… is responsible for the fact that the educational heart of darkness… is the English course…Emphasis on "correctness" – at the expense… of a fluid, knowledgeable command of our mother tongue – is responsible for the incompetence of our students in handling their language, for their embarrassment about their own rich…dialects, for their anxiety when they are called upon to speak or write… and for their feeling that the study of English is the study of trivialities which have no importance or meaning outside the English class…"

– Donald J. Lloyd

1.1 Introduction

My dissertation begins with a quote from a linguist who initiated some of the first debates in the field of composition concerning language rights. Donald J. Lloyd describes some negative experiences that students, who speak non-mainstream language varieties, may have in writing courses. Lloyd strongly suggests that the "English course" does not help students develop and sustain their own linguistic traditions. I can relate to Lloyd's claims because I experienced many of these tensions. As an African American student at a predominantly White university I was very observant of my peers. I noticed, over time, that many of my White counterparts did not have the same challenges that I had in writing courses. This observation often caused me to

question myself and my ability to perform to the level expected by the University and my instructors.

The anxieties I had about writing continued well throughout my undergraduate career, but fortunately these feelings of inadequacy began to shift after my first encounter with scholarship on African American Language (AAL). I was first formally introduced to AAL in an African and African American Studies Masters program at The Ohio State University (OSU). There I took a class on "Language and Literacy in African American Communities," with Dr. Elaine "Dr. E" Richardson and from this course I was inspired to write my thesis on the language vs. dialect Ebonics debate. Writing my thesis on the topic of AAL/Ebonics was a life-changing experience because the texts I read, during this time, caused me to re-think my negative experiences with writing classes. After reading foundational literature on AAL from leading scholars in the field of linguistics such as, Lorenzo Dow Turner (1949), William Labov (1972), and Geneva Smitherman (1977), I no longer considered myself a student who lacked strong writing skills. Instead I began to view myself as more advanced (than my White counterparts) because throughout my entire academic career, I was constantly navigating two very different language systems.

I am thankful that I was introduced to AAL at OSU, but it is unfortunate that I was not introduced to this scholarship before I entered graduate school. Scholarship on AAL restored my confidence and encouraged me to become a more skilled academic writer. I often wonder where I would be academically, socially, and even emotionally if I had not been exposed to this

information. Therefore, at Michigan State University (MSU), where I teach (Tier 1) first year writing, I introduce my students to scholarship on AAL early in the semester in hopes that they too may have an empowering experience.

However, over the years it became obvious to me that when I discussed AAL in the classroom, my students, especially African American students, did not appear to be empowered. For example, in both full class and small group discussions, students did not ask questions about the material and if they did respond, it was often in a form of resistance to the disciplinary literature and materials I presented. My students' unfavorable reactions to my presentations on AAL/Ebonics were troubling to me. Therefore, as a dissertation topic, I chose to examine AAL teaching practices in composition classrooms, in hopes to find a more effective pedagogical approach.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The predominant language education and pedagogies African Americans experience still reinforce the "dominance of Academic English and the linguistic inferiority of AAL" (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009, p. 134). Further, Delain et al. (1985), maintains that while old deficit arguments about AAL in education seem to diminish, "the theory that AAL is different, not deficient, does not lead one to suppose that it is ever an advantage in school" (p.156). In this research study, I examined a teaching strategy, contrastive analysis, which is commonly used in English classes to teach language/dialect difference and the effects it may have on AAL speakers.

Contrastive analysis, in language education, points out the differences between standard and vernacular dialect features. Contrastive analysis techniques often separate language or dialect difference from language use, which is common to higher education. I argue that the different vs. deficit approach of contrastive analysis is not applicable to composition instruction on African American rhetorical practices and the techniques used may be harmful to students of color, particularly in predominantly White settings.

For example, research shows that contrastive analysis approaches to language instruction have proven to be detrimental to student perceptions of their language and identity, as well as limiting to the advancement of students' writing skills (Kelly, 1968; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Rickford, 1999; Sledd, 1972; Smitherman, 1999). Further, James Sledd argues that contrastive analysis and other code switching pedagogies such as bidialectalism are unethical because they consider students dialects to be "appropriate only for uses that middle-class white society granted little intellectual or cultural worth" (as cited in Wible, 2006, p. 452). Sociolinguist John Rickford (1999) also proclaims the limitations of contrastive analysis. He writes:

> Contrastive analysis points out the differences between standard and vernacular dialect features, however the drills used in a contrastive analysis approach tend to be boring and repetitive, and if translation is not carried out in both directions, the message that can be conveyed is that the vernacular variety has no integrity or validity. (p.14)

These scholars present strong arguments that reveal the negative effects contrastive analysis may have on students who speak non-mainstream language varieties; however, it is important to note

that some educators in the field have produced additional literature that may complicate their critiques. For example, Pandey (2000) emphasizes the need for a specific contrastive analysis approach to AAL instruction that highlights language "equivalency." In Pandey's description of a successful contrastive analysis teaching strategy she states, "The instructor never wrote Standard American English (SAE) structures *above* AAL constructions (or vice versa) lest her students begin to think of SAE as 'superior' or 'better' English" (p. 97). Paris and Kirkland (2011) also advocate for a particular kind of contrastive analysis technique that exhibits the same idea of language "equivalency," and invites "vernacular literacies to the table not as gimmicks to pull youth to the more important literacies, but as level players in a critical dialogue about why language varies and how literacy happens in the contemporary world" (p. 191). Overall, most scholars acknowledge that a contrastive analysis approach may have negative effects if it is not applied in ways that promote cultural pluralism and cultural equality, it may have negative effects on student perceptions about language and identity. Therefore, many scholars encourage teachers to refine this pedagogical model or take on a completely different approach.

Due to its oppressive techniques, which are often used to eradicate linguistic difference, contrastive analysis approaches to writing instruction, more specifically, subtractive bilingualism, was rejected many years ago by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). The philosophy of subtractive bilingualism is that instructors "should help students substitute one set of language practices for another set" (Allen, 1952, p.11). During the subtractive process the second language is added at the expense of the first language and culture, which diminish as a consequence (Cummins, 1994). The 1974 CCCC "Students' Right

to Their Own Language (SRTOL) policy specifically resists subtractive bilingualism and clearly describes its negative effects on students:

> Discussions must always emphasize the effectiveness of the various options, and must avoid the simplistic and the patronizing. Tapes, drills, and other instructional materials which do nothing more than contrast surface features (the lack of *-s* in third person singular present tense verbs, or *-ed* in past tense verbs, for instance) do not offer real options. Instead, because they are based on a "difference-equals-deficit" model, they imply that the students' own dialects are inferior and somehow "wrong" and that therefore the students' homes, the culture in which they learned their language, are also "wrong." Such simplistic approaches are not only destructive of the students' self- confidence, they fail to deal with larger and more significant options.

SRTOL advocates for an additive bilingualism, in which the first language and culture continues to be valued and developed while the second language is added. Thus, additive bilingualism allows students to build up their confidence in the ability to write and to respect and retain their home language. In addition, SRTOL requests that teachers encourage students to concentrate on achieving crucial exactness of content, as opposed to focusing primarily on surface features or non-standard forms of spelling, punctuation, and usage, which are the "least serious aspects of writing" (p. 12).

The National Language Policy (NLP), developed by the *CCCC* executive committee in 1988, also promotes the notion/idea that we develop and maintain multilingual learning environments. NLP strongly endorses the need for sufficient pedagogy, curriculum, and

implementation strategies that writing teachers can use to enable native and non-native speakers to achieve oral and literate competence in English, the language of wider communication (LWC). The NLP is a response to efforts that seek to make English the "official" language of the United States. This policy recognizes the historical reality that we are a multilingual society, even though English has become the LWC. However progressive these policies may be, the field still does not have a variety of clear-cut, well-designed pedagogical strategies that writing teachers can use in honoring the philosophical spirit of SRTOL and NLP.

1.3 Purpose and Rationale for the Study

The present research study addresses gaps in existing literature on pedagogical strategies about advancing language rights and composition in academic classrooms, which, according to some instructors is informative in terms of theory, yet does not extend far enough into praxis (Smitherman, 1999, p. 365). The SRTOL policy calls for the development of pedagogical strategies in the field that allow students to preserve their heritage and language/dialect. The present research study answers this call and responds by developing a pedagogy that allows students to preserve and also develop their existing linguistic skills and capabilities. Therefore, through practical application my research provides examples of classroom assignments, activities, lectures, media, and other explicit teaching materials that will show instructors how to employ the philosophy of the SRTOL resolution in their composition classrooms. Ultimately, I encourage teachers to develop comparative pedagogies that will show students the value of AVT in academic settings, and how to incorporate AVT features into expected conventions for

academic writing.

1.4 Research Questions

Five general questions guide this analysis:

1. How can curriculum be developed that values and identifies the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies?

2. How do Whites and Non-Black minorities respond to comparative composition instruction that values, and identifies the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies?

    - What are students' pre- and post- language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in survey responses?

    - What are students' pre- and post- language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in small group discussions?

3. How do African American students respond to comparative composition instruction that values, and identifies the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies?

    - What are students' pre- and post- language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in survey responses?

    - What are students' pre- and post- language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in small group discussions?

4. How does AVT instruction impact students' use of the following five AVT features: repetition/alliteration, signifyin[g] and indirection, call and response, narrativizing, and sounding in their final essays?

5. What do the insights from this study suggest about curriculum and instruction, which is explicitly intended to value, and identify the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies?

This dissertation is organized into seven subsequent chapters that examine overarching themes and findings in relation to the previously mentioned research questions.

1.5 Chapter Descriptions

In Chapter two, I provide an overview of the literature, which explores the trajectory of discussions about Ebonics in the U.S. as it relates to education for African American students. This chapter focuses on the social, political, and economic implications of engaging pedagogies that are inclusive of African American Language and literacies. In Chapter three, I discuss the research methodology for the current study. Chapters four through six specifically explore the effects of AVT curriculum instruction on the development of students' rhetorically effective writing skills, changes in students' language attitudes, and the strengthening of African American students' confidence in their ability to write.

Chapter four explores the ability AVT instruction has to refute racist ideologies about language, which students may bring with them to the academic classroom. Therefore, in this chapter, I perform a cross-case analysis of students' small group discussions and surveys to

examine how AVT instruction may incite possible changes in students' attitudes toward AAL, and its speakers.

In Chapter five, I examine distinctive experiences of African American students with AVT instruction. I identify three major themes that emerged from African American students' small group discussions to describe, interpret, and explain their reactions to the course content. I analyzed small group discussions to explore how African American students used AVT course materials to make compelling arguments for language rights in efforts to undo systems of oppression and to rectify educational inequality. To gain a balanced interpretation of African American students' response to this study, I compared the comments from students in small groups to my field notes, which documented their full class engagement as well. In Chapter six, I examine students' use of AVT features in writing assignments before and after their exposure to AVT instruction. I also explore how students increase, decrease or maintain their use of AVT in the final class essay.

Chapter seven offers conclusions concerning what I learned from performing AVT instruction and how composition instructors can refine this model. The implications for writing instruction/rhetoric practice shows teachers how to use the identification writing exercises in the curriculum to teach all students how to perform literary and critical analysis of written texts. I also discuss the benefits and limitations of the study, as well as implications for future research. I believe the AVT comparative pedagogy has the potential to cause African American students to feel like they belong in universities/colleges. Being made aware of how their culture contributes

to American standardized written communication structures may have larger implications to increase African American retention and college graduation rates.

1.6 Definition of Terms

In this research study, the terms African American Language (AAL) and Ebonics are used interchangeably. The variety of AAL/Ebonics referred to here is U.S. Ebonics (USEB), which is rooted in the Black American Oral Tradition, and represents a synthesis of African (primarily West African) and European (primarily English) linguistic cultural traditions" (Smitherman, 1998, p. 30). However, it is important to note that other varieties of Ebonics exist in Caribbean countries, as well as in "the African American diaspora - e.g. Liberia, Samana (in the Dominican Republic), and Nova Scotia, where African Americans emigrated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and where the descendants remain in linguistic and cultural enclaves" (Rickford & Rickford, 2000, p. 130).

The term African American Verbal Tradition (AVT) is also referred to as African American discourse style. According to Smitherman (1999), the discourse modalities of AVT is not to be confused with the grammar of African American Language (AAL) such as "She be looking good" or AAL pronunciation of "thing" as "thang" (p. 227). Ultimately AVT is a way of communicating that has roots in African and African American culture. Lastly, "contrastive analysis" is a teaching strategy that points out the differences between standard and vernacular dialect features, and "comparative approaches" to AVT instruction makes clear that AVT may be incorporated into expected conventions for academic writing.

1.7 Sites of Tension

"Practice what you preach…"

Scholars in the field who promote language diversity in the composition classroom are often challenged by their colleagues/peers to model writing that successfully engages language variation. In other words, we are often called to "practice what we preach!" This is a tension I have experienced when writing and presenting about this particular topic because my writing style does not display strong AVT use. This contradiction may be explained by my exposure to language education pedagogies and instructional techniques that promote an increased facility in code-switching. For example, early in my academic career teachers often discouraged my use of an expressive writing style, and over time I learned to diminish my written use of AVT features. Therefore, through this project I had the ability to learn with my students and develop my own AVT writing capabilities. Further, the student participants in my study are novice/first year writers, and have not had as much exposure to contrastive pedagogies as I have. Therefore, their AVT use is still strong, and I am proud to say that I was able to learn from my students and use their written texts as models for ways to incorporate AVT into my own academic writing style.

Negotiation of Racial Categories

Another important tension that emerged from this study concerned my use of racial categories (i.e. African, African American) to describe the origins of the five oral features. In one instance, it had not occurred to me, that during the course instruction, other students of color would identify with the five AVT features and attribute them to having origins in their own respective cultures. This reaction to the material was quite surprising because, students from

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different cultural backgrounds seldom identified with AAL speakers in the past when I taught AVT using contrastive techniques, and did not present AVT as having any significant value in academic settings. However, for the first time, students in the data set from varied racial/ethnic backgrounds and cultures identified with African American discourse style.

Thus, in my teaching, I clarified for students that other cultures may use these oral features in their day-to-day communication. And it is my aim that this study will inspire other scholars to describe and explain the historical and cultural connections that these five oral communication features have to other races, and how they emerge in those students' writing, which would ultimately create a more culturally diverse and informed classroom. However, this project specifically explores the five AVT features as distinct communication styles in African American discourse, having roots in West African culture. Therefore, my goal is to highlight African and African American contributions to the continual remaking of English and the influence of AVT on American Standardized Written Communication Structures (Richardson, 2010).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical frameworks underlying the research purpose of

this study. I use critical discourse analysis (CDA), critical race theory (CRT) and culturally

relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy to analyze the surveys, small group discussions and

formal essays of students from a first year writing course in which I performed AVT instruction.

I will also provide a thorough review of relevant empirical studies and qualitative research that

pertains to the topic.

The majority of empirical scholarship reviewed, in this chapter, is written as a response to

the 1996 Oakland School Board's decision to officially recognize Ebonics as a legitimate

language. The backlash that committee members who made this decision received for passing the

"Ebonics Resolution" is well documented in the media and came from various sources such as:

politicians, teachers, community members, and even well known African American celebrities.

In addition to the average lay-person, several scholars from multiple disciplines (e.g. education,

linguistics, African American studies etc.) weighed in on these discussions, providing

knowledgeable linguistic perspectives on language variation, as it relates to the existing

representation of racial stereotypes in the U.S. In the section, "Language and Power," I give a

detailed description of the different arguments that were raised in these debates to highlight the

many misperceptions about Ebonics that were spread during this short time period.

The public denigration of Ebonics in 1997, and the debates surrounding this historical event are significant because of the racial, social, political, and economic implications it has on teachers' ability to openly discuss AAL in the academic classroom, particularly with African American students. Therefore, in the section "Language and Education," I examine specific research studies on AAL instruction, to illustrate the challenges teachers, especially non-Black teachers, experience when they incorporate information about AAL into their teaching lessons, and how past discussions about Ebonics may effect student perceptions of their pedagogy.

Finally, I conclude this chapter by discussing a broader issue within the academy, which pertains to oral and written language differences. There is a prevailing notion in the field, which suggests that orality should be kept separate from written language. Thus, teachers who perform AVT instruction may be expected to address this concern within their classroom or academic institution. Therefore, in my review of literature I will present arguments from noted scholars in the field who effectively refute such claims, and thus illustrate how speech may strengthen writing. More specifically, I will identify and describe the pedagogies of instructors who have demonstrated that African American discourse style can be used to effectively teach rhetorical writing skills.

2.2 Theoretical, Analytical, and Pedagogical Frameworks

To analyze the data collected in this study two concepts which function as both theoretical and analytical frames are applied: CDA and CRT, Critical theory, of the Frankfurt School, can be used as a broader rubric to introduce these two frames. Critical theory is often

associated with the study of power relations and has a vested interest in producing "change" as opposed to mere interpretation. According to Rasmussen (1996), "critical theory can change society. Critical theory is a tool of reason which, when properly located in an historical group, can transform the world" (p. 11). Critical theory draws its main tenets from the idea that critical self-reflection can lead to radical social transformation (Rasmussen, 1996, p. 12). Thus, many tenets of CDA and CRT can be found in critical theory because both require thought and action, or theory and practice. Therefore, in the current project I theorize and analyze my data using CDA and CRT to expose and resist social inequality.

As mentioned previously, the term "critical" in CDA draws from critical theory. "Critical research rejects the overdeterministic view of social theory espoused by Marxists and instead argues for a dialectic between individual agency and structural determinism" (Rogers, 2004, p. 3). For example, in CDA the analyst's intention is to uncover power relationships and demonstrate inequities embedded in society, and through their analysis the goal is to ultimately disrupt those power relationships that exist in social contexts (Rogers, 2004, p. 3). According to Rogers (2004), the word "critical" in CDA means to address and seek to solve social problems through analysis and social and political action (p. 4).

CDA examines "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 352). In terms of analytic procedures, there is no formula for conducting CDA (Rogers, 2004, p. 3). However, many educational and empirical researchers use Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-tiered model that includes description, interpretation, and explanation of discursive relations and

social practices. The description, interpretation, and explanation of the relationships between texts, discursive practices, and social practices is a method that allows critical discourse analysts to explore how power operates within the form and function of language. "The form of language consists of grammar, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. The function of language includes how people use language in different situations to achieve an outcome" (Rogers, 2004, p.4). The theory of language that focuses on the function of language (what language does, and how it does it) is called systemic functional linguistics (SFL). According to Rogers (2004), SFL is the linguistic basis of CDA (p. 8). SFL is often used to conduct close textual analysis of data such as transcripts or classroom discourse. CDA is interested in the description, interpretation, and explanation of hard (form) and soft (function) structures of language. Within SFL, language is encoded as genre, discourse, and style, and each utterance functions in three ways simultaneously to construct meaning (Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 472). For example, in their study on racial literacy and the interactions that occur in teaching and learning settings, Rogers and Mosley (2006) constructed a coding chart that lists themes, derived from the form and function of talk, in their study:

> In terms of genre, or ways of interacting, we looked for the ways that talk 'hangs together' through aspects of language such as humor, interruptions, resistance, metaphor use, overlapping talk, repetition. In terms of discourse or ways of representing, we paid particular attention to the discourses of whiteness and race that appeared in text and talk. Finally, in terms of style, or ways of being, we coded for politeness conventions, passive or active construction of the sentences, absence of talk, the existence of cognitive or

affective statements, the use of pronouns (or favoring third-person pronouns over first-

person pronouns, which functions to distance the speaker from the action), and marked

and unmarked categories. (p. 472)

This example of the construction of a coding list for textual analysis demonstrates how language

form cannot exist separate from its function, and that a close examination of the two can reveal a

speakers intention.

Finally, CDA is used to examine controlling discourse or "mind control" as a form of

power and a way to reproduce dominance and hegemony. Mind control is often enacted when

people are positioned as recipients (e.g. students, employees, etc.), and thus accept beliefs and

opinions from authoritative sources. According to Van Dijk (2003), "recipients tend to accept

beliefs, knowledge, and opinions through discourse from what they see as authoritative,

trustworthy, or credible sources, such as scholars, experts, professionals, or reliable media" (p.

357). Therefore, if dominant groups control public discourse and its structures, they also have

more control over the minds of the public at large (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 358). The concept of

"mind control" as a form of power, and a way of enacting language dominance, is a major

component in the present curriculum that students are encouraged to discuss. Therefore, I

explore students' enactment of controlling discourse through their text and talk and how they

may use "mind control" as a communicative influence.

CRT has historical foundations in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which is a movement

based in the principles of Legal Realism (Taylor, 2009, p.1). In 1977 the main argument of CLS

was that "power and dominion of certain groups (white, male) over an unequal status quo was

continuing, and social and political change was needed" (Taylor, 2009, p. 2). While CLS

scholarship critiques mainstream ideology for its role in helping to create, support, and legitimate

oppressive structures in American society, CLS does not include racism in its critique (Ladson-

Billings, 1998, p. 12) Thus, as an outgrowth of CLS, CRT scholarship examines the role of race

in constructions of power.

The history of CRT began when a group of legal scholars, came together in support of the

new racial reforms and openly criticized law/legal litigation that helped maintain social and

economic oppression (Taylor, 2009, p. 2). Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman were two of the

leading scholars during this period whose work addressed the "slow pace of racial reform in the

United States" (Delgado, 1995). These individuals, along with many other scholars and students,

led workshops and published scholarship that redefined racism as not just "acts of individuals,"

but larger, systemic, structural conventions and customs (Taylor, 2009, p. 4). According to

Taylor (2009) CRT scholarship cannot be considered an abstract set of ideas. There exists

specific insights and observations of CRT such as:

> Society's acceptance of racism as ordinary, the phenomenon of white's allowing black
>
> progress when it also promotes their interests (interest convergence), the importance of
>
> understanding the historic effects of European colonialism, and the preference of the
>
> experiences of oppressed peoples (narrative) over the "objective" opinions of whites. (p.
>
> 4)

In the present study, the observations of CRT function as analytical frameworks to highlight

common core themes across the data set that reveal how race/racism functions in relationship to

the AVT curriculum instruction.

The origins of CRT exist primarily in legal studies, however the field of education has adopted several of its tenets. For example, one of the foundations of CRT in education is the observation that racism is a standard and normal occurrence of daily life in U.S. society (Taylor, 2009, p. 4). As a result, critical race theorists argue that Whites, "find it difficult to comprehend the non-White experience and perspective that White domination has produced" (Taylor, 2009, p. 5). In fact, racial inequality is so widespread in our society in several matters such as hiring, housing, criminal sentencing, and education, etc. that these issues have become irrelevant or insignificant to most Whites (p. 5). However, CRT claims that, in contrast, non-Whites have the ability to identify the many oppressive structures that White supremacy has constructed (Taylor, 2009, p. 5). According to Allen (2004), CRT must be applied to anti-racist education because, White representations of history present Whites as the creators of civilization, "and people of color as a drag on, if not a threat to it" (p.125). Therefore, CRT can be used as a tool to help students of color see how whiteness functions by causing them to think less of their individual and collective selves (p. 132). Thus, using CRT as a theoretical and analytical frame I aim to revise some of the racist assumptions about people of color in education, by presenting a counter narrative that calls attention to the positive impact African and African American culture has on our society, particularly in educational settings.

The application of CRT presents a more fair and balanced explanation of scholarship that pertains to the lived experiences of people from marginalized racial/cultural groups. According

to Sheurich and Young (1997) "dominant research epistemologies –from positivism to postmodernisms – implicitly favor White people because they accord most easily with their social history" (p. 9). This then poses a problem for White researchers because they are unable to identify the sociocultural histories of scholars of color and how they themselves marginalize these histories within the mainstream research community. For example, in Allen's (2004) critique of critical pedagogy and its inattention to racism he describes "Whiteness," as a phenomenon that is much more identifiable to people of color:

> As the oppressed within global white supremacy, people of color are the only ones who are able to see, at least with any primacy and certitude, the various ways that whiteness operates (Allen, 2001, 2002b; Mills, 1997). Whites can also learn to see how whiteness functions, but they require the spark of knowledge that comes from people of color. And this racial knowledge is the essential source of liberation for us all. (p. 124)

The curriculum posed in this study derives from my experience as an African American scholar; at its center the "voice" of African American students, and the importance it holds. CRT functions as a tool for centering race & interrogating Whiteness spaces within composition classrooms/contexts.

Another tenet of CRT is the "voice-of-color thesis," which holds that minority experiences with oppression may allow them to communicate to their white counterparts, through storytelling, matters that the whites are unlikely to know (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9). Storytelling in CRT has many functions, one being: "opening a window onto ignored or

alternative realities" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 39) According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), storytelling is useful because "members of this country's dominant racial group cannot easily grasp what it is like to be non-white" (p. 39). Therefore, engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others, and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) also describe storytelling as a cure for silencing:

> Stories also serve as a powerful psychic function for minority communities. Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence, or blame themselves for their predicament. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences. Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named it can be combated… Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity. (p. 43)

Overall, as a method of analysis, CRT helps clarify the "meaning" of verbal and written qualitative data collected from students in this study, regarding their experiences with learning AVT, and how race impacts those specific experiences.

Ladson-Billings' (1994) theory of culturally relevant teaching is the basis of the proposed composition curriculum. Culturally relevant teaching derives from the notion of "cultural relevance" which moves beyond the difficulties students of color experience with language in schools to include other aspects related to student and school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

According to Ladson-Billings (1994) "culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background distorted" (p. 17). I apply culturally relevant teaching to the design of my study to inform all students of the contributions of African and African American culture to standard American written and oral communication structures. As a result, this pedagogical instruction "allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African American culture" (p. 20). For example, Ladson-Billings (1994) describes the methods of a teacher who employs a culturally relevant style to teach about the U.S. constitution:

> She might begin with a discussion of the bylaws and articles of incorporation that were used to organize a local church or African American civic association. Thus the students learn the significance of such documents in forming institutions and shaping ideals while they also learn that their own people are institution-builders. (p. 18)

Similar to the previous example, the present study also utilizes culturally relevant teaching to empower African American students and develop a "relevant black personality."

While the primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to promote accurate and truthful representations of African American culture it is important to note that all students can benefit from this form of instruction. Culturally relevant teaching "is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually socially, emotionally, and politically" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). Thus, culturally relevant teaching encourages students to value the cultural strengths of others and view

the language of African Americans as "rich, diverse, and useful in both community and work settings" (p. 17).

There are a number of tenets that comprise culturally relevant teaching, however, "culturally relevant teaching is not a series of steps that teachers can follow or a recipe for being effective with African American students" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 26). Culturally relevant teaching should be applied in context and for appropriate pedagogical situations. In the current study I draw from the following tenets of culturally relevant teaching: 1) "Students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are most tenuous are helped to become intellectual leaders in the classroom" (p. 117). This means teachers must affirm and celebrate African American students' culture as well as "work actively against the constant and repeated denigration of Africa, Africans, and African Americans" 2) "Students' real-life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the 'official' curriculum" (p. 117) Thus, teachers acknowledge students' cultural funds of knowledge and students are not considered "blank slates." Instead, teachers challenge "conventional scripts by importing the culture and everyday experiences of the students into the literacy learning" (p. 117). 3) "Teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo" (p. 118). For example, teachers help students understand the misrepresentation of African and African American culture in society and how societal expectations for Black people are generally low (p. 118). At the same time teachers clearly present counter narratives to students that challenge these master narratives/dominant perspectives and they express that students and teachers must join together "to prove the prevailing beliefs wrong" (p.118). 4) "Teachers are cognizant of themselves as

political beings" (p. 118). This means teachers resist cultural-deficit explanations for low achievement levels in African American students and instead move toward "models of cultural excellence" (p. 118). And teachers often talk with their students about the political nature of their work, and how it can be used as a tool to resist dominant oppressive discourses (p. 118). Finally, 5) "When teachers provide instructional 'scaffolding,' students can move from what they know to what they need to know" (p. 124).

For example, Lee (1993) argues that African American students' prior social knowledge of the themes, values, and social conventions of [African American] texts as well as their skill in signifying may be productively drawn upon to teach skills in literary analysis (p.46). Lee (2001) demonstrates this in her article, *Is October Brown Chinese* in which she explores strategic ways to approach reading and writing in English Language Arts using cultural models of knowledge that students bring with them to the academic classroom. The students in her study are primarily African American children who come from low-income families in the community. Through extensive research, Lee provides evidence to support the theory that AAL can be used as a bridge to help students understand literary response tradition. In an attempt to test this hypothesis, Lee develops "The Cultural Modeling Project," which is the idea that literary analysis involves language play. Lee (2001) notes that African American rhetoric has a rich tradition of language play through the use of signifying (p. 100). Thus, Lee uses this knowledge of the students' cultural background as a way to connect their familiar routines to traditional literary response. Lee highlights the effects of this culturally sensitive pedagogy in her description of a classroom discussion that produced the question "Is October Brown Chinese?" According to Lee (2001),

this question shows the growth of the children's analytical skills over the eight-week process of her study because the student who asked the previous question used significant evidence to support his claim that October Brown is not Black, she is Chinese. Lee's instructional approach is a great example for teachers on how to explore the existing knowledge and skills of their students as a foundation for learning.

I build on the framework of culturally relevant teaching with Paris's (2012) essay, which calls for a re-articulation of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies. According to Paris, the terms "relevance" and "responsiveness" do not guarantee that educational programs will maintain and value the linguistic and cultural heritage of students (p. 95). Paris offers an alternative term for culturally relevant teaching, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy" (CSP), which emphasizes the need for pedagogies to help students sustain the cultural and linguistic competencies of their communities, while extending students' repertoires of practice to include dominant language, literacies, and other cultural practices. CSP guides the line of inquiry in the present research study, which seeks to help students incorporate AVT in their writing to produce the most powerful essay possible.

2.3 Language and Education

The Real Ebonics Debate, by Perry and Delpit (1998) examines how the public received the Oakland School Board's Ebonics Resolution and explores its purpose or prospective goal, which aimed to improve literacy rates among African American students in Oakland, CA. Perry and Delpit begin by replicating an exact copy of the first resolution presented by the Oakland School Board. They immediately address the fact that the resolution was revised giving a brief

summary of what was changed. The analyses of these two Ebonics resolutions allow the reader to compare/contrast the two documents, examining the changes and their significance to public approval.

The changes made by the Oakland School Board show a distinct change in wording and phrasing of certain sections, specifically done to appeal to the audience, who at the time, objected severely to the passing of the resolution. Certain areas are elaborated on and thoroughly explained to explicitly convey a certain message and to negate false accusations received by many non-supporters of the new program. An example of this wording is presented in the chapter by the authors stating:

> Before: 'Whereas, the standardized tests and grade scores…will be remedied by application of a program featuring African Language Systems principles in instructing African-American children both in their primary language and in English.'
>
> Changed to: 'Whereas, the standardized tests and grade scores…will be remedied by application of a program featuring African Language Systems principles to move students from the language patterns they bring to school to English proficiency.'(146)

By changing these two sentences one can see that the School Board's intention was to refute the idea that Ebonics would be taught in the classroom. Instead the wording is changed to emphasize that programs will be implemented to help students transition away from their "primary" language to become proficient in Standard English. The first document gives the reader a sense that the mother tongue of African American students will be embraced by the school system and will be regarded in a more positive light within educational settings. This change in wording of

the original document is significant, because it reveals the stigma that is attached to AAL and how it is easily dismissed as a deficient language that AAL speakers should "move" from in order to be proficient in Academic English.

Fillmore (2005) presents a detailed examination of the public response to this issue from a linguistic perspective. Fillmore argues that the language used by the school board in their first resolution statement used ambiguous words and phrases, which led to several different misinterpretations of the new program. According to Fillmore (2005) this confusion could have been avoided, "I think the board should practice what they preach and should do what they say they want their students to do: learn the language of the larger community so that they can achieve their goals in that community" (p. 169). For instance, Fillmore gives suggestions on ways the School Board could have communicated better with the community through their resolution statement by proposing new terms, words, and phrases to replace the ambiguous language that received such controversy. The most important point Fillmore makes is that one cannot judge those who responded negatively to this policy because the resolution itself was flawed allowing members of the community to come up with their own interpretations. When discussing a topic such as Ebonics, and issues surrounding it, the author notes that due to the complexity of the issue, there are no yes-or-no questions and often times a community is divided on this topic (p. 165).

The most significant change the author makes is of the term used to describe AAL. According to Fillmore, the term Ebonics is "politically loaded," therefore he suggests that "African American Vernacular English" (AAVE) be used in place of any of the other previous

descriptions (p. 163). Along with this change he also addresses the use of the words "primary language," in the resolution, arguing that "home language" would have been a better term (p. 164). The use of the words "primary language" caused many critics to understand the meaning in different ways. But the understanding that caused the most controversy was the idea that, the school board voted to treat AAL like any other primary language spoken by students (p. 164). This perception is what sparked an intense debate on whether Ebonics can be considered an actual language separate from English.

According to Fillmore (2005), the school board made a mistake in making the claim that Ebonics "is not a linguistic cousin of English, but is really more directly descended from West African linguistic stock" (p. 165). This claim made by the school board diverted attention away from "the cognitive consequences in American schools of students' having AAVE as their primary language," to an irrelevant debate about its language classification (p. 165). This debate about language was also fueled by advocates for bilingual education who accused the school board of categorizing AAL as a separate language to receive federal funding from the Bilingual Education Act to help pay for the new program (p. 166).

In addition to the ambiguous language found in the Ebonics resolution document, media representations of Ebonics also played a major role in causing significant negative reactions from the general public. For example, Coleman and Daniel (2000) highlight how statements presented by the media reflect the dominant culture's views, which contain racist perspectives rooted in a mentality derived from slavery. For example, Coleman and Daniel (2000) compare the divisive communicatory practices of slave owners to the divisive practices of the media in the 1997

Ebonics debate. According to the authors, the media used two strategies to attack Ebonics and the African American community:

> The first attack was a matter of distortion and misinformation. The second attack extended the historical pattern of reduction ad absurdum when it comes to depicting African Americans. Beginning with the latter strategy of equating Ebonics and African Americans with absurdity, it is noteworthy that the initial round of media misinformation was facilitated by "experts" who were African American civil rights leaders and other public figures, rather than scholars and practitioners with considerable expertise related to Ebonics. (p. 78)

The authors describe the black community's awareness of Ebonics at this time as being minimal and this lack of familiarity is attributed to the media's ability to misinform the public (p. 78).

Media representatives reporting massive amounts of opinions from people who were uninformed about Ebonics caused an influx of distorted information to be spread by the media. African American high school students were consulted on the topic by national news publications, and many prominent African American community activists were conferred with on the topic. According to Coleman and Daniel (2000) those people who could actually provide some clarification regarding the issue were not addressed (p. 79). The Oakland School Board, Ebonics scholars, and professional associations that had position statements on Ebonics are described as "experts who could make the appropriate distinction between Ebonics as a rule-governed linguistic phenomenon as opposed to profane slang" (Coleman & Daniel, 2000, p. 79). Coleman and Daniel suggest that lack of correspondence with these expert sources was a

strategic plan implemented by the media to misrepresent the school board's message and was thus used to misinform the public.

The second attack on AAL is what Coleman and Daniel (2000) call "Reductio Ad Abusrdum," which is the media's presentation of Ebonics as "simplistic, aberrant, and maladaptive" (p. 83). This form of oppression, which is presented by the authors as having served as a repressive tool within the long standing history of mass media, is recognized as having a lasting effect on not only white Americans, but it has infected the minds of some members of the Black community as well. For example, the *New Pittsburgh Courier,* an African American publication, printed an article in which its headline read:

> 'Black English is Produced by Stupidity.' This leading African American publication
>
> extended its mockery of Ebonics with a cartoon featuring a teacher stating that the
>
> 'Oakland School Board, a.k.a., The African American Cultural Legitimization Council'
>
> had several 'newly justified terms,' including, 'ebonkie –refers to only brothers and sisters
>
> hooked on hard drugs,' 'emonancy – refers to Black teenage pregnancy only,' and
>
> ebonstitute refers to Black sidewalk hostesses only.' (p. 82)

What this shows is that African Americans participated in their own degradation as well. African American contributions to this form of linguistic stereotyping proved to be very harmful in terms of adding to the mis-education of the nation on this topic.

Further, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, a famed African American civil rights leader and activist, is often chided for his very public and negative response to the Ebonics resolution. Jackson's initial statements on Ebonics were informed by media representation, which as

mentioned previously, provided misinformation at the time. Jackson later denounced his negative

statements after meeting with the Oakland School Board and receiving accurate information on

the methods of the proposed program (p. 86). Although Jackson retracted his first statement, his

remarks could never fully be erased. Jackson's most harmful accusation was in relationship to

funding for the Ebonics program in which he "chided the school board for declaring Ebonics a

second language as a ploy to obtain additional federal monies" (p. 80). According to Coleman

and Daniel (2000), Jackson's response caused immediate action to be taken against the Oakland

School Board's resolution by the media, politicians, and the Department of Education:

> Within approximately 24 hours of Jackson's appearance on 'Meet the Press,' where the
>
> Reverend advanced the argument that Ebonics speakers should not be eligible for bilingual
>
> education federal support, the Clinton administration deployed a 'pre-emptive strike' by
>
> issuing an official statement on the subject of Ebonics in response to public speculation that
>
> Ebonics may be eligible for federal financing. (p.80)

Jackson's comments on funding reflect the dominant culture's perspective in the United States

that the lasting effects of slavery on the African American community are minimal and have

been overcome. Baugh (2000) explains the political implications of such debates from a

sociolinguistic perspective. He argues that the American public rejects Ebonics because

recognition of Ebonics acknowledges the fact that slavery has had an impact on the linguistic

development of African Americans, and this in turn does not allow the average American to

ignore the fact that the results of slavery continue to affect every aspect of American society

(Baugh, 2000, p. 64).

2.4 Language and Power

      American slaveholders used loosely translated biblical interpretations, as well as physical and psychological oppression to justify slavery and to exercise control over African slaves in America (Coleman and Daniel, 2000, p. 76-77). Language also played a major role in this process because language is commonly used to distinguish life forms that are human from those that are not. Thus, according to Coleman and Daniel (2000), to extend and reinforce their domination, slaveholders exploited the links between language and human status:

      To facilitate the process of "slave making" (Malcolm X, 1990, pp. 42-46), the slave masters immediately denounced the fact that African slaves spoke human languages. Rather, notwithstanding the reality that Africa is one of the most linguistically plural land masses in the world, the slave masters advanced (and attempted to convince themselves) that Africans spoke some sort of primitive "savage gibberish," likening it to monkey talk. (p. 77)

The stigmatizing of African Americans' linguistic roots continues to exist in the educational practices currently enforced in the U.S. Kirkland and Jackson (2009) maintain, language instruction in the U.S. that pertains to the African American experience reflects a history of pedagogies that reinforce the "dominance of Academic English and the linguistic inferiority of AAL" (p. 134). Too often AAL is positioned as peculiar, harmful, and even dangerous to the

academic growth of students who are of all varied racial/ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, critical instructional approaches to teaching on or about AAL are vital to ensure a positive outcome on how it is received among students.

While conducting research in the "My Brother's Keeper" young adult male mentor program, Kirkland and Jackson found that positioning AAL simply as a scaffold to Academic English relegated AAL, as well as the people who speak it, to an inferior social status (p. 137). Students in this study struggled to find value in AAL and many left with the perception that Academic English was "needed to live in the greater social establishment (the official world)," and AAL is "appropriate" only for the playground, the home, or the street (p. 141). Kirkland and Jackson also assert that these notions about language and identity initially come from mainstream societal factors, "we are not born despising our language, but through our day-to-day interactions and continual participation within the American social activity system (school, work, media, etc.), we learn to despise AAL" (p. 145).

Gordon's (2011) essay, "Caught in a Firestorm," further illuminates the need for composition instructors to engage pedagogies that employ the characteristics of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining teaching, which empowers students to praise their own and each others' cultural heritages. In addition, this essay is useful because it illustrates the negative consequences that may occur when teachers present valid information, yet disregard such effective pedagogical frameworks necessary to ensure the most respectful, safe, and appropriate learning environment for culturally diverse students. For example, Gordon (2011), a White, American, female composition instructor and writing center director, describes a negative

experience she encountered while teaching AAL to a class, primarily for secondary – education majors, who were interested in being consultants at the University's writing center. According to Gordon, the one African American student in her course accused her of discrimination, after she presented a handout on language variation, which included examples of AAL grammar. An official statement of grievance from this student led to a number of incendiary events. For example, she was sent a disgruntled, anonymous, letter from an African American person about her teaching practices, which she described as "hate mail." She also received several requests from African American representatives of campus organizations to meet and discuss her teaching practices, and she was invited to attend a campus-wide forum, which was scheduled by the Multicultural Affairs Office, to discuss the issue.

In this essay, Gordon gives a detailed description of the class session and course materials she used, which caused her to receive negative feedback from the African American campus community. In Gordon's description of her teaching practices/teaching materials, it is made clear that she focuses on what SRTOL describes as the "less important" aspects of writing (i.e. spelling, punctuation, and usage). However, the most obvious concern is her use of contrastive analysis techniques to teach students about language difference in writing. As a method to assist future writing center consultants in their ability to identify second language and dialect interlanguage in student essays, she presents a handout which displays examples of African American, Asian, and Spanish, language patterns. An excerpt from the handout, which describes AAL features, is shown below:

Areas of greatest difference between Black English dialects and dominant English

dialects include: (Seven examples follow starting with: 1. *It* will often be used for *there* in situations like "It's a book on the table" for "There's a book on the table." 2. The verb "to be" will tend to be absent in situations where a contraction may be placed in standard written English. This is especially true of the present tense, e.g., "I here" and "we going.")

As mentioned previously, many scholars and linguists have proven contrastive analysis techniques to be ineffective, and caution instructors that these teaching practices may be harmful to students of color. Therefore, it is no surprise that Gordon's handout, which contained contrastive analysis techniques, played a major role in causing her African American student's outrage and a concerned response from the campus community.

In addition to the handout, Gordon makes several offensive remarks that seemingly go unrecognized in her critique of her delivery of the course material. For example, Gordon presents a copy of a letter she wrote to the concerned students, parents, alumni and colleagues that was read publicly at the campus wide forum. In this letter she repeatedly refers to language variation as "language or dialect interference," and she also makes a clear distinction between language variation and the language of higher education:

> My second objective is to provide a handout that will enable consultants to raise the awareness of students who write with these patterns. Once writers are aware of the patterns they can spot the language or dialect difference in their writing and writers can adjust their language use to that which is common to higher education. (p. 278)

In this statement, language or dialect difference is described as unconventional or not commonly

used in "higher education."

According to Gordon (2011) her teaching tool/handout became a symbol of disempowerment, and an offensive affront to many African American students (p. 284). And like the Oakland School Board, she received a negative response from the campus community, and was misunderstood by the University Administration as "promoting Ebonics" (Gordon, 2011, p. 277). However, while Gordon appears to be a courageous, and very thoughtful instructor with good intentions, her anger towards the administration and students may affect her ability to objectively analyze the situation. For instance, when "caught in the firestorm," instead of critiquing her own teaching strategies Gordon bemoans the University Administration for their lack of support for faculty, and she accuses the one African American female student in her class, who made initial complaints about her teaching practices, of being deceiving:

> Carla was not doing as well in the class as she wanted and had indicated her displeasure
> to me about this more than once. In addition, near the time of the dialect lesson she had
> come to class late and, upon entering the room, interrupted the current activity by
> announcing that her car had broken down and continued on with a detailed description. I
> stopped her, saying I would be glad to hear what caused her delay as soon as class was
> over, and she sat down visibly disgruntled. On another occasion not long after, she
> attempted to turn in work that she had done during class that was assigned to be
> completed by class time. She was mad when I informed her after class of the reasons I
> was not accepting her assignment. I will never know with certainty, but… I believe her
> anger at the course and at me played a significant role in what she chose to do with the

handout. (p.285)

In addition to Carla, Gordon also extends her accusations so as to hold all speakers of non-mainstream languages accountable for their resistance to learning from teachers who present dialect/language variation lessons. Gordon (2011) maintains, "as long as there is privileged speech, it is hard for disenfranchised speakers to hear others who are not in their circumstances discuss their disempowered language, regardless of the intent" (p. 288). Ultimately, Gordon represents a vast majority of teachers who have an awareness of language variation and are passionate about multilingual education. However, her hierarchical views on language as it relates to power, reveal that she has a narrow perception of what may constitute "standardized English."

2.5 Language Rights and Composition

According to Zuidema (2005) it is a common myth that "Standard English" is better than other language varieties (p. 671). Zuidema describes this belief, which is often held by English language arts instructors and learners, as a form of linguistic prejudice. Zuidema (2005) maintains that this commonly held belief supports other misconceptions such as the belief that good English "is the everyday spoken language of the most educated and intelligent people" (p. 671). To deny these fallacies, Zuidema boldly asserts that standard English is an abstract ideal that is not based on speech but on the model of written language (p. 671). Therefore, it is pointless to target students of color who speak varied languages as not living up to a standardized ideal of edited American english, in composition courses, because no matter how well educated one is, very few people speak with the polish of revised and edited writing,

which is idealized as standard (p. 671).

Ultimately, Zuidema suggests that educators who perpetuate these myths about standard English, exercise linguistic prejudice in their classrooms. However, acts of "linguicism" are not uncommon, because according to Zuidema linguistic prejudice is an insidious process (p.667). In addition, Greenfield (2011) maintains that educators who promote "standard English" pedagogies are guided by an "unconscious racism," rather than linguistic fact (p. 34). According to Greenfield, believing in standard English perpetuates a racist system because, "when we talk about what constitutes a privileged way of speaking, we obscure the fact that we are not really talking about language at all but about which communities we imagine to be superior (p. 46). Thus, the complex myths about what constitutes good and bad language use are subjective social constructions.

Another misconception in the field of composition is the prevailing notion that orality should be kept separate from written language. In opposition to this argument noted scholars in the field assert that oral language has unique qualities that can enhance academic writing, and these qualities are not errors, because they cause students to produce work that exhibits freshness, and originality (Ampadu, 2004; Anokye, 1997). For example, Elbow (1985) maintains, the best writing has "*voice*, the life and rhythms of speech" (p. 291). Yet some teachers have a tendency "to label students cognitively retarded who tend to exploit those oral or concrete strategies that characterize so much good literature, namely narration, description, invested detail, and expression of feeling" (Elbow, 1985, p. 293). However, literateness in the African American community is measured by one's ability to display successful cleverness

through "intellectual verbal management of significant life situations," which includes displaying attitude through language use (Anokye, 1997; Lee, 1993). For example, Lee (1993) maintains, "whether the text is an oral sermon, political oratory, autobiographical narrative, or simply a good story, language use must demonstrate flair and style, rhythm through selective repetition, and indirection articulated through the use of figurative language" (p. 9). Thus, "style," for many AAL speakers, is a mode of rhetoric that allows one to effectively convey meaning.

Smitherman's (1999) study illuminates the previous scholars' claims in which they describe oral discourse style as an effective mode of communication, and expands this argument to include academic writing. Over a 20-year span, researchers in Smitherman's (1999) study analyzed a total of 2,764 essays, in the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) to assess the effects that students' use of AAL and African American discourse style may have on teacher rater scores. Student essays received two forms of assessment: a holistic and /or a primary trait score. Primary trait scores reflect the measure of student success in accomplishing the specific rhetorical tasks of the assignment, and in this scale matters of mechanics, grammar, and syntax count minimally or not at all (p. 167). The results from Smitherman's study showed that when teachers evaluated papers, using a primary trait scale, Black students "who employed a Black expressive discourse style received higher NAEP scores than those [Black students] who did not" (p. 185).

While AVT use may have increased African American students' "primary trait" scores, Smitherman notes that "African American students have consistently scored lower than their European American counterparts in all rounds of the NAEP since its inception in 1969" (p. 176-

177). However, Smitherman's description of the second scale/holistic scoring criteria for writing assessment complicates these findings and may explain why African American students (who used AVT to write their essays) scores do not parallel those of whites. Holistic scores assess students' overall writing competency, or what NAEP describes as "'a global view of the ideas, language facility, mechanics, and syntax'" (Smitherman, 1997, p. 167). So while African American students, who used AVT to write their essays, received higher primary trait scores, their use of AAL grammar and syntax may have caused them to receive a lower holistic score. In any case, Smitherman's findings reveal that AVT is a rhetorically effective mode of communication that enabled Black students to produce more powerful, meaningful, and highly rated essays (p.186).

2.6 African American Rhetorical Practices to Teach Literacy and Writing Skills

Scholarship on African American Language (AAL) and composition instruction often focus primarily on AAL grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. However research shows that due to a number of societal pressures (e.g. increased facility in code-switching, heightened awareness of the importance of education, media exposure, etc.) these features are converging (in writing), rather than diverging with the language of wider communication (Smitherman, 2000, p. 171). LWC is defined as "a language that facilitates communication beyond one's own speech community, i.e., in this country, European American "standard English" (Smitherman, 1995, p. 228). While it appears that AAL speaking students produce less AAL syntax in writing, these students continue to produce writing that contains strong African American discourse style (Smitherman, 2000; Gilyard and Richardson; 2001).

Further, research shows that African American discourse style or African American verbal tradition (AVT) is often incorporated into academic writing for rhetorical purposes (Ampadu, 2004; Gilyard & Richardson, 2001). For example, Smitherman's (1997) study demonstrates that AVT can be used to help students produce more effective, concrete, readable, and lively written essays for all genres of writing (pg. p.186).

The five AVT features explored in this research are formed by West African communication structures and African worldviews. For example, Ampadu (2004) equates the use of "repetition" in academic discourse to the Afrocentric term "Nommo," (Smith, 1972), which means the potency of the word (p. 139). In speech repetition is a mode of "delivery" and can be very powerful and rhetorically effective in student academic prose such as the narrative, autobiography, and other written work that invites creativity.

"Signifyin[g]" is another AVT feature broadly defined by Smitherman (1999) as the verbal art of ceremonial combativeness in which one person puts down, talks about, 'signifies on' some-one or on something someone has said (p. 26). However "Signifyin[g]" is multi dimensional, having the ability to take on different forms (e.g. direct, and indirect). This research study focuses primarily on the "indirect" form of signifyin[g] as a rhetorical device. Garner and Calloway – Thomas (2004) define signifying/indirection as having certain characteristics:

> Signifying is an alternative message form, a speech act could not be considered signifying without the element of indirection. African Americans through signifying, read between the lines using their own cultural codes and system of analysis as a means of interpretation. (p. 53)

According to Baraka (2000), signifyin[g]/indirection has origins in African tradition, which "aims at circumlocution rather than at exact definition. The direct statement is considered crude and unimaginative; the veiling of all contents in ever-changing paraphrases is considered the criterion of intelligence and personality" (p. 31). In some instances signifyin[g]/indirection can also function as "sounding" in AVT or when the speaker expresses extreme displeasure with, indeed anger at, a particular outcome deemed undeserved, unjust, or demeaning by talking loudly (Troutman, 1997, p. 33).

Call & response is a mode of communication in which, "the audience constantly participates by responding to the speaker, and in most cases the audience members act as co-producers of the text or discourse" (Ampadu, 2004, p.143). Call & response is derived from the traditional African worldview that promotes balance and harmony (Smitherman, 1977, p.104). According to Smitherman (1977) call & response seeks to synthesize speakers and listeners in a unified movement (p. 104). "Emphasis is on group cohesiveness, cooperation, and the collective common good," and focus is on communality rather than individuality (Smitherman, 1977, p. 104).

Lastly, "narrativizing" is a characteristic feature of general Black discursive practices, or when everyday conversational talk may be rendered as a "story" (Smitherman, 1999, p. 275). Narrativizing can be seen diasporically in African and African American communication structures through the roles of griots in African tribal culture, plantation tales and toasts in U.S. slavery, and presently the Hip/Hop Rap generation (Smitherman, 1999, p. 275-276). In AVT curriculum and instruction I compared these five AVT features to American standardized

written communication structures to show students that these specific AVT features may be incorporated into expected conventions for academic writing, and used as tools to accomplish specific rhetorical tasks.

Some African American scholars, particularly in the field of rhetoric and composition, have effectively demonstrated ways to meld AVT and Western classical rhetoric to teach writing. For example, Ampadu's (2004) study on orality and writing explores the rhetorical effects of various schemes of repetition. She maintains that repetition schemes such as anaphora, parallelism, chiasmus, and antithesis are solely identified as classical Greek rhetoric (p. 138). However, "repetition has a longstanding tradition in African American rhetorical practices, since its use is far more prevalent in societies in which prime importance is attached to the spoken word (Ampadu, 2004, pp. 138-139). For example, Ampadu cites Frederick Douglass's (1852/1997) speech "What to the slave is the fourth of July?" to illuminate the careful though that Douglass gave to produce his writing:

> To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy. (p. 288)

Ampadu uses this excerpt to illustrate how parallelism can be used to display logical, orderly sentences, and create a balanced, elegant and clear writing style. Ultimately, in this study

Ampadu uses African American texts as linguistic models to show the importance of repetition in African American oral tradition and to teach her students how to incorporate various repetition schemes in their written speeches.

She also states that students or novice writers must be accurately trained to translate speech into writing (136). Ampadu "strongly endorses the belief that oral language has qualities that can enhance writing" (136). According to Ampadu, students who use repetition in their writing produce texts that contain elements of style, elegance, and persuasion, which allow students to develop effective prose styles and gain control of their writing. She also broadens the scope by asserting that African American oral texts can be used to teach all novice writers from every racial/ethnic background to improve their "persuasive writing style" (137).

Ampadu's essay provides a clear pedagogical procedure for teaching students how to successfully incorporate orality into their writing. Her choice of select written texts and speeches afford students the opportunity to see examples of repetition in written prose, which helps facilitate their development of writing skills that include these oral features.

After their exposure to African American rhetorical practices, particularly repetition forms, students in this class produced a higher percentage of repetition schemes in their final essays. Therefore, this essay is an example of an effective research study that shows students how African American rhetorical practices may be incorporated into expected conventions for academic speech and writing. Ampadu's curriculum was a significant model that I used to help develop a comparative pedagogical approach for this research study, because it shows students how African American discourse style can be used as a rhetorical tool to create more powerful,

dynamic, and clearly written academic essays. And like Ampadu, my goal is to emphasize the value of African American discourse style in school settings.

Gilyard and Richardson (2001) also explore the effects of engaging pedagogies that use African American Discourse Style to teach literacy and writing skills in the college classroom. As a response to the theoretical call of the SRTOL resolution, Gilyard and Richardson provide an example of an empirical study "designed to assess the practicality of implementing the principles of SRTOL with respect to the development of academic writing among African American students" (p. 37). The experimental curriculum designed by these researchers involved training African American students to identify Black discourse patterns from an analytical point of view (p. 43). As a result, researchers found that the African American student participants in the class, as a whole, utilized a total of 15 features of Black discourse style in their academic essays. According to Gilyard and Richardson (2001), using African American rhetorical tradition as the centerpiece for instructional design implemented in this study, helped students develop their written literacy (pgs. 49-50). In addition, Gilyard and Richardson give examples of students' reflections on the course, which suggest that students' perceptions of the curriculum were highly favorable.

2.7 Implications for my Thesis

As evidenced by the literature presented in this chapter, there are few examples of studies that focus on the oral discourse style of AAL to teach literacy and writing skills to college students of all varied racial/ethnic backgrounds. Further, there is a lack of scholars in the field

who demonstrate the positive benefits that competence in AAL and AVT may have to school learning. My thesis study will address these gaps in existing AAL/Ebonics and composition literature in several ways. First, I will explain in-depth how to design empowering writing curriculum instruction that employs comparative pedagogical approaches to literacy and language instruction. Existing literature on AAL has not fully explored the many oral and written rhetorical tools AAL speakers use to communicate, and further, how these African American Discourse patterns influence the English language (Richardson, 2010, p.106).

Secondly, by using qualitative research methods, I will present the "voice of color thesis," through the stories of African American student participants as they discuss their experiences in the research study and with AVT instruction. Current literature on the use of African American rhetorical practices to teach writing gives clear descriptions of teaching methods and procedures, and in-depth analyses of how these pedagogies effect student writing. However, these studies do not monitor and analyze the emotional reactions students may have to the applied pedagogical approach in their studies. Thus, to examine the psychological effects of AVT instruction, I provide opportunities for participants to directly respond to questions about their experience and with the curriculum/course materials. Thirdly, current scholarship on AAL pedagogies and composition instruction discuss the effects of curriculum on primarily African American students. My research broadens this scope to begin to explore how curriculum instruction, which presents African American rhetorical practices as a benefit to academic writers, effects White and Non-Black minority students' perceptions of AAL and AVT.

Lastly, my research will address gaps in rhetoric and writing literature regarding socially

constructed racist ideologies about language, which perpetuate the myth that "Standard English" is the language spoken by privileged White people and does not include the languages of people of color. In this study, students explore how AVT influences American standardized written communication structures, and all students are taught to identify how these features are used in mainstream society. According to Greenfield (2011), Ebonics has historically been used "to communicate messages that non-Ebonics speakers (such as white slave masters) would not understand, thus, many contemporary non-Ebonics speakers, may not know when the rhetoric is being used" (p.45). However, through an intense two-week process of AVT identification exercises, most students were able to identify AVT in both verbal and written communication. As a result, it appears that students may have become more knowledgeable of the rhetoric of people of color, and therefore, they were able to identify these multiple rhetorics in their own conversations and written assignments. Given the lack of research on the oral dimensions of AAL as they affect the teaching of writing, this kind of study has much to offer to the field of composition to advance our understanding on how to effectively teach rhetorical writing strategies to college students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

I designed and studied a new approach for AVT curriculum and instruction in a (Tier 1)

first year writing (FYW) course. In this chapter, I detail the theoretical and methodological

frames of this study examining ways that FYW students engage and respond to AVT curriculum

instruction at a predominately White, midwestern university. I used CRT and CDA to help make

sense of my data from students' written work, my field notes on our classroom experiences, and

the transcriptions from audio-recorded student discussions. It is important to note that my work

is also suited to participant action research (PAR), which shares a similar set of theoretical,

ethical, and methodological principles with CRT, yet CRT is most relevant to my research

purposes.

3.1 Introduction

This research study examined the implications of AVT, a form of African American

discourse style, as a scaffold for teaching rhetorical writing skills and literary and critical

analysis. This examination is related to the broader question of the efficacy of culturally relevant

teaching. As outlined in the introduction, this study is aimed at providing detailed responses to

the following questions:

1. How can curriculum be developed that values, and identifies the written features of AVT

    as standard American rhetorical writing strategies?

2. How do Whites and Non-Black minorities respond to comparative composition instruction that values, and identifies the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies?

   - What are students' pre and post language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in survey responses?
   - What are students' pre and post language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in small group discussions?

3. How do African American students respond to comparative composition instruction that values, and identifies the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies?

   - What are students' pre and post language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in survey responses?
   - What are students' pre and post language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in small group discussions?

4. How does AVT instruction impact students' use of the following five AVT features: repetition/alliteration, signifyin[g] and indirection, call & response, narrativizing, and sounding, in their final essays?

5. What do the insights from this study suggest about curriculum and instruction, which is explicitly intended to value, and identify the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies?

In this study, I proposed that African American students' skills in AVT may be productively drawn upon to teach rhetorical writing skills and critical and literary analysis. I assert that the rhetorical tools of AAL have a major influence on Standard English rhetorical conventions and the verbal traditions of AAL are often used to enhance written communication, particularly academic writing. Specifically, I have argued that a comparative approach to AAL instruction, which does not highlight deficit models or engage code-switching pedagogies, and that explicitly acknowledges the impact of AAL on the English Language will help all students gain a greater appreciation for AAL and an understanding that AAL features can be advantageous in school. Below, I present the data collection site, procedures and selection of participants, explain the methodologies and present the data collection methods, data sources and analysis techniques, role of the researcher, as well as the benefits and limitations of the study.

3.2 Context

Site Selection

The setting and context for the study took place in two (Tier 1) first-year writing courses, with a base theme of "race and ethnicity," at a midwestern university. Courses in the first-year writing program are capped at 24-27 students. As a guest lecturer, I performed AVT instruction in Dr. Gladys Brown's[1] first year writing class for a total of four class sessions (1:50 minutes per session). The course centered "explorations of human origins, race, and language" as the overarching them. The course objectives were drafting, revising, and editing compositions derived from readings on the experience of American ethnic and racial groups to develop skills in narration, persuasion, analysis, and documentation. The writing course began September 1,

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[1] All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

2012, and I entered into the research site on October 3, 2012.

Selection of Participants

Two weeks before I performed the instructional unit, I provided students in both classes with a consent form, asking them to participate in the study (see appendix A). The consent form made clear that all information would be de-identified. I briefly explained the research project and students were presented with the option of being a participant or opting out of the study. Students were informed that their grade would not be affected in any way if they chose not to participate. However, students who chose not to participate were made aware that they would still be required to engage actively in all classroom discussions and complete all class assignments. Combining the number of students in both classes, a total of 30 students volunteered to participate in the present study. The racial/ethnic make-up of the student participants was 12 Black, 11 White, 4 Asian, and 3 Latino students. During the data collection, I did not assume that all African American participants were AAL speakers or that they identified with AVT. Similarly, it was not assumed that non-black student participants did not speak AAL and could not identify with AVT.

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Sources

Qualitative researchers often rely on several recursive methods for gathering data. This study includes six data sources: 1) instructional unit design process; 2) fieldnotes collected during and after class; 3) audio taped transcriptions of students' reflective discussions; 4) audio taped transcription of teacher interview, and; 5) students' written work and documents (e.g., pre

and post essays and pre and post surveys).

Instructional Unit Design Process

In AVT curriculum, I compared five AVT features to American standardized written communication structures to show students that AVT features may be incorporated into expected conventions for academic writing and used as tools to accomplish specific rhetorical tasks. The instructional unit was designed with four phases. In the first phase (day one), students completed pre-surveys (see Appendix B), which contained six questions that asked students to define key terms (e.g., AAL/Ebonics and AVT) and also to rate the appropriateness of AAL and AVT features in academic settings on a scale from 1-4 (1-not appropriate; 2-somewhat appropriate; 3-definitely appropriate; 4-extremely appropriate). The pre-survey was used to determine students' language attitudes and perceptions of AAL before their exposure to AVT course materials and instructional stimuli. The survey also functioned as a tool to analyze students' prior knowledge of historical, political, and social conventions related to AAL/Ebonics.

After completing the pre survey students were introduced to the topic of study. A guest lecturer and fourth year college student at the university, who is proficient in AAL studies, gave an informal and interactive presentation on the linguistic structure and historical background of AAL. Following the presentation, using an AVT tool I constructed, I taught students the five features of AVT, and how to identify these features in verbal and written communication (see table 1.1 below).

Table 1.1

AVT Comparative Tool

African American Verbal Tradition	Definition:	Rhetorical Device in Academic Writing
Sounding	The speaker expresses extreme displeasure with, indeed anger at, a particular outcome deemed undeserved, unjust, or demeaning by talking loudly. (Troutman, 1997, pgs. 33-34)	**Extra Declarative Sentences:** Rhetorical Questions, Exclamation Marks (!) "Shouldn't students be given the right to discover and warm up their authentic voices before they add on other voices? Isn't that precisely the philosophy we prescribe but do not practice? Do we aim to create humanoids who write in simulated voices, not possessing individualized senses of self?" (Troutman, 1997, p. 36).
Repetition	An involvement strategy in which a word, phrase, or larger unit is used more than once to create meaning through strategies based on sound. Key words and sounds are repeated in succession, both for emphasis and effect. (Ampadu, 2004, p. 138)	**Anaphora, Parallelism, Chiasmus, Antithesis, and Alliteration** "All my life I have been suffering for words. Words have been the source of the pain and the way to heal. Struck as a child for talking, for speaking out of turn, for being out of my place. Struck as a grown woman for not knowing when to shut up, for not being willing to sacrifice words for desire. Struck by writing a book that disrupts. There are many ways to be hit" (Hooks, 1997, p. 258)

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Table 1.1 (cont'd)

Call-Response		
	The audience constantly participates by responding to the speaker, and in most cases the audience members act as co-producers of the text or discourse. (Ampadu, 2004, p. 143)	**Rhetorical Questions/Dialogue** "Does Culture Matter?"
Narrativizing	A characteristic feature of general Black discursive practices, or when everyday conversational talk may be rendered as a "story" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 275)	**Narrative Sequencing: Anecdotal Leads, Conclusion/Reflection** "While sitting in the only black barbershop in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on the morning of writing this prelude, trying to think of the best way to acquaint you with what this book is about and who I am as the author behind it, I was struck with just how different I am from a lot of other black men, and yet again I was compelled to acknowledge my desire to be like them." (Young, 2007)

Table 1.1 (cont'd)

Signifying/Indirection		
	Signifying is a ritualized kind of put-down, an insult, a way of talking about, needling, or *signifyin on* someone else. Sometimes it's done just for fun, in conversations with friends and close associates. Other times, the put down is used for a more serious purpose. In this communicative practice the speaker deploys exaggeration, irony, and indirection as a way of saying something on two different levels at once. (Smitherman, 1999, p. 26).	**Personal Narrative, Scare Quotes, Rhetorical Questions** [O]ur children were named from some event, some circumstance, or fancied foreboding at the time of their birth. I was named Olaudah, which, in our language, signifies "vicissitude or fortunate," also, "one favoured, and having a loud voice and well spoken." I remember we never polluted the name of the object of our adoration; on the contrary, it was always mentioned with the greatest reverence; and we are totally unacquainted with swearing, and all those terms of abuse and reproach which find their way so readily and copiously into the language of more civilized people. (Equiano, 1789: 20)

Lastly, I introduced students to the Western rhetorical writing strategy: revision, arrangement, invention, delivery and style (RAIDS). RAIDS (see Appendix D), is a rhetorical concept constructed by DeJoy (2004) to counter the prewrite/write/re-write pedagogies of the first phase process movement.[2] According to DeJoy (2004), prewrite/write/re-write pedagogies

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[2] The first phase process movement is defined as having first phase writing process models that "bracket student subjectivity in ways that make it difficult for students and their discourses to become active agents in the field" (DeJoy, 2004, p. 5).

restrict students' and teachers' abilities to explore the many ways in which we process knowledge and the products of our processes (p. 73). Ultimately, DeJoy seeks to bridge the gap between reading and writing in the field of composition by encouraging students to analyze "products" or texts in ways that challenge students' subjectivity. For example, invention is positioned as a process in which reading can be used to "expand our ideas of what it means to be a writer" (p. 79). Arrangement is also expanded to go beyond the organization of things within the text, but also to include, "how things are being put in relationship with one another" (p. 72). Revision not only encourages students to make changes within the written text, but also to consider changes that must take place outside of the text, causing students to rethink their own experiences, standards, and expectations (p. 83). Finally, delivery and style activities explore styles of language and media used to meet the writing expectations for the situation (DeJoy, 2011).

RAIDS is used at many academic institutions throughout the nation as a tool to promote inquiry based learning, encouraging students to meet a number of research outcomes. More specifically, RAIDS "permits students to think more critically about how they are locating, critiquing, and evaluating the sources they use in their research papers and projects by asking specifically targeted questions about the relationship between their sources and the arguments students aim to present" (DeJoy, 2004, p. 53). I positioned AVT within the framework of RAIDS to enhance students' understanding of rhetorical writing strategies and we discussed how the five main features of AVT could be used in written communication to reflect and to achieve these research outcomes. The purpose of this phase of the instructional unit is to help students make

the distinction between AAL and AVT and to explore the rhetorical functions of AVT features.

In the second phase of the instructional unit (day two) students explored and examined the function of the AVT feature "repetition." Repetition was described as a method of delivery and style in academic writing. In this class session, I taught students the following five schemes of repetition: anaphora, parallelism, alliteration, chiasmus, and antithesis. In addition, students read Ampadu's (2004) text, which discussed repetition as a longstanding tradition in African and African American rhetorical practices (p.139). This text also detailed the value of modeling orality as a rhetorical practice in academic writing. As an in-class writing activity, students read "Writing is My Passion" by bell hooks (1997), and students were asked to code this text for the author's use of the five schemes of repetition listed previously.

In the third phase (day three), using the AVT map, I explained the African and African American origins of AVT. Students also learned to identify the next two AVT features: narrativizing and signifying/indirection in academic writing. I presented the AVT feature "narrativizing" as a tool of revision and invention to illustrate that some rhetorical strategies may overlap. For example, I presented/discussed with students optional ways of using narrativizing as a tool to make meaning and inspire change through use of storytelling; simultaneously, and at the same time their use of narrative may also call up beliefs and world-views of the audience. I presented the AVT feature signifying/indirection as an arrangement strategy in academic writing. Students read Smitherman's (1977) text on "narrative sequencing," which describes the African origins of narrative and how it has evolved over time taking on many forms in African and African American culture (i.e. toasts & tales, sermons, etc.). Short narratives written by

contemporary African American scholars (Richardson, 2003;Young, 2007) were also read and discussed to explore how these authors used personal narrative to revise a situation or inspire change. In addition, students discussed the personal narrative in relation to delivery and style strategies. For example, students read Ballenger's (2011) essay "Writing Multiple Leads," which describes the narrative as a communication strategy that is rhetorically effective as an anecdotal lead in academic essays (p.185).

To examine the AVT feature signifying/indirection, students read Mitchell Kernan's (1972) text, which describes signifying as a "way of encoding messages or meaning in natural conversation, which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection" (p. 152). In this text, Mitchell-Kernan gives several examples of signifying/indirection in verbal communication. During class, I showed students examples from alternative media and written excerpts from academic/formal writing (Equiano, 1967; Kozol, 1991) that used signifying/indirection. After a detailed discussion of signifying/indirection, students were given a homework assignment, which required them to locate examples of signifying/indirection in texts they usually encounter outside of academia (e.g. social media, poetry, music lyrics, television shows, etc.). I specifically encouraged students to utilize digital spaces in this particular assignment and for school literacy work to honor the ways literacy exists in the lives of contemporary urban youth communities (Paris & Kirkland, 2011). As a result, students presented examples from text messages, social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Myspace), poetry, TV shows, music lyrics, and other forms of alternative media. Students were also instructed to code their first assigned essay in the course for features of AVT and to write a one page response paper addressing the following questions:

Which AVT features do you use and why? How do these features help you serve a rhetorical purpose or help you achieve your revision outcome?

The fourth phase of the instructional unit and final class session (day four) served as a reflection period in which students discussed their homework assignments. For example, in full class discussion, students reflected on their response papers and their results from the coding exercise in which they were asked to code their own essays for AVT use. I encouraged students to share some examples from their essays of their use of AVT and the rhetorical moves they associated with these rhetorical writing strategies. After the full class discussion students individually presented their second homework assignment/examples of signifying/indirection to the class. Following the presentations, students participated in a lighthearted interactive activity in which they voted for the best examples of signifying/indirection presented by their peers. Next, students engaged in an informal full class discussion about AVT in which students identified new features or more current developments of AVT (e.g. shout-outs, freestylin', and spoken word etc.). Lastly, students took a post-survey, which was a replication of the pre survey, to determine possible changes in their language attitudes and perceptions of AAL and AVT. This survey was also used to assess student levels of knowledge acquired during the course of instruction in regards to AVT.

Field Notes

I produced field notes on students' in-class learning experiences and reactions to course materials and instruction (in all classes). After every formal class session I immediately took notes in my journal on the outcomes of the class sessions. I took notes for approximately two

hours after each class session. I recorded specific moments when students appeared to enjoy the lessons and class activities, I recorded moments when students appeared to be confused, and I recorded specific moments when students were exceptionally quiet or defensive. In addition to students' responses to the daily class sessions and course material I also documented my own ideas and experiences as a teacher and researcher during the course of the study. I reflected on my feelings while teaching and how I responded to student questions and comments. I recorded anything I noticed in my teaching strategies/moments in the classroom, which facilitated or enhanced effective learning of the comparative capabilities of AVT and more traditional approaches to teaching rhetorical writing concepts. I also reflected on my teaching and how I may have promoted or caused specific moments of learning to occur.

Audio taped Transcriptions of Students' Reflective Discussions

My decision to collect data from narrative discussions rather than interviews is consistent with CRT epistemology, which values narration as a core source of human meaning making (Bernal, 2002). After completing the four class sessions on AVT, student participants from varied racial/ethnic backgrounds were placed in small discussion groups of three-four participants. I asked students to respond to three questions about their experience in the course and with AVT instruction (see Appendix E). To document their conversations, students were given an electronic recording device, to encourage students to talk freely I, the teacher-researcher,[3] was not present during their small group discussions.

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[3] Teacher research is defined here according to Cochran- Smith and Lytle as "systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers" and is based on the belief that, through their own research, teachers have the ability to "strengthen their judgments and improve their own classroom practices" (p. 7-8).

Audio Taped Transcription of Teacher Interview

In early December 2012, I conducted a 60-minute interview with the teacher - participant, Dr.

Gladys Brown. The purpose of this interview[4] (see Appendix F for the protocol) was to solicit

background information from the teacher-participant. I worked closely with the teacher-

participant and we had established a strong relationship. Seidman (2006) maintains however, "

[i]nterviewers and the participants who are friends usually assume that they understand each

other. Instead of exploring assumptions and seeking clarity about events and experiences, they

tend to assume that they know what is being said" (p. 42). Therefore, it was extremely important

to create some distance, so as to assure that I took nothing for granted. Dr. Brown and I

discussed her experiences with teaching AAL and her observations during the course of AVT

instruction. In addition, I asked Dr. Brown about her experiences working with students during

and after the AVT study was performed.

Students' Written Work and Documents

I used the following documents to conduct this study: students' pre and post essays

(paper 1/ paper 2), students' pre and post surveys, daily class lesson plans, assignment sheets,

media/video clips, AVT and RAIDS/rhetorical writing strategy handouts as well as secondary

materials, such as AVT identification exercises and student response papers. These documents

helped to illuminate the teaching content and to provide students with opportunities to display

their understanding of AVT instruction.

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[4] The interview protocol comes from Dr. Dorinda Carter's dissertation, "In a sea of White people": An analysis of the experiences and behaviors of high-achieving Black students in a predominately white high school" (Harvard University, 2005).

Students' Pre- and Post- Essays

Two essays were collected from students: 1) the lived literacy letter (pre essay #1) and 2) the analysis paper/expository essay (post essay #2) (see Appendix G for full/detailed assignment sheet for essay #1). Students uploaded these essays and response papers to a course management website and also presented the instructor-researcher with a printed copy. The first essay (paper #1), the lived literacy letter, is traditionally the first essay the students produce in FYW at this particular university. It is commonly written in narrative format, which is often rich with student expression and displays many oral features. This essay was compared to the second expository essay (paper #2), which is a more formal academic essay, and thus requires students to focus on clear analytical writing, especially asserting an original claim and substantiating it. [5]

Students' Pre- and Post-Surveys

Student participants were required to take pre and post surveys to determine their language attitudes and perceptions of AVT. The surveys asked students to define AAL and AVT as well as rate the appropriateness of using AAL and AVT in academic settings. The pre/post surveys contained the same questions and were used to determine the immediate effects of AVT instruction and student retention of course matter. The pre survey was used to evaluate the level of students' prior knowledge on AAL/Ebonics and AVT. The post survey was given to assess how much student's learned from the AVT instruction, as well as to detect possible changes in language attitudes towards AAL and AVT.

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[5] The teacher-participant, Dr. Gladys Brown, constructed all course assignments.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Analytical Frameworks

Critical Race Theory

CRT helped me understand the effects race may have had on students' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions when exposed to anti-racist pedagogy that challenges negative assumptions about people of color in relation to education. CRT provides a tool for analyzing potential applications of race in relation to educational research. For example, there are five defining tenets of CRT, which support raced epistemologies: 1) importance of transdisciplinary approaches, such as ethnic studies, women studies, etc., 2) emphasis on experiential knowledge, 3) challenge to dominant ideologies, 4) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, and 5) a commitment to social justice (Bernal, 2002, pp. 109-110). Of these five tenets, three are applicable to my study: 1) centrality of experiential knowledge, 2) challenge to dominant ideologies, and 3) commitment to social justice.

Centrality of experiential knowledge was applied to my analysis of African American student responses in directed small group conversations in which students of color used counterstories, narratives, testimonies, and oral histories to illuminate their experiences with AVT curriculum and instruction. The counterstories/narratives from African American students also helped contextualize or situate the meaning of small group responses from White students, and other students from varied racial/ethnic backgrounds, as well as the overall results from

other collected data materials (e.g. surveys and student essays). In this formal learning environment African American students' life experiences were viewed as strengths as opposed to deficits and are used in this study as a form of analysis to interpret the results from the data.

I applied the next CRT tenet, challenge to dominant ideologies, to the development of AVT curriculum. This tenet helped me expand traditional notions of what counts as "knowledge" to include African American cultural and linguistic ways of knowing in formal schooling as a method to resist dominant ideologies, which may confine AVT to "home language" or household knowledge. Lastly, the tenet of CRT, which is committed to social justice, is applied to the theoretical frame. For example, I draw from two social justice approaches to language instruction, Ladson-Billings' (1994) culturally relevant and Paris's (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy, to develop daily lessons and select course materials that resist common code-switching methodologies, and instead work to ensure the valuing and maintenance of African American language and culture. In addition, the small group discussion questions are also designed to prompt students to discuss social justice issues and the relevance of educational research and practice such as AVT curriculum, which seeks to promote political and social change on behalf of African American communities. My commitment to social justice is also shown in chapter five, where African American students' transcripts from small group discussions are analyzed for counter-narratives, that often go untold or ignored altogether; in fact, they unpack truths and challenge master narratives (Miller and Kirkland, 2010, p. 3).

Open Coding

Key transcripts, and pre and post survey answers/results corresponding to my research

questions were analyzed using open coding. For analysis, I reduced the data (i.e., text data, including transcripts, surveys, and written essays) into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes (Creswell, 2007, p.148). I performed three common qualitative data analysis strategies: 1) preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data: transcripts, surveys, and written essays), 2) reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, 3) representing the data in figures, tables, and as discussion (Creswell, 2007, p. 148).

I began analyzing data during and shortly after the 2 weeks of formal AVT instruction. After collecting pre surveys, I began to analyze these documents for emerging codes, categories, and themes by using a "lean coding" process – five or six categories with shorthand labels or codes (Creswell, 2007, p. 152). I read the transcripts from the small group, student-led, recorded conferences in their entirety several times and immersed myself in the details to get a sense of the discussion as a whole before breaking it into parts (Agar, 1980, p. 103). I also wrote analytic memos (i.e. short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the reader) in the margins of fieldnotes, transcripts, and student written texts to combine my thoughts about participants' responses, actions, and understandings concerning the AVT instruction.

I utilized categorical aggregation for data analysis and interpretation (Stake, 1995). Through this form of data analysis, in each content chapter (chapters 4-6), I aggregated the transcript data from small group conversations into approximately 10 broad categories. For example, I came up with the following categories: interactional patterns (i.e. humor, tension, silence, enthusiasm), problem solving (textual/social level), language as biology, racial stereotypes, lack of interest, changing laws, whiteness, whiteness embedded in comments,

fairness and equity, and double consciousness. I then collapsed the categories into 3-5 common themes that emerged from the data. For instance, in chapter four, I constructed three primary categories: enacting white privilege, resisting racial stereotypes, changes in students' language attitudes by looking at student transcripts. I looked for patterns across categories, and created a table to show the relationship between categories. This cross case synthesis allowed me to look for similarities and differences within the study. Finally, I developed generalizations from the data and how those generalizations compare and contrast with existing literature on AAL writing instruction.

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is an analytical theory that examines "the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 353). After generating the primary themes I used CDA to perform a close textual analysis of select transcripts to describe the form and function of these oral and written texts, and to offer an interpretation, and explanation of the relationships between my text data, discursive practices, and social practices (Rogers and Mosley, 2006, p. 472) I used Rogers & Mosley's (2006) coding chart, which brought together literature in racism with the forms and functions of talk. After identifying key transcripts for each theme I conducted a CDA at the intersecting levels of genre, discourse, and style (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). I looked for reoccurring themes and patterns across the discussions, silences and absences in the data, inconsistent data, and emerging themes.

When analyzing field notes, I looked for students' use of AVT in the classroom, students' moments of understanding, students' familiarity with AVT, as well as students' moments of confusion. I compared/contrasted moments of learning with shared classroom activities to make connections between theory and practice or improved comprehension of writing expectations.

Students' written essays were examined before and after AVT instruction to assess their skillfulness in using the five AVT features in their written assignments (paper1/paper 2) to accomplish the rhetorical demands of the task. The student essays were coded for the five features of AVT taught and selected in the study: repetition, signifyin[g]/indirection, call & response, testifying/narrativizing, and sounding.

For the AVT feature repetition, I coded student essays for five schemes: chiasmus, parallelism, anaphora, antithesis, and alliteration. The following definitions and examples of repetition forms were used to code student essays for these specific features. The first scheme, chiasmus, which relates to word order reversal in a consecutive clause, "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first," can significantly be used to involve the audience in oral discourse (Tannen, 1994). Parallelism, which is the repetition of similar grammatical structures, is used because of its symmetry and balance. Parallelism may appear in various forms. For example, the following forms of parallelism were coded in student essays:

> parallelism as a balanced series of –ing words, "reading, listening, working," a balanced
> series of descriptive words, "exhausted, irritable, hungry," a balanced series of to be, to
> live, to have, "My hope for retirement is to be healthy, to live in a comfortable house, and
> to have plenty of money," or balanced verbs and word order, "puts out the trash, checks

the locks, turns on the burglar alarm." (Langan, 2008)

Anaphora was coded as the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses, "They will take a line from the Bible that may say something like slaves are to be humble servants to their masters, and they will use this line to keep slaves in check" (Ampadu, p.148) I coded Antithesis in student essays as a figure of speech in which an opposition or contrast of ideas is expressed by parallelism of words that are the opposites of, or strongly contrasted with, each other, "I know what it is to have life taken from me and to feel the joy of having life renewed." Lastly, I coded alliteration in essays as the repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words. According to Smitherman (1977), repetition and alliterative word-play is used for both emphasis and effect, "In the early sixties, when blacks were pushing hard in the South for the right to vote, Malcolm X cautioned America that it would be either voting or violence. He expressed it in the simple alliterative dichotomy: 'the ballot or the bullet'" (p. 143). Examples of alliteration in student essays were coded that appeared in this tonal semantic form, having similar rhetorical effects.

According to Smitherman (1999) indicates that signifying/indirection may appear in speech in the following ways:

as a ritualized kind of put-down, an insult, a way of talking about, needling, or *signifyin on* someone else. Sometimes it's done just for fun, in conversations with friends and close associates. Other times, the put down is used for a more serious purpose. In this communicative practice the speaker deploys exaggeration, irony, and indirection as a way of saying something on two different levels at once. It is often used to send a message of

social critique, a bit of social commentary on the actions or statements of someone who is in need of a wake-up call (p. 26)

The forms of signifying/indirection described above were coded when they appeared in students' written texts through indirect language use, punctuation devices (e.g. scare quotes), rhetorical questions, and narrative sequencing used strategically to convey a message or to get the audience to consider an alternative viewpoint. Additionally, signifying was not coded in student essays if it did not contain the element of indirection.

According to Noonan-Wagner (1981) researchers have concluded that students from an AAL background write discourse that is influenced by the Black religious tradition (as cited in Ampadu, 2004). Thus, in student essays I looked for examples of call response, which is a verbal tradition rooted in African American churches, in which the audience constantly participates by responding to the speaker (Ampadu, 2004). For example, Rickford and Rickford (1999), in their observation of civil rights activist Reverend Dr. Jeremiah Wright, conclude, "Black preachers are famous for demanding answers to rhetorical questions" (p. 51). For example, when preachers sense a lull moment "they will not hesitate to ask, 'I'm not boring y'all am I? Or 'How much time I got left?' To which the only proper response, of course, is a hearty 'No sir!' or Take your time, Preach!'" (Rickford & Rickford, 1999, p. 51). Thus, rhetorical questions were coded in student essays as examples of call response because, as shown above, rhetorical questions may be used as a rhetorical device to speak directly to an audience and to gain the reader's attention.

Narrativizing was coded in student essays when the relating of events (real or hypothetical) were utilized by students as a rhetorical strategy "to explain a point, to persuade

holders of opposing views to one's own point of view, and in general to 'win friends and influence people'" (Smitherman, 1977, p.148). Each form of narrativizing in student essays was counted as one example if the narrative included related events. If a student began a new narrative in another section of the essay for a different purpose or a set of events I counted this narrating event as a separate form.

Lastly, sounding, or when a speaker expresses extreme displeasure with, indeed anger at, a particular outcome deemed undeserved, unjust, or demeaning by talking loudly (Troutman, 1997, pgs. 33-34) is coded in student essays as evidence of strong language use (e.g. "It **annoys** me that…"). Sounding features were easily identifiable in student essays as extra declarative sentences or exclamatory statements in which students utilized exclamation marks to emphasize a point. After all AVT features were coded, I analyzed the changes in the amount of AVT features in students' pre and post essays to determine if students increased, decreased, or maintained their AVT use, which allowed me to draw conclusions about the possible psychological effects of the curriculum on students language attitudes and perceptions of Ebonics and AVT, perceptions on speech and writing.

3.5 Dependability and Quality

Guba and Lincoln (1994) "see the concept of reliability as a criterion by which to judge qualitative research as belonging to the positivist or postpositivist paradigm" (as cited in Brock-Utne, 1996, p. 8) Thus, these scholars suggest that a more appropriate concept for qualitative researchers is "dependability" because according to Kleven (1995) some qualitative researchers view reliability within qualitative research as an unattainable and irrelevant demand (as cited in

Brock-Utne, 1996, p.8).

Thus, I performed a number of strategies to help strengthen the dependability of my research findings and interpretation of data sources. I triangulated data sources (e.g. student directed conversations, field notes, surveys, essays etc.) to avoid researcher biases and assumptions that often result from limited amounts of data collection. I also coded student essays for the five AVT features using an AVT tool that includes definitions and examples from noted AAL scholars in the field of composition and rhetoric. Lastly, I, compared my analysis of small group discussion transcripts with an AAL expert, who also analyzed the transcriptions/data from small-group discussions to help validate conclusions drawn from student responses to the open-ended discussion questions.

3.6 Role of the Researcher

As an African American student and teacher, my personal experiences and challenges assisting students with their written translation of oral linguistic features in AVT informs my construction of lessons, curriculum, and research design as well as my analytical interpretation of student written texts. For example, I have experience working with students in one-with-one writing conferences in which we often discuss how to represent oral features in writing in the most effective ways and for rhetorical purposes. I drew from my experiences conversing with students and evaluating their written texts to design the four sessions of AVT instruction.

Also as an AAL speaker I am familiar with the lived sociocultural realities of AAL speakers in African American communities. Thus, I was able to use this knowledge to construct daily lessons and meaningful assignments that build bridges between African American cultural

communities and school experiences. My competence in AAL studies (i.e. undergraduate and graduate AAL courses) also allowed me to easily identify the AVT features that are most prevalent in AAL speakers' writing, and to design a curriculum that highlights those particular features.

I was emotionally and intellectually invested in the outcome of the teaching of AVT because, as mentioned in chapter 1, AAL scholarship helped me improve my academic writing, which ultimately led to my academic advancement and opportunities to further my educational experiences (e.g. graduate studies, academic awards, education related job opportunities, scholarships and awards/fellowships). AAL scholarship taught me that I was not incompetent because I struggled in writing courses; instead AAL scholarship restored the confidence I had in my writing and speaking skills, and enhanced my ability to master academic English. Therefore, when designing AVT curriculum, I knew the possibilities of such pedagogy for African American students. As a former struggling writer and now PhD candidate in writing and rhetoric, I am living proof that minimal exposure to scholarship on AAL may spark cultural awareness in an African American student that may strengthen their confidence in their academic abilities and thus empower them to seek and obtain further academic success.

3.7 Benefits and Limitations

Many research studies on AAL and composition instruction focus solely on the effects this teaching can have on African American students. The site and design of this study allows me to broaden the frame to include and make observations on the opportunity this form of instruction has to enhance the writing skills of students from varied racial/ethnic backgrounds.

By teaching AVT as a rhetorical benefit to all students, I am able to observe how these rhetorical strategies affect AVT speakers' perceptions of their language, as well as non-AVT speakers and their perceptions of AAL and AVT.

The SRTOL policy and CCCC's Language Policy Committee calls for the development of pedagogical strategies in the field that allow students to preserve their heritage and language/dialect by creating curriculum instruction that allows non-mainstream language varieties to enter into the academic classroom. The present research study answers this call and responds by developing teaching practices that allow AAL speakers to preserve and develop their existing linguistic skills and capabilities.

Due to limited amounts of data in the field at large and lack of research on comparative methods to teaching AAL in composition, this study has the potential to make a significant impact and contribution to the field of composition and Black Language studies. It will also serve as a model for scholars interested in these multiple forms of analyses to build on and enhance future research aimed at integrating dominant and marginalized language groups.

One significant limitation of this research study is the lack of discussion on class as it relates to AAL and AVT. For example, Kochman (1981) states, "Because the term *black* describes the patterns and perspectives of black "community" people, there are those who will argue that these are *class* as opposed to *cultural* patterns and perspectives" (p. 14). Further, Kochman explores how racial segregation plays a major role in causing black rural and urban communities to retain their ethnic patterns and perspectives. In contrast, the black middle-class may not retain as much of these ethnic patterns due to their social networks and level of

education, which "has brought them more within the sphere of influence of dominant white cultural norms and values" (p. 14). Thus, arguments on class are relevant to the discussion of AVT and may support the need for culturally sustaining pedagogies in higher education, especially for African American college students.

The small groups for student led recorded conversations were constructed based on student attendance. I was unable to construct specific groups based on students' survey responses because some students were absent during the days I chose to record these conversations. However, on the days of recording I did attempt to construct groups that were ethnically diverse to see how students' different racial/ethnic backgrounds may affect their conversations and communication with one another. I also strategically constructed one all White group and two African American student groups to specifically make direct comparisons between these two groups in my analysis. My aim was to create groups that consist of only three students, however due to lack of time and an even amount of participants, some groups contained four students. When analyzing the recorded conversations it was clear that the small groups, which contained only three student participants generated more engaging conversation then groups, which had four student participants. I was able to make this determination based on the amount of time students spent in their small group discussions, which was significantly longer in groups of 3 participants as opposed to groups with four participants, and the in-depth information that was shared, which was substantially more detailed in groups of 3 participants. Overall, the smaller groups, which contained only three students, engaged in longer conversations and more detailed debates when answering the discussion questions they were provided.

In terms of coding the student essays, I aimed to substantiate my findings/numerical data with inter-coder reliability. However, I was unable to secure two AAL experts to triangulate my findings across. In future studies on AVT I will elicit the help of two AAL experts to analyze the student written essays for evidences of student use of the five AVT features.

Class sessions were performed over the course of two weeks; therefore, the daily class lessons contained heavy content. In future studies on AVT I will allot more time for class sessions and expand the study over the course of a semester. This will allow students time to fully engage with the material and learn AVT features in-depth in ways that will enhance their understanding of AAL, AVT, and the importance of linguistic diversity.

Lastly, due to time constraints I was unable to conduct member checks. Thus, participants were not interviewed individually in this study. This omission does not allow students' voices to enter into the research during or after the end of the course, so some analysis is speculative & does not allow the students' voices to enter into the analysis.

CHAPTER 4

AVT CURRICULUM: A PEDAGOGICAL SITE OF RESISTANCE TO RACIST &
STEREOTYPICAL PERCEPTIONS ABOUT AAL AND AVT

"When people hear AVT they think of African American people and say it's like how they speak

and everything, but when she [teacher-researcher] was talking… I'm a Hispanic and I was like –

we use that kind of language. We talk like that. Every time we talk we use stories to get

something across – like every time! And we cut off words and stuff like that. It's like we don't

even speak Spanish correctly. Most of the [Hispanic] people put English answers together and

so we make up words and stuff like that. So I saw a connection there. It's not only African

American people, it's all types of people."

-Belicia

4.1 Introduction

A major component of my research explores the effects of a comparative approach to

composition instruction, which demonstrates that some features of AVT (e.g. the 5 AVT features

presented in this study) are American standardized communication structures and may be

employed in academic writing. Additionally, the curriculum shows students that these features

are rhetorically effective modes of communication. Thus, the components of AVT curriculum

discussed in this chapter sought to challenge the dominant and racist ideologies about

AAL/Ebonics, discussed earlier in chapter 2, which assert that AAL/Ebonics does not have value

in academic settings. Therefore, many of the readings, writing exercises, and

lectures/presentations, resist some of the stereotypical perceptions about AAL/Ebonics students

may bring with them to the academic classroom.

4.2 Student Language Attitudes

In the beginning of this classroom-based research study, students were given a pre survey to determine their familiarity with key terms such as AAL/Ebonics and AVT. The pre survey was compared to the post survey to examine any changes that may have occurred in students' answers to specific questions after their exposure to AVT instruction. In this chapter, I will analyze students' answers to key questions on pre and post surveys comparing them with students' responses in small groups, to reveal possible changes in students' language attitudes towards AAL/AVT.

Survey Results

Students were asked the following question on the pre and post survey: "Do you speak AAL/Ebonics?" As an answer, students could select either "Yes," "No," or "Sometimes." Results showed that, for this question #2 on the pre survey, 41% of students answered either, "Yes" or "Sometimes" and 59% answered, "No." However, post survey results showed that after AVT instruction, 62% of students answered, "Yes" or "Sometimes," and 38% answered "No." Overall, after having AVT instruction, there appears to have been a small increase in students who identified as AAL speakers on their post surveys.

The increase in students who identified as AAL speakers may not be significant; however, it is important to note that students were taught the difference between AAL and AVT and there was no question on the survey that asked students, "Do you speak AVT?" Therefore,

the results for this question may not be the most accurate, because students were not given the option to identify as both AVT and/or AAL speakers, which may have caused some students to conflate the two terms. Although AVT exists as an outgrowth of AAL there is a possibility to separate the two. AVT is the rhetoric of AAL.

However, the increase may be attributed to the deliberate positionality of AVT in this research as an advanced, intellectual mode of communication, which may have caused some student participants to seek to establish themselves as AAL speakers and/or fluent communicators in AVT. For example, as shown in the epigraph above, in small groups some non-African American minorities discussed how specific features of AVT are used frequently in their own cultural verbal traditions. Belicia states, "... I'm a Hispanic and I was like – we use that kind of language. We talk like that. Every time we talk we use stories to get something across – like every time!" Other non-African American minority students also identified as AVT speakers and some challenged the curriculum or made claims that AVT did not originate with African and African Americans, and instead had roots in their own specific cultures. For example, in the following conversation a small group of students respond to the discussion question, "What I thought was most interesting/distinctive and/or surprising about learning AVT?" In this dialogue a Korean student rejects the African origins of AVT and instead asserts that AVT has origins in Korea.

1. AVT Across Cultures

1 Kyung: I think the interesting point is that I'm from Korea and many Koreans use

2   the 5 method of AVT, even, the Korean did not have contact with Africa.

3   But it is used in Korea, so that was interesting.

4 Katie: You mean without knowing it, that, they use it?

5 Kyung: Uh-huh.

In conversation #1, the Korean student, Kyung, states that Koreans use the five features of AVT. He also makes clear that "the Korean[s] did not have contact with Africa." His statement indirectly suggests that the claims made in AVT instruction, regarding the African origins of AVT, are problematic because Koreans had no contact with Africa, and therefore could not have been influenced by African language patterns. Ultimately, this student's statement strongly implies that the five features of AVT may have roots in Korean culture. Overall, the small group discussions in which students explored the origins of AVT are encouraging, because the two student responses above, from Belecia and Kyung, suggests that AVT instruction may encourage other students from varied racial/ethnic backgrounds to explore and consider African and African American culture/linguistic practices in relation to their own cultural language patterns.

To answer one of my research questions, "What are [African American] students' pre and post language attitudes towards AAL and AVT as shown in survey responses?" I specifically examined changes in the African American student response on pre and post surveys to question #2, "Do you speak AAL/Ebonics?" On the post test, one African American student's answer shifted from "No" to "Sometimes," three African American students' answers shifted from "sometimes" to "Yes," and only one African American student's answer changed, from "Sometimes" to "No." The seven remaining African American students did not change their answers and maintained their initial AAL identification at either "Yes" or "Sometimes." The

results show there was a slight increase in African American students who identified as AAL speakers after AVT instruction.

To describe, interpret, and explain the post survey increase in African American students who identified as AAL/Ebonics speakers, I examined African American students' responses to the following discussion questions: "Did anyone in our group change their survey answer for question #2 'Do you speak African American Language/Ebonics?' from 'No,' to 'Yes' or 'Sometimes?' If yes, why did you change? If not, what do you think caused some people to change?" For each discussion question, students were given background information, which described the pre and post survey percentage of change for all students' in the class (as shown below):

> For survey question #2, "Do you speak African American Language/Ebonics?" pre -test results showed that, before having formal instruction on AVT, 41% said either Yes or Sometimes and 59% said No. After having formal instruction on AVT post-test results showed that there was an increase in students who identified as African American Language/Ebonics speakers having 62% answer Yes or Sometimes and 38% answer No.

I performed open coding of each conversation transcript for the previous discussion question, specifically listening for responses from African American students. Two common themes emerged from the data, which may help explain the small increase in African American students who changed their answers to identify as AAL speakers on the post survey: 1) After AVT instruction, students could identify the linguistic features of AAL and AVT in their own speech

and writing, lastly 2) AVT instruction refutes racist stereotypes about language and presents

AAL as a valid linguistic system, and AVT as a necessary component for academic success.

Some conversation excerpts from African American students, which illuminate theme #1, are

shown below:

2. Students' Ability to Identify AVT Features

Group #1

1 Karinn: I went from "sometimes," to saying that I speak African American

2   Language, to "yes." I think that's just because I didn't understand what it

3   was at first, and then after we learned about it I was like, "oh," I speak that

4   probably, pretty much every day.

5 Leah: Same thing for me, I went from "sometimes" to "yes" for the same reason.

6   Because, you know, once you learn exactly what it is, then you know that

7   you speak it. Yeah. So, I would say the same thing for me.

Group #2

1 Calina: I know about Ebonics but I didn't know about the in-depth parts of it,

2   which was all the structures and everything. Cause it's so much like a

3   regular language, and people still say it's not, which it's like – clearly it

4   is.

5 Tiffany: Like "I be late."

6 Calina: Right! Cause that's like how people really talk.

7 Tiffany: I say that too. Now - I 'm like oops I did not just say that. *(laughter)*

8 Calina: Yes! And people always be trying to correct me! I be like, "hey, hey, this 9

            is real. Don't talk about my language. I'm speaking, umm, some type of

10   English. *(laughter)* I just don't know yet!" *(laughter)*

In group #1, Leah and Karinn assert that, learning the linguistic structure of AAL and AVT

caused them to change their answers on the post survey to identify as AAL speakers. Their

conversation suggests that AVT curriculum, which provides students with readings, writing

exercises, and lectures/presentations on AVT and AAL, may have played a major role in helping

them identify AAL/AVT language patterns, which appear in their speech that they may not have

been aware of. Further, the student participants in group #2, Calina and Tiffany, support these

claims made by the students in group #1 because according to Calina, AVT instruction explained

the specific forms of AAL/Ebonics, which also allowed her to notice these linguistic structures in

her daily conversations. For example, in line 1 Calina acknowledges that she was unaware of

AAL structures, "I know about Ebonics but I didn't know about the in-depth parts of it, which

was all the structures and everything." However, after AVT instruction she was able to identify

these features in her daily conversations, such as her use of AAL patterns using the invariant

verb to *be*, which is often used to indicate an event that occurs habitually, such as "I be late."

Both students in group #2 appear to be excited about learning and understanding the linguistic

structures of AAL, and in lines 8-10, Calina suggests that she has even more to learn. For

example, in lines 8-9, Calina asserts that when "people" try to correct her language, she resists

them: "And people always be trying to correct me! I be like, 'hey, hey, this is real. Don't talk

about my language. However, in lines 9-10 she admits that she is not able to fully defend AAL because she is still learning how to describe it, "I'm speaking some type of English, umm, I just don't know yet!" Ultimately, both students refer to a specific component of course instruction, which helped them identify some of the Black language patterns they often use.

Other students expressed that they changed their answers because AVT curriculum refuted racist stereotypes that are perpetuated about AAL/Ebonics and provided significant validation for AVT as a writing strategy that is "necessary" for academic situations. For example, in the following conversation two African American students discuss how AVT curriculum, which refutes racist stereotypes about AAL/Ebonics (theme #2), inspired them to change their answer to the post survey question #2, "Do you speak AAL/Ebonics?" from "sometimes" to "yes":

3. Stupid/Smart Language

1 Robert: I also went from sometimes, to yes. But, for me, like hearing Ebonics, I

2   knew it was looked down upon. So I didn't really want to admit to using it

3   necessarily, especially in a writing course. I figured I shouldn't, wouldn't

4   want to admit to that. But after learning about it [AVT], you know that it's

5   necessary to use. So I went to "yes" because I do use it a lot.

6 Leah: Yea I think that's really important and I mean that's not necessarily why I

7   changed it to "yes," but that's important because a lot of times, you know,

8   even as a Black person, you are told that slang and Ebonics is "the

9	stupid language," you know. It's like a "lazy language." They always say,
10	"Talk properly. That's not properly." So that is the reason why sometimes,
11	people don't want to say, "I speak Ebonics." It just doesn't sound like
12	you're speaking a "smart language."

In conversation #3, Robert, acknowledges that in the dominant society Ebonics is "looked down upon," and he indirectly suggests that this language dominance is also present in the academic classroom, especially in English classes, "I didn't really want to admit to using it [Ebonics] necessarily, especially in a writing course. I figured I shouldn't - wouldn't, want to admit to that." However, following this statement, Robert asserts that AVT curriculum taught him the value of AVT in academic writing, and this gave him the confidence to change his answer from "sometimes" to "yes." For example, Robert describes his new awareness of the appropriateness of AVT in writing in the following statement: "But after learning about it [AVT], you know that it's necessary to use. So, I went to "yes" because I do use it a lot."

Leah also acknowledges the dominant view of Ebonics in which Ebonics/AAL is often viewed as the "stupid language" or "lazy language." In her statements she affirms Robert's claims that this negative view of Ebonics in the dominant society can deter someone from identifying as an Ebonics speaker: "They always say, 'Talk properly. That's not properly.' So, that is the reason why sometimes, people don't want to say, 'I speak Ebonics.'" Leah's use of the word "they" to refer to people who say Ebonics is not a "proper" language may function as a form of indirection. The context of the conversation and Robert's previous comment about English classes and Ebonics may suggest that Leah uses the word "they" to refer to several

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groups: 1) people who "look down upon" AAL/Ebonics speakers and, 2) writing teachers who do not acknowledge AAL as a legitimate language.

Further, Leah's comment at the end of the dialogue, It just doesn't sound like you're speaking a "smart languagev"is significant because, if not viewed within the context of the conversation, this statement may be misinterpreted. Leah makes this statement as a follow-up to her previous remark about the dominant view in society that Ebonics is a "lazy language" or "stupid language." Therefore, Leah's final statement appears to be a critique on how controlling discourse is used in the larger society as a form of power to perpetuate negative stereotypes about AAL speakers. In Leah's response, "So, that is the reason why sometimes, people don't want to say, "I speak Ebonics. It just doesn't sound like you're speaking a 'smart language,'" she seems to assert that the stereotypical dominant discourse on Ebonics makes it difficult for people to view AAL/Ebonics as an advanced intellectual mode of communication, or view AAL/Ebonics speakers as "speaking a smart language," and this may cause some AAL speakers to disassociate themselves from the term "Ebonics."

The responses from African American students in the small group discussions presented above, and the increase in African American students who identified as AAL speakers on post surveys may suggest that the comparative approach to AVT instruction was not harmful to African American students' perceptions of their language and identity. In fact, based on their survey answers and comments in small group discussions, it appears that these African American student participants were not ashamed to identify as AAL speakers after having exposure to AVT curriculum. As shown in some of the conversations above, after AVT instruction some African

American students felt that AVT was a necessary component of academic writing and this information caused them to feel more comfortable identifying as AAL speakers in an academic setting.

4.3 Racist and Stereotypical Perceptions about AAL/Ebonics and AVT

The AVT curriculum directly resists dominant racist and stereotypical views about AAL/Ebonics by exposing students to AAL scholarship, which demonstrates that AAL is a rule-governed, complex, and intellectual language system. Thus, to inspire change in students' language attitudes specific readings and course materials were selected and designed to refute two common myths that abound about AAL/Ebonics, 1) AAL is "just bad grammar, lazy pronunciation, and slang," (Hoover, 1998), and 2) African language systems are genetically based, meaning AAL is inherently "Black" and only Black people can speak it (O'Neil, 1998). To assess if there were changes in students' language attitudes in response to these myths, I compared the students' pre survey results to their post survey results for the following survey questions: "How would you define AAL/Ebonics?" and "What is African American Verbal Tradition?"

The responses from all students in their small group discussions correspond with the results from students' surveys, which suggests that most students were unfamiliar with AAL and had never received any formal instruction on AAL history and linguistic structure. For example, student definitions of AAL/Ebonics, on pre surveys, were highly reflective of the stereotypical definitions and common myths that are often portrayed broadly about AAL. However, after AVT instruction, students' post survey definitions were more informed, conceivable reflecting

students' new knowledge about the history/origins of AAL. A summary of key terms students

used to define AAL/Ebonics, on their pre and post surveys, is listed below.

Table 2.1

Comparison of answers to the survey question, "How would you define AAL/Ebonics?"

Pre Survey Definitions	Post Survey Definitions
• I don't know – 12 • **Slang – 6** • **Link to Africa – 1** • short-cut/ not talking proper – 1 • chopped up – 1 • ghetto language/ incorrect version of English – 1 • dialect – 3 • cultural – 1 • type of English language – 1 • partially different language – 1 • **The Language/way African Americans speak – 1** • Lazy pronunciation – 1	• **The Language/way African Americans speak – 11** • not so much slang, but the way we [African Americans] use our words – 1 • African grammatical structure – 1 • Black English – 2 • **Connection to African American history/roots and slave trade – 6** • **Slang/improper English – 2** • AVT – 1 • No Definition – 6

In table 2.1, results show that before AVT instruction some students defined

AAL/Ebonics as slang, and this number changed from 6 students on the pre survey to 2 students on the post survey. Also, on the pre survey, 1 student acknowledged the African origins/roots of AAL/Ebonics and on the post-survey this number rose to 6 students who defined AAL as having roots in African culture (i.e., U.S. slave trade, West African language practices). Lastly, 1 student, on their pre-survey described AAL/Ebonics as "the way African Americans speak," and on the post survey 11 students used this description to define AAL. The significant increase in students who defined AAL as an African American language practice may suggest that AVT instruction makes clear that AAL/Ebonics is not slang because it has roots in African and African American oral traditions. Overall, the results above, which aligns with AAL scholarship definitions of Ebonics, and the terms appear to be more respectful of African American culture and language, may suggest that a "comparative" approach to AAL instruction might successfully displace some common negative stereotypes that people may have about Ebonics as merely bad grammar, lazy pronunciation, or slang, and instead demonstrates that AAL/Ebonics is a rule-governed, valid linguistic system.

Language and Race

According to O'Neil (1998), one of the most prevalent scientific questions about AAL/Ebonics that linguists are asked to shed light on by the media pertains to language and genetics (myth #2) or the notion that "African Language Systems are genetically based" (p. 38). According to O'Neil (1998) "AAL is historically derived from certain West African languages as well as from English. West African grammatical structures are superficially masked by English words: a Creole account of the origins of AAL (p. 40). Further, as mentioned in chapter 1,

Smitherman (1998) maintains, AAL/Ebonics, specifically the variety of Ebonics spoken in the

U.S./ United States Ebonics (USEB), "is rooted in the Black American Oral Tradition, and

represents a synthesis of African (primarily West African) and European (primarily English)

linguistic cultural traditions" (p. 30). The main point that can be taken from these authors is that

AAL is not in the genes of African Americans (O'Neil, 1998). AAL is a learned language system

with a complex historical background. Thus, a major aim of AVT curriculum was to promote

this reality by exposing students to readings, lectures, and class discussions on the history of

AVT. Therefore, I compared all students' survey responses, small group discussions, and results

from their final essays to explore students' capacities to resist dominant discourses in the media

that describe AAL as a language system that cannot be acquired and mastered by people of all

varied racial/ethnic backgrounds. Changes in all students' pre and post survey definitions for the

open-ended question #5, "What is African American Verbal Tradition?" may be used to

determine if students were able to comprehend this lesson. A list of pre survey results for this

question appear below:

Table 3.1

Pre Survey Answers: What is African American Verbal Tradition?

I don't know	13 students
Rhetorical Practice	5 students
Link to Africa	4 students
Tradition/ passed down	3 students
How African Americans communicate	3 students
Slang	1 student
Ebonics	1 student

Table 3.1 shows that before AVT instruction most students were unfamiliar with this term (AVT), although some students did describe it as having a rhetorical function. However, when students were asked to define AVT again on their post surveys, most students produced more concise and detailed definitions (see table 4.1):

Table 4.1

Post Survey Answers: "What is African American Verbal Tradition?"

Rhetorical Practice	18 students
How African Americans Communicate	7 students
Link to Africa	3 students
Tradition/ passed down	2 students

Table 4.1 shows that after AVT instruction, most students described AVT as a "rhetorical practice" as opposed to a form of communication that is inherently "Black," or "how African Americans communicate." Thus, the comparative approach I applied, which emphasizes that AVT features may appear as American standardized rhetorical writing strategies that people from all racial/ethnic backgrounds utilize, seems to have caused a significant change in the overall student response to question #5. For example, in small groups, some African American students said they were "shocked" or "surprised" that AVT could be used in academic writing, because they had never received curriculum instruction that showed the value of using AVT in academic settings. I anticipated this as a common experience for most African American students and as a result, when designing the AVT curriculum, I explored ways to counter this negative portrayal.

According to Kirkland and Jackson (2008), "a language is seen as valuable when the dominant group defines it as valuable. Logically a language looses value when wielded by people who lack the power to assign value" (p. 142). Therefore, it was clear that in order to assign value to AAL or AVT in an academic setting, AVT must be positioned strategically as a viable source within the dominant culture. Therefore, during class instruction I emphasized that AVT has roots in African and African American culture; however, all races utilize these rhetorical tools. To explore this concept further students read and analyzed texts from scholars of all varied racial/ethnic backgrounds who use AVT features in their writing. Results from table 4.1 and the small group discussions below strongly suggest that this comparative component of AVT instruction, which specifically shows that various races/ethnicities utilize the 5 features of

AVT in writing, may be an effective teaching strategy to use to counter specious arguments about language and genetics, especially with regard to AAL.

In small group discussions, many African American students were able to comprehend that people speak AAL and AVT from all racial/ethnic backgrounds, and some students expressed that AVT curriculum made this concept clear. For example, in the following small group discussion, three African American students discuss intersections of race and AVT curriculum:

4. AVT and Race

1 Calina: So why do you think some people would change their answers?

2 James: Maybe because they didn't, like, understand the definition of it? Or,

3   exactly what it was?

4 Calina: And I think, not to be racist, but like, some people, you know how some

5   people think, like "Oh, I'm white. I can't really speak Ebonics cause I'm

6   white." (*laughter*) So I think that's why some people did change, cause

7   they know that it's not really a racial thing. You can speak it if you're not

8   Black.

In this group discussion, Calina, an African American student, repeats the expression "some people" (lines 4-5) twice in her statement, which according to Rogers and Mosley (2006) may indicate that she is self-monitoring her speech as she constructs her response. She also interjects qualifying language, "not to be racist," in the middle of her sentence, it seems, to reduce the severity of the following claim, "some people think, like 'Oh, I'm white. I can't really speak

Ebonics cause I'm white.'" Calina's qualifying language, "not to be racist," may indicate or index her refusal to accept an accusation of reverse racism/discrimination from her classmates in response to, what she understands is, a controversial statement. According to McIntyre (1997), reverse discrimination is a discursive theme of whiteness, or "white talk," which is, "talk that serves to insulate white people from examining their/our individual and collective roles in the perpetuation of racism" (p. 46). In further support of this theory, Allen (2004) maintains, "many whites now think of themselves as the oppressed group. In fact, conservative whites have twisted the racial discourse in their favor such that the word 'racist' can now be used to describe anti-racist people who publicly contest white racism" (p. 126). Thus, Calina's qualifying statement may suggest that she is aware of how racially inflicted language in the classroom is often reversed toward people of color, by White people, to avoid difficult conversations.

Calina also engages in conversational narrative, as she reconstructs some conversations that may have occurred in the past, by modifying her voice, tone, and pitch to represent a "White," speaker. Etter Lewis (1991) describes this conversational element as a "buffer," which allows the speaker to discuss painful experiences or uncomfortable situations in an indirect manner (p.47). Thus, Calina's tone signals that she is clearly in disagreement with the viewpoint of the speaker she imitates.

In addition, Calina engages in "signifying laughter," (line 6) or what Morgan (1993) describes as, the laughter of African American women, which "often signals an indirect critique on situations in which injustice and the exercise of power highlight the event under discussion." Thus, Morgan (1993) maintains, "when you hear 'the black woman laugh,' it is never about

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anything funny" (p.85). Calina's use of signifying laughter appears to function in this indirect way, and seemingly asserts that it is illogical for one to assume that African Americans are the only people who can speak "Ebonics." Calina's signifying laughter may also indicate that she believes statements, which suggest that certain statements are racist such as African American languages are only spoken by African American people and are genetically or biologically based. However, Calina does not directly state her claim, she carefully constructs her argument using several AVT tools. For example, notice Calina's use of politeness conventions (indirect references to race) to refer to White people – "some people" – which fails to acknowledge her main claim that primarily White people make these racist assumptions about AAL and African American people.

Calina's narrative ends with a significant point, which is that some people may have changed their answers after their exposure to AVT instruction, which included information on the history and structure of AAL grammar and syntax, because they now know that Ebonics is not a "racial thing." Her claim is supported by the post survey responses to question #2, "Do you speak AAL/Ebonics?" because for this question, a total of 9 students changed their answers, from "No," to "Yes" or "Sometimes," and 8 of these 9 students, identified as having a non-Black background. Therefore, as Calina describes, results show that some students did not allow their non-Black racial status to prohibit them from identifying as AAL speakers.

Other direct comments from African American students in small groups, which show students' clear comprehension of the AVT curriculum components, which resist specious arguments about language and race, appear below:

I think that once people found out about it, they realized that they do use it and it's not

just – even though it's called African American Verbal Tradition, **people of all races use it.**

It all links together and it brings out the point that **it doesn't matter what color we are because there are some Black people who don't use AVT.** It just depends on what environment you grew up in. **It has nothing to do with race.**

For me what was most interesting about all of this was just, **like looking at non-African Americans that use the same thing and I think that shows that it can be a language, spoken by anybody.** That was interesting to me because when I was first in this class, it was on African Studies. And then we started to learn about African American Verbal Tradition and Ebonics. **But in my mind I thought it was just specifically towards that race. But as we started learning it you see that anybody can use it.**

As shown in the individual statements above, from African American students, a number of African American students in the class were able to resist stereotypical arguments about genetic difference, with respect to AAL. However, the following conversation from a student-led small group discussion may suggest that one White American student, still, may not be able to separate language and race.

In the dialogue below, two White American students, Cassie and Alex, and one African American student, Ashley, explore discussion question #1, which prompts students to provide an interpretation for the increase in students who identified as AAL/Ebonics speakers on the post surveys:

5. Speaking vs. Understanding AAL/Ebonics

1 Cassie: So, why do you guys think that there is such a large increase in people

2   deciding that they identify themselves as Ebonics speakers?

3 Alex: Because most of the class is White and they now understand it. You saw at

4   the beginning just how no one, like, really understood Ebonics what-so

5   ever. And then, once they understood what it actually was…I

6   guess...[now…

7 Cassie: [They *think* they speak it? (*laughter*)

8 Alex: Not – they speak it, but they understand it.

9 Ashley: They have some understanding of it. They have a certain understanding of

10   what Ebonics or African American Language is.

11 Alex: Yea.

12 Cassie: Or at least (understand) some of the rules. I feel like lots of people didn't

13   know what Ebonics was before this too. So they probably like, spoke it –

14   but they just didn't know, because they weren't aware that it had a name.

Conversation 5 illustrates the dichotomy between students in the class who define AAL as a

learned language system, and those who may still perceive it as race based. For example, Alex, a

White student, begins to assert that the increase in AAL speakers on post surveys is attributed to

the majority White students in the class, "most of the class is White and they now understand it

[Ebonics]." Alex's response suggests, that after AVT instruction, White students became more

informed about Ebonics and could possibly identify some of the features in their own speech

patterns.

        However, Alex is interrupted by Cassie, a white female student, who challenges his claim

that the majority White students in their class are AAL speakers. In line 7, Cassie interrupts

Alex, by asking a question, which ultimately changed the topic of discussion from why some

White students may have identified as AAL speakers on post surveys, to whether or not the

increase in White AAL speakers is justified. According to McIntyre (1997), in "white talk," interruptions function as maneuverings used to repel critical conversations. For example, Alex suggests that after learning about AAL and AVT some White students may now be aware that they speak AVT or AAL. Therefore, Cassie's interruption successfully defuses a conversation that may have occurred, on how genetic relationships among languages are not biologically based, because some White students in the class may speak AAL or AVT. Instead, Cassie steers the conversation in another direction. Cassie also manipulates the conversation by using distancing pronouns, such as "they," another facet of "white talk," to separate herself from the other White students who may have changed their answers. This distancing signals that she is not in agreement with their response.

Cassie's linguistic patterns are significant because although she argues that White people may not be able to speak AAL, she utilizes a number of AVT features to convey her thoughts. For example, Cassie's rhetorical question can be analyzed as a form of signifying/indirection. Cassie's tone of voice when asking this question, "They *think* they speak it?" signals that the question is more of a statement, which indirectly implies that most White students "understand some of the rules" (line 12) of Ebonics, but they do not "speak it." Further, her signifying laughter in line 7 suggests that she is in total disagreement with the idea that some White students in her class may be fluent in AAL/Ebonics. Therefore, Cassie's response in this dialogue may reflect her inability to view AAL/Ebonics as a learned language system that can be used by people from all varied races/ethnic backgrounds, particularly White Americans.

4.4 Conclusion

      A major aim of this present research study was to examine how students responded to a comparative curriculum that valued and identified the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies. The results in this chapter are significant because the comparison of results across the data set (i.e. surveys and small group discussions) suggest that students may have become more knowledgeable about the origin/background of AAL and AVT after their exposure to AVT instruction. Thus, the information students received from pedagogical tools and readings may have caused a change in students' language attitudes towards AVT and AAL.

      Students' small group discussions and post survey definitions strongly suggest that AVT curriculum instruction did not reinforce racial stereotypes about language, particularly AAL/Ebonics. To illuminate this some students shared personal narratives in their small group discussions to explain how AVT instruction helped rectify some of their own stereotypical beliefs about AAL/Ebonics. Other students discussed how certain pedagogical strategies of AVT instruction were effective because it directly addressed and disproved these negative stereotypes by demonstrating the value of AVT and how it may enhance academic writing. Overall, the stories shared by students in small groups correspond with students' post survey definitions of AAL/Ebonics and AVT, which were much more informed and respectful of African & African American language practices.

      The comparative framework applied in this research study is a rhetorical strategy, which functions as a form of resistance. Specifically, the comparative approach provides a counter

narrative to stories that are often told about AAL, which limits AAL/AVT to an informal language practice that is only used in African American communities. Thus, to counter this narrative, I specifically demonstrate how AVT is a standardized American academic rhetorical writing skill that is used by writers from all varied races/ethnic backgrounds, and the results in this chapter strongly suggest that students were very receptive to this approach.

As shown in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, some non-African American student minorities identified AVT features in their own cultural verbal traditions. This was an unexpected response from students because, as mentioned previously, when I taught AAL in the past using contrastive analysis, very few students would identify as AAL speakers, including African Americans. However, a comparative approach showed students the intellectual and rhetorical value of AVT in academic writing, which may have inspired some students to identify with or as AAL speakers and point out that AVT features exist in their own cultural/verbal traditions. Another unexpected response in this study came from non-African American students who inquired about and/or requested that I present a similar curriculum that explores their own distinct cultural verbal traditions (i.e. Latino Verbal Tradition, Asian American Verbal Tradition, Native American Verbal Tradition, etc.) in comparison to academic rhetorical writing strategies. This request from students affirms the philosophy of SRTOL and the CCCC National Language Policy, which asserts that students have a desire to sustain and build on their own cultural linguistic skills. The AVT instruction made clear to students that people of color make distinct contributions to American standardized communication structures; therefore, many non-African American minority students were interested to see how their cultures may be represented within

this larger frame, and how the existing language skills they possess may be developed or used to enhance their academic writing.

Additionally, in their small group discussions, African American students asserted that they were also more comfortable or more inclined to identify as AAL speakers after having AVT instruction, because the course materials and other information provided (i.e. writing exercises, pedagogical tools) refutes negative stereotypes about Ebonics and made clear that AVT is, "necessary to use" in academic writing. The results for African American students who identified as AAL speakers on post surveys are also significant because the increase and/or consistent number of African American students who continued to identify as AAL speakers before and after AVT instruction, may suggest that AVT curriculum was not harmful to African American students' perceptions of their language and identity, which was a major goal of the present research study. Therefore, in the following chapter I will examine the distinctive experiences of African American students with AVT curriculum to further explore how these students respond to comparative composition instruction that values, and identifies the written features of AVT as standard American rhetorical writing strategies.

CHAPTER 5

DISTINCTIVE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

1 Rachel: Was there a positive response?

2 Eve: I thought that it was kind of a bored response, [but that's just class.

3 Rachel: [(*Laughter*)

4 Eve: I thought, I mean, just cause it mostly is African American people in

5   there, that they thought it was kind of interesting, but that, they already

6   knew what was going on.

7 Cathy: Yea.

8 Eve: Especially with the language portion.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the distinctive experiences of African American students who

participated in this study and how they interpret the AVT materials and instructional stimuli from

a "Black" perspective. The dialogue above is an excerpt from a small group discussion in which

three White American female students explore the following discussion questions: "How would

you describe your own and your classmates' overall response to the instruction on AVT? Was

there a positive response?" In this excerpt, Eve describes her perception of the overall class

response to AVT instruction, and in lines 3-5 she specifically describes her view of the African

American students' overall response to the AVT classes. Eve's comment: "I thought it was kind

of a bored response," is significant because she performs what McIntyre (1997) describes as

"white talk," by using humor to avoid directly answering, what may be perceived by the group

as, a difficult discussion question. She also utilizes the AVT feature signifying/indirection to convey her message. For example, Eve's description of the class sessions, as "boring," indirectly suggests that her view of the class response to AVT instruction was not positive. After Eve's signifying incites laughter from one of the group members, she uses qualifying language to explain why the class was "bored." In particular, she justifies her sarcastic response with a qualifying statement, "but that's just class," which suggests that, no matter the subject, classroom/school culture is always unexciting. Eve also uses distancing pronouns, such as "they" to refer to African American students, and to distance herself from them and the distinctive experiences they may have had during the course of instruction because of their African American background. For example, Eve, states that AVT curriculum "was kind of interesting," to the African American students. The phrase "kind of" implies that it was not very interesting to them. Lastly, according to Eve, African American students were not interested because they already knew Ebonics, "especially the language portion."

However, results from this study and across the data set strongly suggests that Eve's claims, about the distinctive experiences of African American students is inaccurate. Eve's explanation in line 4 begins with the repetition of the word "I." She says, "I thought, I mean," which may indicate that, at this point, she is self-monitoring her speech, particularly because she may be constructing a false statement about the experiences of African American students. According to Allen (2004), as a defense strategy, Whites may act individually and collectively to silence and subvert the counternarratives of people of color (p.125). Eve's speech monitoring, may signal that she is manipulating the conversation intentionally to deny the positive effects of

AVT instruction, especially on African American students. Eve suggests that all students in the class were "bored" with AVT course materials, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, she may index her inability to separate language and race, as she specifically points out that African American students were uninterested because they "already knew what was going on… especially with the language portion." However, Eve's claims are not supported by the results across the data set, which suggest that the majority of African American students, who participated in this study, were very interested in AVT curriculum, and were not familiar with the history/origins, and linguistic structure of AAL before AVT instruction. According to Allen (2004), "in courses that present a critique of whiteness, we Whites tend to get defensive about so much focus on the oppressiveness of our group" (p. 132). Thus, Eve's seemingly false claims, about the experiences of African American students in her class, may be caused by a conscious, or unconscious, reaction to the course content, which directly addressed the linguistic/cultural oppression of students by White dominant social norms.

According to Sheurich (1997), Whites have a long-standing social history that has been profoundly hostile to people of color (p. 9). Thus, as seen in the previous group discussion, it is hard for some students to break free of their "White tendencies" (Allen, 2004, p. 125). Eve's similarly dominant perspectives about language and race may have caused her to believe that all of the African American students in her class are AAL speakers, and were thus familiar with AVT curriculum. However, the results from African American students' pre and post survey responses, reflection papers, and group discussions support the idea that, before AVT instruction, most African American students were not familiar with the history/origins, and linguistic

structure of AAL/Ebonics. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the voice of color thesis, because "whites cannot speak validly for people of color, but only about their own experiences as whites" (Grillo & Wildman, 1997, p. 623). Thus, to gain a greater understanding of their distinctive experiences with AVT instruction, the counternarratives from African American student participants are examined in this chapter.

5.2 African American Students' Responses to AVT Curriculum Instruction

The African American students in this study, when compared to non-African American students, had distinctly different experiences with AVT instruction. To illuminate these experiences I will discuss three major themes that emerged from students' small group discussions: 1) African American students asserting a sense of pride in AVT, 2) African American students asserting their rights to educational fairness and equality where language is concerned, and 3) African American students displaying double consciousness as a sociological-linguistic phenomenon.

Students Asserting a Sense of Pride in AVT

The curriculum for this study was specifically designed to empower African American students to take pride in their AVT skills. To achieve this goal, the intellectual process and complex structure of AVT was highlighted presenting AVT as a formal mode of discourse that can strengthen written communication. This positive framing of AVT allowed African American students the opportunity to associate AVT and Ebonics with intelligence and higher academic achievement, despite societal pressures (e.g. racist education practices, media exposure, etc.) that claim or imply otherwise.

Two weeks after I conducted the present research study in Dr. Brown's class, I returned to observe her students engaging in a peer review workshop for their final essay. When I entered the classroom I noticed that the teacher used the students' chairs to create a large circle in which everyone in the class was facing each other. A Latino student, Enrique, was reading a draft of his essay to the entire class. Enrique was a very engaged student in this course. He sat in the front row of the class and regularly asked critical questions. He also completed all assignments and turned in drafts of his essays on time. As part of the peer review, Enrique was required to read his essay aloud; when he finished, the class was expected to give him feedback.

As Enrique read his essay, I noticed that his writing style was very reflective of what most people may consider General American English because he used carefully fashioned grammatical phrases, "correct" verb tenses, conditional phrases, and other forms of English that most students may learn in school and from academic texts. I put my head down and scribbled some notes on a pad of paper as he finished the final sentences of his essay.

The class began to give feedback; I continued to take notes. However, as I started to write, a student in the class made a comment that startled and immediately jerked me out of my note taking. Lynn, an African American female student who was also very engaged in AVT class sessions, volunteered to give feedback about his essay. Lynn's feedback/suggestions were about writing style and how his paper would benefit from utilizing more persuasive language. Enrique replied to Lynn in a way that suggested he may not have completely understood her comment, and in exasperation, Lynn closed the pages of his essay, tossed the paper in her lap and she said, "It's kind of dry. You need to throw some mo' AVT tools in there." Lynn's comment is

significant because: 1) She made this statement in full class discussion, which may suggest that she is not ashamed to discuss African American language patterns as a rhetorical benefit in front of her peers, and 2) she exudes confidence in AVT as a rhetorical skill that may enhance her classmates' writing.

Other African American students made comments, specifically in small group discussions, which may also illustrate their belief and confidence in AVT as an effective mode of written and verbal communication that they may take pride in using. For example, in small groups, students were asked to discuss the following questions:

Before having formal instruction on AVT 31% of the students in this study said, "Yes" AVT is appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings. After having formal instruction on AVT, 94% said "Yes" AVT is appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings. What do you think caused this number to increase from 31% who said AVT is appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings, on the pre-test, to 94% on the post-test?

To answer this question, some African American students described the rich, complex, and intelligent structure of AVT as an explanation for the rise in survey percentages. It is important to note that when students referred to AVT as an intellectual mode of communication I coded this response as African students asserting a sense of pride in the African and African American origins of AVT and their ability to use it because intelligence has a positive connotation. A sense of pride was also asserted in some African American students' responses when they positioned AVT as more advanced or superior to other modes of communication, as shown in the individual

student responses below:

> It's just better to listen to. It's more exciting and you just use your mind more when you read it. Cause its more of like, interactive reading, interactive listening. It's not like, "The dog went to the park and played with the ball. It was fun."

> It made me think like, Wow! I've been writing like an author! Almost – with the sounding and everything.

> I did my analysis paper on AVT and I realized it's like this really, in depth, complicated thing.

In the responses above, students describe how learning AVT, was enlightening because it gave them confidence in their writing skills. The students also used powerful language patterns that reflect repetition, "Cause its more of like, interactive reading, *interactive* listening. It's not like, 'The dog went to the park and played with the ball. It was fun.'" The response from the previous student is significant because she uses specific schemes of repetition, such as parallelism, in her language as a form of rhetorical power to emphasize the importance of AVT. The repetition in this example uncovers how students may exercise power through language, in their small group conversations, to resist the naturalization of academic writing conventions, which often encourage the use of an impersonal and dispassionate written discourse style. The power in this students' language use may suggest her strong belief that AVT is an advanced mode of communication, which again shows that she may take pride in her ability to employ AVT in her academic writing.

African American students also engaged in conversational narratives to describe their experiences with learning AVT. As mentioned in chapter 4, the conversational narrative contains conversational elements to illustrate an idea or event (Etter-Lewis, 1991). An example of this is

the narrator reconstructing conversations that occurred in the past by modifying voice, tone, and pitch to represent different speakers and different emotions (Etter-Lewis, 1991). In the following example, two African American female students use conversational narrative to describe the AVT feature, signifyin[g]/indirection, as a dignified verbal skill that involves having "smarts" or high intellect. This may signify that students are continuing to take pride in the complex structure of AVT. It is important to note that these students engage in signifyin[g]/indirection while discussing this feature, which amplifies their understanding of the mode of communication:

1. Smart/Intellectual Language

1 Calina: I be saying some little slick stuff and I be thinking I'm real smart doin'

2   that signifyin' and indirection *(laughter)*. I be sarcastic on Facebook an I

3   be like "Awww shoot, check us out. We smart and don't even know it!"

4 Tiffany: Somebody said, "Why you tryin' to be sarcastic" I said, "No! It's

5   SIGNIFYING." *Student imitating a dignified voice (erupting laughter)*

6 Calina :   She says, "You're very conniving." No. I'm smart cause I know how to

7   say it − and talk to you without you knowing! (laughter)

In conversation 1, the students continue to exercise rhetorical power (e.g. rhythm, intonation, stress) in their patterns of speech to resist language hierarchies that devalue AVT. As a result, students construct new relationships with language that elevate AVT features to a higher social, and intellectual status. In the example above, both students refute words in General American English that are often used to refer to these speech practices by replacing them with AVT features: "No. It's *signifying.*" The students' refusal to accept other Western terms (e.g. sarcastic,

conniving) is significant because it shows that these students understand the AVT feature signifyin[g]/indirection as a mode of communication that is more powerful or intelligent than similar ways of speaking within American standardized communication structures. Calina's statement in line 6 : "She says, 'You're very conniving.' No! I'm smart." Here, the student refuses to be called conniving due to the negativity it seems that is associated with "conniving" behavior. Conniving behavior is also rarely associated with intellectual students. Therefore, the student suggests that signifyin[g]/indirection is the more appropriate definition for her mode of communication in this exchange because it acknowledges the intelligence it takes to "outsmart" or "outwit" another person: "I'm smart cause I know how to say it—and talk to you without you knowing!"

It is important to note that there are other things going on in this triadic conversation that are important but that may not pertain to this particular theme. However, I read each component of the conversation discussed and analyzed as significant to the study and significant to understanding specific African American students' responses. For instance, the laughter and humorous reenactment of conversations in this dialogue reveal an underlying message in the narrative. According to Etter-Lewis (1991), conversational narrative style functions as a "buffer" allowing the speaker to discuss painful experiences or uncomfortable situations in an indirect manner. Thus, the amusing conversational exchange above between the two African American female students may suggest that these students may have encountered a negative experience during AVT instruction.

First, Calina's statement suggests that she takes pleasure in her new awareness of her

ability to use AVT verbal skills; however, her signifying tone suggests that she may have experienced a form of disappointment, in herself, during the course of instruction based on her indirect joke/crack on herself: "Awww shoot, check us out. We smart and don't even know it!" This reaction may be in response to a major component of AVT pedagogy, which illuminated how American academic institutions that fail to acknowledge African and African American contributions to standardized written communication structures deceive students, especially those who are African American. This reality may explain Calina's humorous yet sarcastic response: "We smart and don't even know it!" It is evident here that Calina asserts a sense of pride in the AVT and her ability to use it, however her sarcasm may index that learning about AVT was an uncomfortable experience.

The majority of African American student responses suggest that there were more positive experiences than negative. In the following excerpts from small group discussions African American students describe their experiences with AVT instruction, and many of their responses suggest that they were excited to learn about the African & African American origins of AVT:

> And it's just so crazy how many speeches are given that starts off with a rhetorical question – a *bold* rhetorical question, or narrativizing. And these are great speeches by great people! And when we hear great speeches, we would never think that it was African origins behind it. Give credit where credit is due!

> We have been using it this whole time so now we [African Americans] can relate to it more. We are proud to say, this is a good thing. I've been using it this whole time and it's helping me in this way.

> Because of this class, I went to my friends and I was like, "AVT! AVT!" And they were like "What are you talking about?" *(laughter)* I was like, "Speaking another language!"

> It [AVT instruction] was very positive cause like even people from all over was like, you

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know how our class is very multi-racial, it was like everybody understood how we talk and why we talk this way. So we understood how it makes a big impact on how people talk in they community and how it has an impact on regular English or Standard English because she [teacher-researcher] showed the significance of signifying and indirection and repetition and all that stuff. So I felt that it was very impactful.

The way Bonnie explained it was really helpful because she took things that we were already like used to, and what we knew, and she was like "But did you notice this?" And we were like, "Whoa!" Mind freak!

Cause like there are so many things that I say, and how I stress things when I talk. I realize it even more now when I talk. I'm like, "Oh, I'm using repetition!" Like how much in my everyday speech I actually use all of these and I just never thought of it before.

This was really interesting learning this. Cause, its one of those things you just like assume, you just don't know, and now you know.

And what's actually cool too is like I'm pretty sure like in different cultures each culture has their own version of AVT. Like, SPVT Spanish Verbal Tradition. So like each culture has their own thing, and if you were to go and like listen to that, even like how they speak in English or a different language, it would be like the same thing, like mannerisms and stuff like that. You would be like Whoa! Super! AVT Wow!

The previous comments show African American students taking pleasure in knowing the history and different modes of AVT. Some students also express that they enjoy knowing that they have African and African American ancestral connections to it. They also express a desire to receive some form of recognition for their ancestors' contributions to standardized American communication structures, "give credit where credit is due!" According to one student AVT instruction reinforces her confidence in the ability she has to produce great writing, "We are proud to say, this is a good thing. I've been using it this whole time and it's helping me in this way." Another student shares her enjoyment in gaining this new knowledge and how excited she was to share it with her friends, "I was like, AVT! AVT!" Even her friends' uncertainty, "what

are you talking about," does not seem to deter the student from sharing this new information, as she boldly replies: "Speaking another language!"

After receiving AVT instruction, African American students not only began to assert a sense of pride for AVT, they also began to reflect on their language rights in relation to course readings and materials. In the next section I analyze student responses for references to "fairness and equality." Two sub-themes emerged in this section that pertain to social justice: 2a) African American students demanding the right to use AVT and AAL grammar and syntax in all settings and 2b) African American students asserting their right to learn about AAL/Ebonics and AVT in K-12.

Students Asserting their Rights to Educational Fairness and Equality

The AVT instruction encouraged students to discuss several forms of linguistic prejudice and how stereotypes about AAL are perpetuated in our society. In their small group discussions many students continued to discuss this topic in relation to their experiences in K-12 and the school teaching practices they have been exposed to. The following student responses, which illustrate this theme appear below, which shows African American students engaging in critical discussions about "linguicism" or linguistic prejudice by raising complex and controversial questions about their language rights in school as AAL speakers. In the conversation below, three students discuss the survey question, which asks if AAL and AVT are appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings. Alex and Cassie, two White students, express that they have different views about AVT and AAL. Both White students view AVT as an appropriate mode of communication in formal settings; however they believe the linguistic

structure of AAL (e.g. grammar, syntax, pronunciation of words) is not. Ashley, an African American student, argues for AAL speakers to have the right to use AAL in all settings by juxtaposing the monolingual views of the U.S. with the multilingual views of other countries:

2. Appropriateness of AVT vs. AAL

1 Cassie: I had different views on like whether or not it is appropriate to use verbal

2   traditions in the workplace vs. using language in the workplace?

3 Alex: I get that. I definitely think that the African American verbal traditions,

4   themselves, in writing are definitely more than appropriate.

5 Cassie: Yea, it keeps your presentations or whatever you're talking about from

6   being really dry and like boring.

7 Ashley: Is this for writing or are you thinking of formal settings?

8 Cassie: In any setting. Using verbal traditions like sounding, and

9   narrativizing, and signifying…

10 Ashley: But if you use like, you know how she showed us examples of how they

11   use almost like a double negative in a sentence…

12 Cassie: I feel like that's part of the grammatical structure of the language.

13 Ashley: I know! I'm saying I agree with you. I think though, that you *should* be

14   able to use it and not say "Oh there are rules and that's not correct

15   English." Because if it's considered a language then it should have the

16   right to be used without being criticized or even like degraded because

17   some people don't agree with it. Because they have like so many different

18   languages in African countries, just because they have different sounds,

19   but they might all be in the same category.

This conversation is reflective of the students' exposure to course materials/readings and lectures in which students were taught to make distinctions between AVT (ways of communicating/discourse style) and AAL (grammar/syntax). In this conversation, the students draw on this information in lines 10-11, "you know how she [teacher-researcher] showed us examples of how they use almost like a double negative in a sentence…" to decide which form (AAL or AVT) is appropriate for academic settings.

In this conversation, Ashley disagrees with her classmates and asserts that AAL speakers should have the right to use both forms in all settings: "if it's considered a language then it should have the right to be used without being criticized or even like degraded because some people don't agree with it." She then creates a moral hierarchy in her counternarrative by establishing a shared sense of "good and bad, right and wrong" (Rymes & Wortham, 2011, p. 48). For example, in lines 17-18, Ashley asserts the following statement: "they have like so many different languages in African countries, just because they have different sounds, but they might all be in the same category." Ashley's story presents a counternarrative of how language is viewed in other parts of the world in contrast to how language is viewed in the U.S. It appears that she shares this story with her White classmates to illustrate how the dominant society perpetuates linguistic prejudice by creating language hierarchies. This counternarrative is effective because it allows Ashley to position herself as "right," and her Whites classmates or "some people" who support this belief – "wrong."

In the small group discussions, many African American students continued to challenge unjust racialized language ideologies in the U.S. and some generated resolutions on how to rectify these acts of social injustice. In the following conversation, three African American students criticize academic institutions for their lack of appreciation and disregard for AVT and AAL.

3. School Reflections/Stories

1 Leah: So why do you think now that we're in our first year of college and we're

2   just now learning what AVT is and we've been using it our whole lives? I

3   see that as a problem! Like that's a big problem because I'm learning a

4   language—I mean I've been using this language my whole life, and it's

5   been looked down upon and I never once learned about it. You know, it

6   was never brought to me in any school setting or anything, and that's

7   *crazy* to me! That's a problem!

8 Robert: Yeah. I feel you on that. I think it's just cause, I mean—I know in

9   high school, and elementary, and middle school you never learn about

10   anything like this. And I don't know, I think it goes back to that whole

11   general idea of it being looked down upon. I don't know if this is

12   something like, just now coming out? But it seems like it's been around

13   for a while, so I don't know why they don't teach it in High school. Or—

14   yeah at least High school.

15 Leah: Or at least mention it. Yeah. Mention it. I mean – because honestly, I've

16   been learning Spanish since I was in kindergarten and that's a different

17   language than, you know, my language. So how come I couldn't even

18   learn something about my own language? That's how I'm looking at it.

19 Karinn: Society just like looks down at it. They don't consider it a

20   language. I guess. You have to have people who are willing to go against

21   the grain like Dr. Brown. You know in other English classes we probably

22   would not learn about this.

In conversation 3, the students send moral messages by fashioning details within their narratives in ways that create empathy and compassion: "I've been learning Spanish since I was in kindergarten and that's a different language than, you know, my language. So how come I couldn't even learn something about my own language?" They also show their disdain for U.S. academic institutions through their "strategic deployment of pronouns, repetition, and parallelism" (Rymes & Wortham, 2011, p. 49). For example, bold statements that are repeated such as: "That's a problem!" suggest that students are aware of how the lack of information or misrepresentation of AAL in schools is socially constructed to suppress AAL speakers. There are other messages communicated by students that clearly describe who the "good guys" and the "bad guys" are, as shown in the following statement: "You have to have people who are willing to go against the grain like Dr. Brown. You know in other English classes we probably would not learn about this." These students' responses suggest that after being exposed to AVT instruction some students believe they have a right to learn about AAL/Ebonics and AVT in all English classes.

These students also raised critical questions pertaining to fairness and inequality in education for African Americans, and that challenged the status quo such as: "Why do you think, now that we're in our first year of college, and we're just now learning what AVT is, and we've been using it our whole lives?" and "It seems like its been around for awhile so I don't know why they don't teach it in high school?" These questions reveal a sense of disappointment that students may now have toward the educational system in which they assumed they were receiving fair treatment.

The previous examples in conversations 1-3 show students asserting their rights to be informed about AAL in school and to have the right to use AAL in all settings. Students raised critical questions that critiqued the level of fairness and equality for African American students in academic institutions in relation to the lack of information they receive, specifically in K-12 on AAL/Ebonics. However, not all African American students shared this kind of vehement response for recognition and/or awareness of AVT and AAL. Some students displayed the linguistic ambivalence described in Smitherman's (1999) sociolinguistic theory, Linguistic push – pull, which describes the "psychological language ambivalence" (p.295) that is experienced by African Americans. For example, some students, in their small group conversations, expressed "being caught between two worlds," by acknowledging the existence of AAL and the effectiveness of AVT, yet relegating AAL and AVT to be used only in African American communities and specific settings. In the following section I analyzed African American students' language in small group discussions for evidences of the "push-pull" momentum.

Displaying Double Consciousness as a Sociological-Linguistic Phenomenon

"Linguistic push-pull," (coined by Geneva Smitherman) is a linguistic phenomenon that was identified sociologically by W.E.B. DuBois, in which Dubois (1968) describes the "cultural and political ambivalence" of the African American:

the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this

American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only

lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation,

this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of

others … one ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts,

two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (3)

In relation to AAL, Smitherman states, "the 'push-pull' momentum is evidenced in the historical development of AAL in the push towards Americanization, which is counter balanced by the pull of retaining its Africanization" (p. 295). Thus, a "de-creolization" of African languages occurred as slaves became more Americanized (push). However, "blacks have never really been viewed or treated as equals," which prompts their rejection of White American culture and English, causing the process of decreolization to remain unfinished (pull) (Smitherman, 1999, p. 295).

Language ambivalence is displayed in the following excerpt from a small group discussion in which an African American student describes AVT as an effective mode of communication, yet she advises AAL speakers to be cautious when using AVT in their academic writing:

> I think that because this is just now getting out it is still resistance from everyone else who is not aware. You know what I mean? So, I think you still have to be conscious of what teacher, or what professor you are putting it in the paper for, because some teachers and professors will resist it. And if you write it they will call it unprofessional. And you know, I guess they're un-educated. But still you have to be cautious like when you use it.

In this dialogue the student acknowledges the validity of Ebonics and AVT, and its ability to be used as a successful mode of communication, yet she still exhibits a fear of judgment from teachers who may be "uneducated" on the subject matter. Her wavering response may demonstrate a lasting effect of double consciousness on curtailing the amount of information some students received.

This form of language ambivalence caused some African American students in this study to feel "caught between two conflicting worlds" by having to switch back and forth mentally between the discourse that is often used to describe AAL/Ebonics in the media, and the contrasting discourse that what was now being used to define AAL/Ebonics in AVT instruction in this particular class. For example, one of the major claims in AVT instruction is that AVT is appropriate for any genre of academic writing (Smitherman, 1999, p.186). However, the responses from some African American students in their small group discussions strongly suggest that after AVT instruction, some African American students were still unable to grasp this concept.

Another form of language ambivalence that many African American students expressed in their small group discussions was having to endure the frustrations of explaining AVT to people outside of their writing class. For example, in the following small group discussion three

African American students describe their experiences with discussing AVT with friends and family members in the African American community:

4. Explaining AVT

1 James: And explaining that [AVT Curriculum] to people is even harder.

2 Calina: Yeah!

3 Tiffany: Older people – they say, "No that's not true!" You don't wanna be

4   fighting wit' yo grandparents about it!

5 Calina: Right, and like with the whole Ebonics thing, you really can't tell

6   people like, "I am speaking correct. This is "blah blah blah." They're

7   like, "that's not a language." But it's so hard to be like - "yea it is, I

8   learned it." They're like "No. You didn't learn anything!" *(laughter)*

9 Tiffany: It's like, if they learn it, then they gon' understand it.

The African American students in conversation 4 describe their experiences with language ambivalence and being caught between two worlds, which for them is their community and school. In their small group discussion, the students describe being judged or misunderstood by people in their communities who have not been exposed to AVT curriculum and instruction. They share stories about how difficult it is to explain to their family and friends what they are learning about AAL.

5.3 Conclusion

An explicit goal of this research study was to elicit a positive response from students, especially African American students, which may encourage them to view AVT as a valuable

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asset in academic writing. The examples from students' small group discussions may suggest that this goal was accomplished. To reiterate, after AVT instruction many students expressed a sense of pride in the AVT, which ultimately resulted in their desire to learn more about AVT and the linguistic structure/history of AAL, as shown in the following statements:

> I don't know if there were that many negative responses. I think a lot of us grasped it and were like, "Oh, that's cool." It was exciting to learn about – for me. I wanted to learn more, actually.

> If we weren't in this class, honestly, how long would it have taken us to know about AVT? I mean, I literally went home and went on the Internet. I was like, "this is like so intriguing to me!" Seriously.

The responses above and other examples from students' small group discussions presented throughout the chapter show that most African American students took pleasure in learning about AVT, and some of these students took it upon themselves to gain more knowledge on the topic by doing additional research.

The previous comments also reflect some African American students engaging in the linguistic "pull," in which they seek to retain the Africanization of their Language by expressing their desire to learn more about the history/origins of AAL. For example, the student above described AVT instruction as an interesting experience or one that caused her to seek more knowledge about the subject matter, "I literally went home and went on the Internet. I was like, 'this is so intriguing to me!'" Similarly, other students chose to explore AVT further by choosing AVT as a research topic for their final essay in the class. All students were given the option to write their final paper on any topic that was discussed during the semester, and after four class periods on AVT, three African American students chose to write their final research papers on

AAL. This continued interest in the topic from students can also be considered a "pull" or evidence of their efforts to retain the Africanization of their language. Very few examples of a "push" towards Americanization from African American students were found in students responses in small group discussions. Overall most African American students seemed to have a desire to retain (pull) and develop (pull) their AVT skills.

Finally, the culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogical framework implemented allowed African American students to see how their culture contributes to American standardized communication structures, and may be incorporated into expected conventions for academic writing. This rhetorical strategy and social justice framework may have encouraged students to assert their rights to educational fairness and equality in the very explicit ways that they are illustrated in the student conversations presented in this chapter.

Overall, the results strongly suggest that African American students were very receptive to AVT instruction and, in the small group discussions, most African American students expressed having a positive experience in the class. Ultimately, African American students responses on surveys, essays, and in small groups suggest that African American students' grasped the overall concept of AVT instruction, which asserts that some of the written features of AVT are standard American rhetorical writing strategies and may be used in academic writing to help students produce more powerful rhetorical essays.

CHAPTER 6

STUDENTS' 'WRITE': THE IMPACT OF AVT INSTRUCTION ON THE DEVELOPMENT

OF STUDENTS' RHETORICAL WRITING SKILLS

Picture this; there is a white male relaxing on a usual day. He receives a call from a telemarketer about a survey. So the telemarketer asks the man will he be willing to participate in the survey. The man says yes. So the telemarketer begins to inform the man on what the survey is for and then follows up with an extensive question in a rapid tone. The man didn't comprehend everything so he asked the telemarketer to repeat himself. The telemarketer says, "Yo, what's up witcha?" with a displeased tone. The man replies and says, "Did you really just ask me that? I don't understand how you became a telemarketer and you cannot even use proper English." In a harsh tone he says, "You should be fired immediately and that way of speech should be eliminated!" and then hangs up.

 –Student Sample Introduction from Paper 2

6.1 Introduction

I was pleased when I read the previous introduction, which displays a student participant, David, in the course utilizing the AVT feature narrativizing as a rhetorical tool in his introductory paragraph as a lead-in to his essay. The anecdote above is a fictional story created by David, which suggests the main point of his essay in which he argues for society to accept and respect Ebonics as a legitimate language practice. The AVT curriculum encouraged writers to use narrativizing in introductions to frame the focus of their essay and it was encouraging to see that some students had engaged this rhetorical strategy. However, I was overwhelmed with excitement when I noticed that David developed his use of narrativizing later in the essay in a way that had not been taught or emphasized during the course of instruction.

As mentioned previously, I encouraged students to use narrativizing as a tool of revision and invention to call up ideas, beliefs, and worldviews in relation to their topic that would inspire

readers to take action and make change (DeJoy, 2004). However, this student used narrativizing in his introduction and conclusion as a way to reiterate his argument in a powerful way. For example, as shown below, in his conclusion the student refers back to the fictitious story he presents in the introduction, to emphasize his main point. The introduction and conclusion from this particular essay appear below:

Introduction

> Picture this; there is a white male relaxing on a usual day. He receives a call from a telemarketer about a survey. So the telemarketer asks the man will he be willing to participate in the survey. The man says yes. So the telemarketer begins to inform the man on what the survey is for and then follows up with an extensive question in a rapid tone. The man didn't comprehend everything so he asked the telemarketer to repeat himself. The telemarketer says, **"Yo, what's up witcha?"** with a displeased tone. The man replies and says, "Did you really just ask me that? I don't understand how you became a telemarketer and you cannot even use proper English." In a harsh tone he says, "You should be fired immediately and that way of speech should be eliminated!" and then hangs up.

Conclusion

> It may seem evident to many that Ebonics should be eliminated because of its slightly configured structure of Standard English. Based on facts, Ebonics is every bit of useful as Standard English, maybe even more useful because of AVT. As long as the message is being transmitted efficiently the debate over eradicating Ebonics should be terminated. Evidently the use of Ebonics is very reliable in today's media. Due to the effect of the AVT, history of African American language, and the usefulness of it in the African American community, Ebonics has every right to be respected as its' own language. So to all the nay-sayers my question still remains: **"Yo, what's up witcha?"**

In his conclusion, David ends with a line from his introduction/narrative, which brings his essay full circle. By ending with this line and posing the question, "Yo, what's up witcha," David uses signifying/indirection to remind the reader of the previous narrative he constructs in the introduction in which a white male boldly reprimands a telemarketer for his use of AAL. By

quoting this line David indirectly identifies with the telemarketer and positions himself as an AAL speaker. In contrast, the "naysayers" or readers who disagree with his argument are aligned with the white male in the conversation/narrative who shows no respect for AAL. David's choice to use AAL in the concluding paragraph of his essay may represent a form of resistance to the dominant culture, which does not consider AAL a legitimate language or proper form of communication for speaking and/or writing. Further, his rhetorical question: "Yo, what's up witcha?" ("Hey, what's wrong with you?"), conveys sounding and signifying/indirection because the tone of the question reveals his frustration with people who reject his point of view and indirectly suggests that people should acknowledge and respect AAL as a valid language system. The student's use of narrativizing in the introduction and his reference back to this narrative in his conclusion is an extremely effective rhetorical move that makes his writing more powerful. Thus, I was pleasantly pleased to see this student developing his AVT skills in creative ways that were not explored in the readings and full class discussions.

Development of rhetorical writing skills is an especially important task for first year college students to explore due to the increasingly common expectations for delivering messages in written form for rhetorical purposes (DeJoy & Williams, 2010). According to DeJoy and Williams (2010) students often have to write, read, discuss, etc. with members of a community who have different cultural literacies. Thus rhetorical writing skills may help students develop strategies for participating in and contributing to conversations that include people from different structural positions of power and different cultural backgrounds in effective ways. Research shows that students are often instructed to write in ways that do not reflect rhetorical style and

creativity. According to Trimmer (1997) most of our professional training has debunked teaching

or using stories to convey knowledge because "They are not reliable. They are not verifiable.

They are not statistically generalizable" (p. xi). Tan (1990) also explores how language ability

tests and achievement tests (e.g. IQ tests and the SAT) force students to construct writing that is

filled with carefully wrought grammatical phrases, past perfect tenses, conditional phrases and

other forms of "standard English" that may produce bland combinations of thoughts. Tan argues

that language ability tests do not capture the intent, passion, and imagery of our speech that are

the nature of our thoughts (p. 32). Ultimately, what Tan asserts here is that we cannot rely on

standardized tests to measure one's intelligence, which is often evidenced by the creativity and

style employed in our writing. Matsuda and Tardy (2007) also explore the relevance of voice in

academic writing and how Western ideology, characterizes academic writing as "relatively

impersonal—if not objective or neutral—and therefore voiceless." (p. 236). However, the AVT

curriculum in this study encourages students to use rhetorical writing strategies that display voice

and style in their essays, and reading and writing activities were designed to help students

develop these skills.

This chapter examines my research question, which inquires the following: "How does

AVT instruction impact students' use of the following five AVT features: repetition/alliteration,

signifyin[g] and indirection, call & response, narrativizing, and sounding, in their final essays?"

Thus, student essays were analyzed to determine if students used AVT features in their writing

before and after the study was conducted. The number of AVT features applied in each student

essay is calculated to determine frequency. For example, the amount of AVT features students

used in paper 1 (the lived literacy letter), which was written before students' exposure to AVT instruction, was compared to the amount of features students used in paper 2 (the analysis paper), which was assigned after AVT instruction. Also, students' pre- and post-essays were analyzed to determine which AVT features were used more and less frequently. To enhance verification and explore the meaning of the results, the numerical data from students' essays is compared to student survey responses, and observations of students' in-class learning experiences documented in my field notes. Finally, I explore how students employ AVT, in writing, to complete specific rhetorical tasks. I examine changes in students' rhetorical use of the five AVT features from paper 1 to paper 2 to assess the effects of AVT instruction on the development of students' rhetorical writing skills.

6.2 Students' Combined Use of AVT Features Before and After AVT Instruction

Before AVT instruction took place students were required to write a "lived literacy letter" (paper 1) addressed to their family members, which described their experiences with learning about the course focus on human origins. For this assignment students read Diop (1974) and other scholars whose texts recognize the silence on African and African American contributions to the world, especially with regard to human origins. The controversial nature of the readings, and the form of the first essay (i.e. reflection), permit students to engage several expressive delivery and style choices in their writing (e.g. strong voice, direct address, attitude/mood, oral language patterns, etc.) to meet the expectations of their audience.

The second essay compared in this section is the analysis paper (paper 2), which was assigned after AVT instruction. This assignment asked students to generate one main deduction

or assertion from the course readings and present a clear and convincing argument. In addition, the writing prompt for this essay made clear that the writer's tone and voice should be: serious, professional, respectful, and ethical. The analysis paper/expository essay is commonly taught to have a more traditional structure (i.e., claim –evidence-warrant) than the reflection essay or personal narrative. This writing style is also less inviting to the incorporation of oral language features. However, the comparative framework I used as a teaching strategy strongly encouraged students to employ AVT features in all writing assignments for rhetorical purposes. Thus, to determine the effects of this approach I compared the amount of AVT features students used in paper 1, to the amount of AVT features students used in paper 2. The difference in quantity of students' AVT use before and after AVT instruction is shown below (see Figure 1.1):
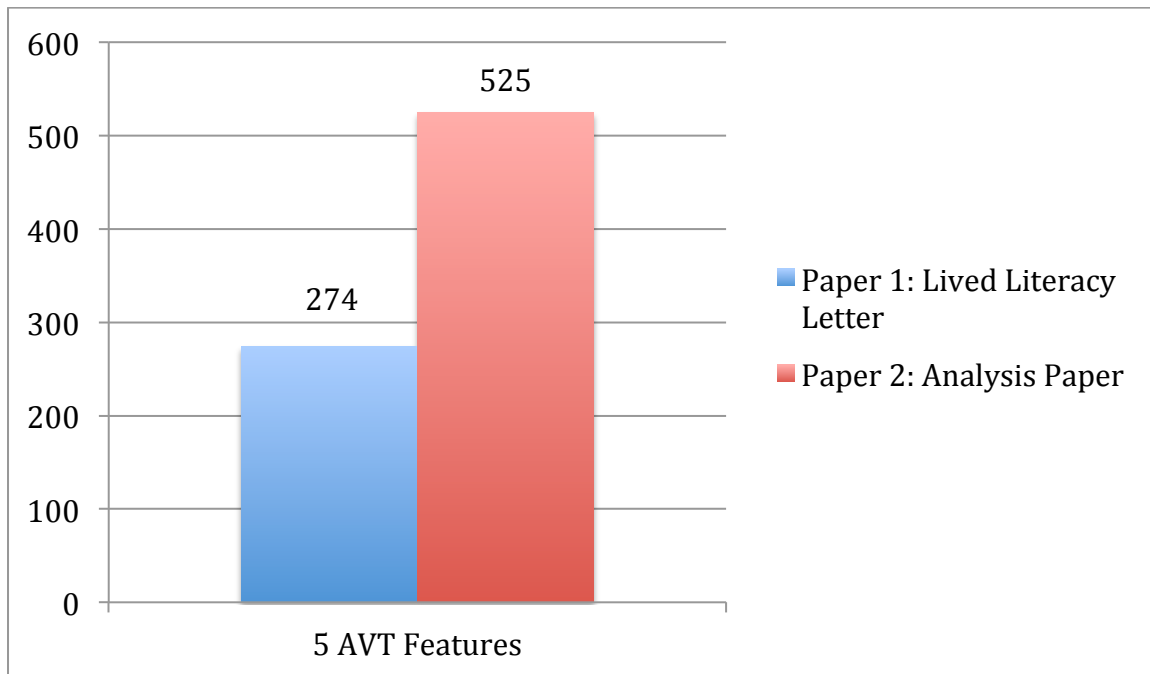
Figure 1.1 AVT Use Before and After AVT Instruction For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.

As shown above, the number of AVT features students used in their essays rose from 274 features in paper 1, to 525 features in paper 2. It is important to note that the lived literacy letter (paper 1) was significantly shorter in page length (2-3 pages) than the analysis paper, which required a minimum 3-5 pages, however; most students' essays for assignment 2 ranged from 5-8 pgs. Therefore, the increase of AVT features in paper 2 may conceivably be attributed in part to the longer length of the essay. Despite the potential influence of page length, the increase in the amount of AVT features may also be attributable to AVT instruction.

The results show that an increase in AVT features corresponds with positive student assessments/evaluations, which were highly favorable of AVT use in academic and professional

settings (see Figures 1.2-1.3). Students were asked the following question on the pre- and post-surveys: "Is AVT appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings?" For this question, students were required to rate the appropriateness of AVT and were given the following options: 1 (no answer), 2 (not appropriate), 3 (somewhat appropriate), or 4 (appropriate). The pre-survey was administered to students before they were exposed to any components of AVT instruction. I assumed students would not be able to answer many of the posed questions on the pre-survey about AAL and AVT, however I administered the survey at this time to generate proof of this assumption. Before having formal instruction on AVT 22% (in Figure 1.2) of the students in this study said, "Yes" AVT is appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings. After having formal instruction on AVT, 84% of students chose option 4 indicating the appropriateness of AVT for writing and or speaking in academic settings. Thus, it appears that after being exposed to AVT instruction many students gained a greater appreciation for AVT as an effective mode of communication in academic settings. The significant change in the percentage of students who identified AVT as "appropriate for writing and/or speaking in academic settings," strongly suggests that AVT instruction has the potential to positively affect student perceptions of AVT. Further, the increase of AVT features in student essays, as noted above, supports the students' changes in attitude.

Pre-Survey Responses

Is African American Verbal Tradition appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings?

7%

22%

16%

41%

- No Answer
- Not Appropriate
- Somewhat Appropriate
- Appropriate
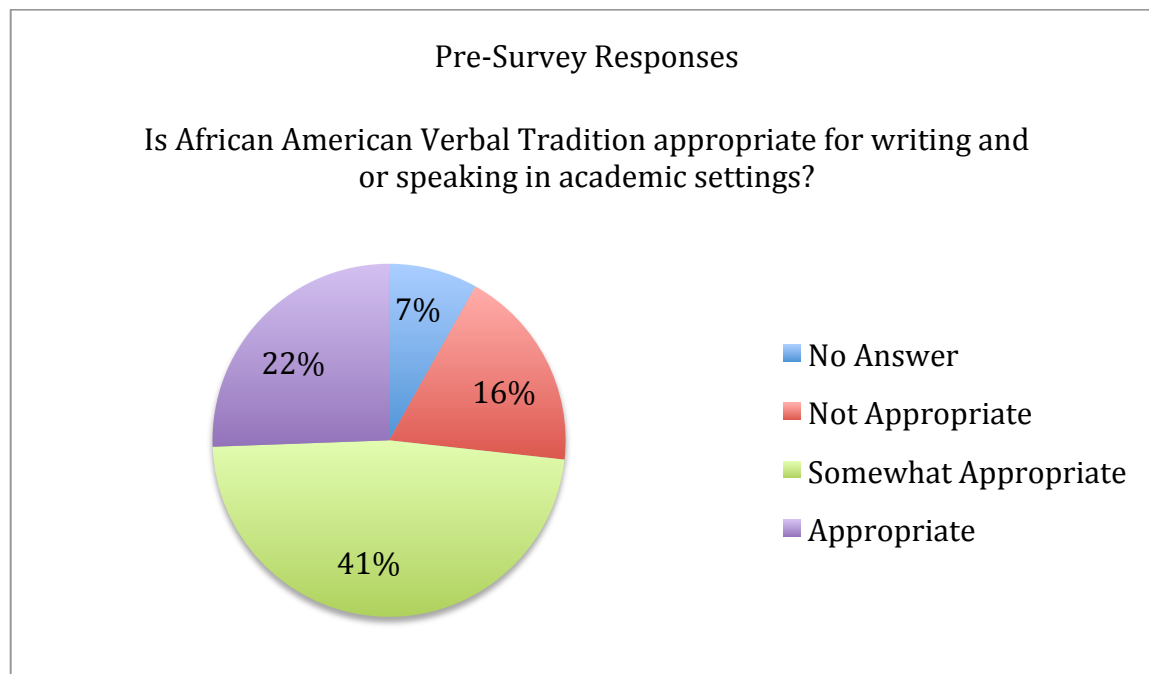
Figure 1.2 Pre Survey Responses

Post-Survey Responses

Is African American Vertbal Tradition appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings?

16%

84%

- No Answer
- Not Appropriate
- Somewhat Appropriate
- Appropriate
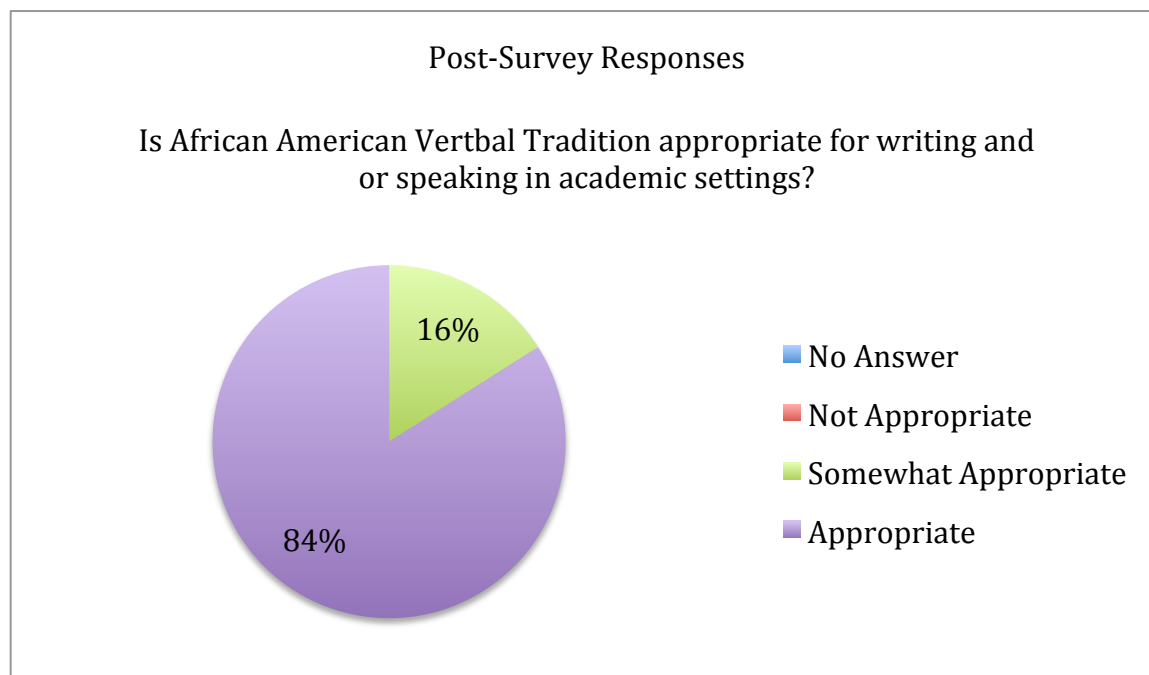
Figure 1.3 Post Survey Responses

The data in this section answers my research question in regards to students' pre/post language attitudes towards AVT, and suggests that AVT instruction may have positive effects on students' perceptions of AVT use in academic writing.

6.3 Development of AVT Features/ Changes From Paper 1 to Paper 2

In this section I will individually examine the frequency of each AVT feature and how it may change from paper 1 to paper 2 (see Figure 1.4) to determine which features were more developed in students' writing after AVT instruction. To help explain the results I will describe my interactions with students, during formal class sessions, to illustrate when it appears students may have comprehended a particular rhetorical strategy and the lessons and teaching strategies employed/engaged, which may have caused or facilitated this comprehension. I will also discuss parts of the curriculum that students found challenging and how this relates to their use and/or nonuse of specific AVT features.
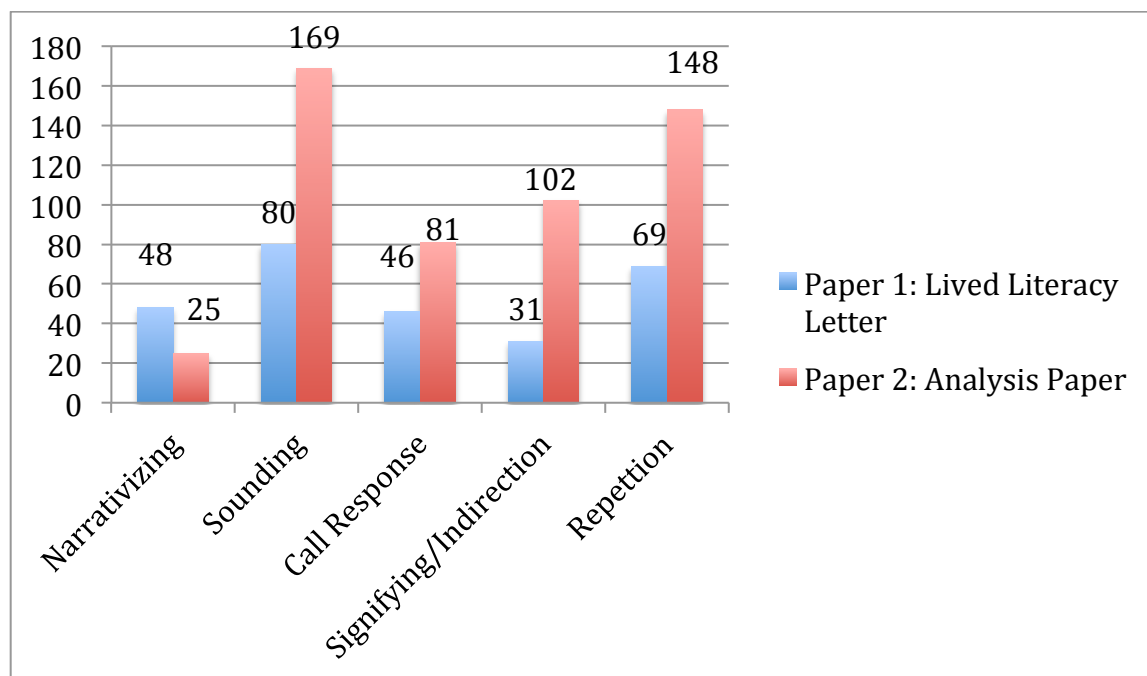
Figure 1.4 Changes in AVT Features from Paper 1 to Paper 2

As shown in the table above, of the five AVT features coded in paper 1, sounding and repetition appeared most frequently. In paper 1, results show 80 examples of sounding and 69 examples of repetition. Results also show that, of the five AVT features (in paper 1) signifying/indirection was used the least and only appeared 31 times in student essays. For paper 2, students continued to utilize sounding and repetition features most frequently. For example, sounding features increased from 80 forms, in paper 1, to 169 in paper 2, and repetition increased from 69 examples, in paper 1, to 148 forms of repetition in paper 2. Finally, of the five features coded in paper 2, call response, signifying/indirection, and narrativizing appeared the least. Call response examples increased from 46 to 81, signifying/indirection features increased from 31 to 102, and narrativizing decreased from 48 to 25.

6.4 Analysis of Significant AVT Features in Paper 1

Sounding

Sounding always involves an audience (Delain and Anderson, 1985). However, according to Spears (1999) the "directness" (which includes indirection) in sounding is often criticized and censured, particularly, "in cases of public rhetoric delivered in a black cultural framework but interpreted by whites or other non-African-Americans" (p. 1). Further, Spears maintains those with linguistic expertise must analyze directness, in African American speech, in order to counteract the many misbegotten discussions that are currently in circulation (p. 2). According to Spears (1999), directness in African American verbal culture can be seen in many forms:

> It involves speech events such as cussin out (cursing directed to a particular addressee), playing the dozens (a game of ritual insults), snapping, reading people (theatrically delivered negative criticism), verbally abusing people, going off on someone (a sudden, often unexpected burst of negatively critical, vituperative speech), getting real (a fully candid appraisal of a person, situation, event, etc.), and trash talk (talk in competitive settings, notably athletic games, that is boastful and puts down opponents). (p. 2)

According to Spears (1999), African Americans are influenced by White mainstream contexts to turn apologetic for their use of directness (p. 3). However, "many of the behaviors that African Americans sometimes wish to disclaim were integral, functional characteristics of the highly successful all-black institutions that flourished before integration, educational institutions not the least among them" (p.3). Thus, directness should not be considered a negative speech practice

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because it has been, and is still of use in many institutional settings (Spears, 1999, p. 3).

Many students used sounding in their first essay (lived literacy letter) to directly express their feelings of frustration and/or anger towards the topic under study. The main texts for this course emphasized that there is a silence on African & African Diasporic contributions to the world, especially with regard to human origins. Content from students' essays show that these claims were surprising to the majority of student participants. Therefore, as shown in the examples listed below, many students used sounding in their writing as a tool to convey their thoughts and to reflect on the readings:

> I felt that it is not very important to know where the origins of man came from **because as long as we are here on Earth it did not matter.** I also felt that there should not be arguments on who was the first race on Earth or whose stories on how man came to Earth were true.

> I understand that Diop's findings will not sit well with many of the other cultures because **they are too busy worrying about the physical features and not the blood that's running through our veins.**

> **It annoys me** that people have attempted and partially succeeded in changing history.

> This experience has helped me grow and learn more about my background as an African-American woman, **this is why I wanted to share this information with you! Diop evinces that race is made up or doesn't exist!**

> They made a white skull to try to show that the first man was white but Diop realized that it was a fake skull and that information was being hidden so that people will never know the truth. That is why my dear family, that **you must understand where we come from and to believe it, because people are going to want to fool you all about the truth.**

> It's outrageous to think when we look at history, especially targeting Americans. Looking back less than two hundred years ago blacks were treated unbearably and were slaves to white people. **If Diop's theory is correct, then my race as Caucasian people were putting our own race in chains.**

I would have never have thought that human origins began in Africa and that the first man was a black man. **When I read that, I was surprised and couldn't believe it.**

We were once kings and queens and should be noted for the civilized lifestyle that we know today. **We were not incompetent wild savages and then brought to America and was tamed by the white man.** All of this information was falsified. **Not knowing the truth only contributed to the white man being able to beat us down.** Keeping this secret from Africans brought our race down. Most black people felt that they really had nothing to fight for because we came from nothing. Thanks to Dr. Diop we shall all be able to live more confidently.

I can now trace many of my misconceptions about Africa [back] to **the dishonest scientists.**

As shown above, students used sounding as a written communication structure to describe their reactions to learning about African human origins. For example, in the excerpt that reads, "**It annoys me** that people have attempted and partially succeeded in changing history," the student's use of the word "annoys" directly suggests her anger towards historical documents and scientists who seek to promote a false belief of human origins. Other students used indirection to convey sounding in their essays as shown in the following statement: "This experience has helped me grow and learn more about my background as an African-American woman, **this is why I wanted to share this information with you! Diop evinces that race is made up or doesn't exist!"** In this sounding example, the student states, "this experience has helped me grow…as an African American woman," which indirectly suggests that she may have had identity (race/gender) issues, which were positively affected by reading Diop and learning that race is a social construct or "doesn't exist." Another example of sounding appears in the following sentence written by an African American student: "That is why, my dear family, that **you must understand where we come from and to believe it, because people are going to**

want to fool you all about the truth." This student's use of the word "people" to describe those who "are going to want to fool you," is an indirect statement because Diop specifically identifies specific scientists as the proponents of the false claims regarding the origins of human civilization. However, her use of the word "people," (instead of those specific scientists) may be a rhetorical move to expand Diop's claims about cultural bias in scientific research to include all people, particularly White people. Thus, in the previous examples above, sounding may have served as a vehicle for students to describe their perceptions of the course content, which ranged from shock and amazement to denial and displeasure, etc.

As mentioned previously, sounding is a mode of discourse in verbal communication that is commonly used to convey strong emotions. Thus, it is logical that students used a significant number of sounding features in this essay, as a writing strategy, to convey their feelings. Additionally, students may have used sounding more frequently in paper 1 due to the form/structure of the essay, which allowed students to directly address the audience. Also, the controversial nature of the readings for this assignment may contribute to the significant use of sounding features students utilized to express their personal opinions.

Repetition

Repetition also occurred frequently in paper 1. However, it is important to note there are several schemes of repetition, and in this study each essay was coded for five specific forms: parallelism/parallel structure, anaphora, chiasmus, antithesis, and alliteration (see table 5.1). These schemes of repetition are solely identified in classical Greek rhetoric; however, as mentioned in chapter 2, repetition is far more prevalent in African American rhetorical practices

since prime importance is attached to the spoken word (Champion, 2003; Tomlin, 1999). The

five forms of repetition in this study were selected because they are commonly used in AVT and

can often be observed in political speeches, songs, sermons, and informal conversations (Tomlin,

1999, p.148). Therefore, it was expected for these forms of repetition to appear in student texts

because novice writers often rely on discourse rules that have a basis in speech (Welch, 1990).

Table 5.1

Examples of Repetition Schemes from Student Essays (Paper 1)

Anaphora	**"Some say** we look different because of the climate. **Some say** we are different because we are different races."
	"If we don't learn our history we are bound to repeat it, and **if we** aren't informed we are bound to lose our historical memory becoming a very fragile people."
Antithesis	"Greek is not a race - it's an ethnicity."
	"While we all presently have accepted this fact as truth not too long ago it wasn't."
Chiasmus	"I do not define myself with color, and it does not define me."
Parallelism	"The writer used many pictures of Egyptian **carvings, paintings, and structures.**"
	"Dr. Diop, he was a visionary, **a man** who refused to conform, **a man** who denied living in ignorance, **a man** who would search for a truth that could unite mankind once again."
Alliteration	"If ***Jesus*** was from ***Jerusalem***, he had to be black."
	"If you were to open your eyes and read between ***the lines of lies***, you would see that your ancestors and my ancestors meet in a common place, Africa."

However, as mentioned earlier in the literature review, there is a prevailing notion in the field of composition that orality should be kept separate from written language, and orality includes repetition schemes, which are speech like strategies. Therefore, most students had not received writing instruction on how to incorporate different schemes of repetition in their persuasive writing assignments. Thus, as an in-class activity, I designed a teaching tool/handout that described the select five schemes of repetition. Students used this tool to code an academic essay written by bell hooks (1999) in which the author writes using the five schemes of repetition. During this coding exercise it was difficult for most students to easily identify the schemes of repetition in their distinctly different forms.

Of the five schemes of repetition, parallelism appeared to be the most accessible to students. Parallelism is performed when writers repeat similar grammatical structures to create a balance. Students appeared to be very familiar with this form of repetition and could verbally describe how it functions. For example, the coding activity asked students to identify repetition schemes in the text and to share the examples they found with the class. I confirmed students' answers using an answer key I constructed, which highlighted and identified the specific forms of repetition in the text. In this literary exercise one student identified an example of parallelism that I did not have in my answer key. When I mistakenly dismissed her example she challenged my response and explained specifically how the author's sentence resembled parallel structure. As she gave her explanation, other students in the class joined in to help her describe how the sentence under review was indeed a form of parallelism. Thus, most students in the class were able to successfully identify parallelism or parallel listings.

Parallelism is significant in this study because parallelism is commonly taught in basic composition courses as a sentence skill (Langan, 2008). Thus, students' familiarity with parallel structures suggests that most students may have been formally taught how to use this feature in writing prior to having AVT instruction. In addition, the results from student essays show that parallelism accounts for 65% of the repetition schemes in paper 1, which strongly implies that parallelism is widely used and therefore, may be considered a more common dominant Western form of repetition. However, according to Champion (2003) parallelism is a stylistic characteristic of storytelling within West African culture, which is "frequently used in longer narratives due to the storyteller's memory loss" (p. 22). An example of parallelism in African storytelling is when "the narrator will use his imagination to play one set of words against another without changing the theme of the narrative" (p. 22). The repeated devices in parallel structures create an effective narrative strategy for African storytellers because the rhythmic effect appeals to both the audience and the performer, and supports "the overall framework on which the performance is built" (Champion, 2003, p. 21-22). Ultimately, parallelism is a feature of African American oral tradition that has been passed on from generation to generation and can be seen in the following forms of narrative sequencing: toasts, personal storytellying, folktales, ghost stories, and preaching (Champion, 2003, p. 21).

Table 6.1

Total Number of Repetition Schemes for Paper 1

	Paper 1 Frequency	Percentage Produced
Anaphora	7	11
Antithesis	4	6
Chiasmus	1	1
Parallelism	**45**	**65**
Alliteration	12	17
Total	69	100

The other four schemes of repetition in table 6.1 are not used as frequently in academic writing, but are commonly identified as AVT. Of these four forms combined, 24 examples appeared in student essays, and of these 24 examples, 12 of these examples were identified in African American student texts. Therefore, it is apparent that while most students were unfamiliar with the least common schemes of repetition, (e.g. anaphora, antithesis, chiasmus, alliteration), African American students utilized these features more frequently in their writing, which supports the idea that repetition is a commonly used feature in AVT.

Signifyin/Indirection

Although signifyin/indirection may appear in many light-hearted forms (e.g. the Dozens, which is a ritualized kind of put-down, an insult, needling, etc.) and employed just for fun; it is another form of directness and "it is often used to make a point, to issue a corrective, or to

critique through indirection and humor" (Smitherman, 1999, p. 277). According to Spears (1999), directness characterizes some of the speech of all human communities, including white Americans. However, "there is significantly more directness in black language behavior, and the rules and norms governing it are significantly different from those of the white U.S. community" (p. 6). Thus, Spears' claim that directness is more prevalent in African American speech communities supports the following results: In the present study, of the five AVT features, signifying/indirection was used the least by students in the lived literacy letter (paper 1). For example, in paper 1, only 31 forms of signifying/indirection appeared in student essays. The lower frequency of signifying/indirection features in paper 1 may result from non-African American students' lesser familiarity with this AVT feature. For example, 83% of African American students used signifying/indirection in their first essay, compared to only 28% of Non-African American students who also applied this feature. Therefore, these results from student essays suggest that most African American students were familiar with signifying/indirection prior to AVT instruction and non-African American students were less familiar.

Further, observations and experiences documented in my field notes from my interactions with students during and after class sessions shows that signifying/indirection was the most challenging feature for non-black students to comprehend. For example, signifying/indirection was taught in the third class session. Up to day three many students, particularly White American students, had refrained from actively engaging verbally (i.e. asking/answering questions, offering feedback) in full class discussions. However, at the end of this class period I introduced an unexpected homework assignment that asked students to identify signifying/indirection in an

alternative media form. I made clear that in the following class session, students would be required to give an informal presentation on the example they chose, and describe to the class how it is a form of signifying/indirection.

After I introduced the assignment the class immediately erupted with questions. The students who asked the majority of the questions were primarily non-black students. The most common response I received from these students was "I don't get this." Specifically, after class, one Latina student began to cry, which was very shocking. When her peers tried to console her, she just continued to cry and said she understood "nothing."

Other non-black students also stayed after class to continue to discuss the assigned homework. As mentioned previously, most non-black students who were unclear about the assignment did not actively participate in full class discussions, and often appeared to be disengaged during class. Many said, "I don't get it [AVT]," yet when I asked, they could not explain what they did not understand. Their inability to verbalize their concerns and confusion about the assignment suggests that these students may not have been paying attention during AVT class sessions. One Asian American student who seemed disengaged in the first three class sessions expected me to explain all three days of AVT instruction to him in the 20 minutes between the end of their class, and the next class session. It was clear that this student did not pay close attention in the previous AVT sessions, because he could not remember any examples or instructional techniques I used in prior classes. However, the larger point here is that the AVT feature signifying/indirection was the most challenging feature for non-black students to comprehend.

6.5 Development of the 5 AVT Features in Paper 2

Sounding

Students utilized sounding features more frequently in the second essay. However, this feature may have occurred more frequently because it often overlaps with other AVT features in academic writing. For example, many authors convey sounding through signifying/indirection and call response. To illustrate how some authors utilize overlapping features, students read excerpts from Troutman's (1997) essay on oral features of AAL in African American first year college students' writing. In this study, Troutman describes the need for teachers to adopt cultural and linguistic pluralism in composition classroom and she uses rhetorical questions as a strategy to assert her argument and generate a dialogue with the reader:

> Shouldn't students be given the right to discover and warm up their authentic voices before they add on other voices? Isn't that precisely the philosophy we prescribe but do not practice? Do we aim to create humanoids who write in simulated voices, not possessing individualized senses of self? (p.36)

As a class we examined Troutman's writing style in the excerpt above and how she uses sounding in rhetorical questions to convey her feelings of displeasure with the current state of composition, which does not honor the different languages/dialects of diverse students. The rhetorical questions (call-response) she presents indirectly (signifying) calls attention to the morals and ethics of educators that all teachers should be privy to. In full class discussion students considered the rhetorical effects of Troutman combining three AVT features (signifying/indirection, sounding, and call response) to make her point. Some students

maintained that sounding and signifying/indirection in its individual forms might be

inappropriate for some writing situations because of its directness and strong tone, which may

not always be engaging, especially when attempting to generate a dialogue with the reader. Thus,

many students used overlapping AVT features to convey strong points in ways that may appeal

to the reader/audience. The following excerpts from the second essay are rhetorical questions

that combine the following AVT features: sounding, signifying/indirection, and call-response.

> Would you believe humans were originally black?
>
> How could something so valuable, turn into something phony, essentially overnight, and be so accepted in such a vast world?
>
> Theories like African and Asian derivation contradict so which one do you choose?
>
> Why have I never heard of this before? And why is this new to the majority of the class also? How true can something be if students don't, and most likely won't, learn about it unless they take this particular class in college?
>
> We have all heard the saying *"Africa is the cradle of civilization."* If this is to be true then why are its people made out to be wild savages? Why have most of its technological advancements been accredited to the Greeks, and why do people believe that we didn't all evolve from one being and place hierarchy over one race?
>
> Followers of this [polygenetic] theory believe that man was born in Africa, Europe, and Asia and there was no evolutionary or climatic development. Where is the evidence that supports this claim?
>
> Why is information not taught uniformly? Why does the scientific community not make an effort to make these facts well known? This is because the information supports that the origination of humanity occurred in Africa.
>
> Why are all "White" public figures glorified, and few "Blacks" are mentioned in American history?

The previous examples show students using rhetorical questions as tools to express their strong

emotions toward the course content. Many of the questions posed by students reveal their

frustration with and anger toward the silence on African and African Diasporic contributions to the world. Students appear to use signifying/indirection as a means of conveying discontent as shown below:

> We have all heard the saying *"Africa is the cradle of civilization."* If this is to be true then why are its people made out to be wild savages? Why have most of its technological advancements been accredited to the Greeks, and why do people believe that we didn't all evolve from one being and place hierarchy over one race?

In the previous example, the rhetorical questions posed by this student function as sounding to resist people who make racist and false claims about people of African descent, which purposely seeks to deny the humanity of this population of people, "why are its people made out to be wild savages," and their historical contributions to civilization, "Why have most of its technological advancements been accredited to the Greeks?" The questions here indirectly suggest that people who perpetuate these myths are racist because they construct racial hierarchies, which privilege one group over another. Another example of overlapping AVT features, which appear in the previous example above, states: "Followers of this [polygenetic] theory believe that man was born in Africa, Europe, and Asia and there was no evolutionary or climatic development. Where is the evidence that supports this claim?" The rhetorical question in this statement is also a form of signifying/indirection. The question asks, "Where is the evidence that supports this claim"; however, the author's main argument suggests that she means the opposite – or that there is no evidence to support this claim. The tone of her question also signifies her frustration with "followers" who believe this theory. In addition, the term "followers" has a negative connotation,

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which further supports that this statement contains strong features of sounding. Students who use rhetorical questions as a vehicle to express these powerful emotions show their awareness of how style can be used to communicate effectively with diverse audiences. The central point here is that students who engaged call response and sounding as an overlapping AVT feature may have demonstrated their development of and ability to effectively use AVT features as rhetorical writing strategies.

When constructing their essays, and especially when using strong overlapping AVT tools such as sounding and signifying/indirection, students were encouraged to consider the point of view that when engaging an audience orators must carefully choose among inventive strategies to construct a speech appropriate to the personalities or dispositions of the listeners. According to Porter (1992) one of the problematic ways that audience is described in rhetoric is, audience considers the person as one thing, and does not consider the person in the act of reading. Thus, Students were encouraged to consider this point of view when constructing their essays, and especially when using strong AVT tools such as sounding and signifying/indirection in their conclusions in paper 2.

For example, in paper 1 (the lived literacy letter), students used sounding features consistently throughout the body of the essay, which was tone appropriate for that particular genre. However, for the formal analysis/expository essay (paper 2), I encouraged students to employ tone appropriate use of sounding features, which requires students to apply factual evidence and supporting details in body paragraphs, and use sounding to voice their opinions and major claims in the conclusion or near the end of the essay (Langdon, 2008). Thus, in paper 2,

sounding features appeared more frequently in students' concluding paragraphs, which differs

from paper 1 in which sounding appeared more fluidly throughout the entire essay. The

following paper excerpts are examples from students who used sounding in their conclusions to

emphasize their main arguments:

Sample Conclusion #1

> **Throughout the years the African Americans have adopted the western ideas of "black history." The biggest being, we have no history.** This has significantly affected our communities. There is a lack of self-confidence. This void can only be filled with the discovery of this history, and the distribution to our generations. **It is the world's duty to give credit to those who have contributed so much to our nation, that being the Egyptians. If the schools decide to keep teaching us the wrong information regarding the origin of mankind, we must be intelligent enough to know what is false. This is where we apply the wise words of Dr. MK Asante "In history class, I take two pairs of notes, the ones from the professor and the other the truth."**

Sample Conclusion #2

> **As a result of America's "Quality" education, society has been brainwashed into believing that human beings are classified into races.** It has been proven that there is no race among humanity, and **the only "race" is mankind.** Race, is simply a matter of climate, and the governments way to confine us all into groups. It is also a social construct that was created by "Whites" centuries ago, when they were thought to be superior beings. **I will leave you readers with this question, will you continue to let the American government spoon-feed you misinformation about your history, leading you to misconstrue your entire viewpoint on life?**

Sample Conclusion #3

> **We must stop teaching our youth the false history, which white European and Western civilizations have re-written, during the time of the slave expansion, and instead begin teaching the youth, world-wide, the truth behind our origins and our ancestors.** Dr. Diop (2007) says in his speech at Morehouse College, our educational system was in the hands of the colonizers who taught the population a fictitious history (p. 335). As mentioned earlier about the stolen Egyptian history; Africans lost all sense of their true past as the people who began the human race. **I believe we must introduce, reinforce, and teach the truth behind human origination. In a worldwide polluted educational system, we must begin to erase the counterfeit polygenetic history and**

replace it with the accurate monogenetic theory along with the facts about the first man being colored. Cleaning our polluted educational system will allow all humans, from every corner of the world, to understand their roots, and ancestries, and it will give them the realization, we are all the same, **there are no superior civilizations or groups of individuals!**

Sample Conclusion #4

Overall, the points mentioned: the falsification of historical records, the failure to acknowledge fossil records, and the disregarding of research on racial differentiation, announce that there is a serious unappreciation of Africa. This ignoring and lack of knowledge towards African contributions illustrate racism from the scientific community. Scientific Racism is the very severe obstacle we must dismantle. It is because of this racism that facts and actualities are camouflaged and misconstrued by the average population in contemporary society. As I stated before, Scientific Racism is the ultimate form of prejudice; it states that through "undeniable" "so called" scientific evidence certain groups are and always will be superior than others, and the others will indefinitely be inferior! I think this is an abomination! The average person on the street can be quite heedless to the contributions of Africa to humanity, yet people don't have to be rocket scientists to understand the facts, and their correlation towards the altercation against the un-appreciation of Africa as the birthplace of humanity.

We can all just sit and let life take its course, or we can take action, and refuse to lose a part of us, and to chart our own destiny towards a future that doesn't accept Scientific Racism. Any action, as menial as it might seem, can change the future of humanity; actions like educating ourselves, education our fellow neighbors, and advocating against ignorance. We are submerged in a world of misunderstanding, supremacy, and hate, but there is too much at stake for us to be fake, we have already came so far in this game of life to just turn and walk away and not do what we have to do. Distortion, Truth, Myth and Reality, sometimes it's hard to tell a difference, but we as the people of today, the people of tomorrow, have a responsibility to the kids of tomorrow.

In the examples above from students' concluding paragraphs it appears that students engaged

strong language use to convey their final points. For example, conclusion #4 reads: "there is a

serious unappreciation of Africa" and "I think this is an abomination!" Sounding also appears in

conclusion #3 in the following forms: "We must stop teaching our youth the false history, which

White European and Western Civilizations have re-written." The writer also ends their essay with the following statement: "there are no superior civilizations or groups of people!" In conclusion #2 the author engages sounding through their combined use of signifying/indirection and sounding as evidenced by their strategic use of scare quotes to describe "America's 'Quality' Education." These examples of sounding, which appear in the students' conclusions, may be considered some of the stronger examples of language in their essays. During AVT instruction I encouraged students to engage this form of strategic sounding in their research papers by presenting students with examples from academic texts of authors who also engage sounding in this way and for specific purposes. Overall the most apparent observation in paper 2 is that sounding appeared most frequently in the second essay. However, after closer examination it is clear that, in paper 2, students also used sounding strategically and for rhetorical effect (as shown in the previous examples). Thus, AVT instruction discussions on audience awareness may have contributed to this development in student writing.

Repetition

Repetition also appeared in high numbers in students' final essays. In fact, students' use of repetition increased significantly from paper 1 to paper 2 (see Figure 1.4). However, of the five schemes of repetition, parallelism remained the most dominant repetition scheme utilized by students. As mentioned previously, students were most familiar with parallelism/parallel listings as a grammatical structure appropriate for academic writing. Therefore, in paper 2, students were expected to either maintain or increase their use of this feature.

Overall, the lack of varied repetition schemes (anaphora, antithesis, chiasmus,

alliteration) utilized by students in paper 2 may suggest that there is a need for writing instructors to teach these skills. Some African American students, though, continued to use varied schemes of repetition in their essays; however, as mentioned previously, all class participants, regardless of their race/ethnic background, struggled to identify the varied schemes of repetition during the repetition coding exercise. Nonetheless, some African American students used unique repetition schemes in their writing perhaps because these schemes are part of their verbal tradition, yet the results from this study suggest that these students may have not been formally taught to identify them. Thus, there is room for more discussion on schemes of repetition in writing courses and it is a rhetorical device that should be made available to all students.

Table 7.1

Total Number of Repetition Schemes from Paper 1 to Paper 2

	Paper 1 Frequency	Paper 2 Frequency
Anaphora	7	12
Antithesis	4	6
Chiasmus	1	0
Parallelism	**45**	**110**
Alliteration	12	20
Total	**69**	**148**

Signifying/Indirection

During AVT instruction, students were taught how to use various forms of

signifying/indirection for rhetorical purposes. Several course materials were utilized to demonstrate how signifying/indirection may appear in academic texts. For example, as a full class exercise students read an excerpt from Equiano's (1789) slave narrative and analyzed the author's satirical writing style. The passage students were required to read and analyze describes Equiano's experiences as a slave and a seaman, who was born in Nigeria and sold into slavery. In class I explained to students that Equiano uses the discourse of Christianity to persuade his Anglo-European audience, and when he refers to Christians, it is often in "an indirect signifyin' way" (Richardson, 2003, pp. 42-43). I then asked students to analyze the language in the excerpt below from Equiano's autobiography for examples of signifying/indirection features:

> [O]ur children were named from some event, some circumstance, or fancied foreboding at the time of their birth. I was named Olaudah, which, in our language, signifies "vicissitude or fortunate," also, "one favoured, and having a loud voice and well spoken."
>
> I remember we never polluted the name of the object of our adoration; on the contrary, it was always mentioned with the greatest reverence; and we are totally unacquainted with swearing, and all those terms of abuse and reproach which find their way so readily and copiously into the language of more civilized people. (p. 20)

In the fuller excerpt, Equiano indirectly signifies on how he is perceived as a lesser human being by his slave masters; when he compares his background to his masters', Equiano's African cultural practices more closely align with Christian principles. When analyzing this written text, students observed how Equiano distinctly used language to demonstrate indirectly the civilized nature of his African culture (i.e. naming practices, heritage, language use, etc.) in contrast to the

"uncivilized" Western culture of his slave masters.

Students also explored how signifying/indirection can be performed in written texts through use of specific punctuation devices such as scare quotes, which are used around a word or phrase, when they are not required, to elicit attention or doubts. As a class we discussed how humor and satire may be used in writing to make a very serious situation easier to discuss. Conversely, we examined permissible ways of using a satirical writing style to create the opposite effect or to cause feelings of humiliation and anger, which may also be effective in some situations because it has the potential to appeal to the audiences' emotions and generate an immediate response/action from the reader.

Results show that signifying/indirection features were not among the most frequently used AVT features in paper 2. However, there was an increase in students' use of signifying/indirection from paper 1 (31 examples) to paper 2 (102 examples). The examples from student essays suggest that the writing and reading signifying/indirection exercises had a major impact on students' development of signifying/indirection, particularly students' use of scare quotes. In paper 2 scare quotes were "off the chain," which means signifying/indirection appeared more frequently in this form. Some examples of this writing style in students' texts appear below:

> Some of the false evidence that scientists have tried to create was the Piltdown man, which was "found" in 1912, but later in 1954 was revealed to be fabricated (*Ivan Van Sertima*, pg. 182).

> It's outrageous to me that so called "scientists" would ever falsify evidence in any field of study!

> However, due to sentiments of the white race being the "right race" they have in essence

de-pigmented civilizations of old in many instances.

After being forbidden to return to their homeland, these scholars such as Archimedes, Dinostratus, Plutarch, Plato, and Pythagoras went to Egypt to escape the persecution. When all of these great thinkers returned to their homeland they had "invented" new theorems, formulas, and tools.

All this effort in dividing us into groups blurred the real image that no human being in this planet is different and belongs to a "specific" group, culture, or race. This action of "educating" us about different races and origins took human beings into diminishing African Americans culture and language practices, and not only that but also gave us wrong information of our ancestors.

Because of the false evidence given throughout our education, the white men who are suppose to be the "superior" race, got in charge of diminishing people of color and putting them on the bottom of the race scheme.

It is my belief that when Europeans "rediscovered" Africa by means of colonization, and saw a tribe-based society, that they viewed the Africans as below them.

Through this metamorphosis, humans would be diversified into several "races". The word "races" is set in parenthesis because race is a social constructed notion.

In the examples above students performed the AVT feature signifying/indirection in their writing through their use of scare quotes to display elements of sarcasm, doubt, and denial in relation to false claims made by specific scientists.

It is important to note that in paper 1, of the 31 coded features of signifying/indirection, only 3 examples of signifying/indirection appeared in the form of scare quotes. However in paper 2, of the 102 written features of signifying/indirection, 47 examples of this feature appeared in the form of scare quotes. Thus, the results strongly suggest that AVT instruction, which demonstrates how this punctuation device may be used to achieve signifying/indirection, may have caused a significant increase in student use of this particular form and ultimately

caused an overall increase in the total amount of signifying/indirection, which more than tripled from paper 1 to paper 2.

Call Response

Call response was also utilized less frequently but very effectively in essay 2. Call response, traditionally performed in many Black churches, is defined as the "spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 104). Examining how call and response may transfer to students' writing allowed the class to discuss the role of rhetorical questions as a form of call and response and how these could be used as tools of "invention" to generate a response from the reader in terms of calling up "ideas, world-views, beliefs, and actions" in relationship to claims made by the author in the written text (DeJoy, 2004, p. 72).

During AVT instruction, call response was described as an effective writing tool for the opening/introduction of a formal paper. Thus, in the beginning of their essays students were encouraged to ask readers questions pointedly that launched their research, or questions readers might raise about the particular topic. As a result, many students used call response in the form of rhetorical questions as a lead-in to their main argument. Some examples of call response from student introductions appear below:

Sample Introduction #1

> **What is your first thought when hearing the name Africa? Does the "Dark Continent" come to mind?** The thought that "Oh, they haven't done anything significant." This is probably some of the most common thoughts. **What is the reasoning behind this?** This stigma cripples the African community. They are left thinking they haven't contributed anything in their pasts. This is a stigma that can be broken, by the substantial amount of evidence of Black/Egyptian contributions. Africa's contributions to the world have been expunged from history, and therefore have affected

the African community.

Sample Introduction #2

Where did humans come from, what did they look like, and who had the most advanced civilization during the time of the pyramids? These are two questions that are asked by many people living in this world. The answer to these two questions are in the research of Cheikh Anta Diop. He was a historian, anthropologist, physicist, and politician, who studied the human race's origins and pre-colonial African culture. He has the evidence and he has done the research to back up much of what he has to say about these two questions that I agree with.

Sample Introduction #3

As we communicate in our everyday lives, do we stop to think about every word we use, how we accent each syllable, what grammatical rules we are following? Do we question the way we formulate our thoughts to get our point across to our intended audience—the way that we stress our sentences, narrate our stories, and articulate our words? For most of us, our daily communication comes naturally, so we don't spend much time analyzing what we say and how we say it. We simply use the language that we learned from childhood. For those of us who grew up speaking English, how we speak it, depends on where and by whom we were raised. In fact, it could be said that our mode of communication defines who we are. Different language environments produce different ways of communicating. These differences create the dialects that can immensely impact our style of speaking. Quite possibly, the English dialect with the most flavor, the most originality, is Ebonics with the ornaments of African Verbal Tradition (AVT). Politicians, preachers, writers, and even teachers have used it to get across their message. Thus, the use of AVT including Ebonics has proven to be an extremely effective mode of communication.

Sample Introduction #4

Have you heard about the misconceptions of Ebonics? Were you misinformed that Ebonics is slang and spoken by only African Americans? Well this is not true. More than half of the myths and perceptions of Ebonics are incorrect. Ebonics is the language spoken by African American descent derived from their enslaved African ancestors. Despite the reputation Ebonics holds, Ebonics is a language and can be used appropriately in professional setting.

Sample Introduction #5

Did you know that all people are actually connected together? That we all come from Africa? We all may have experienced one time in our lives when we asked someone where we came from, with the implication of birthplace of our ancestors. And

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that person most likely told us that our ancestors' birthplace is China, or Europe, or India, or America, or any of the other countries around the world. But in fact our birthplace is Africa. All people of the world have a connection to Africa. According to scientific evidence, it has been established that mankind originated from Africa. One scholar and world-renowned scientist, Dr. Diop has devoted his life to supporting the fact that Africa is the birthplace of civilization.

Sample Introduction #6

> **Have you ever wondered what Adam and Eve looked like, or what race they were? Were they white, black, red, or yellow?** Many have heard the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, based around the belief that God created all mankind. However, I have always wondered how this was done; there was not a legitimate explanation as how man came to be. Recently, I have discovered a new explanation of how man came to be. In my WRA 125 class, we read Dr. Diop's book called Great African Thinkers. Diop presents various arguments, all based on the idea on Monogenetics. Since then, I have come to a conclusion about the existence of mankind: man derived from one country called Africa, the first civilization was the Egyptian Civilization, and finally, Egypt is not credited enough for their contributions to modern day customs.

Many examples of call response from student essays appeared in introductions; of the 30 essays from students, 16 students utilized call response in their introductions as a lead in to their argument. The previous results may suggest that AVT curriculum may have helped some students develop or expand their awareness of audience and how call response, in question format, can be used in and introduction to frame the focus of an essay. In each example rhetorical questions are utilized to establish the writers' purpose and also suggests their thesis or main point, which is an effective way to begin an academic essay, especially one that explores controversial topics, which may reveal surprising facts.

Narrativizing

Narrativizing appeared the least in paper 2; of the five AVT features, narrativizing, is the only feature that decreased from 48 examples in paper 1 to 25 examples in paper 2. According

to Smitherman (1977) the story element/narrative is engrained in Black culture having roots in African ancestry and is used in everyday conversation as a strong black communicative strategy (p. 161). Therefore, one can see how African American narrative patterns are culturally at odds with White American culture, which is "unaware of the black cultural matrix in which narrative sequencing is grounded; whites, often become genuinely irritated at what they regard as 'belabored verbosity' and narration in an 'inappropriate' context – thus we have yet another case of cross-cultural communication interference" (Smitherman, 1977, p. 161). Smitherman's description of how narrative is devalued in Western culture may explain the essay results, which show lower numbers, overall, for narrativizing in student essays.

Although narrativizing appeared less frequently in paper 2, when students employed this feature it was utilized appropriately and effectively. For example, when students used narratives in paper 2, their stories were often used as tools of invention, in their introductions, to call up specific "ideas, beliefs, world-views, and actions" (DeJoy, 2004) in relation to the paper topic. According to Ballenger (2011), anecdotal leads or short stories/narratives that frame papers are effective writing strategies in academic essays because they suggest the purpose of the paper and may grab the readers' attention. In the following anecdotal leads students effectively use narrativizing to engage the reader, explain their relationship to the subject, hint at the central question, and provide a focus for their thesis:

Sample Introduction # 1

> Throughout the first half of this semester my classmates and I have been discussing the injustices served to African Culture by others. Or, as Dr. Brown more adequately phrased it, we have ben discussing the "silence" in Modern Society about the contributions Africa and Africans have made. We have thoroughly covered the topics of human origins and the indiscrepancies that have occurred in the field of study throughout history. We have

also covered, to an adequate extent, the influence of African Verbal Traditions and how these particular patterns of speech have been wrongly interpreted by outside cultures, mainly Western Society. We as students have now been asked to analyze what we learned, to draw our own conclusions. What are these "silences" and why are they there? After going over the information and looking at the bigger picture I have come to realize several things about this "silence". Western Society has demoted African's as 'lesser' because of its continued misunderstanding of African culture and how it has really affected modern society, mostly in the areas of language, music and human origins.

Sample Introduction # 2

Born in May of 1993, I was raised in a middle-class area known as Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. Brought up by an African-American and partial Hispanic father, as well as my mother who is of Italian, Irish, Chinese and Native-American Indian decent; I was around the age of five, when my father received a promotion and we moved to an upper-class suburban area named West Chester, Pennsylvania. West Chester is a predominantly Caucasian city. According to the U.S. Census (2000), the majority of the population is seventy-six percent white, seventeen percent is black, and the remaining seven percent is that of other races including but not limited to Asian, Hispanic, and Native-American Indian. Throughout my entire academic career, I was taught that the first of mankind was white. None of the students ever questioned the teacher nor did they ever think of questioning the school text books!

It wasn't until college that I learned of the monogenetic theory, and that mankind today derives from people with colored pigmentation. College! Eighteen, almost nineteen, years of life living under the false impression that original mankind was white. I believe had I not been enrolled into, *The American Ethnic and Racial Experience,* course, taught by Dr. Brown, my freshmen year at Michigan State University, I would still be influenced by the polluted educational system in West Chester. The Educational system, virtually world-wide, has been influencing vulnerable children at a young age, that the origins of mankind was white, which is completely inconsistent with science, evidence, and experts of human origins.

Sample Introduction # 3

My whole life I have been raised Catholic. I have gone to church every Sunday since I was a child. Ever since I was a baby I've been taught that Adam and Eve were the first people that God created. Never once did I think about the world starting any other way. I was never told anything different and never heard of any other theories to think about. That was until my freshman year of college. The first day in my WRA class, I was told of a new theory. A Monogenetic Theory where the first man originated in Africa. I was introduced to Dr. Diops' Great African Thinkers and was overwhelmed with all the brand new information. Diop presents the idea that people originated in Africa and supports his

claim with a lot of evidence founded by both himself and other scholars. However I still find it questionable because of what I was raised to believe and how I was brought up religiously.

Sample Introduction # 4

> History has been told in many ways that has reflected what we believe it to be today. In history there have been some parts that has been falsely told for many years. The part of history that I am talking about is the history of the African Americans. The Africans Americans of today have been lost in who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. The generation of today has lost all forms of knowledge about themselves and their history of their people. It's just not some of the African Americans that do not recognize their history, as well as their peoples contributions, but also the society that do not acknowledge the many and major contributions of Africans and Africans Americans. Knowing your history is something that will encourage and find out who you are as well as your people.
>
> In my life I have been to a lot of schools since I was in elementary school. All of my life I didn't know such amazing things about my history that I know now. As a child, I knew bits and pieces about African American history. The schools I went to didn't teach very much African American history. At my church back at home, they had lessons on African American history during February for Black History month. But that only went so far. I wanted to learn more about my history that maybe could have been hidden. From middle school to the high school years, the knowledge I was trying to receive from African American history wasn't much. Still they only taught bits and pieces of African American history. It included most of the times during slavery and some accomplishments that some African Americans made to the world, as well as ending slavery. We as African Americans and Africans need to learn more as well as embrace our history of what great people we were. We need to get ourselves aware of what is true.

The previous examples of narrativizing show students engaging audience awareness through their appropriate use of tone and voice. Each anecdote/story is focused, clear and engaging, and points the reader in the direction of the paper topic. For example, in sample introduction 4, the student shares a personal story with the reader about her experiences with learning African American history in school. The purpose of her narrative seems to be emphasizing that she is African American, but she knows very little about her history. Her narrative sequence involves

taking the reader through her experiences at significant grade levels to illustrate how the school system neglects to teach this particular subject matter: "in my life I have been to a lot of schools since I was in elementary school. All of my life I didn't know such amazing things about my history that I know now…. From middle school to the high school years, the knowledge I was trying to receive from African American history wasn't much. Still they only taught bits and pieces…." This narrative leads to the main point of her essay, Africans and African Americans have made many contributions to civilization and it is upon us (African American people) to seek out this information.

Effective use of narrative was discussed in-depth in AVT curriculum because in my past experiences with African American students in one-with-one conferencing many expressed that they had negative experiences in former writing courses and with writing instructors when they employed narrative in their academic essays. However, according to Collins (2003) in African American culture, particularly among African American women, real knowledge and truth can only be constructed from "concrete experiences" (p. 202). Thus, personal narrative is critical to knowledge production for many African American students. Therefore, as part of AVT instruction, students examined many forms and read several examples of narrative in academic texts to help develop their narrativizing skills. The readings and literary analysis exercises were used to illuminate the many forms of narrative available to students and how these sequences may be used creatively for rhetorical purposes.

6.6 Conclusion

The examples of writing presented in this chapter are primarily examples of students who

use AVT effectively; however it is important to note that some students may not have used the five AVT features in the most rhetorically effective ways. It appears some students may have employed excessive amounts of AVT in their essays. For example, the average amount of AVT in student essays was approximately 16-17 features. However, three students applied over 35 AVT features in their final essay. Why is this? Did these students misunderstand the lessons? Did some students use the features excessively in efforts to create the most powerful and expressive essay possible, in order to receive the highest grade? Or could students not be fully familiar with the functions yet, and learning new skills generally, when trying it out for the first time did things go awry? These are all questions to consider when exploring student comprehension of the comparative curriculum that values AVT in academic writing.

Overall, the examples of student writing in this chapter and the discussion of how AVT curriculum instruction may help students develop rhetorical writing skills is significant to the field of rhetoric and composition. First, rhetorical writing skills are taught in composition courses and AVT curriculum instruction is a feasible way to illuminate these rhetorical writing strategies. However, as mentioned previously in chapter 2, any reference to AAL/Ebonics may cause a "firestorm" in most academic institutions (Gordon, 2011). Therefore, it is not our current textbooks that are the problem; it's the racist ideology of what language should sound like that needs to change. Thus, the current curriculum provides an opportunity for teachers to discuss AAL through AVT in the academic classroom in ways that may create a balance in response to the racist ideologies that are perpetuated in composition classrooms in regards to AAL use in writing.

Secondly, there is also the issue of the teacher-student power dynamic in which teachers are placed in an authoritative position. Teachers may not encourage students to use these features because it allows students to assert themselves and maintain a voice in their academic written texts. Therefore, it is important to consider how racism intersects in the suppression of students' voices or some academic institutions not wanting students of color to speak powerfully, which may reflect why some composition instructors, at all grade levels, may focus on the "less important" aspects of writing such as spelling, punctuation, and usage. As a result, they devalue AVT and other expressive rhetorical strategies in academic texts, and they do not develop their students' ability to write. However, the curriculum I present in this study challenges this seemingly racist composition hierarchy and demonstrates how AVT can and is used effectively in academic writing as a rhetorical tool that helps students produce more powerful, concrete, and readable essays.

Overall, I have presented and analyzed several examples from field notes, student essays, and student-led group discussions to make a strong case for AVT to be respected in the academic classroom. Further, the results in this chapter suggest that AVT instruction may have inspired some students to explore new rich and creative writing styles, which allow them to develop their writing skills, complete rhetorical tasks, and maintain a presence/voice in their writing. Thus, the examples in this chapter from student essays serve as models to illustrate this point. So, "to all the naysayers, my question still remains: Yo, what's up witcha?"

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: ANSWERING THE CALL – WITH AN
INFORMED RESPONSE

"For your job talk, this is not the kind of thing where we want you to read from a paper like you
would normally do at a conference. I would like for you to talk to the committee, engage them in
your presentation."

-Chair of the Job Search Committee

I was excited when I received my first call to interview for an Assistant Professor of

rhetoric and composition position. However, when the Chair of the search committee made the

following statement above, the excitement just seeped right out of me! I had less than two weeks

to prepare a 40-minute "job talk" on my research/teaching strategies; in addition, I was asked to

present my information with spontaneity and natural flow. As I committed to the interview, it

occurred to me, that I had very little experience with this style of presenting, which involved

speaking for long periods of time using only "talking points." My prior experiences with public

speaking normally occurred at academic conferences in which it is standard procedure for

presenters to read their papers aloud to an audience. Therefore, speaking from the heart with

passion and zeal would be a new approach for me.

I spent hours upon hours practicing daily, writing, re-writing, memorizing, condensing

outlines, etc. At times, I felt a little crazy – talking to myself in the mirror, and practicing jokes I

assumed would make them laugh. I was in dire need of help, so I called my former teacher, who

is one of the most expressive, powerful, and passionate African American female speakers I

know. My mentor, who is almost 20 years older, but has more flash in her wardrobe than I do,

and a different hairstyle for every day of the week, agreed to help me practice. I stood in the middle of her living room reciting my speech, while she sat in a large professorial chair in front of her desk in the corner of the room. After the first five minutes of my talk, she looked up from her computer and said, "You gotta put some more passion into it! You should start with a quote!" She immediately turned to her files and started pulling out articles from great writers for me to read. "Or maybe you should tell them a story about how you became interested in AAL," she said. As she continued to brainstorm ideas on how to make my presentation more engaging, my nervousness rose to an all time high. "A quote! Which quote?" I exclaimed. "All these years I have been trained to be a plain, boring 'academic,' and now you're asking me to be creative? Talk to the audience. Tell a story. Don't speak from the paper…" Obviously irritated with my whining she boldly interrupted me and said, "I always start with a quote from Zora Neale Hurston!" And, as if she was given a cue, she recited it before me with passion and emotion. I watch her in awe, standing still in the center of the room with my mouth wide open. As she finished the last line she looked at me with a knowing expression, and I instantly fell out on the floor in exasperation and screamed, "How am I supposed to do that!"

The purpose of sharing this story is to illustrate that at a very important point in my academic career, the job interview process, it was necessary for me to engage verbal traditions and rhetorical strategies that are part of my cultural heritage. However, I had very little practice using these verbal skills in academic settings and was extremely uncomfortable incorporating them into my oral presentation. According to Paris (2012) this experience is not uncommon for many students of color who are exposed to deficit and difference (e.g. code-switching and

contrastive analysis) approaches to school learning:

> It is important to recognize that access to the opportunities afforded by proficiency in the dominant academic and social ways with oral and written language and other cultural practices were goals of deficit and difference approaches too, though deficit approaches expected the eradication of heritage and community forms of communication and knowledge and difference approaches expected to focus attention solely on the legitimated school ways. The result of both deficit and difference approaches was the explicit (with deficit) and implicit (with difference) expected outcome that students would lose their heritage and community cultural and linguistic practices if they were to succeed in American schooling. (p. 94)

Therefore, my story is relevant because it demonstrates the importance of maintaining community and heritage ways with language for academic and professional success. Thus, the present research study supports the idea that cultural competence in African American language practices can help students achieve academically and professionally. Ultimately, this research identifies the rhetorical cultural language and heritage practices of African American communities and emphasizes its value within the dominant discourse of school learning and access.

7.1 Disciplinary Implications

The present research study has implications for how composition classes are taught, particularly in first year writing, because it specifically addresses immediate issues in rhetoric and composition such as current debates on oral practices in writing, which some scholars

believe hinder the development of effective prose style (Cook-Gumperz, 1993; Kolln, 1991), and the need for teaching practices and assignments that protect students' language rights and promote language diversity in the academic classroom. There has been a plethora of research studies conducted on language differences in the decades since the CCCC and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) passed two language policies (SRTOL and NLP), which were designed to set the tone for policy and pedagogy development to support language diversity in the classroom (Barbier, 2003; Gilyard and Richardson, 2001; Wible, 2006). Yet, experienced professionals in both organizations continue to express concern about current teaching practices and lack of academic preparation in language diversity of college composition instructors (Smitherman, 1999). The present research study answers this call and responds by developing teaching practices that allow students to preserve *and* develop their existing linguistic skills and capabilities.

AVT curriculum refutes monolingual attitudes, which promote language dominance and do not acknowledge African and African American contributions to standardized American communication structures. Further, AVT curriculum suggests that monolingualism and English Only Laws are unsound because they do not acknowledge the non-white, and in this study, particularly Black contributions to the continual remaking of English. Thus, monolingulism is an unrealistic concept that is perpetuated to exert dominance, power, and control and to devalue other languages, and non-mainstream language varieties, and its speakers. The 1992 CCCC National Language Policy (NLP) resists English-Only policies and asserts that English-Only is educationally unsound because it does not help students build on their linguistic skills, which

limits their learning opportunities. The present research study strongly supports arguments made by the NLP and demonstrates that learning may occur for all students of varied races/ethnic backgrounds when we encourage diversity and explore the linguistic strengths of African American students.

In response to current debates on orality and writing, AVT curriculum explicitly asserts that oral dimensions of language may be very effective in academic writing for rhetorical purposes. For example, many scholars have explored the features of AVT and have successfully demonstrated that these features may be used to help students create more powerful writing (Ampadu, 2004; Gilyard and Richardson 2001; Lee 1993; Smitherman, 1997). Thus, my study suggests that AVT may enhance written texts for all genres of writing (argumentative, informative, exploratory, comparison-contrast) and help students produce essays that are concrete, readable, lively, and expressive (Smitherman, 1999, p. 186).

Additionally, this research study positively alters what it means to be an "academic" writer. For example, "good" writing is not limited to the delivery of factual evidence and effective use of academic jargon; "good writing" is also described as having "flava"—not "flavor," like the distinctive taste of a food or drink—"flava," meaning "style and attractiveness," and that is something that is rich in the dynamic quality of AVT (Smitherman, 2006, p. 30).

AVT curriculum and instruction reframes the stereotypical perception that AAL lacks value in the academic classroom. Scholars, such as Heath (1982), present culturally White American literacy traditions that prepare White American students for higher achievement.

However, the present research study adds to arguments made by contemporary scholars in the field, who argue that African American students have home language and literacy practices that prepare them for academic success too (Ampadu, 2004; Lee, 2001; Moss, 2003). In addition, the AVT teaching practices, such as AVT identification exercises and coding of academic essays can be used as pedagogical tools to teach all students how to perform literary and critical analyses of written texts in English and composition classes.

The AVT curriculum instruction was performed in a first year writing course because my focus is on oral traditions and research shows that novice writers often rely on discourse rules with which they are familiar and which have a basis in speech (Welch, 1990). However, AVT curriculum is also relevant for graduate composition courses, which explore methods of research into language, learning, and literacy. For example, classes that explore qualitative literacy research (e.g. ethnography, case study, oral history, and narrative inquiry) may provide opportunities for graduate students to conduct empirical research in various and mostly non-school settings, and in diverse communities in which they may encounter various oral traditions. Therefore, AVT curriculum may be applied in a qualitative literacy research graduate course to inform students that there are many oral discourse styles and ways of communicating, and that these modes may vary across cultures. Thus, AVT curriculum may be employed to help students in this class explore various methods for eliciting and working with narrative/oral data in diverse communities and settings. For example, it is imperative to teach graduate students (from all racial/ethnic backgrounds), who conduct research in African American communities, how to identify oral features of AVT and how they function. This information will help students write

about and conduct research in these communities in ways that are ethical and respectful, and that best represent the population of people.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

The culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogical framework applied in the present research study allows African American students to examine Black contributions to standardized written communication structures and to incorporate African American discourse styles within expected conventions for academic writing. By illustrating African American students' views on language rights and social justice (in chapter 5), as a result of a sustaining pedagogy, my aim is that teachers may envision and articulate concrete goals of such a pedagogy and refine the model presented in this research.

In addition to culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies, I use CRT as a theory to examine students' experiences with learning AVT because CRT requires researchers to honor the student narratives, which counter the normative hegemonic discourse. It is important to note that CRT is a theory that is rarely utilized in the field of composition; however, CRT is important to consider when analyzing students' experiences with learning about AAL in the composition classroom, especially within a racially/ethnically diverse student population. CRT foregrounds race and racism and asserts that racism is permanent and endemic to society. CRT challenges scholars to explore ways to honor this reality, which will ultimately create some kind of balance. In the current study I directly addressed the fact that negative perceptions about AAL syntax and grammar are endemic in our society. I assert that these negative stereotypes about AAL syntax and grammar are caused by racism, and they are not going away. Therefore, CRT

challenges me as a scholar to address the following questions in relation to these claims: What are we going to do about the racist stereotypes attached to AAL? How will we balance it out in the classroom? One way to create a balance is to deconstruct intentionally the normative hegemonic discourse about language in the U.S., which constructs and maintains a linguistic hierarchy in which Eurocentric language patterns are perceived to be "better" than other varieties (Zuidema, 2005, p. 671). Therefore, I intentionally chose to explore AVT because academic scholars from all races/ethnic backgrounds often use this branch of AAL to enhance their writing, however; the rhetorical tools they use are not often recognized as AVT. Presenting AVT as an advanced mode of communication in writing provides a balance because it counters the negative stereotypes about AAL use in academic settings.

7.3 Methodological & Epistemological Implications

Critical Race Theory

As researchers, CRT theorists specifically explore the centrality of experiential knowledge and storytelling (Bernal, 2002). Thus, by using CRT as a methodology I am affirming the value of narrative data. To provide a balance to the endemic racism that plagues our society, I specifically honor the African American student narratives, which is counter to the normative hegemonic discourse about AAL as having no value in academic settings. The African American student participants' response is a counternarrative because their response favors AVT and pushes back at hegemonic norms, which is not the typical African American student response to most forms of AAL instruction (Gordon, 2011; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009).

CRT is viewed as a counter-epistemology; thus, CRT fits well as a method in my

research because I specifically affirm that there are other cultural/ethnic ways of knowing and expressing within oral and written standardized American communication structures. This research asserts that we typically learn under a Eurocentric epistemology but there are other ways of knowing and other ethnic epistemologies that are not integrated into how we learn in the U.S. This study may help both scholars and students understand rhetorical writing from a different epistemological lens that is rooted in an ethnic way of knowing and understanding writing. The point of this research is to acknowledge that there is a different way of communicating in AVT that is socially acceptable and arguably preferred in Mainstream American English. Therefore, this study does not apply a Eurocentric epistemology, which is primarily monolingual. The epistemology I use explores the linguistic mixing in this country and how all languages make contributions to Mainstream American English. My research makes these intersections and begins this discussion.

Ultimately, the present research suggests that there is a different way of looking at writing and rhetoric, from a cultural and disciplinary standpoint. Therefore, my work and CRT are both conceptually related because my research and CRT highlight alternative epistemologies and alternative ways of expressing knowledge.

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA was an effective analytical method to apply in this research project because AVT curriculum demonstrates how language form or oral discourse style plays a major role in the way we communicate and may be used for rhetorical purposes. Thus, using CDA as a method affirms the importance, described in AVT instruction, of looking at the style of language & its form in

order to understand how it functions in speech and writing. Overall, CDA allowed me to examine how dominance and hegemony were reproduced or resisted in the students' text (essays) and talk (student directed conversations). Thus, using CDA as a form of textual discourse analysis was effective in the present research study because the close examination of transcripts and essays for language form and function helped reveal speakers' and writers' perspectives and intentions.

Teachers and Researchers

The research methods applied here also have implications for teachers and researchers, and some of these implications may intersect. The pedagogical strategies employed may generate positive class discussions and simultaneously serve as effective data collection methods. The student directed small group conversations were very effective because students were allowed to speak freely with their classmates/peers. The timing of these discussions is also significant because the small group discussions took place 2-3 weeks after AVT instruction was performed. The break between recorded small group conversations and AVT instruction gave students time to think about and process what they learned; it also allowed time for me to evaluate pre and post surveys and to generate discussion questions for students that were based on these results. Students seemed to be very interested in the results and overall response from their classmates on pre and post surveys, and the numerical results of surveys also appeared to have sparked some very interesting debates in small group conversations. In addition, teacher-researchers who perform classroom-based research may find value in the use of student directed small group conversations because they appear to be more engaging and less time consuming than

conducting individual interviews. Also, as a critical race methodologist it was important for me to collect data in a manner sensitive to power. Thus, I was aware of the teacher-student power dynamic, which may limit the possibility of conversation in small groups. Therefore, small group conversations took place in a small, enclosed office in which I was not present. The informal close setting provided might have helped elicit the rich narrative data/storytelling that was generated among participants in small groups.

7.4 Imaginative Work/Future Studies

Expansion of AVT Curriculum

The AVT curriculum has many components, which stem from the amount of features I chose to examine. Thus, the level of complexity of each feature determined how much class time was used to describe it. For example, the pilot study for this research revealed that of the five AVT features, signifying/indirection was the most challenging for most students to comprehend. As a result, in the present research study, I discussed signifying/indirection in two of the four class periods, and students were required to give a small presentation on this particular AVT form (see description of signifying/indirection written homework assignment in chapter 3). However, the large amount of time spent in class discussing signifying/indirection, meant that other AVT features could not be explored and analyzed as in-depth as this feature. Therefore, there is room for expansion of daily lessons and course materials on each of the five AVT features.

For instance, at a recent academic conference I gave a presentation on AVT and I discussed the five features of AVT in this research. However, the writing instructors who

attended my talk were very interested in my discussion of repetition, in which (as shown in

chapter 6) I suggest that English teachers may not teach various schemes of repetition, and most

discussions on repetition in writing classes focus on unnecessary repetition of ideas. As a result,

in my study, I found that many students had an overall fear of using repetition in writing, and

were unaware of how to use schemes of repetition as rhetorical writing strategies. Many writing

instructors at this conference requested that more information be generated from this study on

repetition and how it is problematic that there is a dominant, negative view of repetition in our

academic discipline. An email I received one week after the conference, from a writing center

director at a well known university who attended my presentation session, appears below, which

illustrates some of the conversations that I had about repetition at this writing conference:

> Currently, in my work in the Writing Center at Franklin University [pseudonym], I teach
>
> one half of the sequence of courses training tutors for our center. I have been struck both
>
> by the need for tutors to have a more sophisticated understanding of the use of repetition -
>
> - and the lack of training materials available. My particular concern is that our tutors,
>
> without this kind of training, will default to what they know. While I am not even at the
>
> pilot stage of research on this topic, my sense is that what they know, for the most part, is
>
> New England's upper middle class white rhetorical style and a powerful K-12 anti-
>
> repetition bias. You mentioned that you ran into this bias in your study. What is going on
>
> there?
>
> Here at Franklin University, tutors generally receive no training in style of any kind
>
> during first year composition or during their tutor training. Personally, I feel this leaves

their writing impoverished. Of greater concern, though, is the fact that it leaves them

blind or even unwittingly hostile to rhetorical strengths in the language of African

American students.

The e-mail response above is significant because the writing center director shows specific

interest in the repetition feature/curriculum component of AVT instruction. She also identifies a

way to incorporate AVT in writing center training as a form of anti-racist education and to resist

dominant perspectives, such as "anit- repetition bias," in the field of composition. This

expansion of AVT curriculum would positively impact the field of composition in a way that

challenges linguistic dominance and helps sustain African American linguistic practices. Each

feature of AVT may be expanded in this way to build on some of the concepts generated in this

research and to develop newer ones.

Shifting from Students to Teachers

In future studies on AVT, I would like to shift my focus from exploring AVT in student

writing to developing AVT curriculum for teachers. Thus, I will begin to research specific

methods on how to teach teachers the rhetorical skills of AVT. As shown in chapter 5, many

African American students requested that they be taught about AVT and AAL in K-12 and many

questioned why they had never heard about AVT or AAL before they took this college course.

The interactions I have and responses I receive from teachers, who view my presentations on

AVT at academic conferences and in workshops, may provide some insight to students'

expressed concerns. A common question I often receive in regard to AVT instruction is: "Do you

think a White teacher can teach this [AVT]?" My signifying/indirect response is: Can a Black

person teach Aristotle's rhetoric? The answer to both of these questions is obviously – yes! Teachers who are not African American can definitely teach the daily AVT lessons; however, like any other language, it takes time to learn. Spears (2001) provides an alternative view to consider, he states:

> African-American language scientists who are culturally African-American are in the best position, other things being equal, to theorize controversial realms of black language behavior and, particularly, African-American verbal culture as a whole. This is due to their intimate knowledge of it and the huge head start in this type of study that such knowledge provides, given that macro patterns are often not discernable without a lifetime of immersion in the community. (p. 3)

Thus, it is important for me to acknowledge that my background and experiences with AAL is of value (as mentioned in chapter 3 "role of researcher"), especially in my ability to develop such curriculum. However, the question pertains to the teaching of AVT, which is different from the development of AVT pedagogy and theorizing of AAL practices, which Spears refers to. Therefore, I find this question, "Can a White person teach AVT?" offensive because the underlying statement suggests that I, the teacher-researcher, am able to teach AVT because I am "Black," and I grew up speaking Ebonics. However, I have studied and taken college courses on AAL for over 9 years, and this background is what permits me to teach AVT curriculum effectively. So, "Can a White person teach AVT?" Yes; again, anyone can teach AVT if they put in the time it takes to learn AAL.

Further, this question may also imply that, as mentioned previously in Gordon's (2011)

essay, White teachers feel "it is hard for disenfranchised speakers to hear others who are not in their circumstances discuss their disempowered language, regardless of the intent" (p. 288). Gordon's argument is valid; however, AVT instruction does not present AAL as a "disempowered language." More specifically, in AVT curriculum and instruction, AVT is described as a rhetorical benefit and complex intellectual communication structure. Thus, African American students who speak AAL are empowered by AVT instruction because their language is valued in this curriculum as a necessary tool for academic writing. Therefore, my response to Gordon and other teachers who would like to teach AVT but fear that their good intentions may be misread by students of color, particularly African American students, is: I have yet to see a student of any color show signs of resistance when teachers/instructors teach them that they're smart! And this is exactly what AVT curriculum does. AVT curriculum shows African American students that they have cultural linguistic "gifts" and the writing activities help them develop these skills. Therefore, because of the empowerment that AVT instruction provides for AAL speakers, I believe African American students will be very receptive to AVT instruction, regardless of the racial/ethnic background of the teacher.

Ultimately, it is my goal to develop a course for teachers of English, at undergraduate and graduate levels, which explores AVT in-depth and demonstrates how to teach AVT as a rhetorical writing skill in the academic classroom. AVT curriculum publicly asserts that AAL speakers, who are often deemed "basic writers," have home literacy and language practices that prepare them for academic success in composition classrooms, and that students from all varied racial/ethnic backgrounds can learn from. Specifically, AVT is a major component of the writing

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process because there are many ways in which it can and has contributed to standardized American written communication structures. The verbal techniques may be incorporated into writing, which has the ability to help students cross borders (e. g. disciplines, expressive modalities, ethnicities and social identities). When students compose writing to be shared with those with whom they are unfamiliar, their rhetoric must persuade or at least connect to diverse groups of people. Therefore, drawing upon AVT, following moves made by rhetorical kings and queens such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., President Barack Obama, Sojourner Truth, and Dr. Geneva Smitherman, we model revision, invention, arrangement, delivery, and style strategies that encourage students to become heirs to writing and rhetorical communities as they move through general education courses throughout their academic careers.

Thus, the present study demonstrates that AVT has value in academic and professional settings. Therefore, it is beneficial for all students to learn and develop AVT skills. As true for my circumstance per the epigraph in this chapter, I took my mentor's advice and used expression in my first major job talk. When I gave my speech: I shared my story, I started with a quote, I spoke with passion, and I got the J.O.B!

Shortcomings of the Study

As mentioned in chapter 3, the study contained some downfalls/shortcomings. In terms of the numerical data/coding of student essays for AVT features, to increase dependability and reliability I was unable to triangulate my findings across 2-3 AAL experts. Also, student participants were not interviewed individually during or after the end of the course, which did not allow their voices to enter into the analysis of their recorded conversations; thus, some

analysis is speculative. Lastly, the class sessions contained heavy content due to the short time period (2 weeks) in which I conducted the classroom based research study. In future studies on AVT I will devote longer periods of time to teaching the AVT strategies. Other limitations exist and are discussed fully in chapter 3; however, the previously mentioned shortcomings are key in this study.

APPENDICES

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researcher any questions you may have.

Study Title: "Cross-Cultural Composition: African American Verbal Tradition in First Year Writing"

Researcher and Title: Bonnie Williams, Doctoral Student
Department and Institution: Rhetoric & Writing, Michigan State University
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Office: (517)432-2558
E-Mail: bjwill@msu.edu

Primary Investigator (PI):   Dr. Denise Troutman
Office: Writing, Rhetoric & American Cultures
E-Mail: troutma1@msu.edu
Phone: (517)432-2576

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH
You are being asked to participate in a research study on African American Verbal Tradition and the opportunities it has to enhance academic writing. From this study, the researcher hopes to learn about your thoughts and experiences about language attitudes in the U.S. in relationship to education and power.

WHAT YOU WILL DO
After completing a consent form you will answer survey and interview questions. For the 60 minute interview session, you will be audio or videotaped. I will utilize an essay that was written and uploaded to angel as part of your WRA course, in which you are previously enrolled. I will code the essay as part of the research and the interview will include analyzing the essay and reading it aloud, explaining unclear sentence structure and wording. Upon request, you may obtain results of this study by contacting the researcher.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS
The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study are that you may feel some satisfaction from your contributions in addressing issues about African American Language, especially contributions that become interjected into a broader U. S. dialectic.

POTENTIAL RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

DATA AND CONFIDENTIALITY
Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The research data will be kept on the campus of Michigan State University (MSU) in a locked file cabinet and/or password protected computer for 2 years after the close of the research. Only the appointed researchers, their respected institutions and the Institutional Review Board at MSU will have access to the research data.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW
Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no to participating in this study or you may change your mind at any time and withdraw from participating in this study. There are no consequences of your withdrawing from this study or from incomplete participation in this study. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing from this study will not make any difference in the quality of any services you may receive or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no affect on your evaluation. You will be told of any significant findings that develop during the course of the study that may influence your willingness to continue to participate in the research. You will not receive money or any other form of monetary compensation for participating in this study.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher, *Bonnie Williams, Michigan State University, Rhetoric & Writing Department, 237 Bessey Hall, E. Lansing, MI 48824,* *bjwill@msu.edu*.

IRB CONTACT INFO
If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Documentation of Informed consent
Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____

_____   _____

Print   Signature   Date

Your signature below means that you DO NOT voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____   _____

Print   Signature   Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Name _____

Pre/Post AVT Questionnaire

1. Have you ever heard of Ebonics or African American Language? If so, please state where and how you would define it?

2. Do you speak African American Language/Ebonics? (circle one)

                   Yes   No   Sometimes

3. Do you understand African American Language/Ebonics?

                   Yes   No   Sometimes

4. Is African American Language appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings? Why?

KEY: 1-not appropriate at all; 2-somewhat appropriate; 3-definitely appropriate; 4-extremely appropriate

                   1   2   3   4

5. What is African American Verbal Tradition?

6. Is African American Verbal Tradition (AVT) appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings? Why?

KEY: 1-not appropriate at all; 2-somewhat appropriate; 3-definitely appropriate; 4-extremely appropriate

                    1   2   3   4

APPENDIX C

Revision, Arrangement, Invention, Delivery, Style (RAIDS)

Revision
- What is revision? (What is/has to be done to accomplish those changes?)
- What's being revised? (What changes is the author trying to inspire?)

Arrangement
- What is arrangement? (How are things being put in relationship with one another?)
- What's being arranged? (What's being put in relation to what?)

Invention
- What is invention? (What did the writer have to do to create the text?)
- What's being invented? (What ideas, beliefs, world-views, and actions does the text call up?)

Delivery
- What delivery options are available?
- What delivery option is or should be engaged in this situation?

Style
- What is style?
- What style decisions are key in this situation?

WRA 125 In class small group discussion about AVT:

Background: For survey question #2 "Do you speak African American Language/Ebonics?" pre-test results showed that, before having formal instruction on AVT, 41% said either Yes or Sometimes and 59% said No. After having formal instruction on AVT post-test results showed that there was an increase in students who identified as African American Language/Ebonics speakers having 62% answer Yes or Sometimes and 38% answer No.

QUESTION #1 for Discussion: Did anyone in our group change their survey answer for question #2 from No to Yes or Sometimes? If yes, why did you change? If not, what do you think caused some people to change? Did anyone's survey answer stay the same for question #2? If so, why?

Background: Before having formal instruction on AVT 31% of the students in this study said, "Yes" AVT is appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings. After having formal instruction on AVT, 94% said "Yes" AVT is appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings.

QUESTION #2 for Discussion: What do you think caused this number to increase from 31% who said AVT is appropriate for writing and or speaking in academic settings, on the pre-test, to 94% on the post-test?

Background: Pre-test results show that 97% of the population in this study could not define African American Verbal Tradition prior to having instruction on this topic. This indicates that instruction in AVT is new to many people.

QUESTION #3 for Discussion How would you describe your own and your classmates overall response to the instruction on AVT? Was there a positive response? Was there any resistance?

QUESTION #4 for Discussion What I thought was most interesting/distinctive and/or surprising about learning AVT?

_____

Written questions: Q. What I thought was most interesting and/or surprising in this discussion? **Q**. What I thought was most interesting/distinctive and/or surprising about learning AVT? (can use back if you want)

Optional Name_____

Optional E-mail _____

APPENDIX E

Adult Interview Protocol

Teacher Participant Interview Questions

This interview is confidential. That means that I won't share anything you say with anyone else. I may publish my results as a book or in articles, or I might present the findings at conferences. I won't use your name or any other information that would identify who you are.

You can tell me you don't want to answer any question you don't feel like answering, and you can stop the interview at any point. If after the interview is over, you want to withdraw from the study, I'll destroy your information.

I'd like to videotape the interview. Is that okay? You can tell me to turn of the video at any point if you want. All the tapes will be stored and locked in my office and labeled with a code name that you can pick. The tapes will be transcribed by someone else who won't know who you are.

Do you have any questions?
Is it okay for us to start?

1. Tell me a little about your background.

   a. Probes: Where are you from, how long have you been in the profession, what is your field of specialization, etc.

2. Why did you volunteer to be a participant instructor in this research project?

3. Are you an African American language speaker?

4. What was it like teaching African American Verbal Tradition in the composition classroom?

5. How did students respond to AVT instruction, and AVT being presented as a potential benefit for academic writers?

6. Which feature (out of the five presented) was the most challenging to represent/explain to

the class?

7. Do you feel as if you presented this curriculum accurately?

8. Did reading information on AVT enhance your ability to communicate with AAL speakers or other students in your class? How?

9. Did learning about AVT affect the way you read, comprehend, and evaluate AAL speakers' academic essays in any way?

10. Would you use this curriculum again in one of your composition courses? Why?

Wrap-Up

1. Is there anything I didn't ask you throughout the course of this study that you would like to add?

2. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX F

Lived Literacy Letter Assignment Sheet (Essay #1)

- Write a letter to your family members about your experiences in coming to learn about the origins of humans.

- 2-3 pgs.

- Your Task:

  1.)What did you know about human origins prior to the course readings?

  2.)What did you think?

  3.)How did you feel?

  4.) What were some of your beliefs? stereotypes? misconceptions about the content in the readings?

  5.) What do you understand now?

- Purpose:

  Note that this letter writing = a discovery and learning tool to aid your thinking about the course focus on human origins. What have you learned? discovered? Inform your family. This task = fodder for the analysis paper.

- Incorporate key points and evidence from the readings.

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