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## Final MA Portfolio

Annelise Mason

*Bowling Green State University*, [agmason@bgsu.edu](mailto:agmason@bgsu.edu)

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FINAL MASTER'S PORTFOLIO

Annelise Mason

agmason@bgsu.edu

A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in the field of English  
with a specialization in Teaching

November 30, 2017

Professor Lee Nickoson, First Reader  
Professor Bill Albertini, Second Reader

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## Enhancing Teaching Through Greater Understanding

When I began my program of study for the Masters of English with a Specialization in Teaching in 2014, I had just completed my undergraduate degree. I was also beginning my first year of teaching in an urban school district. In many ways I did not know what I was doing, and I sometimes regretted choosing to begin my master's at the same time as I was beginning teaching, but I think, overall, it was for the best. First, the achievement of this degree makes me the only teacher in my building with a master's, which will enable me to teach dual enrollment courses with a local community college. Also, I believe that I benefitted from the lack of gap in my education, as it enabled me to seamlessly transition from full-time student to life-long learner. I also believe that the chosen materials and research I engaged in my courses helped me with some of my struggles with understanding my students and how best to instruct them as a beginning teacher.

I was able further my path to becoming a life long learner first, because I continued to take courses. However, the more important way in which I was able to become a life-long learner through this degree program was because it gave me a way to think critically and creatively in a non-work setting. In addition to the coursework that directly related to my occupation, this program also challenged me to investigate different forms of English typically reserved for higher education (such as literary theory, rhetorical theory, and composition theory), creative writing, and even some technical rhetoric and investigative journalism. Stretching my brain in these ways enabled me to consider the world around me in a more nuanced manner and engage in more complex and creative thought. When one is working in a school, it is easy to get caught up in the same thought patterns and processes for teaching. For example, one may be tempted to use the same technique (or even the same powerpoint presentation) for introducing figurative language and fail to adapt it to different schools, or even classes. Just because it is successful with one, or even many classes, does not mean it would work for all. Thinking in different fields and in different ways helped me to avoid getting caught in these

patterns. In addition, it keeps my brain active and engaged in higher level thought. When teaching at the lower levels, it is so easy to get caught up in the practical and situation specific. My courses encouraged me to engaged in analytic and theoretical level thought. Now, if I do at some point decide to continue my formal education to pursue a doctorate or an ed specialist degree, I will be able to do so.

In addition, my Masters in English with a Specialization in Teaching has helped me with some of my struggles as a beginning teacher. My first few years teaching have been spent in an urban, primarily African American, primarily low-income school. When I entered the school, I felt very unprepared to teach this population. My classroom was disorganized and techniques I used to teach skills like essay writing or theme, proved ineffective. Students were unable to perform the tasks, and became disruptive because they were frustrated. I was missing the specialized knowledge and skills needed to fully help my students. Through the Master's in English with a Specialization of Teaching, I discovered helpful theories, developed practical resources, and identified research-based strategies aimed at the specific population I teach. One strategy I found especially helpful was that of explicitly teaching skills and instructions. I found this strategy in the course of research for Teaching Writing. This strategy suggests that urban and African American students need to be taught some skills and strategies very clearly and explicitly that might come to others naturally. Then, with this instruction, a student may then go on to apply it to complex material. Another strategy I found especially helpful was that of contrastive analysis. This language learning model, which is commonly applied to learning foreign language can also be successfully applied to teaching AAL (African American Language) speakers how to speak SAE (Standard American English). Contrastive analysis is found to be more successful than other methods such as general grammar instruction without the contrast or a harshly corrective approach. Learning these strategies in my research for graduate courses has directly made me a better teacher of students who speak AAL and for urban students in general.

As the capstone to this graduate educational experience, I have chosen four papers to revise and

resubmit: “Intertwining Narratives: Stories of the I-280 Bridge Collapse,” “Reshaping Attitudes: Tailoring Urban Education to fit the African American Student,” “The Study of Language in a Multi-Dialectical Classroom,” and “Youth Acquisition and Ownership Is Crucial Language Vitality.” The first of these papers, “Intertwining Narratives” was written in the first course I took for this master's, ENG 6400: Technical Writing. In it, we focused on the writing of accident reports: mainly on the creation of the accident report, which began when the first big technology related accidents began as a result of the creation of the steam engine, and on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. We looked into how BP's previous accidents were reported and how Deepwater Horizon was reported as well. In this course, our final project was to research an accident and its reporting on our own and write about it. As a Toledo native, I chose the collapse of the I-280 bridge.

I chose to revise “Intertwining Narratives” because since it was my first paper, I could tell that I had grown significantly as a writer since I had originally written it. In addition, I found the process of research for this paper very interesting and was excited about returning to it. Unlike most every paper I had written previously and those I have written since, I did not find a few key and relevant articles on JSTOR to focus my review on before getting to my own analysis. In contrast, this paper has more sources than any other I've ever written. I had to research creatively in many different types of archives on the internet, not just for peer-reviewed academic journals, but articles from *The Blade*, company websites, large machinery discussion forums, and government documents. My research was diverse, and each was to answer a question I or my professor had. I felt more like a detective than a researcher. I greatly enjoyed the process. In addition, because much of what I was researching was new to me and was to answer questions I had, not see what others had to say on the topic, I found the process much more exciting and fulfilling than traditional research. I felt less like I was ticking the “previous studies” box and more like a detective. It was exciting to dig around: following links in articles and searching for the website of specific companies, and I enjoyed looking for answers to questions instead of

looking for something on the topic.

With this paper, my main focuses of revision were all related to clarity. First, since this was very early on in my academic career, many of my errors were bulky or awkward sentences. I went through and spent some time clarifying and working on concision. Then there were other errors due to conflicting terminology. For these I looked up the most accurate term and then replaced all alternates for it. For a few instances, some of the facts I had didn't quite line up, so I had to do a little more research to clarify what was correct. For instance, I needed to add in how much money the contractors paid to the families of the victims in private court, not just what OSHA fined them. In another spot, I researched to see if the accident was more likely due to the contractors misunderstanding the directions, or choosing not follow them. So these revisions were heavily based on some more time spent researching and the increased writing abilities I had developed in my course of study.

The next paper I chose was “Reshaping Attitudes: Tailoring Urban Education to fit the African American Student,” written for ENG 6200: Teaching Writing. This paper counts as my teaching paper, though the Graduate Writing paper is also related to teaching. It fit within my Teaching Writing course, which focused on practical approaches to teaching writing on all levels. We spent time reading about different composition theories and reflecting on our own writing theories. At the end of the course, we were asked to conduct a research project on a topic within the field of teaching writing. I chose to research teaching writing in the primarily urban, African American, low-income classroom, as this is the situation I face everyday at work and I was feeling especially in need of assistance my first year of teaching. I chose this paper for my portfolio because I found some extremely pragmatic information in the course of my research that I wanted to revisit. Revising this paper gave me a chance to polish it and reacquaint myself with the material, perhaps with the goal of presenting it to my colleagues at my school. This paper also marks the beginning of my research into AAL, though I did not realize it at the time or even know the word. However, in discovering how to best teach urban, African American

students, I was also researching students who primarily spoke AAL as a first dialect. So I wanted to include this paper to show how it led to my ENG 6040: Graduate Writing paper as well.

As I was researching this paper, I gained a clearer picture of what teacher researchers were and what their work looked like. Teacher Researchers typically keep data on their own classrooms and share best practices with others. Some may incorporate colleague data as well. While some of the articles I found were larger studies across schools or regions, others were also best practice reports compiled by teachers. When I began research for this paper, I had no idea what I would find. I had done most of my research in undergraduate in literature, so was familiar with what that sort of writing looks like. However, I had not done nearly as much educational research. I quickly found a few related papers that discussed urban education, one of which, a report by a teacher researcher, I found especially helpful and useful and still refer back to. My goal in this research was to get more of a broad idea of what was out there than an exhaustive survey. I accomplished this through highlighting a few useful studies and reports instead of trying to summarize the general trends in urban education research. In one study, the author, Marlene Carter, reported that she found active, higher order thought to be most effective in the education of urban students. She also found that it I found the research very immediately, practically useful. Since I chose to go more in-depth on a few articles than broadly over many, I got a better understanding of the strategies like Carter's being offered.

The revision process for this paper involved three main tasks, generalizing it to be more than a course specific paper, adding the creative writing skills I had developed in my studies, and utilizing my increased knowledge of linguistics. First, I had clearly written this paper as a Teaching Writing paper. I made references to the course and mentioned specific readings from the course without giving adequate context. Next, I had developed my creative writing and creative nonfiction skills in the Graduate Writing Workshop I took and in ENG 6040: Graduate Writing. As a result, I utilized these skills to write some creative narratives of my time teaching, and give the paper a better flow. Finally, when I

initially wrote this paper, I had a very limited understanding of code switching and dialects. So, I very clumsily wrote about these topics as they arose. However, after developing a greater knowledge of them, I was able to revise to more clearly explain. So this revision process relied heavily on the knowledge I had gained in the course of the program.

The next paper I chose to revise was “The Study of Language in a Multi-Dialectical Classroom,” written for ENG 6040: Graduate Writing. I chose this one to be my substantive research paper, though all of the first three papers contained significant research. Since the course was directed mainly at building our writing skills, we read a lot about writing and the field of rhetoric. We also were required to keep a daybook which was about half prompted writing and half free writing. This paper was our semester long project, worked on in the daybook over the course of the entire semester. In addition, this paper was the most free form that I wrote. The prompt was very open, and merely asked us to research something we were interested in and apply the rhetorical and creative nonfiction writing strategies practiced in the course. I chose to continue the topic I had discovered in my teaching writing paper: the effect of an SAE teacher on students who speak primarily AAL. I worked in stories of my own classroom among the survey of past and present attitudes about teaching AAL, as well as practical strategies. I chose “The Study of Language in a Multi-Dialectical Classroom” because it is probably the paper I am most proud of writing. I am pleased with my personal narratives and happy with the survey approach to the history of the topic.

This research was much more exhaustive than that done for my Teaching Writing paper. While “Reshaping Attitudes” intended to share several examples of best practice with teachers, “The Study of Language in a Multi-Dialectical Classroom” was intended to more comprehensively evaluate the topic of AAL in the classroom past and present. In it, I sought to present a survey of major works and attitudes about AAL, specifically those related to teaching. As a result, I needed a much larger pool of articles, as well as to double check to make sure I had included the major important works. I had never

tried to pin down which authors and articles were the most important in a field before, so I just started seeing who came up and who was frequently referenced by other authors. In addition, I knew much more what I was looking for this time. I already knew going into the paper which topics needed to be discussed: the old idea that AAL was a corruption of SAE, code-switching, and the impact on teaching, and what attitudes need to be represented: Geneva Smitherman and William Labov. So while in some ways it is more difficult to find something you are specifically looking for, at least it wasn't a stab in the dark to see what I could find. I kept looking for more detail on specific time periods or topics, and eventually found what I was looking for.

My revisions for the paper had to do with concision and sensitivity of my position as a member of the dominant culture. First, my original draft told too many stories, so I greatly shortened much of the opening section about my personal history. Then, I had a tendency toward short blocky paragraphs and long rambling sentences. These I both became more cognizant of and fixed for the most part. Second, though I had tried to address this in my initial version, I still did not carefully enough address my position as a white, middle class woman talking about primarily African American students of a lower socioeconomic level. I clarified my section on privilege and tried to remove anything that seemed to be saying that one group possessed all the power and skills while another did not. I standardized my terminology as well. In these ways, I tried to more clearly express the privilege I have of working with students different from me, and not sound as if I were talking for them and about them.

The final paper I chose to revise was “Youth Acquisition and Ownership Is Crucial for Language Vitality” for ENG 6150: Linguistics. This paper was one of four book reports we were required to write on books related to topics in linguistics. “Youth Acquisition and Ownership Is Crucial for Language Vitality” was started by my experiences with the book *Language Death* by David Crystal. I also worked in my own experiences with Welsh speakers in Wales, as well as a narrative from a Native American woman that I read for ENG 6040: Graduate Writing. I chose this paper for a couple of

reasons. First, I wanted to include a paper that was about something different, and my book report about AAL speakers was very similar to the papers for Graduate Writing and Teaching Writing. Second, linguistics was my favorite of the topics I have studied in the course of this degree. Finally, I enjoyed being able to use the storytelling skills developed for Graduate Writing in another paper. I relished in the opportunity to talk about my own first hand experiences with the topic.

Unlike the other three papers, my research focused mostly on what I already knew, at least initially. In the first version of this paper, my only sources were my own memory, the book the assignment was based on, and a reading from a previous course that I remembered would apply. So at this point there was not really any research involved at all, just memory and making connections. However, I did research the topic as I revised “Youth Acquisition and Ownership Is Crucial for Language Vitality.” I looked into more of the factors involving language death such as increased communication with other language groups due to better roads or a focus on language purity, other Native American and minority languages in decline or already dead such as Dhalo in Kenya or Karuna in Australia, as well as specific statistics on various languages mentioned in the paper (Cornish, East Sutherland Gaelic, Welsh, Dhalo, and Karuna). For the statistics on each of these languages, I used the linguistics website Ethnologue, which was recommended to me by my professor during Linguistics. These extensions made up the majority of my revisions. I also did some work to make this less of a course specific paper, as I did with Teaching Writing. However, due to the original book report framework, this could only be done to a certain extent.

So after all of this revision and research, I am happy to say that I did achieve my goals with which I started the master's program: to become a life-long learner and to help with some of my struggles as an early-service teacher. First, the courses caused me to think about different topics and to consider the topics I was used to thinking about in a different way. In technical rhetoric, I learned how to do a more journalistic research style, and explored a field I had never dreamed I would explore. I

discovered that I enjoy fact-checking and investigation. In teaching writing, I became much more cognizant of the implicit goals and strategies I used in my teaching. I think more about why I assign a particular writing task like five minute free writes or response papers. “Reshaping Attitudes” helped me to practically apply the frameworks I had been learning about in the course. ENG 6040: Graduate Writing caused me to think and write in a completely different way than I had before. The injection of creative nonfiction style into my writing has made it so much more interesting and readable. I know use much more narrative from my own life, and am better at incorporating descriptive details. Finally, linguistics helped me to discover and extend what has become a new passion of mine. I learned the framework my previous studies into AAL fit into, and began to think of the world through a linguistics filter instead of only a literature filter. As I teach, I am constantly thinking about how AAL as a dialect differs from SAE as a dialect both on the grammatical level and on the lexical level. So each helped me to view the world in a new way.

Finally, all of my course work throughout the program, and these courses in particular, greatly helped me to become a stronger teacher. Technical Rhetoric, though not seeming immediately connected to teaching, did give me some insight into research, and ideas for making research more exciting for my students. Answering questions and “finding out what really happened” is more interesting than just looking up a topic. Teaching Writing introduced me to several useful skills and strategies. The one I use most often would be the explicit teaching of skills and instructions. I now regularly use this tactic to teach skills such as writing a 5 paragraph essay. I explicitly explain what each sentence should do (the introduction follows a hook, transition, thesis pattern. I even break it down by how many sentences should be in each part for them sometimes). Before I would have just told them what each paragraph should be about. I also use explicit teaching to work on skills such as metacognition, which teaches students how to read difficult texts using specific thought processes. These thought processes help students who would typically struggle with grade appropriate reading to

use skills and strategies to understand it. However, this additional step in learning, instead of holding them back and trapping them in a lower curriculum, serves as a stepping stone to make the tasks and materials that would on their own be too difficult, accessible.

In addition, I also use the strategy of code-switching and contrastive analysis to now help my students better the differences between AAL and SAE. Instead of simply presenting them with the rules of SAE, I will put up on the board a few sentences that demonstrate the rules I am teaching and what those same grammatical differences look like in AAL. The students will look at both sets of sentences and determine how the rules apply differently in each dialect. For example, I recently had a list of sentences that contained possessive nouns both in SAE and in AAL. The students then, with some guidance, could notice that the SAE side used apostrophe s to mark possession and the AAL did not. This was a much more effective way to help the students understand possessive nouns in SAE than simply teaching the rules of SAE. As a result, I think this strategy will be very effective in teaching my students to code-switch, which is a valuable life skill if they are to communicate in both their home variety and the language of power. Retaining their home dialect will enable my students to maintain a sense of cultural place and belonging. They will feel more ownership in their voices and as writers. Being able to comfortably speak the language of power will enable them to be more successful at college admissions and in college as students, as well as in interviews and for promotions. The skill to comfortably use both AAL and SAE will enable my students to be much more successful in their life after my class, which has been my primary goal all along.

## Intertwining Narratives: Stories of the I-280 Bridge Collapse

The Veteran's Glass City Skyway (colloquially known as the I-280 bridge), is one of Toledo, Ohio's most recognizable landmarks. The reinforced concrete structure stands 8,800 feet long and 403 feet high at the pinnacle ("ODOT's Largest"). Impressive features include the thickest stay cables on a bridge at the time and the color changing glass light panel down the main pylon to light up the downtown skyline each night. ("ODOT's Largest"). However, in addition to its architectural landmark status, the I-280 bridge is also known for a far more somber reason: the site of the worst Toledo-Area construction accident since 1976 (Mar). Few who have lived in the Toledo area for a considerable amount of time are not familiar with the bridge collapse in 2004, which killed 4 workers. As a Toledo resident, it was one I was familiar with, and I remember public opinion about it myself. Though the events were relatively well known, the investigation was actually rather complex and spanned several years. This story will be told in five parts, first the story of the accident itself, then the story of the investigation, followed by how it was reported, then public opinion, and finally observations and analysis which discusses the complicated nature of assigning blame in accidents and who I believe was most likely responsible.

### **A Story of a Remarkable Construction Project**

Before mid-February 2004, the progress made on the I-280 bridge was astounding. Though the most expensive project in ODOT's (Ohio Department of Transportation) history, it was both significantly under budget and over a year ahead of the scheduled deadline. It was the feather in the city's cap, shown off to visiting dignitaries (Mahr and Hall). In addition, it was a model of safety; in 1.3 million man-hours worked, there had only been five hundred lost-time injuries. As ODOT's spokesman John Rutherford explained, "That's about 400% better than what OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) would expect for a project like this" (Mahr and Hall). So initially, the project was exceptionally safe and ahead of schedule.

If this were not impressive enough, nine months after the beginning of the project, local and state officials met with contractors and unions to set up labor-management committee to manage a comprehensive safety program. The committee's responsibilities included auditing safety performance at the site, checking subcontractor's safety performance, and reviewing issues that arose. OSHA, ODOT, state consultants, the contractor Fru-Con, sub-contractors, and local unions met in March 2003 to sign the agreement to create the committee, which contained representatives from each group ("Safety Programs"). So from near the beginning, safety was a priority with this project. All involved wanted to avoid any injury to workers. As Representative Marcy Kaptur said after the meeting, "We want this the project to be the one where [horrible injuries and deaths] don't happen. We want this to be the one where no family is left grieving" ("Safety Programs"). The project was off to a good start.

The good start came to a screeching halt less than a year later. On February 16, 2004, at 2:22 pm, one of the two launching gantries (cranes used to put new pieces into place) building a new section of the bridge suddenly collapsed (Kassabian et al 1570). A gantry is made up of two over head steel trusses. One end of it rests on the completed portion of the bridge, while the other rests on a pier or anchor for the bridge. The gantry holds up a new piece of roadway as it is attached to the existing roadway. Next, it moves to the end of the new section of road and repeat the process (*OSHA, Fru-Con Settle*). As the gantry began to move to a new section and was partially connected, the back supports suddenly collapsed, dropping a 1,000 ton section into the construction site and narrowly missing the busy roadway nearby. Three ironworkers were killed on the spot and 5 were injured (Baker).

Witnesses of the accident quickly called emergency personal. Drivers on I-280 described it as sounding like a tornado. "It was loud, an incredible noise," one explained (Mahr and Hall). Others watched from their living rooms, as close as 500 feet away. Those who saw it said that the crash looked like it was happening in slow motion, or, as one witness described it, "like you were pulling an erector set apart" (Mahr and Hall).

When emergency personnel arrived, members of the close-knit ironworker community helped to carry the bodies of victims to the ambulances (Mahr and Hall). The remaining workers held a vigil for the victims for four hours in the 20 degree cold (Baker). As a representative from the ironworkers' union explained, "Nobody was leaving until everyone was accounted for" (Mahr and Hall). The injured were taken to a local hospital and the death toll rose to four when one more worker died of his injuries (Baker). As a result of the accident, ODOT closed I-280 until they were sure that the area was safe for drivers (Mahr and Hall). Drivers were bypassed to one of the other bridges in the city, workers began the difficult task of safely removing debris.

Eight days later construction resumed at the site; a painful task for many of the workers who had lost friends and family members in the collapse. As the business manager of the cement masons' and plasterer's union put it, "Many of the workers returned to work stations with the wreckage in their line of sight. It hurts every time you drive by it" (Wilkinson and Erb). Though returning to work right after the funerals was difficult, it was also necessary for the many workers who simply could not afford to miss a paycheck (Wilkinson and Erb). The clean-up process proved to be complicated as large pieces of debris were hanging from cables and sticking out of the roadway, but had to be done quickly in order for through traffic to resume on northbound I-280. Once the road was passible, ODOT put up a 6 foot barrier to hide the accident debris from the view of passing drivers (Wilkinson and Erb). While the concrete masked the marred work site below, the rest of the project was unable to escape the shadow of the collapse.

The rest of the bridge project continued to be fraught with challenges. On October 23 of the same year, another accident involving one of the trusses (the framework for supporting the bridge) occurred ("Help Sought"). Then, a positioning leg fell from the other of the two gantries due to a miswired control switch. This second gantry accident resulted in no injuries however. Consequently, the contractor, Fru-Con, decided to modify the gantries to no longer used the moving repositioning

system. Eventually, Fru-Con abandoned the use of the specially designed gantries altogether and used a new gantry system that supported new sections from below instead of from above. Even after switching gantry systems, the project still was not completed smoothly; by the time the project was completed there were also issues with concrete quality and with the plastic coating on the stay cables (“ODOT's Largest”). Finally, on June 24, 2007, the bridge opened to the public (Kassabian, et. al. 1581).

Reception was positive. As the then mayor of Toledo Carty Finkbeiner said of the opening of the bridge, “No matter the weather, the sun's going to be shining on Toledo, Ohio” (“ODOT's Largest”).

### **A Story of a Careless Contractor**

Immediately after the accident, the Toledo Police Department and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), began investigating. At the same time, another investigation was launched by the contracting company themselves. They utilized the engineering firm of Simpson, Grumpertz, and Heger, inc. (Kassabian, et. al. 1570). The firm began investigating on February 23 concluded their investigation on March 24. They observed the debris and also examined the other gantry not involved in the accident (1570). As Paul Kassabian, a structural engineer from Simpson, Grumpertz and Heger involved with the investigation, and his team explains, “we monitored activities at the site and in storage areas. We observed, photographed, and measured debris in place and as it was removed” (1573-74). The group also examined the concrete core and software from the program logic controller (a computer that makes decisions for machines) (1573).

Simpson, Grumpertz, and Heger inc. used the gantry manufacturer's safe operating procedure, their discoveries in the investigation, and the site procedures to make an analysis, finding that “the contractor misunderstood that the PT bars stabilized the entire gantry against unrestrained longitudinal movement, rather than functioning simply as a 'hold-down' device [which only keeps an object from turning over]” (Kassabian et.al. 1581). In the course of their investigation, they had discovered that not only did Fru-Con stop putting the post-tensioning bars (PT bars) in, they also did not even have holes

drilled for them on the other gantry. Also, they found in their interviews that the workers said they were told not to put the PT bars in. They did not find any PT bars or evidence of damage from the PT bars snapping or flying out in the debris (1575). So while Fru-Con claimed to be following the required safety protocol, the evidence says otherwise. Without PT bars in the debris or evidence of their being there, it seems that Fru-Con had clearly violated safety standards.

In addition to the private investigation, The Toledo Police Department and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), also began investigating the accident right after it occurred. The investigators went into the investigation with no clear idea of the cause. As a representative from the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) told the Toledo *Blade*, “We don't want to rule anything out. Everything is in play: structure, mechanical, the process, the human issue” (Mahr and Hall). OSHA also brought in civil engineers from Chicago and Cleveland to assist with the investigation. Days later, OSHA still had not come up with a suspicion of cause, at least not one they were willing to share with the press. The same representative told *The Blade* on February 25 that “no one is looking at any specific cause of the collapse.” He said the investigation wants to “remain open to any possibility” (Wilkinson and Erb). At least at the initial stage, ODOT was unsure or unwilling to say what the cause of the accident was.

Eventually, OSHA cited Fru-Con for willful negligence. In the course of their investigation, OSHA found that the accident resulted from Fru-Con not designing the piers to have enough room to properly anchor gantry's legs. Fru-Con claimed that this was because the anchoring PT bars took up too much space and interfered with stressing cables and other equipment. When Fru-Con began the project, they initially decreased the number of PT bars used to instead of completely eliminating them, however, by the time of the accident, they were no longer using the anchoring PT bars at all on the rear legs, and only one bar per front leg. In addition, the front legs of the gantry were found to not have been properly tightened. The workers were using a wrench instead of the proper stressing process in

which high strength steel wires attached to the PT bars are individually stretched by a trained professional. A few months before the accident, the rear legs of the gantry had moved about two centimeters as it was securing a new section of the bridge. The gantry manufacturer's warnings indicated that this type of movement could cause a collapse, but this warning was ignored (“Overhead Launching”). So it is clear that if there is evidence that the bars were not there, and if Fru-Con had been specifically told to put them in, there is little Fru-Con can say against them.

In addition to the warnings provided with gantry upon delivery, the manufacturer’s representative at the site found that the gantry was not being anchored properly. He then sent Fru-Con an email warning that the gantry was not being anchored properly (Mahr and Pakulski). PdN (the manufacturer)'s representative, Mr. D'Elia then sent three more messages to Fru-Con that the gantry legs were not being anchored properly, including one after the legs moved two centimeters to the supervisor of the employee he had been communication with. Mr. D'Elia warned, “This has happened after our reiterated warnings about the bad or uncertain conditions of the anchorings of our launcher you have prepared following your decision to modify the erection sequence in a different way than ours and under your responsibility” (Mahr and Pakulski). Though Fru-Con maintained that they were anchoring the gantry legs according to manufacturer directions, when *The Blade* investigated, “three workers told investigators that, after PdN representatives returned to Italy, the rear legs weren't anchored at all” (Mahr and Pakulski). This seemed to lay the blame squarely on Fru-Con.

In May of 2005, OSHA announced that they had settled with Fru-Con. Fru-Con was fined \$280,000 (the maximum amount). In addition, Fru-Con was ordered to make the following changes: they must have an independent consultant who specializes in bridges at all future bridge projects, investigate and correct all worker safety complaints, allow OSHA on the work site at any time (normally they needed a warrant or a complaint to receive access), and implement all of OSHA's recommendations (*OSHA, Fru-Con Settle*). Jonathan Snare, OSHA's secretary, explained “This

agreement offers and an increased level of protection at all Fru-Con projects and allows working men and women the opportunity to become real partners in workplace safety. These advances can be made immediately, avoiding a lengthy litigation” (*OSHA, Fru-Con Settle*).

As a part of this settlement, however, OSHA also made a concession. They changed the classification of the charge from “willful violation” to “unclassified citation” (“Kaptur Seeks”). OSHA has four classifications of violations that it can give after an inspection: willful, serious, repeated, and other-than-serious. A willful violation is one in which the employer or management willingly took actions that they knew could lead to an unsafe workplace. Serious violations could lead to serious injury or death, repeated violations are present in more than one inspection, and other-than-serious violations are “violation that has a direct relationship to job safety and health, but is not serious in nature” (*Federal Employer Rights*). In the case of the gantry-collapse, the contractors knew that the manufacturers said that removing the PT bars could lead to collapse, but chose not to use the PT bars anyway. So this was initially classified as a willful violation. However, in a response to a letter about a similar decision in a 2001 accident, John L. Henshaw, assistant OSHA secretary states:

The issuance of "unclassified" citations is a settlement tool used to achieve prompt abatement and avoid lengthy litigation. Nationwide since 1989, the Agency has successfully resolved several hundred accident investigations through the use of "unclassified" citations. In this way we can secure both the deterrent effect of appropriate penalties and speedy abatement.

*(Standard Number 2200.100).*

So to avoid a drawn-out and costly trial, OSHA frequently uses the title of “unclassified citation” in cases of willful violation to appease employers and get the penalties that OSHA desires.

However, not all parties agreed with OSHA's reasoning in the violation classification change. Even before OSHA dropped the willful charges, the Lucas County Prosecutor, Julia Bates, and Police Chief Mike Navarre were considering filing criminal charges. While OSHA's civil charges would hold

Fru-Con somewhat accountable, Bates and Navarre wanted Fru-Con to face the even harsher criminal charges (“Help Sought”). As Julia Bates said, “We really feel we owe it to this community to do a thorough investigation” (“Help Sought”). However, these harsher charges also needed stricter proof, which the local police and county prosecutor were ill-equipped to provide. The department began by assigning three officers to review the findings of OSHA's civil investigation and conduct follow-up interviews. They soon found that with the manufacturer of the custom built gantries Paolo de Nicola’s (PdN) location in Italy, the project would soon outpace the finances available. The police department estimated that it might cost from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars. Additionally, they did not possess the engineering expertise necessary to carry out a criminal investigation alone. As Julia Bates and Cheif Navarre told *The Blade*, “the police department lacks the sort of engineering expertise that may be needed to prove that the crane collapse resulted from criminal negligence” (“Help Sought”). This article uses the term crane instead of gantry because many news documents replace the term to clarify what could be an unfamiliar term to layman audiences. As a result, they sought the help of the Ohio Attorney General, who they hoped could provide legal experts with civil engineering backgrounds.

Then, in the summer of 2005, the criminal investigation again sought help, this time from the U.S. Department of Labor. Once again claiming lack of resources and expertise, Marcy Kaptur, the area's representative, called on the federal government for help. After OSHA settled with Fru-Con, she accused them of being part of the problem: “These men died, in my view, because of the apparent willful negligence of the U.S. Department of Labor and OSHA” (“Kaptur Seeks”). She believed that OSHA knew something before the accident and could have prevented it. Others expressed less pointed motives for asking for help. Once again, Julia Bates explained that the local department simply did not have the resources to conduct this investigation on their own. Not only did she not have the money or expertise, they did not have the staff. Though she had assigned one of her attorneys to the case “full

time” he was also conducting another investigation “full time” at the same time. If the Lucas County commissioner would give her an attorney, she said, then she could have someone on the case full time. She explained, “You want [the investigation] to be thorough. It's not going very fast, but it's going” (“Kaptur Seeks”).

The investigation got help from more than just the government, however. They also sought help from the University of Toledo's department of Engineering and a California engineering firm. *The Blade* also helped by discovering that during tests in 2003, the manufacturer of the custom built gantries had contacted Fru-Con that they were not anchoring the gantries correctly. The investigators decided to pursue criminal charges of involuntary manslaughter and reckless homicide and continued searching for ways to prove them (Blake and Patch).

Nonetheless, the criminal investigation eventually met an obstacle that money and expertise could not solve. Nearly four years after the accident, the manufacturer of the custom built gantries, Paolo de Nicola, went bankrupt. Though Fru-Con filed a case against them, it was difficult to find the result of the case, or if this had anything to do with their bankruptcy. When the company temporarily closed, all of their information and records were sealed and became very difficult to access. As Bates and Navarre explained in a letter to one of those injured in the accident, “it has become virtually impossible to recover any of the relevant records, and extremely difficult locate and interview the former employees” (Blake and Patch). Without those documents, the investigation team could not get enough proof to successfully go to trial for criminal charges. However, the victims were not completely without justice: They received \$11.25 million in private settlements with Fru-Con (Blake and Patch). So, with that settlement and the bankruptcy of Paolo de Nicola preventing criminal charges, all formal investigation of the I-280 bridge accident had reached an end.

### **A Story of Accident Reports**

The official report of the accident came in three forms. First, is the actual accident report on the

OSHA website, which is very brief. It simply states that the gantry collapsed due to improper anchoring and four were killed (*Accident: 202086633*). Though it does cast some blame by mentioning improper anchoring, there is no mention of consequences or even the contractor's name. Then, in May 2005, OSHA released a brief news bulletin detailing their settlement with Fru-Con. The bulletin focused on the standards that Fru-Con must meet to become a safer company. In addition, the quote by Jonathan Snare emphasizes that the goal of OSHA's actions is to Fru-Con a safer company, not merely to punish. (*OSHA, Fru-Con Settle*). It then mentions the fine very briefly before moving on to discuss employer's responsibility for the safety of their employees. The details of the accident are not mentioned, nor is the change in charge from “willful violation” to “unclassified citation.”

The third report does not appear to be about the accident at all at first. This report is a safety information bulletin, not a report on the accident or news bulletin. While the news bulletin was only for regional viewing and looked less polished, the safety information bulletin has U.S. Department of Labor heading at the top. Filed under “Safety and Health Information Bulletins,” it was designed to be sent out nationally to all employers in related fields. The top of the bulletin states that the purpose is “to assist employers in providing a safe and healthful workplace” (*Overhead Launching Gantry*). It has a disclaimer at the top, informing the reader that the purpose of the bulletin is to inform, not to make any new regulations. Though it's content is clearly inspired by the I-280 accident, it is not limited in scope to those who are involved in that specific incident, but is instead nationally oriented. First, it informs the readers of the importance of following all manufacturer's safety directions when operating overhead launching gantries. Next it provides clarification about what an overhead launching gantry is. It then uses the case of the I-280 collapse as an example of what could happen if one does not follow the guidelines. It describes the results of OSHA's findings: the company had stopped using the anchoring PT bars, did not adequately tighten the front legs, and ignored the warning sign of the rear leg moving 2 centimeters before the accident. Next, it moves on to what others should learn from the collapse, that

all manufacturer's directions should be followed precisely, and if they cannot be found, a qualified engineer should be consulted. This report, though not appearing to be about the accident at first, actually provides more information and places more blame onto the contractor than the official report on the accident.

Next, the company hired to investigate the accident by Fru-Con also released a report in the form of an article in *Structures Congress* 2011. This report was by far the most thorough discussion of the accident itself, mentioning the technical issues in great detail. This thoroughness is probably due to the intended audience of the text, which is a conference related to construction. In this setting, the audience would be familiar with the technical terms and concepts, and so the authors were able to go into more detail and use more jargon, though the conclusion is similar. The other thing worth noting about the contractor's investigation report is the language used to describe the cause of the accident. While *The Blade* and OSHA speak of the culpability of Fru-Con for the accident, Kassabian words it this way: "In this case, It seems that the contractor misunderstood that the PT bars stabilized the entire gantry" (Kassabian et. al. 1581). Kassabian et. al. downplay Fru-Con's culpability in the decision not to use the anchor PT bars and does not mention that they may have know beforehand how dangerous the project could be without them. This choice of description seems most likely due to the fact that since Fru-Con payed for the report, the team was unlikely to too severely criticize their actions.

Finally, *The Blade* covered the entire story of the accident and the investigation. As a local newspaper, the report was understandably focused on what local officials were doing and the reaction of Toledoans. *The Blade* first mentions the investigation in the first article after the collapse "Crane Collapse Kills 3." At this point, the reporting of the investigation relied heavily on quotes from Police Chief Mike Navarre, though this article and the second article, "Work Begins Again on New I-280 Bridge" were the only two to include a quote from an ODOT representative. Reporting of the investigation was at first very neutral, including a quote that assured the readers that "ODOT's Mr.

Martinko vowed a complete investigation of the crane collapse” (Mahr and Hall). As the investigation continued, *The Blade* would become less supportive toward state and national government.

After the first two articles, the reporting of the investigation focused on three individuals, Chief Navarre, Lucas County Prosecutor Julia Bates, and Representative Marcy Kaptur. Though Kaptur is a national politician, she is very closely tied to the district she represents, and so warrants being included as a local official. By December, it was clear that the investigation would not be cut and dry. When *The Blade* reported on the first call for additional assistance in the investigation, it was very careful not to place blame on local law enforcement. David Patch, author of “Help Sought for I-280 Bridge Inquiry,” emphasized that the police had been working diligently (they had assigned three men specifically to the case) and that the need for additional help was due to lack of funds and specialized expertise, not incompetence. The article also served to quell any fears that the lack of funds had to do with recent suspected layoffs, which it specifically said was not the case. Overall, Chief Navarre was painted as the dedicated hero, determined to get justice for the victims' families. Patch includes a quote from Navarre, who said, “we may eventually have to say we don't have enough evidence to go forward. But I don't want to go to the families and say, 'we can't move forward because of lack of funds’” (“Help Sought”). Julia Bates was also portrayed as a defender of the community. For example, Patch included the quote by Bates: “we really feel we owe it to this community to do a thorough investigation” (“Help Sought”). She and Navarre were both presented as committed to the cause and tirelessly working.

This was even more true in *The Blade's* portrayal of Marcy Kaptur's involvement. In David Patch's article, “Kaptur Seeks Federal Help in Bridge Probe,” Kaptur is presented as practically scathing toward the state and national government. They even go as far as to include a quote where she lays the blame for the accident on ODOT and OSHA's negligence. Each article after the settlement made a point of mentioning it and how OSHA had changed the classification from “willful violation” to “unclassified citation.” Though *The Blade* never overtly said that it disapproved of this measure,

multiple reporters mentioned it as the reason for the need for a criminal investigation. In addition, the fact that *The Blade* continued to bring it up, even four years after the fact showed that it was significant to them and not a mere technicality.

Kaptur also defends the local investigators in her request for more help. Though it had been over a year at that point and the investigation was not concluded, *The Blade* is careful to pin the lack of results on a lack of resources. They include another quote from Kaptur, who blamed OSHA and ODOT for not doing enough; she said: “an investigation of this magnitude is an enormous task for any local agency. I believe that the Department of Labor can be of immeasurable assistance” (“Kaptur Seeks”). Bates and Navarre, however, did not come out and say directly that OSHA and ODOT did not do enough. Navarre was not quoted in as saying anything in regards to OSHA and ODOT at all, and Bates simply requested general help, saying “this is a very complicated and complex situation, and we do not have the resources to accurately unravel this and get to the truth of what happened” (“Kaptur Seeks”).

Despite the Navarre and Bates viewpoint *The Blade* had presented so far, they chose to report the end of the case from the viewpoint of a victim, not from the view of the public officials. Even the title highlights this fact: “Decision Pains Injured Skyway Worker.” The article still includes an official statement from Bates and Navarre explaining why the bankruptcy of PdN forced them to close the investigation, in addition to several quotes from a man injured in the accident and the mother of one of those killed. It explains very thoroughly that Bates and Navarre had tried to find information, but much had simply disappeared with the collapse of the company. The article also concludes with a subtly critical tone. Blake includes a quote from the mother of a victim saying “tearfully,” “be careful for those workers. Money will not bring them back. You want those companies to learn” (Blake and Patch). *The Blade* seemed to want to come out squarely on the side of the victims, emphasizing their pain and underscoring the subtle message that perhaps those responsible had not faced strong enough consequences, while still avoiding editorializing by coming out and saying that explicitly.

## A Story of Public Response

The public's response to the bridge collapse began as shock at the events and ended in criticism of the parties responsible. The shock was especially noticeable in this particular accident, however, due to the project's extremely impressive safety record before the accident. Toledo residents were unaccustomed to major construction accidents, since the last fatality from a construction accident had been in 1976, and the last fatality from a bridge project had been in 1956. In addition the project itself had an exceptional safety rate, and Fru-Con had just made an agreement with OSHA that OSHA had said, would “tremendously lower rates of injuries and illnesses” (“Safety Programs”). Thus the public responded with shock when such a terrible accident occurred on this project. In an editorial, Rose Russell explained, “the shock is due to knowing that this smooth job was going relatively smoothly” (Russell). A witness of the accident exclaimed, “I can't believe I saw that, I'm looking at it, and I still don't believe it” (Mahr and Hall). A city council man stated that he felt, “absolute dismay and total sadness for workers and their families” (Mahr and Hall). A fire department's chaplain said of the families of the victims, “they're in shock. They're dealing with it the best they can” (Mahr and Hall).

As those closely involved were shocked by the accident, the public also respected the close-knit community of iron workers. A representative from the ironworkers union, Mr. Blaze said that the group had a bond tighter than just co-workers; they were family to each other, which is one of the reasons why the deaths were so tragic (Mahr and Hall). The pain of the accident would be felt for months. Immediately after the accident, one of the workers stated, “They never really go back to normal” (Wilkinson and Erb). Another mentioned, “It hurts every time you go by [the accident site]” (Wilkinson and Erb).

Public opinion was very supportive of the workers' abilities as well. As Blaze noted, “they were very experienced ironworkers, none of them were rookies” (Mahr and Hall). In addition, Rose Russell, a reporter for *The Blade*, takes it one step further, stating that “human error is not impossible, but the

mere suggestion is an insult to the ironworkers” (Russell). She goes on to mention that those chosen were specifically used for this task because of their skill and that as a close-knit community, ironworkers stick up for each other. Thus, even before the report had come out, public opinion was strongly against the idea that an operator error by the ironworkers.

As the investigation moved into the summer months, however, the response turned from one of shock and sadness, to one of criticism. When OSHA made the deal to change the charge from “willful violation” to “unclassified citation,” it faced harsh criticism both from *The Blade*, from officials, and from the public. As previously mentioned, *The Blade's* criticism was the most subtle, mainly seen in the fact that change is frequently brought up and is occasionally paired with others' (such as Marcy Kaptur or Julia Bates') criticism. For example, when *The Blade* mentioned the change in “Kaptur Seeks Federal Help in Bridge Probe,” they immediately followed it with a statement about how Kaptur is “baffled” by the change and was upset about OSHA's refusal to take as much action as she would like (“Kaptur Seeks”). The transcript from Kaptur's floor speech is even more critical. She states, “I am angry. I am very angry. They do not want any oversight. They want the weaker OSHA regulations. They do not care about these men. They do not care about these families” (*Congressional Record*).

Nonetheless, as long as local officials were still searching, public opinion was still relatively positive towards the investigation. After the decision to stop investigating for criminal charges, however, public opinion was less supportive. One victim said, “There are four guys dead. What's the end result? One company goes out of business and Fru-Con continues to go on doing business” (Blake and Patch). Though Kaptur was less critical of Bates and Navarre than she was of OSHA, she still said through a representative, “I think it's worth the effort [to investigate criminally]. It's just a difficult thing all the way around” (Blake and Patch). The mother of another victim was less critical, saying only that she hoped that the companies were still about to learn from the tragedy, even if criminal charges were not brought to court.

## A Story of Intertwining Narratives

The story of the I-280 accident is one of several different stories of the same event. Each source of information, and sometimes each author, has a different focus. While the OSHA reports focused on safety, *The Blade* focused more on justice for the company and local individuals. Simpson, Grumpertz, and Heger inc. focused on specific technical reasons behind the crash, not even delving into what should happen afterwards. In addition, while the accident itself is very tied to the contractor and the construction workers involved, the story of the investigation is very centered around politics involving OSHA. Finally, the story of public opinion focused mostly on reactions to loss and justice (or injustice).

In addition, Several trends present in the reporting of the I-280 bridge accident are similar to other works of accident reporting. First, noted that the format of the report by the company hired by Fru-Con is structurally very similar to the early accident reports in the book *Twisted Rails, Sunken Ships* by R. John Brockman. Kassabian, et. al. present a list of possible causes for the accident, the fifth and last of which is the actual cause, the movement of the rear legs due to improper anchoring. Thus Kassabian sets up for their conclusion by proceeding from causes which are least likely to the one which is most likely. This is set up in the same way as Silliman's report of the explosion of the *New England* mentioned in the book. Silliman also listed several possible causes for the accident, beginning with the least likely to have happened and ending with the cause he thought to be true. As Brockman notes, "The finesses and seamless design of the conformation suggested, to the reader, that the choice of four explanations was as inexorable as the scientific laws of the universe" (Brockman 29). However, unlike Silliman's report, Kassabian et.al do not exonerate the company that issued the report. They instead are rather neutral, focusing on technical details, such as what went on structurally, and hardly mentioning whose fault it was that the legs were not anchored. At the end, they do mention fault; however, it is assumed that the lack of PT bars was an accident, saying that "the contractor

misunderstood” (Kassabian et.al. 1581).

While the Kassabian et. al. report was similar in structure to many early accident reports, *The Blade's* coverage reminded me in some ways of the journalist Abraham Lustgarten's technique of humanizing those involved in an accident, particularly noticeable in his book *Run to Failure*. Immediately after the accident, *The Blade* described the victims in detail, so as to give the readers a better understanding of those involved and to involve the reader's emotions. For example, Mahr and Hall quote workers that who knew the victim Mr. Phillips, “he'd do anything for you. This was horrible. He had a little boy and a little girl.” They also quoted someone who knew another victim, Mr. Moreau, who said of him, “he was a wonderful person” (Mahr and Hall). This reminded me of how Lustgarten always added extra details and included stories about the victims of the BP accidents. Like in *Run to Failure*, these descriptions serve a key purpose in enhancing the readability and emotional involvement of the text. When a reader is emotionally connected with the victims, it makes the report more interesting and strengthens the desire for justice in the reader.

Furthermore, the workplace culture of Fru-Con bears connections to Nick Pidgeon's work on workplace safety “Systems Thinking; Culture of Reliability and Safety.” In this work, he summarizes the research of David Blockley and Brock Turner in workplace culture and the maintenance of safety. While reading of Fru-Con's previously excellent safety record, a connection could be made to Turner's four categories for a good safety culture which Pidgeon mentions in “Systems Thinking”. Did Fru-Con meet these criteria? In the first category, senior management commitment to safety, the answer is yes. If the senior management had not been committed to safety, they would not have made the effort to meet with OSHA and unions to come up with an agreement to promote safety in the workplace. They also greatly inconvenienced themselves by allowing OSHA to examine the site at any time, without a warrant. Senior management was committed to safety.

In addition, there was the second category, a shared commitment to safety and that norms for

safety were in place. It would not have been possible for Fru-Con to have achieved a lost-time rate of 400% better than average if a concern for safety had not permeated the entire workplace culture.

Moreover, the fact that Fru-Con invited union leaders to their safety meeting also shows that all levels of management were involved. This meeting additionally exhibits that all three groups possessed good transcultural communication skills; they were able to communicate concerns about safety and come up with plans for successful implementation. Next, the astonishing safety record could not have happened if there had not been rules in place, addressing the need for safety. Thus they must have had flexible norms as well.

Finally, Fru-Con also had plans in place for continual reflection. They had established a safety committee with members from OSHA, Fru-Con, ODOT, state consultants, unions and sub-contractor to regularly review safety programs, audit how they project was doing in regards to safety, and resolve any sudden safety issues. By establishing this group, Fru-Con was clearly attempting to reflect on what they were doing well and what needs work.

So with the four required components of a good safety program, why is it that Fru-Con experienced such a terrible accident? Perhaps Fru-Con may have been merely giving the appearance of a concern for safety, without actually having it. BP did this repeatedly, well enough to fool Joan Pascal, a government inspector, so it is logical that Fru-Con may have as well. If they had given the appearance of safety without actually maintaining it; however, then the accident rate could not have stayed as low as it did. BP's accident record was always very high, even when they were "focusing on safety." As a result, I think that the accident was in fact due to factors outside of a failure of the safety system.

So, if the accident was not actually due to a failure of the safety system, what caused it? Perhaps it was actually a lack of transcultural communication between the contractors and designers. It is possible Kassabian et.al. were correct, maybe it was a misunderstanding of the manufacturer of the

custom-built-gantries's plans. A misunderstanding of the plans could lead to an accident. However, this does not explain why Fru-Con chose not to make changes when Paulo de Nicola repeatedly informed them of potential dangers in the way they anchored their device. In addition to the plans, they had also received instructions with the gantries about anchoring them. These instructions they also ignored. Therefore, the two groups might have not been communicating effectively. However, it is unclear what could be confusing about "we hope that you clearly understand that the inadequacy of the anchorings may cause the collapse of the equipments" which was taken from a memo Mr. D' Elia wrote (Mahr and Pulkalski).

In addition, while Fru-Con would gain an additional \$4.3 million dollars if the project was completed on schedule, difficulties with the gantries were causing delays (Mahr and Pulkalski). Was the accident caused by haste to finish early, despite the delays caused by the gantries? Failing to take the time to anchor them properly would save time. Or did Fru-Con somehow not understand PdN's repeated warnings? It may never be certain what caused the failure to properly use the PT bars.

So, the narrative of the I-280 accident refuses to be simplified into one unified narrative. The course of events is somewhat determined by whose perspective one chooses to evaluate from. If one looks from the public's point of view, one sees the tragedy of loss and frustration at a lack of justice. If one looks from the point of view of OSHA, one sees an opportunity to inform the public about safety and a chance to force a company to improve. Finally, if one looks from the point of view of Fru-Con, one sees a tragic misunderstanding of directions. In order to fully understand the event, one must see each of these intertwining and sometimes contradictory points of view. As with all accidents, the most that can be hoped for is justice for the victims and perhaps others can see and not repeat the same mistake. Even if the culpable source of the accident is not uncovered satisfactorily, one is still able to see all possibilities and to move on fairly. At the end, the millions of dollars in private settlements to the victims ("ODOT's Largest), and the safety bulletins put out by OSHA bring as satisfactory a

conclusion to the events of that February day as could be hoped for.

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## Reshaping Attitudes: Tailoring Urban Education to fit the African American Student

It all started my first year teaching. I was a young hopeful, fresh into her first job and full of youthful enthusiasm. I had no experience with the age group, middle school, and little experience with the demographic, primarily African American, urban, and nearly all free or reduced-lunch (this is used as an economic marker in the education system). All too soon I found that the tools I had been prepared with in my education program were inadequate. I assigned five paragraph essays and found my students unable to write complete sentences. On one occasion I asked the students to write letters to local businesses asking for donations to the community breakfast. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders were shown a business letter format and were asked to write two or three paragraphs introducing the event and requesting donations. Most students managed to string together two or three sentences, some refused to do the assignment, and one even turned in a letter which only said “can we please money.”

I found myself continually assigning tasks, then realizing that my students were unable to complete them. On another occasion I assigned a research paper about a problem they saw in world. I explained how to do citations; the librarian did a lesson on how to use the school research website. Most students turned in poorly paraphrased papers with no citations. I had one copy and paste an article about head lice in the New York Public Library. Another turned in an entirely copied and pasted paper inexplicably about Polar Bears. At another point, I assigned a simple elementary style book report with regular reading time in class and assigned reading outside of class. Only a handful were able to finish their books. My classroom was loud, and not in a good way: out of control and defiant.

By the end of the year, I wanted a do-over. I needed more training. My teaching methods, while fairly successful in the rural school where I had student taught were ineffective in this new setting, and I feared my students had gained nothing from my instruction. So I set out to use all of my mishaps to guide my search for an answer. I wanted to know: what is the best way to teach urban, impoverished, African American students? How can they go from basic readers and writers to college ready in four

years of high school?

I began to conduct some preliminary research into how to meet the specific needs of students who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and come from a disadvantaged socio-economic class. I discovered that best practices for teaching urban African American students were often through changing student and teacher attitudes. In order for urban African American students to be successful in the classroom, the students must learn to successfully code-switch (transition between one dialect and set of cultural norms and another) between the ideas and language of home and those of school, and teachers must learn to put aside low expectations to engage students in deep-thinking, active education.

Before I begin to explain my findings, I would like to take some time to discuss this particular demographic and explain why it is so uniquely at risk. This essay is intended to be a survey (though by no means exhaustive) of several writing pedagogies found effective in classrooms where the majority of students are African American, whose families fall below the poverty line, and who live in urban environments. Students in this demographic are statistically higher at risk. In a companion fact sheet to the PBS special “Too Important to Fail” about African American males in school, Tamika Thompson reports that “across the board” though more than three quarters of white and Asian students graduate high school, while only just over half of African American students do (Thompson). In addition to missing school from dropping out, African American male students are more than twice as likely to miss school due to suspension. Not only do these students not get as much school time, they also are not able to get as much out of the schooling they do get. Thompson reports that on average, African American twelfth graders' reading levels equal that of white eighth graders' reading levels. When eighth graders, only 14% of African American students achieved a proficient reading score. Clearly this demographic has been an area of particular need, and one that has often not been helped successfully in the past. Treating them just like white, suburban students has not been successful across the board.

So, knowing this information, what must teachers do? Research says that first, they must help students improve attitudes about school and learn to code-switch effectively. Many students do not want to be perceived as people who care about school or want to learn. For example, Marlene Carter, a teacher and researcher in Los Angeles conducted a study on her teaching practices for The National Writing Project about what makes male African American students successful or unsuccessful in her AP English class. She found “the culture of the school did not encourage young men to excel academically. In my non-AP classes I heard students accuse others who were particularly enthusiastic about the class of “brown nosing” (Carter 201). In a report for the New York Times on a successful private alternative to urban Atlanta schools called SEED, Maggie Jones found the same thing when surveying students. She reports, “Black inner-city boys particularly have to wrestle with the question of whether it is O.K. to be smart” (Jones). The students she interviewed attended a boarding school where excellence was expected and returned home to inner city neighborhoods on weekends, where they had to struggle with their community's reaction to their education.

Students therefore need to learn the tools to live in both worlds and thrive in a variety of circumstances. Jones explains that for these students, the solution is code-switching between the language and culture of school and the language and culture of home. Jones describes a student named Parry Elliot. He “knows he can’t swagger through the hallways in baggy jeans, the rapper Ludacris blaring out of his iPod, while he avoids eye contact and a handshake with Mr. Adams. But if he takes too much of SEED back to the neighborhood basketball court — the big words and pressed shirts — he could have troubles of a different sort.” So students need to learn to expect success in the classroom, and be able to still communicate culturally in a home setting. They must learn how to behave appropriately in two different cultures and to alternate back and forth between the two.

However, the code-switching needed to behave successfully in two different cultures can prove very difficult for students, as Rebecca Lakin Gullan of Gwynedd-Mercy College, Beth Necowitz

Hoffman of The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and Stephen S. Leff of the University of Pennsylvania report in a study on identity in urban African American adolescents. They surveyed students and found that those who acted one way at school and a different way at home responded that it was stressful, " 'cause it's hard to be a different person when it's not you." Another student explained it this way, "Sometimes I act Black, sometimes I act White. 'Cause when I'm around a lot of people I don't know, I talk properly, but when I am around people I know, I don't. I don't know...I act nerdy." In an additional study, Gullan, Hoffman, and Leff, all psychologists, found that "the need to change behavior across contexts was articulated by several youth, many of whom indicated that it was a difficult task that resulted in them feeling inauthentic in one or both settings." As a result, even when teachers convey high expectations in the classroom and teach an intellectually rigorous material, they must also be aware that this atmosphere may be stressful and the necessary code switching may be difficult for students. Code switching is the process of mentally translating from one dialect and set of behavioral norms to another. Though beneficial, code-switching can also be stressful. Urban students code switch from AAVE (African American Vernacular English) and neighborhood or urban cultural norms to Standard English (what used to be called "good English," the English spoken by those in power) and school cultural norms. However, if mastered, the ability to code switch in this way is very useful for students. Students then become fluent in language and interactions of two cultures, are better able to communicate with a wide range of people, and maintain the rich social and cultural connections of both cultures. The principal of SEED explains that though keeping the students at the boarding school seven days a week would keep them from having to do this code switching, he does not want to rob them of this valuable skill (Jones). The ability to code switch is useful for students' lives during and after school, as throughout life all people have to be able to transition between different settings and cultures. If students learn to do this in high school, they will be better equipped to transition between home and academia, or between friends and social encounters and work.

However valuable a skill, as a result of code-switching, students may then develop other problems beyond emotional stress. When students learn to code-switch and speak Standard English at school, it can feel unnatural and separate them from their “voice” as a writer. A writer's voice is what makes his or her writing sound unique from anyone else's. Without a strong voice, a person's writing can sound dry or forced. Patricia Smith, a famous poet and writing teacher, explains this problem in a story about her childhood. She explains that her mother told her “if you ever want to get out of here, you've got to talk white.” She took her mother's advice, but “talking white” left her feeling like “a clear, colorless slate scrubbed of my own history, a slate where people could write my life any way they wanted, with any beginning, any middle, any outcome” (Smith). By learning to speak and write in a way that felt culturally inauthentic to her, she felt that she lost ownership of her own life and identity. This made it difficult for her to begin writing in any way that was creative or authentic.

This feeling of clear “colorlessness” can leave students struggling to begin writing and sounding forced and dry when they do. One solution is what Smith defines as the “second throat:” a voice used for stories and poems, the familiar and home voice, as opposed to a voice used for technically correct grammar. This is another example of code switching; students can speak in one voice while writing formal papers or taking tests, and in another voice when writing creatively or for emphasis when appropriate in a formal paper. Learning to code switch as a writer can sometimes be a difficult process, however.

As a writing teacher and poet, Smith sometimes does workshops in schools. Smith tells of a workshop she did in a sixth grade class where the students she was working with were excited to begin writing, “but when they sat down to write, it was if they'd shed their skins and their stories.” The students told her, “I don't have nothing to write about.” She then explains her process of getting students to feel comfortable relating their own stories. She tells them that “all your stories are yours,” and that she does not care about their grammar mistakes. “What matters is the power that flows through you

when you pick up that pen,” she explains. By teaching them that their own words, ideas, and stories are valid and beautiful, she helps them reclaim the voice they have lost.

In addition to student attitudes and code-switching, I propose that expressive and critical writing pedagogies would be effective in urban African American classrooms as well. Several of Smith's stories sound very much like expressive pedagogy, a style of teaching writing which also focuses on student voice and empowerment. Expressive writing primarily focuses on student voice and its development. Expressive writing argues that even formal writing is more powerful when the writer has a strong voice. Peter Elbow is a professor emeritus at University of Massachusetts Amherst and the director of the national writing project from 1996 – 2000. When counseling applicants for conscientious objector essays, he explained that his writers could not just argue logically to be successful, “they must communicate intense belief through voice” (Burnham and Powell 114). Theorists trace this connection all the way back to Plato and Aristotle in the concept of the “resonant” voice. If a writer's voice is resonant, he or she is able to come close to expressing the whole person in words. As a result, the writing produced is more powerful. In addition, like Smith describes, writing with a strong voice is linked to self-actualization. The theorist bell hooks argues that a truly expressivist teacher “must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (Burnham and Powell 124). So just as Patricia Smith believed that when writers lose their voice they lose a part of themselves, in the same way expressivist writers believe that when a writer is fully able to express his or her voice, they are able to become more self-actualized and so more powerful and emotionally healthy as a person.

As a result, expressivist ideas can be easily and effectively applied to the urban classroom. One way this can be done is by regular journaling. Students can be encouraged to journal in their dialects in order to develop a strong voice and story. Then, these works can later be revised to fit conventions of standard English grammar if necessary. Journaling helps students become comfortable with writing,

and using their own dialect helps students write more clearly in their own voice. In some settings, revising to standard English is not necessary, such as in a creative or reflective narrative. In others, students can use the last stage of drafting to make grammatical or mechanical changes, while keeping as much of the original voice as possible. Peer review and collaborative work will also help students work within their community while still using the writing conventions of the classroom.

Finally, expressivist principles can help resolve some of the issues that speaking and writing both in an academic voice and in a home voice can cause. Like code-switching in behavior, code-switching with language can also lead to stress and confusion. Gullan, Hoffman, and Leff argue in the study “I Do but I Don't” that students who learn to code switch from a dialect to standard English may struggle with identity, as they connect with aspects of both cultures and feel that they are masking their first culture. They explain, “the concomitant rejection of one’s own culture can be damaging, particularly for adolescents in the midst of establishing a sense of themselves in relation to the world” (Gullan, Hoffman, and Leff). Expressive pedagogy enables students to communicate clearly in the way they feel most comfortable. It can help students resolve this feeling of rejection and instead empower them to use their own voice.

Not every piece of writing needs to be revised to meet the standards of conventional English, and in fact, not all work should be revised in this way. Both AAVE and Standard English are effective and useful for a variety of types of writing. This will help students develop a “both-and” approach to culture instead of an “either-or.” As Gullan, Hoffman, and Leff explain, a “both-and” approach is one “wherein life is not viewed as dichotomous, but rather made up of dual realities that co-exist within individuals, groups and institutions” (Gullan, Hoffman, and Leff). When students can see themselves and their writings with a both-and approach, it will minimize the stress brought on by code-switching. Students need to see that they are capable of producing quality writing, and one way they can do so is by seeing people who look like them and speak like them produce it. Thus examples of successful

code-switching is essential to implementing Expressive Pedagogy. Expressive Pedagogy helps students to see the multiple cultures and languages that surround them and influence their writings and to use these multiple cultures in writing as fully as possible.

While Expressive Pedagogy has its aim in students developing their voice, Critical Pedagogy can also be helpful in African American urban classrooms because gives them a way to use the voice they have developed. Critical Pedagogy is a style of writing that allows students to use their writing to look critically the world around them. This is especially important for urban African American students, who can feel powerless. A critical classroom returns power to the student by being student centered. Teachers do not ask students to criticize the problems that the teachers see in the world, but instead ask students to write about the problems that they themselves see. Critical Pedagogy theorists explain that they seek to created “decentered” classrooms, where “students' writing and voices” are in the “foreground” (George 81). Students are asked to take part in choosing the materials and even in selecting and criticizing the methods used in a course. So in a critical classroom, students are able to take the voice and ideas cultivated in Expressivism and use them to make their point of view known and to try to change their world. Since a critical classroom is student centered, students are able to express and explore the dual cultures they experience. The setting is not the school culture and standard English, but is an open space where students create the culture. This enables them to discuss, explore, and critique the dichotomy between school culture and home culture as well as create in the code-switching place in between.

Much like self-actualization in expressive writing, students who are able to use their voices to critique the world around them feel more empowered. Instead of the passive receiver of culture, students are able to chose, act upon, and change the culture around them. They are able to use their writing in practical and tangible ways, not as exercises in conforming to norms. As theorist Ann George explains, critical writing teachers “want to empower students, to engage them in cultural critique, to

make a change” (77). Empowerment, cultural critique and change are especially important for urban African American students, who may feel disenfranchised by dominant culture. Critical pedagogy then enables them to not view this disenfranchisement as inevitable, but as something to challenge and change. As F.J. Graveline, a counselor and advocate for aboriginal peoples' education in Canada, explains, students can enact this change by, “learning to question and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that would provide individuals and their communities' with the basis for transforming the wider social order” (Graveline qtd. in Leard and Lashua). So students enact real change by finding areas of the dominant culture that impact them and their communities and attempting to change them.

Diane Wishart Leard and Brett Lashua, doctoral researchers at the University of Alberta, have implemented aspects of both expressive and critical pedagogies into the urban African American classroom. Leard and Lashua used a critical approach to popular culture to engage students in formal writing about a familiar topic. They explain, “As teachers and researchers in these schools, we explored our involvement with young people’s engagement of popular culture to voice their experiences and challenge dominant narratives in their public schooling and daily lives” (Leard and Lashua). The students involved in this study, like the students I teach, are from several traditionally marginalized subgroups. In the past, people from urban centers, African Americans, and young people, all have not been able to participate in spheres of power. As Leard and Lashua explain, their voices are important to be heard because we “need to value the voices of youth who have traditionally been silenced or unheard, and attend to the importance of popular cultural practices in young people’s lives.” In the study, researchers used popular theater and rap to identify and criticize aspects of popular culture that are harmful to their students and their communities. The students began to see how media and culture influenced them and those around them to support stereotypes and create assumptions that lead to their powerlessness. However, as in critical pedagogy, power relationships are mutual, the teachers also

became more aware of their own positions of power and learned to consider popular culture with a more nuanced view. So through the use of critical pedagogy, both teacher/researchers and students were able to gain a clearer and more nuanced view of the factors influencing them and are then able to express themselves more powerfully and clearly in response to these factors.

As a result, for urban African American students to learn to write engagingly, they must learn to first code-switch between conflicting ideas about academic excellence at home and at school, and then learn to develop a strong voice when code-switching between standard English and AAVE. Expressive and Critical pedagogies can both help achieve this goal. However, the changes necessary to help this demographic are not limited to student skills, teachers of urban African American students must also learn to combat unhelpful patterns and assumptions within themselves about teaching this population. Several researchers have noticed one trend that is hindering urban African American students: low teacher expectations. As NCTE (National Council for Teachers of English) president Kyrene Beers reports, many teachers limit their students with ideas of what “those” students can do. She relates what she was told by a teacher in an urban school: “Students here need to get the basics; we don’t have much time with them when you look at all they need to learn, so we must drill the basics into them. They do better with strong discipline” (Beers). Teachers with the idea of “those kids” operate under the idea that urban African American students cannot handle group work, activities, or more difficult tasks. Marlene Carter found the same thing: “at my high school, most conversations about the achievements of African American males focused on them getting good enough grades to be eligible for sports or graduation. . . . Many teachers are content to have young black men sit quietly and obediently in their classrooms, earning C's” (201). In many schools, whether consciously or not, teachers settle for good behavior from urban African American students, and do not expect academic excellence.

However, the unlike those who just settle for good behavior, American Psychological Association found that when students are told that their teacher has higher expectations for them, they

achieved more. They conducted a study of three schools and in each of them compared scores of students who were told that teachers gave them feedback because they had high expectations for them versus students who were given feedback without this explanation. In each study, the group that were told that they were getting feedback because their teachers had high expectations for them showed greater improvement than those who were not (Yeager and Cohen). As a result, it is important for teachers to make sure that they are communicating to their students the belief that their students are capable of doing well.

It is also of note that in each of these studies, this understanding of high expectations was in the context of feedback. Feedback is an essential part of teaching, and teachers need to make sure that they are both giving good, constructive feedback and that students understand that the purpose of the feedback is for students to reach the potential that their teachers see in them. In one study, students improved by 88% after responding to feedback given with the understanding that teachers had high expectations for them. Without the knowledge that feedback is there because teachers expect more of them, urban African American students are likely to ignore the feedback. As Yeager and Cohen explain, “African-American students who need to improve their academic performance may do better in school and feel less stereotyped as underachievers if teachers convey high standards and their belief that students can meet them.” Teacher belief is crucial in student achievement.

Similarly, when teachers do not believe in their students' abilities, they fail to achieve. Kylene Beers labels the belief that the urban students in a low-income setting cannot achieve as “genteel unteaching.” She explains that the genteel unteaching is disguised by what seems well-meaning, “they need structure’ and ‘they need discipline’ and ‘they need the basics.’ In the end, we are left with an education of America’s poor that cannot be seen as anything more than a segregation by intellectual rigor, something every bit as shameful and harmful as segregation by color” (Beers) She argues instead that teachers should provide students with, “rich, exciting, and powerful educational experiences.”

Instead of only drilling structure and the basics, teachers should also enable the class to engage in higher order thought. This can be achieved through group work, class discussion, debate, creative projects, and other student centered activities.

Marlene Carter describes some of the “rich, exciting, and powerful educational experiences Beers suggests. She explains that teachers in her school also often have low expectations for their students. In addition to challenging these beliefs in other teachers by encouraging and modeling academic rigor, Carter also offers active learning because she feels it is more suited to her students' needs. Instead of needing structure and quiet, Carter believes that African American youth, particularly young men, need opportunities for active learning. However, these opportunities cannot be without structure. When given the opportunity for unstructured group work, Carter noticed that the groups of all African American males in her class tended to perform lower than mixed gender groups or all female groups (Carter 199). However, when offered clearly structured, active, group work, her students excelled. She offered experiences like acting out a chapter of a novel, presenting work to the class, leading class discussion, and working together to design, write, and publish a magazine (Carter 205). These sorts of activities got the students moving, thinking critically and independently, and working with and challenging their peers. Judith Langer, a researcher for the University of Albany, also found that students learned better when able to “to develop depth and complexity of understanding in interaction with others” (Langer 21). These are the sorts of educational experiences that Beers calls for.

Teachers should not only change assumptions about how urban African American students are to be taught, but also rethink how the content should be structured. Judith Langer found that urban African American students learned best from concepts that are integrated together. Instead of skills and ideas presented individually and then abandoned once mastered, urban African American students learned best when ideas were integrated and revisited throughout the entire curriculum. So instead of teaching argumentative writing as a unit and then moving on, the teacher might have students write

argumentatively about what they read for the rest of the year. The same idea applied to test prep, which was found to be more successful when spread throughout the curriculum instead of in isolated chunks. Students also retained more when ideas were extended when mastered, instead of abandoned to cover a new topic (Langer 21). So for example, a teacher might teach rhetorical devices such as repetition and parallel structure, which can make argumentative writing stronger, after a unit on argumentative writing instead of switching to expository or narrative writing.

In addition to an integrated curriculum, Langer also found that for urban African American students to be successful, they need clear expectations. Langer states that the most successful classrooms used “Overt teaching of strategies for planning, organizing, completing, and reflecting on content and activities” (Langer 21). Teachers need to be precise and clear about what strategies are to be used in each activity and how they are to be used. For example, if a teacher asks students to pre-write, different pre-writing techniques such as free writing and idea webs must be overtly explained, and students must be told exactly what is expected to be produced from the pre-writing activity. Langer explains the rationale behind this process, “In the higher performing schools, the teachers often segmented new or difficult tasks, providing their students with guides for ways to accomplish them. However, the help they offered was not merely procedural; rather it was designed so that the students would understand how to do well” (34). In overtly explaining how to do a task, students not only know what is expected of them, they also have a clear idea of how to do it well, so the next time they can do it thoroughly and correctly on their own. The instruction is not to make the material more basic, but to make harder material more accessible. This way students are provided ways into more challenging texts, so that they may understand and analyze them.

Lastly, teachers can help their African American students be more successful in the classroom by making writing more present across the curriculum. If students are to be college ready, they must be able to write in all of their classes, not just in their English classes. As a result, Writing Across the

Curriculum, a writing theory that writing should not be limited to English class but should be engaged in all subjects, is helpful to prepare all students for college. When students write in a non-English course, not only do they become better at writing, but the teacher is also better able to assess students' learning (Thaiss and McLeod 284). The writing tells the teacher and the students, as Thaiss and McLeod, writing across the curriculum specialists explain “what they know, what they need to learn, and ways to think about what to study” (Thaiss and McLeod 284). Through writing, teachers are able to gauge what a student knows by what they can articulate, instead of what they can merely guess correctly on a test. Writing gives teachers a more precise and nuanced understanding of student comprehension than multiple choice questions ever can.

Second, writing across the curriculum helps students learn the terms and writing forms needed to write for that discipline later in high school and in college. When students are able to practice writing in social studies, math, and science, they learn what type of writing is expected in those disciplines and the vocabulary used. This makes students more prepared for participating in college courses in the future. If a student is already knowledgeable in the “specialized discourse” of a discipline (Thaiss and McLeod 286), when a student begins writing in that discipline in college, he or she is much more likely to be successful. Writing in science class in high school, for example, will prepare students to use science terminology on papers and lab reports in college. It will also familiarize students in using science terminology in a way that merely defining it on a multiple choice test could not.

Finally, Writing Across the Curriculum helps students get the rich learning experiences and direct feedback necessary for success. Writing Across the Curriculum allows teachers to “confront students with different problems and challenge them to write about these problems” (Thaiss and McLeod 293). Students who engage in a writing assignment instead of fill out a worksheet or answer a series of questions are engaging in deeper, more complex thought. In addition, when writing has provided a teacher with a precise understanding of what the student knows, he or she is more capable

of giving the feedback necessary for that student to grow. Responding to writing gives the teacher more opportunities for nuanced feedback, just as the writing give students a chance to show what they know more precisely.

Using Expressive, Critical and Writing Across the Curriculum pedagogies, urban African American students can be successful in the classroom by learning to code-switch between the ideas and language of home and of school, and teachers can successfully teach them by learning to put aside low expectations and to engage students in deep-thinking, active education. This is the answer to my original question: what is the best way to teach my urban, impoverished, African American students? But how can this be achieved? In closing, I would like to propose a few practical applications of these findings that I intend to use in my classroom. By changing attitude and seeking to change that of my students, explicitly teaching skills, writing regularly, and collaborating, I hope to teach more effectively in the future.

First, make students clearly aware of the belief that they are capable of quality, academic work. Be sure to include with routine feedback that the teacher gives suggestions because he or she knows that the student can do better, and expects him or her to do better. Promote an atmosphere of academic excellence in the classroom.

Second, aid students in their work at code switching by explicitly explaining the process to them. The students will code-switch more successfully if they can see how they are doing it already and how they can improve. Also, aid the students in code-switching by providing models of successful code-switching to them. Have students read essays, poems, and stories by adults who have learned to code-switch and talk about how code-switching is beneficial in academic, professional, and personal settings. Then give the students opportunities to practice this skill in the classroom.

Third, include activities that are thought-provoking, active, and collaborative. However, like Marlene Carter and Judith Langer suggest, be explicit with instructions and expectations so that the

students know specifically how to succeed and how to do each task on their own the next time. The students should work together to present ideas to the class, create and produce their own writing, and lead discussions so that the students' work is both academically rigorous and intentionally active. Though it might be counter-intuitive, the students need active participation as much as they need structure.

Next, involve students in regular journaling to help them develop their voice and become more comfortable writing. Students will practice writing in their home dialect and not revising it, writing in their home dialect and revising it to Standard English, and writing in Standard English. By writing repeatedly in each of these forms, students will become comfortable with all forms of writing and will gain useful practice in code-switching.

Finally, collaborate with teachers of other disciplines regularly, both to gain insight into how they teach urban African American students and to help them to incorporate writing into their courses. If teachers establish an open line of communication and support, they will all be able to help their students become as proficient writers as possible.

Through research, collaboration and practice, I hope to continue to teach more effectively each year. Thorough research and constant learning are the first steps in doing so. By utilizing these strategies, I hope to better instructive my students so that they may leave my classroom prepared with the skills needed to read with more comprehension and write with more clarity and depth in wherever life takes them next.

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The Study of Language in a Multi-Dialectical Classroom  
An Anecdotal and Research Driven Approach to Teaching AAL Students

Annelise G. Mason

Bowling Green State University

## Abstract

Through a combination of research summary and anecdote, this essay explores AAL (African American Language) as a variety of English and proposes some strategies for teaching students who speak it. As a speaker of SAE (Standard American English), I discovered many characteristics of AAL through trial and error and I know many did the same. The essay begins with a brief summary of systemic oppression and how it effects students who speak primarily AAL in the classroom. Then it provides a survey of major works done on AAL in academia in the past, as well as an explanation of many of the features of AAL. It provides a few examples of how teaches educationally disadvantage their students by teaching them as if they spoke primarily SAE. Finally it includes a summary of several techniques that have been found effective in teaching students who speak primarily AAL. Interspersed throughout are anecdotes from my own classroom. My primary audience for this paper is fellow teachers as many may be unaware of the research out there for how to effectively teach students who primarily speak AAL.

Keywords: AAL, AAVE, SAE, Urban Education, Linguistics, High School English, Teaching Writing, Rhetorical Theory

“I love nothing in the world so well as you.” My heart melted. I was a sappy romantic young teen, desperately in love with Raoul from *Phantom of the Opera* and the idea of fairytale romance. But there was something about Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* that awoke in me the sense of beauty in language, of the power of words strung together as I lay on my purple floral bedspread doing my English homework that spring afternoon. Though I had read *Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* before this, my memories of those plays are of sitting in a hard desk under dim, flickering florescent lights. I remember discussions in class, getting answers right on tests, but not the almost emotional connection to the beauty of words. I didn't *feel* “Has not a Jew eyes?” until much later. In fact, I did not fully grasp the beauty of rhythm and phrasing until Beatrice's agony for her cousin and love for Benedick slapped me in the face. While I had been able to answer comprehension questions before, I now could read and grasp a language entirely different and yet still English. It was a “click” moment, as we in education might say. Suddenly I could read and be immersed in it, I didn't have to awkwardly translate each individual phrase. Instead of reading “In sooth, I know not why I am so sad” and having to look up the meaning of sooth and rearrange the word order on “I know not” to “I don't know” to get “Honestly, I don't know why I'm so sad; ” I could read “I am gone; though I am here” and feel the sting of the words with Benedick; no complex decoding necessary. I “felt” the meaning and the beauty, despite the unfamiliarity of the syntax and vocabulary. Subconsciously, I performed some of the skills I learned before, rearranging word order, using context clues, but I no longer had to perform each task intentionally.

The following year, I began to read *Le Morte d'Aruthur*. I ventured deep into the filtered sunlight and towering ceilings of the downtown branch of the public library. I wandered past ancient tomes, my feet padding on the carpet and returned home with a suitably ancient looking blue hardcover, no book jacket, no ornamentation. I took it home, made a cup of hot chocolate and curled up in my closet against the slant of the stairwell below. A fifteen year old needs her privacy and sitting in a

closet with a very important old book was as secretive and magical as it got. As soon as I opened the yellowed pages, I knew I was in for a task. “It befel in the dayes of Vther pendragon when he was kynge of all Englund.” Seeing words that looked like English, and could sound something like English, I decided that this must be what English looked like before they unified the spelling. What I didn’t realize at the time was that I had picked up a Middle English copy. I didn’t know that Middle English existed at the time. This required more complex decoding, but I still loved it. I dutifully guessed my way through: *well, befel must be befell. Dayes to days is easy; I’ve heard of Uther Pendragon, so that must be who Vther pendragon is. Kynge and Englund are both easy too.* As I plodded through, it was almost a logic puzzle to figure out what each phrase was trying to say and decode it. Upon reading “Thenne for pure angre and for grete loue” I deduced that the only word that fit there was love, so just like capital Vs are Us, lowercase Us must be Vs. I made it thorough many a battle when “people just keep getting knocked off of their horses” (my impression of the book as a whole at the time), before the effort out-weighed the interest. Though I eventually gave up or ran out of time (I can’t remember which), it inspired a lifelong passion. I became fascinated by words and phrases, how English has grown and changed over time. I read Beowulf over my lunches while working at MacDonald’s. I devoured portions of Canterbury Tales in the car on the way back from family vacations.

As a result of these experiences and the passion they kindled, I decided I wanted to learn more about linguistics. I didn’t know the term for it at the time, but I knew that I loved words. I wanted to work hands on with urban youth as well, so I majored in English Education. I thoroughly loved the linguistics courses I have taken, however and began to read linguistics books for fun. This interest, combined with my current teaching assignment, led me to write this paper. Through this research summary, essay, and (at times) diary, I seek to share what I see every day. I want to let you into room 215, meet my students. Experience my failures, share in my successes. In this, I seek to become a better teacher, both by examining my teaching practices and through seeking outside research. I want to

describe what I see and where I spend my work week: the crashing together of SAE (Standard American English), teacher language, and AAL (African American Language), student language.

In order to fully understand that, however, one should first understand a few things about the larger context speakers of AAL find themselves in in school. The fact is, the cultures and politics of power in the United States keep those who have power (European American, straight, Protestant, male) in power and make it very difficult for those outside of power (people who don't fit into those categories) to get it. This is accomplished both intentionally and unintentionally through complex admission policies, discriminatory hiring practices, glass ceilings, housing discrimination, unequal schooling, and too many other ways to count. The United States is a country where race and socio-economic class are currency, and those on the outside are often kept out through a series of complex, unwritten rules.

The uneven distribution of power that results in systematic oppression has a significant impact on schools. This impact is discussed by John Baugh, an authority on African American English, in his book *Out of the Mouths of Slaves*. In one section of the book, Baugh focuses on how students who speak AAL often do not receive the same educational advantages that speakers of SAE do. He gives an example of this in the 1980's educational program *What Works*. This national initiative sought to inform teachers about best practice in the “usual” or “average” situation, but failed to account for differences present in minority speakers' languages, communities, and in urban schools. This is just one example of how education is often tailored to the dominant culture, and does not account for how those from other communities learn. As Baugh (1999) explains it, “to strive for homogenized educational policies in a diverse and continually changing society is both futile and misleading” (p. 16). For example, while *What Works* argues that learning phonics helps students learn to read more effectively, it fails to account for the fact that a child's “phonological inventory” is greatly determined by the variety of English or language a student learned to speak. Baugh demonstrated this through an example of his

personal experience with learning the difference in en and in sounds (such as pen and pin), “from a linguistic point of view, the vocalic phonemes in these words were merged in my nonstandard black dialect, thereby complicating the phonics lesson.” So this lack of linguistic understanding on the part of teachers, “is biased in favor of students who already speak standard English” (Baugh 1999 p. 23). This is just one example among many of specific education practices that favor SAE speaking students.

This systematic pattern then compounds generationally. As Baugh (1999) explains, “when parents have been unable to obtain a good education for themselves, they are often skeptical of the prospect that their children will benefit from equal educational opportunities” (p. 21). So while *What Works* says that students learn better when parents and teachers work together, parents who have been failed by the educational system are less willing and less able to effectively work with teachers. Again, educational practices are biased toward native SAE speakers, to the compounding disadvantage of those who speak other varieties or languages.

Baugh's proposed solution to this systemic oppression is an accountability program of educational malpractice. Baugh maintains that teachers should be held to the same standard as doctors. If they make a mistake that they should have known better than to do and a peer of similar education and experience would not have made, that teacher should be held liable. He then provides several different examples: a few of students who did not receive services that they needed due to their variety of English, others of students who were misplaced into special education services due mainly to the fact that they spoke AAL. Baugh (1999) states “Under these circumstances, I argue (Baugh 1998) that many African American students are ill served by linguistic misclassification, owing in large measure to a combination of inadequate linguistic diagnostics and educational policies that dismiss nonstandard English as a barrier to academic success” (p. 54). So in this way, through educational malpractice, many students of color are underserved or misplaced by the educational system due primarily to the variety of English that they speak. This malpractice results in a lack of opportunities and leaves many

students without the skills they need to be successful.

One might argue that I am not the person to discuss the issue, however. I was never a victim of educational malpractice. At some point in high school, I became aware of this place of privilege that I have as a white, heterosexual woman whose native variety of English is SAE. This awareness, combined with my own personal faith, led me to want to give back to others who are not in a place of privilege. I know this sounds like white teacher wanting to save her black students, and perhaps in some ways it was, but I ended up at this point out of the best intentions. Honestly, what teacher doesn't go into teaching feeling like he or she wants to "save" his or her students? We're fed it all through undergrad, inspirational stories and promises of "making an impact." I felt that I had received a good education, I knew the ins and outs of the education system, how to find scholarships, how to speak the language of power. These things all came instinctively to me. I wanted to share this privilege and these skills. So before I had a strong concept of AAL(African American Language) and SAE (Standard American English), I wanted to teach my students how to play the game, use the right words, show up at the right places, things that people within the dominate culture of an affluent background just grew up knowing, but those kept in the margins might not know. I now hope as a teacher to serve as an ally and an advocate; not to speak for my students, but to help them up to the microphone and guide them to access their own voices. I want to be a bridge between them and power, so that they may one day seize it for themselves without my help. This is why I am still researching and teaching in a gender-separated magnet school in an urban school district. I am daily absorbed in a world of AAL, and I seek to understand it better so that I may be an ally for those who speak it.

Urban School District, Third Year teaching

My students

Step into my classroom. The first thing you'll notice is the cacophony of color: posters and

student work coat the walls. Light streams in from the far windows, just two, on the opposite side of the room. The scent from the candle warmer is sometimes overpowered by cheap perfume, or worse “must” (as my students call it). Books and binders are strewn around the room. Students are strewn around the room too, some sitting at desks, some sitting on desks, one is even lying on the floor. One stands at the front table, leaning over her poster as she adds a decorative flower to her information about annotation. They are working (mostly) silently, most have head phones pumping out the newest Montana, Lil Dicky, or Becky G song. They ask each other for help when they are confused. One girl calls me over. The passage she has chosen to annotate is from *The Color of Water* when Ruth talks about the sexual abuse she experienced as a child. She says, “this is connection to real life because lots of people is molested as kids everyday.” Her voice is earnest. Just yesterday she asked me what erection meant (she was unfamiliar with the technical term), but today she is sobered by the experiences of her friends and family members, maybe even herself.

Another calls across the room, “Miss Mason, my cousin is doing better in the hospital today!” “I’m so glad!” I tell her. Her cousin was hospitalized two weeks ago because she was hit by a car as part of gang warfare. Her left lung collapsed and she had several broken ribs. One student braids another’s hair in the back of the room. “You guys need to work on your posters,” I remind. “It’s just a minute,” the helpful student explains, her own hair puffed out above a bandana, “she couldn’t walk around like this.” The seated girl nods. They take care of each other, make sure they are all presentable. There is a close knit community, mistrustful of outsiders, but fiercely loyal to each other. A student exclaims in the course of discussion, “Miss Mason, you didn’t even try today did you?” about my outfit. Another quickly retorts, “Don’t talk to my teacher that way!” I am honored they’ve invited me into their community of loyalty. I try to live up to their trust.

One way I try to live up to their trust is by creating a classroom space that recognizes their language as what it is: an organized variety of English with rules and patterns. AAL is not a corruption

of Standard English, nor is it lazy English. Geneva Smitherman, a prolific authority on the subject of AAL, describes these patterns and rules: both her from own observations and those of the early AAL researcher Dr. Turner, who wrote *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* in 1949. Dr. Turner found that AAL-hybrid language of Gullah contained “Nearly 6,000 words of direct African origin” (Smitherman, 1997 p. 31). In addition, many West African languages do not contain a th sound. The natural response of anyone learning a new language that contains sounds their home language does not is to replace unknown sounds with known ones. Thus the unknown English th became a known D sound (Smitherman, 1997 p. 31). Finally, many African languages used the same word for singular and plural verbs, another feature of AAL. Smitherman (1997) goes on to elaborate this further: “USEB [United States Ebonics, another term for AAL] has an aspectual verb system, conveyed by the English verb ‘be’ to denote iterativity (that is a recurring or habitual state of affairs” (30). So it is not that West African languages were lacking in linguistic versatility, for they contain a verbal form that does not exist English. Their linguistic offerings are simply different from those of English. The original creators of AAL, those brought to the Americas as slaves, used this to their advantage. They used this new hybrid language they had created to keep their own business secret from those on the outside. As Smitherman (1997) notes, “Thus USEB has provided a code for Africans in America to talk about Black business publicly and privately, and in the slave business, even to talk about the “Massa” himself, right in front of his face” (31). So AAL is a hybrid of West African Languages and English, completely useful for everyday communication and for keeping ideas within the community from spreading around.

I am certainly not the first to look at AAL (African American Language)/ AAVE (African American Vernacular English)/ Black dialect/ Ebonics in the classroom. Daniel DoBell in an article on the legacy of Geneva Smitherman reports that the first study of AAL was in 1884, where the scientist J.A. Harrison in his study, *Negro English* found, “African-derived aspects were evidence of intellectual inferiority” (Smitherman and Baugh qtd. In DoBell, 2008 p. 157). Others who came after him agreed

with this theory: J. Bennet (1908), George Phillip Krapp (1924), and H.L. Menken (1936) (DoBell 158). Bennet epitomized this position writing, that AAL was made up of “The shortening of words, the ellision of syllables and the modification of every difficult enunciation” ( DoBell, 2008 p. 40, 45). Thus he assumed that all changes between SAE and AAL were simply a result of laziness and making anything difficult to say in SAE easier.

Moreover, AAL also has cultural and semantic differences from SAE as well. Darryl Hall and James Damico note several of them in their article “Black Youth Employ African American Vernacular English in Creating Digital Texts” for *The Journal of Negro Education*. They note four key features of AAL, tonal semantics, sermonic tone, call and response, and signifyin’. Tonal Semantics is when word meanings change based on stress and emphasis, for example, the transition from one syllable to two in words such as like girl, please, and what. Another feature is sermonic tone which is a tone of exhortation, authority, and often uses story-telling or parable. This is seen both in religious material and general advice. Call and response is a specific structure with a leader who says the first thing and a choral or follower response. This feature is often seen in education and music. Finally, signifyin’ is when, as Hall and Damico (2007) explain, ”One preserves its original meaning, while there is an additional oppositional tone over it.” (85). They go on to say “To speak with innuendo and double meanings, to play rhetorical upon meanings and sounds of words, to be quick in one’s response” are features of signifyin’ (Hall and Damico, 2007 p. 86). These devices are common features of AAL, in addition to the previously mentioned grammatical features.

The first wave of research in post-modern times came in the 1960's and 70's. It was much as expected, fully entrenched in the privileged ideas of those in power. Charles Watts and Joseph Caliguri (1966) went into an urban school, where many of the teachers were from the community (a rarity these days) to “fix” teacher language. The teachers are described not as speaking another variety of English, but as being careless with their language. As they say, the teachers in the school, “relegated the

teaching of English to a lower level of priority” (Watts and Caliguri, 1966 p. 518). Teachers were forced by the principal to participate in the program to help with “bilingual speech problems” (Watts and Caliguir, 1966 p.520). The teachers’ natural ability to code-switch was viewed as a hinderance, not a help: “In addition, the ‘bilingualism’ acquired by most individual faculty members (largely from Negro ‘ghetto’ conditions) also presented a problem” (Watts and Caliguir, 1966 p.518). AAL was not even viewed as the same language as evidenced by the terminology: “bilingualism” versus code-switching between varieties.

Fifteen years later, Butters, the linguistics director at Duke, (1981) moved on from this historically biased and negative view to a less critical approach. While in the 60’s and 70’s black students were viewed as “culturally and linguistically inferior” in his words, in the 1980’s, “sociolinguistics have demonstrated that oral expressiveness, fluency, and coherence come naturally even to the most ‘deprived’” (Butters, 1981 p. 634). However, Butters still views AAL as valuable in a very depreciating way, only useful for emotion and sort of as beneficial despite itself, “black English, like Appalachian English, Boston English, or even the English of lower-class whites in Des Moines is beautiful English in its own way” (Butters, 1981 p. 635). The language is described as “beautiful,” but not useful.

In addition to the demeaning language, Butters' technique is also not without faults He pushes back against harshly corrective and devaluing techniques, but he also argues that when teaching “black English” writers “While there may be ‘unique problems’ in a ‘dialect student’s paper,’ the problems are scarcely great enough to need elaborate special methods and greatly different materials for teaching composition to dialect speakers in most college English classes” (Butters, 1981 p.633). Despite this, Butters shows the beginning of a movement toward a rich understanding and appreciation of cultural and familial language as a foundation to learning SAE (Standard Academic English). Butters rightly notes, “I found that students respected a teacher more who treated their background and culture--even

linguistic aspects--with interest, dignity, and respect” (Butters, 1981 p. 634). Instead of being harshly corrective towards students who speak other varieties of English, teachers found more success when they were interested in and respectful towards all parts of a student, including the variety of English or the language he or she speaks.

However, as this conversation was going on about African American Language from outside the culture, another conversation was going on within AAL about AAL. First, the white linguist William Labov in 1966, published *The Logic of Nonstandard English*, which was a foundational text for much research that came after it. Smitherman and Baugh explain how it “dispelled the racist myth that African American language is illogical or ungrammatical” (qtd in Dobell, 2008 p. 159). This first step was a springboard for the AAL authority Geneva Smitherman. Smitherman, then a professor at Wayne State University, published her ground-breaking book *Talkin’ and Testifyin’* in 1977 (“Dr. Geneva Smitherman,” 2016). The book was unique because it dealt with speech forms and words used not only with linguistic structure. While other works had focused on the syntax and grammar of AAL, *Talkin’ and Testifyin’* focused more on the words more commonly utilized in AAL and the culture they created. It was also ground-breaking because its audience was not only academics, but also the average person (DoBell, 2008 p. 159). It sought to be accessible to those with no training in linguistics, as well as those well versed in it. Smitherman also wrote the book while code-switching, a technique she uses in most of her work. Smitherman code-switches by writing primarily in SAE, but occasionally writing phrases and sentences in AAL for emphasis or to express an idea that cannot be adequately expressed in SAE.

Smitherman's book was highly successful and brought her a good amount of notoriety. So naturally, she was thought of when a legal case involving students who speak primarily AAL arose in Ann Arbor in 1979. Smitherman, along with Labrov, was called to testify as an expert in the 1979 court case King vs. Ann Arbor. The city of Ann Arbor pursued the lawsuit on behalf of AAL speakers within the community who were being unjustly placed into intervention services based solely upon their use of

AAL. As a part of King vs Ann Arbor, Smitherman, Labrov, and J.L. Dillard of Northwestern University were called as expert witnesses to prove that AAL is a barrier to instruction that needs to be addressed by specific, targeted education (DoBell, 2008 p. 159). Judge Joiner found that failing to account for Black English as a barrier counts as not meeting the “1974 Equal Educational Opportunities Act.” He ruled that “Black English was a language like any other and not a vulgar corruption or vernacular distortion of Standard American English” (Croghan 76 qtd. In DoBell, 2008 p. 159). Now it was written down as a legal precedent that AAL was its own organized and complex variety of English. The result of this case was mandatory “year long diversity training” for the teachers to make them more qualified to teach students whose primary variety of English is AAL(159). This decision then provided the precedent for several other similar cases helping not just AAL speakers, but native Spanish speakers as well.

After the landmark Ann Arbor decision, the conversation around AAL continued to develop. In 1997, Geneva Smitherman reflected on the changes since the 1977 *Talkin' and Testifyin'*. In “Black Language and the Education of Black Children: One Mo Once” she explains that it is important for both a student's self-esteem and for his or her education to learn in the home language and use that home language to transition to SAE. This method is called a bridge model. Smitherman calls for multi-lingual education where students are taught in three languages: Standard American English, Spanish or an African Language, and “the mother tongue.” Her goal is preserve the students’ home culture and to aid in learning through a bridge model of language instruction, which is proven to be more effective than traditional methods. She explains (using code-switching ) why incorporating the home language of students is so important: “See, when you lambast the home language that kids bring to school, you ain’t just dissin’ dem, you talkin’ bout they mommas! Check out the concept of Mother Tongue” (Smitherman, 1997 p. 28). In addition, to being more culturally sensitive, a bridge model of instruction

has been proven to be more effective in regards to learning. Students taught with “bridge models” gained 6.2 months of reading skill in 4 months, while those taught with traditional models only gained 1.6 according to the Simpkins study (1974) (Smitherman, 1997 p. 33).

However, all of these movements in academia have had a limited application in practice. In my experience teachers today rarely receive any training on how to teach students who do not speak a variety of English closely resembling SAE as a part of teacher education. Grammatical materials tend to teach through a corrective technique at the worst, and through an immersive technique at the best. Resources for teaching using contrastive analysis are difficult to find, and are almost never a part of the school provided curriculum. Dialectical language differences are not addressed. As a result of this, when I first began teaching, I knew nothing of AAL, other than that it existed and I probably shouldn't call it Ebonics. I did not know its features, nor did I know how to instruct students who speak it. I was left to figure AAL out as early linguists had before me, by noticing patterns.

#### Possessive nouns

Urban School District , my first year teaching:

My very first year of teaching, I stumbled upon a characteristic of AAL which I had not previously known existed. As I read more and more of my then 7th and 8th graders' writing, I discovered something that surprised me: my students did not use possessive nouns in their writing. I had never seen anything like it. Sentence fragments, no subject/verb agreement, even a complete lack of capitalization, I was used to, but this was an error I'd never seen before. I'd put down my pink or blue or green pen (never red, it crushes their self-esteem or something) and shake my head. As they wrote about where they saw themselves in five years, they seemed to just pair nouns with the things they possessed: her momma car, my boyfriend job, my sister house. I was confused. How did they make it out of elementary school doing this? I stacked the papers carefully and placed them in the tray for that class's work. I decided to listen to see if they did it in spoken English. A quick walk down the

hall told me all I needed. “We should go to Channon house on Friday.” “I stole Kaila phone.” They did.

So, as the inexperienced but intrepid teacher I was, I set out to teach it in the way I had learned grammar: through worksheets. My students seemed perfectly capable of identifying possessives, much to my relief, as this is a primary skill. When we discussed all the forms of possessive (‘s, s’, etc.), they seemed to do okay on specific examples. Next I tried application. Most 7th and 8th graders dearly love to move: on your typical day, taking notes and participating in whole class discussions is punctuated by frequent trips to sharpen pencils, get tissues, throw things away, and even attempts to sweep the floor. So, I came up with what I thought was a rather clever idea. Giving them each several post-its, I asked them to label several things around the room with possessives. They all jumped up, quickly scrawling down things on their post-its and running around the room. They stuck things under tables, to the whiteboard, to each other. For the next few minutes my room was covered with little yellow labels saying “Mikayla’s binder,” “Shauntae’s pencil,” “the students’ classroom” and . . . “Miss Mason desk.” While some were able to make this jump well from abstraction to specific application, others who could make the connection on the worksheet following a formula simply could not apply it to life with few guidelines. But by the next writing assignment, most of the benefit had disappeared. Even girls who gave me three SAE possessives on post-its, immediately went back to “Neveah phone” when they were tasked with writing mystery stories. I would write notes on their work, make verbal reminders before they wrote and even revisit the post its. But, the lesson just wouldn’t stick.

If I’d realized I was addressing a dialect difference at the time, I might have approached it differently. I would probably have done some more with contrastive techniques. I certainly would now. I simply didn’t know that this was anything other than a random grammar gap in my students’ education. I think this is how many teachers who are unfamiliar with AAL and the best ways to teach students who speak it react. They do the best they can, but with out a knowledge of code-switching, a bridge model of teaching and contrastive analysis (which are explained later in this paper), even the

best efforts will not be as effective as they could be.

This lack of knowledge is not limited to teachers however. I have seen an ignorance of AAL and its unique grammatical structures manifest itself on standardized tests as well. While standardized tests are intended to be a benchmark measure of students' knowledge, as you will see, they often test AAL speakers on code-switching and grammatical knowledge, while only testing SAE speakers on grammatical knowledge.

### The PSAT

Urban School District, third year teaching.

In late September, the guidance counselor at my school asked me to administer a practice PSAT. One of the portions of the PSAT is grammar, which takes not account of dialectical differences. I became painfully aware of this, however, as I went through the PSAT to grade it with my students. The first two questions both were related to subject verb agreement. This may seem natural; however, as much of my research has suggested, in AAL, the singular form of many verbs is the same as the plural form (my sister walk to school everyday). So this particular error is very difficult to find. The assessment does not take dialectical differences into account. My students are tested on code-switching where a middle class white student is being tested on the ability to proofread and notice errors. Throw into this that not only are they questions about subject verb agreement, they are also testing the students' ability to determine what a pronoun is referring to. So while the test is trying to determine if they can distinguish that the sentence is referring to the way and not the patrons in this sentence: "Each *cafeteria* functions as a social hub in its neighborhood, and the way in which most patrons consume their coffee contribute to this fact," my students are also being tested to see if they can identify the antecedent, figure out the correct verb, then code-switch to chose the correct verb in SAE. The challenge for my AAL speaking students reminds me of a German foreign exchange student who was in my high school Spanish class. Because my Spanish teacher did not speak German, the student had to

translate assignments and tests from Spanish to German in her mind, then from German to English to write down the correct answer on her paper. She was being tested on translation twice, while we were only being tested once.

I saw this double translation difficulty and tried to whip up a contrastive analysis for my students immediately, wanting to apply what I've been learning in my research. I frantically scrawled some sentences up on the whiteboard and was met with blank stares. Eventually, I gave up with a sigh. I wrote in my notes that day: "I tried a rushed contrastive analysis with my students today. About all I achieved was noting that they do in fact speak AAL. One of the most pervasive errors, other than possessives is the had + regular past tense. When asked to correct "had went", they all just change the words ("had left", ditch the had and just "went", etc. ), with no awareness of the SAE version "had gone". So I really need to do more than just rush through it. That's what I get for trying to teach something spur of the moment in the last 4 minutes of class." Without prior instruction and planning ahead of time, grammatical errors due to dialectal differences cannot be addressed effectively. Even with a knowledge of contrastive analysis, teachers must be intentional and lessons must be thought out.

So a lack of understanding of and instructional knowledge for AAL is a pervasive problem, not one localized to just me, teachers in my area, or even just teachers. In the story of possessive nouns, I sort of stumbled onto a feature of AAL and tried my best to figure out what it is and how to teach students who use it the SAE version. This, I think is how many teachers address AAL. In other cases, teachers respond like I did with the SAT practice, they know what to do, but without a preplanned lesson, inadequately address it. That occurred after I had been researching the topic, however. Initially, I simply didn't have the knowledge of how to teach SAE features to AAL speakers. Fortunately, many others have spent a considerable amount of time researching and explaining this topic.

Unsurprisingly, this problem of addressing differences between varieties just as errors is not an uncommon one. As Cynthia Hansberry Williams cites Labrov (1995) in "You Gotta Reach 'Em,"

“many teachers still have ‘no systematic knowledge of forms which oppose and contradict Standard English’ (p. 3). This lack of knowledge has been perpetuated by an autonomous view or approach to language and literacy instruction, which emphasizes skill and drill” (Williams, 2006 p.347). Rebecca Wheeler, Kelly B. Cartwright, and Rachel Swords attempt to address this issue in their article for *The Reading Teacher*: “Factoring AAVE into Reading Assessment and Instruction.” To demonstrate, they tell the story of an elementary teacher practicing reading *A Cajun Night Before Christmas* for class the next day. The teacher replaced 5 of the 19 words in the stanza with the Standard English equivalent (they for de, etc.). In order to read and understand, she had to pause and decode in her head. This caused her, in some circumstances, to read the decoded version, not the original (Wheeler, Cartwright, and Swords, 2012 p. 415). They argue that students do the same thing when reading SAE. As they explain, “To the degree that students voice equivalent forms from their own dialects--forms that align with the intended meaning of the written text—the students’ decoding supports their comprehension “ (Wheeler, Cartwright, and Swords, 2012 p. 416). In order to assess students fairly, teachers need to identify this decoding process for what it is, a comprehension strategy, and not count it as a reading error. Swords, Cartwright and Wheeler explain that if student decoding is interpreted as errors, a student who is reading on grade level may be marked as reading well below grade level and put into remediation. As they explain, the result of misassessing can lead a teacher to assume a student does not read words all the way through and uses phonic miscues to change the middle of words (Wheeler, Cartwright, and Swords, 2012 p. 417).

A solution to this problem is the technique of contrastive analysis. Most articles suggested this as an efficient way of giving students and understanding of both SAE and AAL (Wheeler, Cartwright, and Swords (2012); Devereux and Wheeler (2012); and Godley, et. Al(2006)). In contrastive analysis, students are given a set of sentences in two varieties like AAL and SAE. At first, they are told what both patterns are, and are asked to recognize them in the examples. In later practice, students are given

the list of sentences and are asked to find the patterns themselves (Devereux and Wheeler, 2012 p. 95). With this technique, students see that both varieties have rules and are valued as equally valid. There are also able to see patterns to adopt in their academic writing, not a series of scattered “mistakes” to correct. When they can see the pattern, they can more effectively chose to use it (code-switch), because they know exactly what change they are making and why.

Another technique for teaching SAE is through a multiple literacies approach. Cynthia Hansberry Williams suggests this technique in her article ““You Gotta Reach ‘Em’: An African American Teacher’s Multiple Literacies.” A multiple literacies approach will encourage students to be fluent in both SAE and AAL. Students speak the variety that is most appropriate at the time, while teachers model code-switching skills (Williams, 2006 p. 348). Williams also suggests that instruction should also be given in AAL. She shares a first hand account from an African American 8th grade language arts teacher, Ms. Kent. ““Cuz if you don’t reach ‘em, they won’t learn from you” (Williams, 2006 p. 347), Ms. Kent explains. In her classroom, she uses AAL and standard English. She utilizes rhythm and inflection in instruction; both of which are features of AAL and proven to increase attention and focus. Additionally, Ms. Kent will even use AAL to teach grammar, usually a bastion of SAE. She will often write an example in AAL to teach other grammar concepts. She used the student example: “When I was playing in the park, I got stole” to teach subordinate and independent clauses. After using it as an example, then it is translated into SAE: “When I was playing in the park, I was jumped by some dudes in a gang” (Williams, 2006 p. 350). In this instance Williams states, “Ms. Kent did not criticize Braelon for using AAL in the classroom, but rather creates a classroom environment that provides opportunities for him and his peers to use their own cultural knowledge to understand standard conventions” (Williams, 2006 p. 350).

Darryl Ted Hall and James Damico (citing Lee and Solomon) suggest additional techniques for teaching students who primarily speak AAL. They advise teaching code-switching between AAL and

SAE “through real-world problem solving, rather than school-based tasks, students are forced to adapt to using multiple strategies to meet the limits of a situation (Lee 2003). Secondly, students should work in groups so thinking and interacting is distributed across more than one person, reflecting a shared process of problem solving (Solomon 1993)” (Hall and Damico, 2007 p. 83). The best method of teaching, they argue, is real world application with opportunities for collaboration. They give an example of this in a digital summer program that they observed. Students in the program used various features of AAL such as tonal semantics, sermonic tone, call and response, and signifyin’ in their projects. In addition, this real world application of AAL was also fused with SAE. So through a project they were invested in and collaboration with peers, students engaged in the material both using AAL and code-switching to SAE. Real life application enables students to gain and retain the necessary language skills for success in academia and the work force.

This is what I seek to learn about my students. I want to know clearly how they learn and how I can better teach them. Through code-switching, I hope to help them gain a better understanding of the words they use and when they use them. When a subconscious process is examined and made conscious it can lead to increased clarity for all. In addition, research finds that when a process is explicitly and clearly explained, it can greatly increase understanding and performance. Judith Langer (2000) found in her study of successful urban teaching practices that “Overt teaching of strategies for planning, organizing, completing, and reflecting on content and activities” (p. 21). This includes the overt teaching of the process of code-switching. The goal is not to teach more basic material, but instead to make sure students have the understanding to perform tasks at a high level of achievement (Langer, 2000 p. 34). So in overtly explaining how to do a task, students not only know what is expected of them, they also have a clear idea of how to do it well, so the the next time they can do it thoroughly and correctly on their own. The instruction is not to make the material more basic, but to make harder material more accessible.

As I discovered contrastive analysis for teaching SAE to speakers of AAL, I realized that I was already using contrastive analysis to teach a different variety of English. I had already figured out the techniques for using it to teach a different dialect that was entirely unfamiliar to virtually all of my students: Early Modern English.

### Shakespeare

Urban School District, second year of teaching

I was so excited to teach *Much Ado About Nothing* with my sophomores. I pulled out the tiny permabound books with excitement. Sliding back into Shakespeare was comfortable, like a soft t-shirt right out of the dryer. I was eager to move past all the anxiety of unfamiliar books and varieties of English. When I began *Much Ado About Nothing* with my students, the decoding began to feel more natural. I think because Shakespeare is something everyone has to decode, the rhythm felt more natural to teach it. Also, when they were almost able to understand, the frustration level was much higher. With Shakespeare, the whole thing felt foreign, so the decoding was less cumbersome. It seemed to them like just the thing to do, not a defect in their understanding.

I encouraged my students to decode straight from Early Modern English into AAL, though I didn't call it that. I was trying to get them to make the clearest connection to the language. While sometimes they did so easily, particularly lines related sexual innuendos, "burns," and jokes about infidelity, other lines that were harder to decode. For example, "there is a merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her" becomes "a crack battle with them." On the more difficult lines like, "I tell him we shall stay here at/ the least a month; and he heartily prays some/ occasion may detain us longer," they would struggle to get it, but when they did, it would often be into academic English first. From there, I believe that they would internally translate it into AAL, perhaps without realizing it. I found this process interesting. Perhaps they equated difficult to understand with academic English, or they weren't adept enough yet at code switching to make the final jump all the way into AAL.

Though I didn't make them do as direct, line by line decoding later in the play, they eventually found the process easier. Even though many found it difficult, *Much Ado* is many of their favorite thing that they read last year. This year when I got the books out, a student from a previous year stopped by to ask a question. When she saw the books, she excitedly told the class how much she had loved reading it before. The connection with Shakespeare could be related to rhythm as well. I wrote in my student notes the day I taught sonnets, "Today I was teaching sonnets to my sophomores. We were tackling iambic pentameter, which is always so hard to teach. I struggle to get students to understand meter in general. While I was in London this summer, I learned a physical exercise involving hitting the arms and the legs on the beats to feel the stressed syllables. My boys immediately turned it into a dance. Spoken in a rap cadence: "My *Mistress*' (swing to the left and hit the left shoulder) *eyes* (repeat with the right shoulder) are *nothing* (swing down and slap the left knee) *like* (swing down and slap the right knee) the *sun* (snap up and clap, ending with an impromptu "whip" and an aaaaaaaaaay). Both classes struggled a bit at first, but after a bit of practice, began feeling the iambic pentameter on their own and even came up with their own sentences in iambic pentameter. I think my students have a much more complex understanding of meter and rhyme (they're pros at slant rhyme) than anyone at my suburban private school did due to the prevalence of hip hop music in their lives. It's just difficult to unlock that knowledge. I can see that it's there, but the terminology isn't. It's hard to make that connection." Shakespeare seems to come after things written in some form of AAL or from an African American perspective such as *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* or *The Color of Water*, but before works written in contemporary academic English, like *The Devil's Arithmetic* or *The Old Man and the Sea* in their internal ranking of "good" books. There's an excitement that comes from literature they can understand and connect with; works that are written in familiar language. But after that much more excitement seems to come out while reading *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day* or while reading and acting *Much Ado About Nothing* than when embroiled in Hemingway, Lowry, or Bradbury.

All of these observations, however, have been made in my own classroom. In my teacher training, I received no instruction on this. I was not taught how to teach SAE to students who didn't speak some variety of English relatively close to SAE, and I was not taught how to teach literature to students with dialectal differences. Two authors who have already done a large amount of research on the topic are Amanda Godley and Allison Etcher. They found that though most professionals agree that SAE is necessary in the job force to avoid being looked down upon by those in power, the way it is taught is very important. They found that: "Current research has suggested that the racial 'achievement gap' in literacy learning is more likely caused by teachers' lack of acceptance of AAVE [African American Vernacular English] than by bidialectal students' confusion over the features of SE [Standard English]" (Godly and Etcher, 2012 p. 705). So the way in which one teaches SAE has a massive impact on the achievement of that child.

First, teachers need to let their students use AAL in discussion and in writing. Not every piece of writing needs to be revised to meet the standards of conventional English, and in fact, not all work should be revised in this way. Both AAVE and Standard English are effective and useful for a variety of types of writing. This will help students develop a "both-and" approach to language instead of an "either-or." Students should embrace and utilize all varieties of English they speak. When students believe that their language is less useful or valuable, their academic interest and motivation declines (Godly and Etcher, 2012 p.705). As they Godly and Etcher (2012) say, "Speaking AAVE in English Language Arts (ELA) classes can allow bidialectal students to focus on generating ideas during class discussion in the language variety that is the most comfortable without having to fear being 'corrected' or focusing on perfect SE" (p. 705). In addition, AAL helps to foster creative writing. As Godley and Etcher (2012) express, AAL also helps students with "evocative language and descriptive metaphors"(p. 705). When students are able to communicate in the language that is comfortable to them, they can share more ideas and write more creatively.

In addition, SAE should not be taught in a harshly corrective, punitive way. As Godly and Etcher (2012) explain, the best thing to provide your students with is: “a space to practice without judgement” (p. 712). Students need an environment where they can experiment with words and practice. They can also discover features of SAE or even of AAL through contrastive analysis, to aid in comprehending the patterns and forms. As Godley and Etcher (2012) note, many students are unaware of different registers in AAL as well as AAL grammar (p. 711). By provide a safe space to explore language without value judgements, students can become more aware their own language as well, which helps them to be better communicators both in AAL and in SAE.

In addition, Victor Villanueva also addresses AAL in the classroom in his book *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, though his remarks are anecdotal as a teacher and a student instead of research based. His description of his teacher’s methods of dealing with race actually read like the story behind Butters’ research. I expect that they may have been happening around the same time. Villanueva stated that most of his teachers ignored the effect of race, SES, and background on their students’ lives. While this may seem more fair, it is in fact discounting a major portion of students’ lives. Villanueva offers the practice of fully engaging with one’s students as people. It is important to both know the information and teach all students, as well as to acknowledge where they are. Villanueva (1993) remembers, “It’s an attitude more of understanding where we live than where we’re from. We came from many places back on the block. A teacher would have had to go a long way to understand and convey an understanding of all those where-froms. But a teacher could have looked around and know the where-at” (p. 2).

So before I try contrastive analysis or another technique for teaching code-switching, I must first understand where my students are coming from: the struggles they face, the skills they have, and their specific needs. Then, after I understand that, I can truly teach them. Villanueva (1993) describes his teacher who successfully did just that. He explains, “Mr. D could speak *with* us” (Villanueva, 1993,

p. 3). So as Godley and Etcher (as well as most of the researchers mentioned in this paper) explain, understanding of and respect for the students' backgrounds is essential to their success inside and out of the classroom. If a teacher values a student's culture, believes that his or her impact on the world is important, and that he or she matters, the emotional effects of such beliefs extends far beyond the classroom as Villanueva demonstrates. He still remembers Mr. D many years later.

However, it is not just a respect for and interest in a student's background that is needed to teach students who primarily speak AAL effectively. Even with the best of intentions, however, a teacher uninformed in AAL and the cultures that speak it can still do harm on accident. Let me offer a story to demonstrate.

Urban School District, my first year teaching

Bald-headed: a phrase that is linguistically significant in two ways. One, it demonstrates the concept of constructing adjectives in AAL (with a kenning-like two part -ed verb structure, light-skinned is another example) and how this differs from SAE (typically one word). Two, it's another story of how I didn't understand my students' culture as a whole.

Two of the most commonly used insults among my female students in my school's community are "stiff weave" and "bald-headed." These both trace back to a deep seated socialized anxiety on many African American women that there is something wrong with their hair. It needs to be fixed in some way. This is achieved by either straightening it, adding artificial hair to make it thicker or longer, or by pulling it back so tightly in braids or a pony tail that it isn't a factor. Though a few of my female students wear their hair loose and natural, they are by far the minority.

This is background to explain the context and history of my 14 year old 8th graders' attitude about their hair. It is not a matter of personal preference, as it is with most girls that age of any other race. It must be managed. So when one of my 8th graders came in wearing a wig, my context for the event (wigs are for cancer patients, which she wasn't, and for costumes) and my students' context (a

wig covers up something you want to hide, a fact my principal informed me of after the fact) were completely different. I, unfortunately did not know this at the time.

So enter into this typical middle school drama and a queen bee who thinks it's funny to be disruptive, defiant, and cruel. As I am writing on the board one mid-week first hour, desperately waiting for my coffee to kick in and struggling to keep my brain in gear, the queen bee, Roquel grabs part of a quiet girl, Saraia's, wig and gives it a tug, nearly sliding it off. I spin around and glare, enraged that I can't seem to turn my back for a second on these girls. Roquel seems annoyed about being caught. I honestly don't remember Saraia's face, though I'm sure she was upset. I view this as a disruption, like knocking off someone's baseball hat. My students view this as a violation, like pulling down her skirt. So I respond with an impatient warning to the offending student, a fitting response for what I take to be an ill-mannered, but not hurtful disruption of class. The class murmurs, but eventually it settles down and we finish the lesson. Saraia's mother later calls the school with concern that I did not write the other girl up. In a less-supportive building, this could have resulted in some serious hot water for me. It was probably what the parent wanted. Fortunately for me, my principal understood the cultural gap, having worked with white teachers and black students for some time now, and explained to the parent my ignorance, not incompetence. She then came up to my room during my planing and explained the whole problem to me. I was devastated. I apologized to Saraia the next morning for not backing her up. I am very fortunate to work with supportive and kind students who have accepted me into their trust. Saraia was very forgiving, and I definitely sought to be more supportive and aware of insults I might have overlooked in the past. I cracked down more on the bullies, especially since I knew more about their malicious intent now. At the end of the year, when I was chaperoning the school dance, Saraia wanted to introduce me to her mom. I was nervous about it, but in her mind we had moved past the incident completely.

I tell this story to illustrate the vast differences in understanding that exist between my students

and myself, differences that wouldn't even occur to most people. Hair is simply what it is to your cultural group, it's not until you sit and talk about it that you grow to understand the differences. Which is somewhat my goal, to sit and talk about the differences before we all go out and make a fool of ourselves. Those of us in power: the white, straight, protestant, heterosexual, and male, in various combinations, have taken for granted that the knowledge we have is universal. I don't think it is always a conscious decision, though sometimes it is. We as humans naturally assume the rest of the world thinks as we do, and we miss others' perspectives and needs.

I don't pretend to have all the answers. I would hardly say that I am a professional at teaching SAE to AAL speakers. At this point I'm just dipping my feet into the water. But I do think we can't treat AAL speakers like students who speak some variety of SAE. We can't assume that every student values the same things and understands the same metaphors. I think if you said this to most teachers you would get a "yeah, and?" sort of response. We don't need to get this solidified in our head knowledge. We need to get it in our heart knowledge. We need to reach the point where our base understanding is of difference and growth not similarity and homogenizing.

I hope that this is not viewed as prescriptive observations from the outside. I truly believe that my students wrote this almost as much as I did. They were equal parts in the stories. I just hope to give them words until they have mastered SAE enough to speak for themselves in the academy. Or, in a better way, until they have changed the academy so that it accepts their voices as they are.

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## Youth Acquisition and Ownership Is Crucial for Language Vitality

In the summer of 2016, I spend a 36 days in the UK for a summer course. Before the course started, I traveled to Cardiff, Wales. One place I visited was Cardiff Castle. As I walked around the ancient stone walls whose foundations were built by the Romans, I saw the tents go up and a temporary stage erected. Then, suddenly, right around lunchtime, it was like I had entered a different country. The festival began. Most everything in Wales is written in English; everyone speaks English. So I was very surprised when suddenly everything around me was in Welsh. All the signs were in Welsh, all the music playing was in Welsh. I ordered my lunch somewhat at random; I picked a number and didn't have a clue what would be in it. One moment, I was comfortably walking through an area where I spoke the language and could easily communicate with nearly anyone. The next, I was surrounded in an unfamiliar language. Signs advertised *llyisiau wedi'u ffrio*; I bought a cute pin with a bird on it that said *dipyn o dderm*, without a clue of what it meant. There were people of all ages at this festival, which was significant. As I found out in my research later, one of the most important aspects of language maintenance is that it is successfully passed on to the next generation. While many languages are learned by children, if those children do not pass the language on to their children and so on, the language falls into decline and dies.

David Crystal's *Language Death* concisely and clearly explains language death, the process which ends with the death of the last living speaker of a language. Language death is a real and growing problem worldwide. Experts estimate that anywhere between 50% and 90% of the world's 4,000 – 12,000 languages are on the path to language death. Some are in immediate danger, with the last few speakers dying off. Others, such as Dutch, may seem healthy and be spoken by millions, but exhibit trends of being less privileged in government and higher learning or being replaced by other *lingua francas* that show that they too could unexpectedly and rapidly decline in the not-so-distant future.

This trend of language death is a grave loss to the world because with the loss of languages, one also loses diversity, cultural identity, historical links, and human knowledge. Languages provide a connection to the history of a people, both their connections to other people groups and to a history of rituals and liturgies, place names, and stories. When a language is lost, so is a unique system of communicating. That cultural connection cannot be regained. For many, the value of a language is especially to those who are ethnically tied to it. Many believe that a person of a specific ethnicity cannot fully embrace or express that ethnicity in another language. Crystal mentions that some who are Welsh who believe that a person cannot be “truly Welsh” and speak only English. David Treuer says of Ojibwe people that saying who you are in English means a loss of a native identity that can only be fully expressed in a native language in an essay on Native American language loss (Treuer). In the same way, the Karuna people of Australia are reviving/recreating their language specifically to be “an expression of ethnicity and identity,” as Rob Amery explains in the book about Karuna Revival *Warrapurna Karuna* (27). By speaking Karuna, a Karuna person connects with his or her culture on a deeper level. Even in the simplest of ways, when a Karuna person can say that he or she is Karuna in Karuna, it is a statement of difference and ethnic identity that saying it in English does not equal. More complexly, languages tell you about how a culture views the world: what is given greater stress through sentence construction, which ideas have separate words and which are grouped together, and in many other ways. So a Karuna speaker can, through language, better understand what it is to think like a Karuna through the Karuna language. The same is true for speakers of many minority languages.

There are many causes of language death. One cause is when dominant groups suppress or attempt to extinguish a native language due to its revolutionary power. When a native population speaks their own language, they have ways to preserve their own ethnic identities instead of being absorbed into the dominant culture, as those in power would desire. In addition, when the native population speaks their own language, they are able to communicate in a way that those in power can

understand. This is dangerous ability when a country is trying to subjugate the native population. So policies were often put in place to try to suppress the native language.

These policies are clearly seen in British policies toward the Irish, Cornish, Scottish, and Welsh, as well as in American and Australian policies toward almost all native groups in the countries before the Europeans arrived. The efforts often focused on the children, for even then those in power knew that if the children forgot or never learned the language, it would die with the last fluent speaker. So school-wide policies of physical punishment and shaming were adapted to help create negative attitudes toward native languages. Many sources describe the “Welsh Not” sign that students were forced to wear if they spoke Welsh at English run schools in Wales. As late as 1945, Native American Students in mandatory boarding schools were forced to cut their hair and were punished for practicing any aspect of their cultures; this extended to speaking their home language. Bill Wright, a Pattwin Indian, recalls that he not only forgot all of his language, but even his Pattwin name. He told an NPR reporter, “I remember coming home and my grandma asked me to talk Indian to her and I said, 'Grandma, I don't understand you,' . . . She said, 'Then who are you?’” Wright says he told her his name was Billy. “‘Your name's not Billy. Your name's 'TAH-rruhm,' she told him. And I went, 'That's not what they told me’” (Bear). So in many cases, a language was intentionally “killed” by those in power who viewed it as a threat to their unifying goals and control measures. These governmental decisions have had a lasting impact on the prevalence of language death and in many cases sped up the process.

Not all languages that are endangered or dead have been intentionally stamped out, however. In some cases, the native population is wiped out due to disease or environmental factors. As Jane Hill reports of Uto-Aztecan languages in her article “Language Death in Uto-Aztecan” the cause of “language death in small hunting and collecting communities [is] very rapid population collapse and cultural destruction” (Hill 260). In these cases, the last living native speaker is also the last living member of that ethnic group. However, language death does not always equate with population death.

In some cases, the destruction of a homeland or marginalization of a group can cause the loss of a language and assimilation into the dominant culture. In addition, sometimes many minority languages still experience language decline while the population who used to still speak the language is alive and healthy, if not growing. Hill reports that “in fact, recent estimates suggest that fertility of indigenous Mexican populations is replacing speakers faster than government policies can hispanize these groups in a sort of 'revenge of the cradle'” (264). However, many of these growing populations can still lose their native language. In these cases, language loss due more to language choice on the part of the speakers than population loss.

This language choice typically follows a standard pattern, which Hill outlines in “Language Death in Uto-Aztecan.” First, formerly isolated language communities begin to communicate more with the outside world and so become exposed to the dominate language. Then, language begins to become a marker of ethnicity both positively and negatively. While those on the outside may negatively label speakers of the language; speakers of the language use it to connect with each other as well. Speakers may tell jokes in the language at the expense of non-speakers. After this point, if the language continues to decline, it may become a solidarity code between speakers and serve as a sort of “secret sign” of connection. However, then the language is also probably losing part of its register: either it maintains the family register and loses the formal honorific forms (which are not as frequently used in smaller language communities), or it maintains the formal register for religious ceremonies (like Latin did) and loses the family register as it gradually goes out of everyday usage. Finally, languages begin to decline more rapidly toward language death as economic pressures and a lack of community livelihood force people to work in large city centers outside of the community where there are limited opportunities for the language's use (Hill 265). At the end of this process, there are often only a few elderly speakers of the language left.

Negative attitudes toward minority languages is another key factor that leads to language death.

One attitude that somewhat paradoxically contributes to language death is the attitude of linguistic purism. In cultures where only “pure” versions of a language are accepted by many in the community, partial speakers are often shamed into not trying to speak at all. This is exhibited in the attitudes toward a simplified version of Hopi. Speakers of “broken-down-Hopi” and other creoles (hybrid languages) were stigmatized, so creole speakers would switch to using only English. As a result, only the formal, ritual version of Hopi survives (with only older speakers), while the family register and any young speakers were completely lost (Hill 270). Another negative attitude is when speakers view their own language as inferior to the “lingua franca.” When speakers view their own language as less valuable or less useful, they will not pass it on to their children. Many people encourage their children to learn and speak only English for example, at the cost of their native language. The lingua franca is the language of power in most cases, so many speakers view its use as more valuable to their children and so let their native language die. With it, is lost a unique way of looking at the world and understanding human connections within it that comes from a language's vocabulary and construction.

This path towards language death is not inevitable, however. Many linguistic organizations and people groups are currently fighting to save their languages. As David Crystal explains in *Language Death*, establishing priorities, increasing the prestige and importance of a language, especially among the young, establishing it as a part of a culture and national identity, and using funding to support efforts to record and train teachers to teach the language are all methods which can be taken to promote language growth. If these methods are consistently and enthusiastically put into place, there is hope for many languages in decline. Countries such as Ireland and Paraguay have used these methods with some success. It may take some time for the growth to outpace the loss of older speakers dying, but eventually the language can be revived and decline can be reversed.

In addition, several organizations, such as Living Tongues and The National Geographic Society's Enduring Voices Project, work with speakers of dying languages to help preserve the

language and encourage new speakers. These organizations work with speakers of minority languages in areas they have identified as especially at risk such as Oklahoma, the Pacific Northwest, Central Africa and parts of Southeast Asia and Oceania. They then help record as much as possible of those who still speak the language: stories, videos, and photographic, audio and written records. Next, they help the group turn these material into teaching resources and set up language classes. These methods are being implemented with many groups worldwide such as the Winnemem Wintu people of central California and the Sauk speakers of the Sac and Fox tribes (Braun). In addition, the Piegan Institute located on the Blackfoot reservation has used similar methods and helped to cause a large upswing in the Blackfoot language (Treuer). Efforts such as these, which provide assistance to minority ethnic groups, who may not have the resources to go through this process on their own, may prove vital in helping to preserve minority languages.

Using these tactics and many others, there are several examples of attempts at language revival that have been successful. First is the well noted example of Hebrew, which had been a dead language for many years before it was revived. It's prime religious and political importance helped create this opportunity. Because the language held religious significance, the formal register survived in the knowledge of many, though it was still considered dead by linguists because it did not grow and change. Then, with the creation of the Israeli state, a language was needed to express the identity of a people group who had lived around the world, but were now uniting together as a distinct ethnic group with a geo-political state. Today there are over 4 million speakers ("Hebrew"). Other, less successful examples, would be Karuna in Australia and Cornish in Cornwall. Each was extinct or nearly extinct. Yet, through interest and dedication on the part of linguists and the ethnic population they were revived (Crystal 162). Today, Karuna has no fluent native speakers, but according to Ethnologue, there are emerging speakers as an additional language, and "several children are being raised as at least semi-native speakers" ("Karuna"). Cornish is even further along in the process with at least 600 speakers,

some of whom are children being raised bilingually (“Cornish”). Each of these examples are ethnic people groups, who are seeking more independence and recognition. As Amery says of Karuna, “reclamation goes hand in hand with the struggle for recognition, self-determination, and liberation. It is both a linguistic and social process” (27). Developing an ethnic language helps ethnicities to have the “solidarity code” present in minority languages.

However, many linguists argue that revived languages are in fact new languages. They argue that once a language has ceased to have living speakers and change that it is dead and could not be revived. These linguists say that any revived languages are “piecemeal and quite artificial creation of antiquaries” (Wardhaugh 75 – 76 qtd. in Amery 22). Yet despite this, many people who are ethnically connected to dead languages still find value in doing what they can to as faithfully as possible restore the language using word lists, written and audio records, and other languages within the same language family if needed (Amery 27). Occasionally, language revival and rebirth has found success as in the aforementioned examples of Hebrew, Karuna, and Cornish.

In contrast to these efforts, several other languages have not shown growth despite the presence of outside interest such as East Sutherland Gaelic in Scotland, which despite a huge movement in the 1990's continues to lose speakers at a concerning rate and today has fallen from the majority language in Scotland to below 60,000 speakers. Ethnologue reports that “there are serious problems in language maintenance even in the core areas” (“Scottish Gaelic”). Another example is Dhalo in Kenya, which despite the 2,400 member ethnic population and outside interest in maintenance had fallen to only 400 speakers in 1992 and may have already died since them (“Dhalo”). In both of these cases, the speakers of the language did not see the purpose, nor have the desire to pass on the language. As Crystal quotes a linguist as saying, if the native population does not want their children to speak their native language “who am I to say that [they are] wrong?” (106).

So what is it that stands in the gap between success and death? It all comes down to attitudes

and interest in the people who speak the language, particularly in the youth and those in the position to pass it on to the next generation. If it is not taught and mastered in childhood, and not valued and maintained into adolescence and young adulthood, there is very little hope for a language. For example, in many places, a language is not viewed as valuable or useful for its youth. Crystal describes a South African taxi driver who spoke all eleven of his nation's languages, but only wanted his children to learn English, because that would be the most financially, educationally and politically, advantageous. On the other hand, a language which used to be a minority in Paraguay, Guarani, has now become a majority language (Crystal 135). This is entirely due to interest in the people; a connection to national heritage and pride that caused the speakers to learn the language and pass it on to their children.

Which brings me back to the fate of Welsh. After I got my mystery lunch, which turned out to be a sort of cheesy broccoli and potato dish, I went off to find somewhere to sit. A lovely group of early retirement-age Welsh people invited me to join them at their picnic table, first in Welsh, then in English when I looked confused. They offered me a glass of wine, then told me about their nation. Wales had just made it to the quarter finals in the Euro cup, so they tried to explain the excitement and national pride they were experiencing. They also told me about their experiences with Welsh. They had all grown up speaking Welsh, and had spoken it in their homes as children. As they grew up and came of age in what I suspect must have been the sixties and seventies, Welsh was common in Wales, and was many people's first language. However, they told me that most of the young people today, especially in Cardiff, the capitol of Wales, only speak English. The language that was a primary language in their youth had fallen to be spoken by only 19% of the population, understood by 33% according to Ethnologue ("Welsh"). So they were very excited to see this festival and hear the Welsh punk rock bands and see all the vendors selling cards and t-shirts in Welsh. It was a sign of hope for a language that was a matter of course for their generation.

I continued to see more of the place Welsh has in Wales as I toured more of Cardiff. Already

national pride was clearly visible due to the football (soccer) victory. Spirits were high across the area, and there was an especially high level of patriotism. Welsh flags hung from most buildings. The Welsh language was on display as well, with an obvious concerted effort to make the language prominent. All brochures were in English and Welsh at castles and museums. Most shops sold cards and books in both English and Welsh, and signs were occasionally printed in both languages. Clearly there has been an effort made to give Welsh official sanction and respectability. I went into a store that was supporting a community group for the preservation of Welsh. Virtually nothing in the store was in English; even signs advertising the clearance section were in Welsh and English. There were cookbooks in Welsh, traditional Welsh foods, Welsh children's books, and even popular novels translated into Welsh. I saw signs for Welsh classes, and places to donate to the organization. Clearly there was a market for these things, and so at least an interest in Welsh was supporting the market for these things. All of these things seemed to be promising signs for the viability of the language.

However, I also heard about another, bigger Welsh festival on the news after I had left Wales, but was still in the U.K.. The clearly English reporters were discussing that even though this festival brought out thousands of attendees over the last 15 to 20 years, the number of speakers of Welsh under thirty had still fallen to below 30%. *The National Survey for Wales 2013-2014* run cooperatively by the Welsh government and the Welsh Language Commission found that 43% of people 3-15 and 25% of people 16 – 19 reported being able to speak some Welsh with 15% and 11% reporting fluency respectively (Welsh Language Commissioner 23). Ethnologue based their figures on reports in the 2011 census, which accounts for the slight difference in numbers. So even though Welsh has achieved great political attention and cultural recognition, the fact remains that the young people of Wales still do not see it as something worth the effort of learning and maintaining. If one can still get by perfectly well in Wales without knowing Welsh and English is more useful to them outside of Wales, than there may not be any incentive to learning and maintaining Welsh. Many young Welsh people do not even intend to

stay in Wales, and those who do often do not learn the language.

While many Welsh people may not view Welsh as valuable or useful currently, particularly younger speaker, unfortunately many who have already lost their languages would strongly disagree. As Crystal mentions, many speakers of languages do not realize the impact of their choosing not to learn or pass on their language to the next generation until it is too late. One account of a people who have already lost their language is found in book by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Native American author and theorist, called *Braiding Sweetgrass*. In it, Kimmerer describes how the United States government forcibly took away the language of her people through mandatory English only schools. Her people were often refused food or government assistance if their children were not taken (Kimmerer 17). Just as with many Native American groups in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were stripped not only of their language, but of their land and culture as well. However, the desire for connection to culture remained. Years after the language her grandfather spoke was lost to them, Kimmerer and her father tried to approximate an ancient ritual of thanks to the land. One morning while camping, they desired to thank the land they had been staying on. They poured out their coffee and said thanks to the gods of the mountain they camped near. Though they felt the ritual had lost its power in English, they still felt some connection to the lost culture and religion. They had lost that religious and cultural story a language gives, and they had felt it acutely. Though the words to make that connection were gone, the desire for the connection was still there. As David Treuer, an Ojibwe author argues, the effort must be made to maintain languages.

If we allow our own wishful thinking and complacency to finish what George Armstrong Custer began, we will lose what we've managed to retain: our languages, land, laws, institutions, ceremonies and, finally, ourselves. And to claim that Indian cultures can continue without

Indian languages only hastens our end, even if it makes us feel better about ourselves. (Treuer)

The loss of language not only serves as a cultural loss, but finishes the work that the dominating forces

began. It is one more step to wiping a culture off the map.

This is just one of the reasons why it is so important to preserve languages and to rekindle enthusiasm among the young. Without this link, peoples all over the world could feel the pain of Kimmerer and her father: a longing to connect, but no means in which to do it. The efforts of minority language groups and outside organizations to preserve native languages must be supported. In my opinion, efforts to revive languages should be assisted. Even if they are not technically the same language, people groups can still benefit from the ethnic identity and cultural connection that a language based in heritage provides. Kimmerer's prayer of thanks might have felt more right to her in a recreation of her grandfather's language. Minority groups can benefit from the "solidarity code" of a recreated language. Language support is just one way of celebrating and encouraging diversity, especially in groups that have suffered from the crushing force of empire in the past. So in the case of Kimmerer or the Karuna in Australia, when governmental practices such as required English-only boarding schools intentionally hastened or even caused the deaths of native languages, the rebirth of those languages strikes back against the repressive forces of empire. The mission of complete conquest failed, and some of the damage could be begin to be repaired.

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