

TEXT DESIGN PATTERNS IN THE WRITING OF URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Teaching to the Cultural Strengths of Students in Multicultural Settings

ARNETHA F. BALL
University of Michigan

This article focuses on the expository writing patterns of four academically successful African American high school students. Through detailed text analyses, the research examines subtle and often overlooked culturally influenced text design patterns that these academically successful bidialectal students bring into the classroom. Although the research looks specifically at literacy practices of urban African American writers, the findings have implications for a broad range of culturally diverse students and demonstrate writing strategies that composition teachers can call upon in their attempts to design more effective writing instruction for diverse groups of students.

This is a tale about one teacher's struggle to allow students to take risks in creative ways; however, it sends the message that African American ways of expressing are not valid ways of communicating ideas within the school setting. The incident that this student describes took place only a few years ago, but it can no longer continue to exist. That is why I thought it deserved repeating in this article. It is a short essay that tells its own story.

[Oral comments on the tape recorder as the student begins writing:
"Okay, now I'm gonna be like telling a story, and I know what it's
about and everything. I just don't know how to get it started. Okay,
I'm just gonna write it out."]

URBAN EDUCATION, Vol. 30 No. 3, October 1995 253-289
© 1995 Corwin Press, Inc.

I'd been given an assignment by Mrs. Brakett, my 5th grade teacher, to write a creative story. I decided to write a story about my shoe. Well, it wasn't actually my shoe but an evil shoe that had the power to make me extremely clumsy. After having completed the story, I discovered it was a masterpiece (I mean that in the most humble way).

Unfortunately Mrs. Brakett didn't share in my enthusiasm. She praised the story, but said that the use of language was unsatisfactory because of the word "ain't." That one little word that I only used once in the entire four pages of brilliant creativity "forced" her to give me a B-. Now I would've been able to understand her judgment if this had been a book report. But this was supposed to be a creative story. So it wasn't really me saying ain't, but it was my shoe saying ain't. Now I don't know about you, but I've never met a shoe with good grammar.

I think it took me a good 3 years to finally put that behind me and start taking creative risks again.

In her oral discussion of the incident, the student concluded,

Well anyways, I think that was bad for my writing because I didn't want to express myself anymore. I started writing like what I thought the teacher would like instead of what I wanted to say. But I have no idea how to put that on paper.

This text shares the experience of one of the four academically successful students in my research and the experience of countless other culturally and linguistically diverse students when teachers are not sensitive to their attempts to share their ideas in ways that are comfortable to them. Despite the fact that for almost 15 years researchers have used terms like *culturally appropriate* (Au & Jordan, 1981), *culturally responsive* (Cazden & Leggett, 1981), *culturally synchronic* (Irvine, 1990), and *culturally relevant* (Ladsen-Billings, 1992) to describe classrooms that attempt to closely match school culture with student culture to promote academic success, research undergirding these concepts has not been widely applied to instruction that attempts to build on the cultural strengths of African American students. One hypothesis for this lack of application is the persistent denial of the existence of an African American culture (Ladsen-Billings, 1992): one that is not merely linked to a culture of poverty and the legacy of slavery—one

that offers culturally influenced literacy practices and resources that have value in educational settings.

The research reported on in this article expands on the notion of "available resources" that can be used in classroom learning. Through detailed textual analyses of texts written by African American students, it provides teachers with information that can help them reconceptualize instruction and create richer, more productive curricula that use the cultural and linguistic diversity of students in their writing programs.

SOME BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For many reasons, culturally and linguistically diverse students have historically not fared well in the American educational system. In spite of the considerable rhetoric over the past several years, recent research indicates that African American, Latino, Native American, and some Asian students are faring very poorly in the nation's urban schools (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Irvine, 1990; Quality Education for Minority Project, 1990). The motivation for much of the prior language-related research focusing on diverse populations has been to explain the school failure experienced by these students. A large number of these studies have taken a deficit model approach to research. Specifically, they have emphasized diverse students' failure to perform in the same manner as European American students. As Pollard (1993) pointed out, this perspective ignores evidence of successful performance by members of diverse groups, especially in the academic sphere. This perspective tends to blame the victim and limits researchers and practitioners to methods and strategies that are most useful with mainstream, middle-class European American students, assuming them to be the norm. Most important, this perspective distracts researchers and practitioners from obtaining a better understanding of factors associated with successful school performance by diverse groups of students who have had different socialization experiences (Pollard, 1993, p. 342). Along

the same lines, Baugh (1988) cautioned researchers not to emphasize analyses of failure at the expense of success.

The well-known practice of analyzing such failure has contributed little to the long-term interests of Black students. They [students] would be better served if researchers devoted as much attention to evaluations of programs in which Black students have experienced academic success. (p. 403)

In this article, I focus on African American students' writing practices in an urban classroom and in informal writing situations. The first section presents a brief overview of literature that supports the notion that students' cultural experiences and language uses within their nonschool discourse communities influence academic literacy practices and educational success. Two bodies of literature are relevant to this notion. The first body of literature describes differences in text patterns across cultures in general and patterns in African American English vernacular (AAEV) speakers in particular. The second body of literature focuses on additive versus subtractive language learning models that help to explain perspectives successful educators have adopted in their efforts to support the writing of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The next section presents my research on the writing patterns of a group of urban African American students. It describes patterns of discourse exhibited in the school- and non-school-oriented writing of academically successful 11th- and 12th-grade African American students as they actively prepare for a successful transition to college composition courses. Rather than conduct research from the deficit perspective, this research identifies resources that these students have cultivated and learned to manipulate in their urban classroom settings and in related nonschool contexts. Research that focuses on the strengths and resources of academically successful students from diverse backgrounds may hold important clues for teaching other students how to use within the classroom culturally influenced resources they have already cultivated and learned to manipulate outside the classroom.

The current study investigates the discourse strategies and styles of expression that academically successful students use to engage in written activities in their formal, school-related contexts and in

their informal, nonschool discourse. Perhaps because I bring to bear my connection with the African American community, I can see in the language of AAEV speakers, much of which is used in skillful and inventive ways outside the classroom, a wealth of resources. My observations and experiences as an African American classroom teacher, researcher, and speech/language pathologist over the past 15 years have led me to regard many of their strategies for including the language of their everyday lives in their written exposition as an untapped language resource that educators might use in developing more responsive pedagogy or in designing more effective language arts curricula. My premise is that, to obtain a more accurate understanding of the writing behaviors of diverse students, it is necessary to view these practices within a broad social context—one that values and validates the culturally influenced resources of diverse students in their own right and that investigates them as antecedents and supports for academic success.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE ON TEXT PATTERNS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The research of Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1981) focused on ethnic differences in communicative style, norms of behavior, styles of argumentation, and modes of reasoning that differentiate cultural groups. Differences in narrative styles among cultural groups was also the focus of research by Collins (1985), Gee (1985), Heath (1983), and Michaels (1985). These researchers conclude that socialization differences among culturally and linguistically diverse populations can result in variations in the use and valuation of literacy practices, communication styles, and verbal participation skills within certain contexts. With the exception of research on speech events (Hymes, 1974), the art of African American preaching (Cook, 1985; Heath, 1983; Moss, 1988; Rosenberg, 1988), and Labov's (1969) analysis of the logic of nonstandard English, few studies have focused on text patterns in African American populations. Researchers agree, however, that the language of the school and that of nonschool contexts for AAEV speakers warrant further investigation.

A related body of literature suggests that African Americans have culturally influenced communication styles and forms. The linguistic system used by more than 20 million African Americans in the United States is often referred to as Black English vernacular (BEV) or AAEV when speaking of the full range of language practices used by many African Americans in the United States. The term *African American English vernacular* used in this article refers to the highly consistent grammar, pronunciation, lexicon, and stylistic features that comprise the first language variety learned by most lower and working-class African Americans throughout the United States and used in much the same way by many adults in their most intimate home settings with family and friends (Labov, 1969). AAEV speakers use certain linguistic features that, although they appear in other American English varieties, occur in AAEV more frequently, systematically, and consistently than in other English varieties. Some of these features include a tendency to systematically pronounce the interdental fricative voiced and unvoiced /th/ sound as the voiced or voiceless dental stop /d,t/ in initial positions of words and the labiodental fricative in final positions of words (e.g., *they* pronounced as /dei/ and *Ruth* pronounced as /ruf/). Syntactically, they systematically eliminate the use of the mainstream plural *s* morpheme whenever plurality is marked by other means in the discourse. Lexical variations include the AAE speakers' creative use of vocabulary that has direct African origins, for example, *tote* meaning *to carry*, or words with double meanings, for example, using the word *mean* to connote a positive reference to an extraordinary person or event. Documented genres of African American discourse include the African American preaching tradition (Cook, 1985; Moss, 1988; Rosenberg, 1988) and speech events such as "playin' the dozens," for example, and many others (Abrahams, 1970, 1976; Kochman, 1972, 1981). These speech events share common features of rhythmic, kinesthetic, and formulaic structures that are grounded in the African American style of rhetoric.

Much of the early writing research with this population focused on analyses of features at or below the sentence level, confirming that oral language varieties influence the written compositions of

AAEV speakers in important ways. Whiteman (1976) examined the culturally related features that frequently occur in the writing of students who speak AAEV and found that, in addition to a wide range of spelling variations present in these students' writings, other characteristic features of AAEV are reflected in their written texts. These include uses of verbal *-s*, plural *-s*, possessive *-s*, consonant cluster *-ed*, and forms of the verb *be* that differed from mainstream and academic English usage. Recent research (Ball, 1992, in press; Smitherman, 1994) makes important distinctions between syntactic features such as those mentioned above and discourse features found in students' writing, that is, the use of rhythmic language, anecdotes, parables, and patterns of repetition and call and response. This research confirms that studies of teachers' assessments indicate that, although most teachers considered AAEV syntactic features that appeared in their students' texts as errors, they actually gave higher scores to students who used AAEV discourse features in their writing.

The research reported on in this article goes beyond earlier studies in that it provides a close textual analysis of how culturally based literary practices and stylistic techniques move into school writing. Through an analysis of subtle patterns that enter writing, the research points out the strengths that this extended repertoire can bring to students' texts. I use the term *subtle* because, unlike syntactic or lexical features, the discourse features highlighted in these texts are often read by teachers and overlooked or considered "not sticking to the point" or "adding padding or fillers to the text" rather than as positive stylistic techniques used by the writer.

Research from the domains of rhetoric and sociolinguistic analyses confirm that culturally influenced communication forms exist beyond the phonological, lexical, and syntactic levels in AAEV styles of discourse. Golden and Rieke (1971) proposed that there is a "Black" way of saying things and suggested that African Americans have a keen sense of oral communication that differs from the speech of European American middle-class speakers in significant ways. Documented genres of African American discourse, including the African American preaching tradition and speech events such as "playin' the dozens," share common features

of rhythmic, kinesthetic, and formulaic structures. Smitherman (1977) posited that African American modes of discourse include "verbal strategies, rhetorical devices, and folk expressive rituals which derive from a mutually understood notion of [Black] modes of discourse, which in turn is part of the rich inheritance of the African background" (p. 103). Hymes's (1974) analysis of African American speech events places them within the framework of culture and society. Hymes's focus on the use and the users of language demonstrates that AAEV is socially constructed and reveals that important variations in AAEV and mainstream and academic English occur at the larger levels of rhetorical patterning and discourse rather than simply at grammatical, lexical, or phonological levels. Gee (1989a, 1989b, 1990) further emphasized the social aspects of language in his discussion of literacy as much more than reading and writing, but rather as a part of a larger political entity that he refers to as a "discourse" or "identity kit." In his discussion, he argues that one never learns simply to read or write, but to read and write within some larger discourse, that is, within the discourse of AAEV-speaking females, and therefore within some larger set of values and beliefs.

ADDITIVE VERSUS SUBTRACTIVE MODELS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

The second body of literature, generally related to English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual education, suggests that an additive, rather than a subtractive, model of language learning might be most useful in addressing issues of literacy use within diverse discourse communities. Briefly stated, the subtractive model of language learning says that students should be encouraged to master mainstream or academic English at the expense of their community-based or culturally and ethnically influenced language patterns. For the African American student, this would mean that the characteristic phonological, lexical, syntactic, and stylistic patterns of AAEV must be replaced by mainstream or academic English patterns in order for the student to function successfully

within the educational setting. Through school policies or by conscious or unconscious teacher attitudes, language patterns that reflect students' home cultures are often constructed as error. Some students feel they are left with a grim choice: to accept the school's norms for expression and reject the language of their communities, or to reject the language demands of the school and continue to use forms of expression valued in their own cultural communities, thus jeopardizing the likelihood of their not only becoming multivoiced in voices that include their own vernacular as well as the mainstream and academic discourses but also jeopardizing the likelihood of their transcending them (Delpit, 1992). Kohl (1991) wrote about individuals who choose not to learn what is expected of them rather than unlearn that which denies them their sense of who they are.

Some educators, on the other hand, subscribe to an additive model of language learning. The additive model encourages teachers to develop formal language skills from the linguistic practices students bring into the classroom, while maintaining an efficient use of language skills associated with their own cultural community. Teachers who subscribe to this model recognize the widespread failure of the schools to adequately address and incorporate students' language varieties. They view the AAEV speaker's plight as somewhat analogous to that of the student whose home language is other than English. When children have non-English-speaking parents, it seems natural to accept their home language as an honorable and worthy medium of communication and to encourage the student to continue to use that language with pride. Educators try to help these students learn English without rejecting the language of the home or community. Students are encouraged to become bilingual. Analogously, it can be argued that, when the AAEV-speaking student learns academic English in school, educators should avoid disparaging the language of the home or community. If one child can become bilingual, another can become bidialectal. Students can thus be encouraged to use their home and/or community language in oral and written exchanges with parents in the home, with friends, and in other contexts they find appropriate.

Language arts instruction, then, can focus on creating bridges between and among the various school and nonschool discourse communities that students encounter. Cummins (1986) discussed this notion of additive versus subtractive and uses it as a basis for providing a theoretical framework for intervention that promotes the empowerment of students that can lead them to success in schools.

Taken together, these bodies of literature suggest that discourse communities play a significant role in the African American student's language patterns. Understanding the positive roles that home and community-based literacy practices can play in academic settings holds important clues for teaching and learning in classrooms with African American students as well as for students from other cultural groups. Among other things, such understanding provides a theoretical base that undergirds practice. This understanding can help educators develop what Baugh (1981) termed "ethnosensitivity," that is, an understanding of, and a willingness to build on, the cultural values and linguistic patterns of diverse students. This being the case, one motivation for the present research is to demonstrate the range of text design patterns and styles of expression one group of African American students bring to the classroom that could be included in curricula development.

THE PRESENT STUDY

In spite of the fact that linguistic research over the past 20 years has focused on the systematic nature and merits of AAEV, it is generally considered to be a low-prestige variety of English (Erickson, 1984). Research on the use of AAEV in the workplace, for example, reveals that many employers feel that a particular variety of mainstream English must be used on and off the job because it lends prestige to the company and an air of competence to the employee. In his research, Anderson (1981) found that, although many jobs did not require proficiency in the use of mainstream or academic English to perform the duties of the job, many employers reported that they would most likely hire speakers of these English varieties regardless of the type of job. Research

also confirms that many employers use nonmainstream English as a criterion for automatically eliminating certain otherwise good and capable job candidates simply because they associated its use with low intelligence, low efficiency, and restricted job skills. Because of these perceptions, job hiring, continuity, and promotions are often heavily influenced by one's use of nonmainstream English. The focus of much research has been to highlight stigmatized aspects of AAEV (i.e., playin' the dozens, sounding, capping, etc.), leaving educators with the impression that there is little of value in the AAEV linguistic system that merits inclusion in academic contexts. Thus another motivation for the present study is to describe literacy behaviors that emerged in the formal and informal writing of academically successful AAEV-speaking students that could be useful in formal academic settings to enrich writing curricula.

METHOD

Subjects

An urban public high school in a culturally and linguistically diverse West Coast metropolis provided the setting for the study. Four students, two males and two females, were selected from a sample of 30 students in an 11th-grade college preparatory English classroom to participate in the study. The Hispanic American classroom teacher appeared highly committed to promoting the success of her students within the urban school context and beyond. She worked to communicate effectively with the diverse groups of students in her classes, challenging them to think and write critically about a variety of topics. She was available to assist her students with problems and challenges both in and outside the urban classroom environment. This teacher assisted me in the initial identification of students who met the following criteria: students who (a) had a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or above; (b) scored at or above grade level in English on standardized tests; (c) were African Americans who were familiar with AAEV and used it at least some of the time; and (d) came from urban, lower class, or

working-class households. The primary indicator used to determine class status was parents' job or occupation. The school was situated in an urban community where at least 40% of the families received state and/or federal welfare benefits.

Procedures

I visited the school site twice a week during the second half of the students' 11th-grade year and the first half of their 12th-grade year. Students also met with me at the school site, at a pizza party, and at my home during the summer recess months to produce oral and written texts in more informal settings than would be possible in classrooms during the regular school year.

The research took place in three phases, with the first two phases occurring during the regular school year. The first phase involved collecting background information about the participants and establishing rapport. During this stage, students completed background questionnaires about their family and community life experiences. Students also participated in small group discussions with me and their peers. These tape-recorded discussions were analyzed to detect the presence of AAEV features identified by Wolfram (1969) and to determine that subjects were indeed AAEV speakers at least part of the time. The second phase of the research involved collecting a broad range of classroom writing assignments from all four students. During this phase of the research, students also visited my home to talk, to eat snacks, and to write on topics of interest to them in a more relaxed setting. The third phase of the research took place at the school site during the summer months. Students were asked to write letters, essays, reports, and speeches on topics of interest to them, to audiences of their own choosing. The only constraints placed on these writings were the following: (a) I predetermined the nature of the four writing tasks, that is, to write an informal letter, essay, report, or speech; (b) the students were given 45 to 60 minutes to talk about the assignments and to complete each writing task (the time limit was used primarily as a device to keep students focused); and (c) students were asked to complete talk-aloud protocols while writing to reveal some of the

strategies they employed while completing the tasks. Students were instructed to talk out loud into a tape recorder as they planned, wrote, and revised their texts. They were asked to keep talking about their thoughts as they were writing. Observation field notes were collected throughout each of the three data collection phases and were useful in contextualizing data during analyses.

During the third phase of the study, I followed procedures similar to those set forth by Chafe and Danielewicz (1987), asking students to produce four types of texts: informal personal letters, formal academic essays, formal prepared written speeches, and informal written discussions. Students wrote about topics that were of interest to them and to audiences of their own choosing. Each text was transcribed and coded to identify emerging features during the analysis. The students' texts were analyzed to determine discourse strategies, patterns of organization, and other culturally influenced styles that these students used to express their ideas. All written text samples, talk-aloud protocols, audiotaped individual and small group discussions, student surveys, observation field notes, and recorded interviews with school personnel and the classroom teacher were organized into case study files for each of the study's participants. The nine text samples included in this article were selected from the case study files of informal personal letters and formal academic essays collected from these students over the course of the 1-year study. These texts were selected as a small representation of the many texts that could have been chosen to illustrate the expressive strategies that emerged throughout many of the students' texts.

Like the Chafe and Danielewicz (1987, p. 5) research, this study was conducted to examine specific kinds of language that are produced in the course of a person's normal activities. As was the case in Dyson and Genishi's (1994, p. 6) investigations of cultural diversity in classrooms and communities, the purpose of this analysis was to help teachers listen more sensitively to the voices of their students and, moreover, to exploit the power of those voices for bringing students and their diverse experiences into the classroom and for forging new connections among students and teachers.

RESULTS

Three of the four students, one male and two females, described themselves as mainstream American English speakers most of the time, whereas one male described himself as an AAEV speaker a majority of the time. All four students demonstrated an ability to skillfully manipulate and interchangeably use AAEV, mainstream, and academic English during our discussions—style switching with ease depending on their degree of personal engagement in the conversation and the topic being discussed. Students tended to use more AAEV features in their speech when they were relaxed and engaged in the conversation (Labov, 1969, 1972) and when talking with peers, such as using simplified consonant clusters at the end of words, increased use of the verb *be*, using varying forms of subject verb agreements, and using speech events like “boastin” in the tradition of African American linguistic creativity. Although many of the discourse strategies used by these students are by no means uniquely AAEV characteristics, they are nonetheless features that are more often associated with orally based cultures (Ball, 1992) and are used more often in colloquial and informal settings than in written exposition. They are also features that occur in the written texts of culturally and linguistically diverse students that are frequently misunderstood, discounted, or overlooked in school contexts.

The five-paragraph essay form used below was written by one of the female students in the study and represents a typical text written in their college preparatory English classroom. The students received a classroom assignment to write a two- to three-page essay on Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Self-Reliance.” They were asked to select a quote from Emerson’s essay and to explain, analyze, and evaluate the quote as well as relate it to a contemporary, historical, social, or religious figure. This student’s text and all others quoted in this article are reproduced exactly as they were written, including all syntactic and typographic variations used by the students. In the examples that follow, I have used italics to highlight some of the culturally influenced patterns the students draw on to enhance their written texts.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

1 Ralph Waldo Emerson was a transcendentalist who, like others,
 2 created powerful writings which would provoke the mind. Many of
 3 Emerson's works express his view of life and his philosophy of man. "Self
 4 Reliance" was one of his greatest works and in this he focuses on
 5 individualism. . .
 6 "Accept the place the divine providence has found for you,
 7 the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events."
 8 Emerson is not very fond of man; in fact he is ashamed of their
 9 actions . . . he is telling man to accept what he has now in life and not to take
 10 life and it's offerings for granted. . . Emerson wants man to appreciate his
 11 society, the people in his society, and the connection of events that have
 12 come his way. . .
 13 "The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our
 14 consistency; a reverence for our past act or word, because the
 15 eye of others . . . and we are loth to disappoint them." [sic]
 16 Here, Emerson is saying that *man* is not willing to trust himself, in
 17 fact, that he is afraid to trust himself. . . *Man will show society an*
 18 "acceptable" personality, even though he may be "unacceptable". . . *Man is*
 19 *afraid to disappoint society.*
 20 Emerson's philosophy can be compared to Gandhi's because *both*
 21 *were* individualists. *Both had a* goal in life, even though the goals were
 22 different, they had one thing in common, not to live to satisfy
 23 society. . . *Both spoke* and wrote words to make man think and possibly
 24 change some of their ways. Though in different times, *both were* quite
 25 common. [sic]
 26 Emerson focused on individuality. He wanted more people to
 27 express individuality. He wanted man to stop quoting people and make his
 28 own quotes, to have a little self-trust. . . To Emerson, if man expressed
 29 *individualism*, he would be a better person.

In the text above, the writer demonstrates that she has learned what was required of her on this academic writing task and she provided it, thus meeting the teacher's expectations. The student uses repetition in lines 16, 17 and 18; lines 20, 21, 23, and 24; and again in lines 26, 27, and 29 to create a formulaic pattern that, although subtle, serves to create a rhythmic pattern in the text. She received an A-/A- grade on this assignment, one A- was a content grade and the other a mechanics grade.

Following classroom discussions, these students were often asked to provide written critiques of literary works they had read, like *Bartleby the Scrivener* by Herman Melville or *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams. They were also asked to write a biographical report and political position paper on an issue of the student's choice. As they prepared for such assignments, much of

the classroom talk centered around the students' readiness for successful experiences within the college writing environment. The teacher often spoke of using a five-paragraph essay format and encouraged students to include such devices as introductions, conclusions, and transitional links in their well-written pieces. In this academic classroom, standard notions of exposition dictated that in most cases a text topic would be clearly stated, followed by elaboration on that topic using lexically explicit language with a theme-based focus and text organization patterns that included topic associations, comparisons and contrasts, and hierarchical outlines. Most of the teachers' comments written on the students' papers related to grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling variations.

To obtain a better understanding of the writing behaviors of these AAEV-speaking students, I also met with them during the summer recess months to gather oral and written texts in informal settings, that is, in my home, at a pizza party, and at casual writing sessions held on the school grounds. The text that follows was written by the same African American female who wrote the Emerson composition above. It is a personal letter written to her girlfriend during one of our informal writing sessions.

- 1 Friend,
- 2 I can still remember when we were freshmen and we planned to take a trip
- 3 to Mexico. As soon as either one of us learned to drive we were *gonna* take
- 4 off south of the border. I've been looking forward to it for three years and
- 5 that's why I'm so disappointed that we can't go. It's just that I know that
- 6 we're *gonna* have to be *shelling out the big bucks* for our senior [year]. I
- 7 mean, with the prom, grad-night, pictures, etc.

- 8 *Speaking of learning* to drive, when are we going to get our licenses? I
- 9 *thought I was bad* because I took safety ed. and drivers training in
- 10 November 1988. *But you're worse*. If I'm not mistaken, you took them
- 11 both in June, '88. So I'm *jammin'* compared to you. I guess we're both
- 12 just too lazy to go down to the DMV.

- 13 *Speaking of lazy*, I don't want to work mornings. I hate having to get up
- 14 early just to feed cinnamon rolls to grouchy, half-awake, old people. I'd
- 15 rather keep working afternoons and evenings when all the gorgeous guys
- 16 drop in on their lunch breaks. . .

In contrast to her formal academic text on Emerson, in this text the student uses African American colloquial phrases, for example, "shelling out the big bucks" in line 6, "I thought I was bad" in line 9,

and “I’m jammin’” in line 11 to speak to her informal audience. She also implicitly links her topics through a personal anecdote rather than through formal phrases like those used in Emerson (e.g., “like others” in line 1, “in fact” in line 16/17, or “thought in different times” in line 24). The overall theme of this informal text, her summer experience, is not at first obvious to the uninformed reader. However, her intended reader, her girlfriend, immediately understood the message as logical and well formulated because of their shared background experiences. According to Erickson (1984), a characteristic feature of AAEV is that it is not necessary to state the underlying point of the story explicitly—indeed, it would be inappropriate—because the receiver could be counted on to get the point based on the receiver’s assumed communicative competence. Note, however, that when this student completes her required school writing assignments, she makes explicit associations among topics and marks topic shifts with terms such as *then*, *but*, and *on the other hand*. In this text, the student also uses the colloquial phrase *Speaking of* as a transition marker when she moves from one topic to another and addresses her audience directly in line 10 when she says, “But you’re worse.” These strategies appear to be deliberately chosen to establish a particular mood because they are more generally found in the student’s informal writing. She seems to strategically choose discourse strategies she feels are appropriate for particular audiences.

The following formal academic text was written by the male in the study who did not consider himself to be an AAEV speaker most of the time. Assigned at the same time as the above Emerson composition, the student was asked to write a two- to three-page essay on Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Self-Reliance.” He was asked to select a quote from Emerson’s essay and to explain, analyze, and evaluate the quote as well as relate it to a contemporary, historical, social, or religious figure.

Emerson Composition

- 1 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *an enormous intellectual and a gratuitous thinker and*
- 2 *writer, exemplified his beliefs and his insecurities in his writing, where he put forth*
- 3 *the ideas of one’s individuality and self-reliance. In his well-know dissertation,*
- 4 “Self-Reliance,” Emerson writes,

5 "Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present
6 every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of
7 the adopted talent of another you have only the extemporaneous, half possession."

8 This chosen passage portrays the transcendentalist in Emerson; his *generative*
9 *ideas of non-conformity* are revealed via a *suave and unrestricted style*. Each
10 sentence was written with a specific interpretation in mind, but the passage as a
11 whole is what captures greatness.

12 "Insist on yourself," were the words ejected from the mouth of Emerson;
13 they seemed to scream "their" sentiment with a noiseless discipline. When Emerson
14 wrote this first sentence, he made it a point not a dabble with words, but to be direct
15 and firm, and it is this firmness that has provided credence to his words. As
17 Emerson reflected on and wrote this lofty entry, he was trying to impress upon you
18 just two words, "be yourself." . . .

19 "Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a
20 whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another, you have only the
21 extemporaneous, half possession." Emerson wrote this sentence in order to expand
22 on his first thought. It serves as a type of self-induced prophecy that is tainted with
23 logic. What Emerson states here also applies to his ideas of individualism. Emerson
24 believed that individualism was a step towards the recognition of God within us,
25 and when man found his individuality, the human possibilities were limitless. . .

26 Dr. Martin Luther King was one man that exemplified Emerson's views.
27 Dr. King was a civil rights leader in the 1950's and the 1960's who challenged the
28 laws of the white man that restricted blacks from becoming true Americans. Dr.
29 King "insisted upon himself" and he didn't let the pressure of the people that ran
30 this country sway from his rough and uneven path. He believed in a faith of God
31 and he used that faith to keep himself fighting against the injustices of the white
32 man. A man that was given the talent to be a leader, Martin Luther King had to
33 work hard to develop it. He read, listened, and preached of the perils of the negro
34 people and all minorities. He was a man with incredible insight, just as Emerson was,
35 and he forged an unsungance for the rights of negroes as they struggled in a society
36 that took them away from their country against their will, so they could be hated
37 and enslaved in another country. Dr. King was not an imitator, but an initiator.

38 Emerson wrote very extensively and deeply on the idea of individuality.
39 "Insist on yourself" are three words of Emerson's that all persons should take heed
40 to. The moment we insist on ourselves we will find ourselves and find reality, a
41 reality that will breed success, happiness; and an individual. With his beliefs and
42 insecurities coming out in his writing, Emerson wrote furtively and without
43 exhaust. He urged us to find our true talents and to use them to the fullest.

Like the writer of the first Emerson composition, this writer has no difficulty demonstrating that he has learned what was required of him on an academic writing task and he provided it with eloquence, thus meeting the teacher's expectations. In his description of Emerson as an "enormous intellectual and a gratuitous thinker" with his "generative ideas of non-conformity" that are "revealed via a suave and unrestricted style," this student uses what AAEV speakers refer to as "high talk." In his use of terms such as "put forth" instead of "stated" in line 2 and "the words ejected from

the mouth of Emerson" instead of "Emerson said" in line 12, this writer appears to be trying to impress his audience with "big words." This is a well-known discourse feature of AAEV and this writer seems to have mastered its use. Also, when this writer use phrases like "he made it a point not to dabble with words" in line 14 and "individualism was a step towards" in line 24, he is using folk idioms used in the African American tradition. Finally, this student seems to capture what Smitherman (1994) referred to as a "sermonic tone reminiscent of traditional Black church rhetoric" in his discussion of the Black preacher, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in lines 27 through 37.

When grading these texts, the teacher did not provide extensive written critiques of the students' writing on their returned papers; rather, "word choice," "wrong word," and "spelling variations" were circled and coded for the students using the shorthand notation "wc," "ww," and "sp," respectively. Awkward (awk) phrases and punctuation changes were also recommended through directional arrows and insertion and question marks. When colloquial phrases were found in these texts, the teacher marked it "cliché." Most formal classroom texts were written in a somewhat formulaic, although well-organized format. There were, however, limited uses of culturally influenced styles of self-expression or references to community life experiences included in these formal school-oriented essays. It is possible that the students felt that such inclusions would not be valued by the teacher or might be misinterpreted as colloquialisms, "clichés," or diversions from the topic.

The following informal, nonacademic text was written by the same male student who wrote the Emerson composition above. In both texts, he adheres to a well-organized matrix pattern that would be quite acceptable in an academic setting. This text has a strong sense of personal voice and evidences a keen sense of personal engagement. The following text is a highly charged, political text written to his fellow classmates during one of our summer informal writing sessions. The writer's talk-aloud protocol, completed while he was writing, reveals some of the strategies he employed while completing the task.

Malcolm and Martin

- 1 People agreed with Martin Luther King because he preached all that nonviolence
2 stuff. *You know?*
- 3 I'm not saying *he sold himself* or his people but I mean he catered to a white need.
4 And they, *he was like saying ok you treated us like dogs*, you made us look like
5 shit, *you know you really*, really tore our families apart *you lowed* our self esteem
6 *you made* it to where a son can't even look up to his father as a role model anymore
7 *you know you whipped* his father in his own house and raped his mom so many
8 times, *you know?* It's so bad.
- 9 And well, "Martin Luther Kings is saying to forgive us. *Hey, yeah*, let's back him
10 up a little bit. We'll kill him later but let's let him calm down the black community.
11 So they're not as bad as everyone."
- 12 When Malcolm X said *fuck* the white people, *you know*,
13 *You know*, you did us wrong, *you know, you promised me one hundred acres of*
14 *land and a mule*. Which we never got. Now when they went and blew up the
15 Japanese and all that kind of stuff, they gave them land. Now they say ok to the
16 Black man. They say we did you wrong we'll give you a mule and a acre of land.
17 They never did that *shit*. *You know what I'm saying?* They never, never did.
- 18 When *Detroit Red*, Malcolm X, said, *you know*, we have our own stuff, you
19 know, we don't need no white man, *you know*. We're economically, *you know*,
20 better off on our own. Have our own teachers who would want to teach our
21 people, who would want to educate our youth *you know*. Have our own grocery
22 stores where you don't have to go in there and always go to the end of the line
23 cause the white person want to get up there first, *you know what I'm saying?* *You*
24 *know*, and it worked like that for a while, *you know*. The Black panther movement
25 was *going on*, *you know*.
- 26 But the white people got scared because they started seeing the Blacks with the
27 same things that they had and that's scary. It's very scary... *You* see them as a
28 nuisance and you're scared. And the only way to keep them down is by physical
29 and mental abuse. Like you tell them "our mind is better than yours." *You* keep
30 them down mentally. That's what white man's been doing.

The talk-aloud protocol recorded while this student produced this political text reveals that this student purposely uses AAEV features when he is trying to make a point. He incorporates African American idioms such as "sold himself" in line 3, "Detroit Red" in line 18, and "The Black Panther movement was going on" in line 25 of this informal letter, but he does not use these kinds of devices when writing academic assignments to his teacher because these terms assume a mutual understanding based on similar cultural experiences. He also uses the statements "you know" throughout

the text and "you know what I'm saying" in line 17 as well as language that speaks directly to his audience ("you promised me one hundred acres and a mule" in line 13/14) in this text to give the impression of a dialogue, somewhat reminiscent of Heath's (1983) discussion of personal group cooperation and effort when using literacy as a social experience in the lives of her Trackton residents.

Another student in the class responded somewhat differently from the first two students in the writing of his Emerson essay. The following formal academic text was written by the African American male in the study who did consider himself to be an AAEV speaker most of the time. At the same time that the above Emerson compositions were assigned, this student was asked to write a two-to three-page essay on Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance." He was asked to select a quote from Emerson's essay and to explain, analyze, and evaluate the quote as well as relate it to a contemporary, historical, social, or religious figure. In response to that assignment, this student establishes a direct rapport with his audience and takes a very politically militant stance on the assignment as indicated by his choice of biographical subjects. This student's five-paragraph essay received a B-/B- grade.

Emerson Composition

- 1 "There is a time in every man's life when he arrives at the conviction
- 2 that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself
- 3 for better, for worse, as his portion. . ."
- 4 These are the sentences I have chosen in this composition. In this
- 5 composition I will attempt to explain, analyze, and evaluate the sentences,
- 6 as well as relate them to a contemporary, historical, social, or religious
- 7 figure.
- 8 To explain and analyze what Emerson is saying is quite simple, his
- 9 thoughts are man versus self-reliance. Emerson is saying that man is afraid
- 10 to expand his horizons and succeed in society, because of the fact that he
- 11 clings on to others for support. The true success of an individual comes
- 12 from self-reliance, because you always know what you need and you'll
- 13 always do yourself right. To achieve self-reliance would place you among
- 14 the list of great human beings. Emerson says, "When private men shall act
- 15 with original views, the luster will be transferred from the actions of kings
- 16 to those of gentlemen."
- 17 To evaluate these sentences on a scale of one to ten, I'd give them a
- 18 nine. The reason I wouldn't give them a ten is because they are too deep.
- 19 These sentences are very complex, but lots of knowledge can be taken from
- 20 them. . . . Emerson says, "To be great is to be misunderstood."

20 I would like to relate what Emerson is saying to the great El-Hajj
 21 Malik El-Shabazz, or better known as Malcolm X. . . Malcolm felt that if *we*
 22 the black race continued to envy . . . *we* would become an ignorant
 23 race . . . Malcolm took himself for better or for worse when his father was
 24 brutally killed . . . He did this by saving all of his hatred and vengeful ideas
 25 and focused into something positive . . . Malcolm X had no idea what power
 26 resided in him, but he used what he had and only to discover that he had
 27 many talents. His main one [was] his ability to earn trust and establish
 28 unity among brothers and sisters. . .
 29 This concludes my composition and I hope *you've* enjoyed my
 30 explanation, analysis, evaluation, and my comparison to a historical figure.
 31 In short, Emerson was a great man also, with the ability to write and give
 32 words new meaning. I'm sure he was also a misunderstood individual. I
 33 will leave *you* with this little bit of information to conclude my report.

One reader's initial response to this text was that it was "a little short on substance." Another careful reading of the text further reveals that the composition has the quality of a performance, with the performer delivering his ideas directly to a specific audience. Dyson (1991) explained that a performer differs from a mere communicator in both the nature of language produced and in the kind of stance taken toward an audience. Techniques used to create a performance vary across different sociocultural communities and, within the African American tradition, include such musical phenomena as the rhythmic use of language, patterns of repetition and variation, expressive sounds, and phenomena encouraging participative sensemaking such as dialogue, tropes, hyperbole, and call and response. Although the first part of the essay is somewhat formal and detached, it becomes much more discursive when the writer talks about one of his admitted personal heroes, Malcolm X. This student uses "we" in lines 21 and 23, "you've" in line 29, and "you" in line 33 to establish an atmosphere of direct interactive communication with an assumed familiar audience. After establishing this atmosphere in lines 20-28, the student goes on to use school writing to perform rather than simply to communicate. When reading lines 29-33, the reader becomes aware that the writer has successfully controlled and enticed the audience into his written world. This performative essay is characteristic of traditional African American discourse patterns used in "running down some lines" and in the Black church's preaching tradition.

The following informal letter was written by the same student who wrote the Emerson essay above. This text was written during one of our summer informal writing sessions.

Letter to Larry

- 1 Dear Larry,
- 2 As your older brother I feel I owe you a big explanation. As you grow
- 3 older you are facing more dilemmas. You are now realizing that society has
- 4 been geared to suppress you. I know as you observe and learn you seem to
- 5 see that only whites are capable of excelling and doing great deeds.
- 6 But to share the little light, our people were the first people to inhabit the
- 7 earth according to the great teacher Faracon, our God is Black. He said the
- 8 Lord Jesus Christ had hair of wool and skin of dirt, and if anyone doubts
- 9 you, read it in Genesis. We are the chosen people because our race has out-
- 10 lived and over endured more than any other race. At one time we ruled the
- 11 earth, but harmoniously like Armagedon states we would once again rule
- 12 the world.
- 13 But Larry, the reason why society is so against you Its because they are
- 14 afraid that you might succeed and if you succeed, you have proven them
- 15 wrong and you have broken the bond of lower self esteem or mentally.
- 16 Whites figure if Blacks take success, they will become hungry and then
- 17 they'll do anything to appease that hunger, even learn.
- 18 [At this point the student verbalizes his pleasure with the job he is doing
- 19 by saying: "Dang! That's great! God, that was great!"]
- 20 It's hard to taste success because we don't really see anyone else Black
- 21 tasting it. And if you do, it's through sports. Society tries to cover up any
- 22 other accomplishments done by Black. And if a Black does accomplish
- 23 something, he has a serious white background.
- 24 [Again, the student complements himself verbally on the taped talk-aloud
- 25 protocol: "Gosh! I'm great! Man, ah man. Pat on the back." (Hand
- 26 clapping is also heard.)]

In writing this informal letter, the student provides evidence of a strong presence of personal voice and a keen sense of engagement in the text through the incorporation of oral phrases like "Dang! That's great! I sure am good! . . . God, that was great!" made on his talk-aloud protocol and through hand clapping that could be heard during the taping of his writing session. Although he used the term *serious* in a characteristically AAEV way in the phrase "he has a serious white background" (line 23 of the text), the majority of this

text adheres to a well-organized topical net that would be quite acceptable in an academic setting. In this instance, the talk-aloud protocols revealed evidence of this student's use of oral comments that confirmed his excitement, pleasure, and validation of his use of colloquial phrases in his writing.

Following is another example of a student's use of AAEV styles of expression in a student's academic writing. This text was written by the second female in the study. Again, I have used italics to highlight some of the culturally influenced strategies that this student drew on to enhance her written texts.

Mendacity

- 1 Mendacity has a simple meaning, a lie. *We use mendacity in our everyday*
- 2 *lives*, whether we know it or not. *We use it to get out of certain situations,*
- 3 *to make others look bad, as well as put yourself in favor of others.* In Cat
- 4 *On A Hot Tin Roof* mendacity is the main theme. It took a father and a son,
- 5 *and gave them a misunderstanding*, as well as take a husband and wife, *and*
- 6 *gave them a shallow hatred of the other . . .* Big Daddy lived amongst liars all
- 7 his life, but he was very tolerant . . . His wife believed that *nothing was never*
- 8 *wrong*, and never questioned him . . . Brick's whole life turned into a lie . . . He
- 9 had played football with Skipper . . . Margaret never lied but once in the
- 10 movie, but it was soon rectified. From *coming up poor*, and hungry
- 11 Maggie knew what it was like not to have material things. . . . In conclusion
- 12 we see that love prevails, even over such a thing as mendacity. We see how
- 13 mendacity tore down a family, and how it made people believe. This same
- 14 thing exists now, but how will you handle it?

Most educators recognize that this student used a characteristic syntactic feature of AAEV, a double negative, in line 7 of the text; and a common African American idiom, "coming up poor," in line 10. Many educators would not, however, recognize that the student also used another characteristic feature of AAEV, repetition and skill in creating formulaic patterning, in lines 1 and 2 and lines 5 and 6 of this text. This strategy, although often found in students' texts, is not generally acknowledged as a feature of AAEV. Smitherman (1977) posited that African American modes of discourse include "verbal strategies, rhetorical devices, and folk expressive rituals which derive from a mutually understood notion of [Black] modes of discourse, which in turn is part of the rich inheritance of the African background" (p. 103). In the tradition of the African American preacher, these modes of discourse include

rhythmic, dramatic, and sermonic language produced in tones reminiscent of traditional Black church rhetoric in which repetition and formulaic patterning are used to evoke an image or mood, to drive a point home, or to give special emphasis to a message.

The following text was written by the same female writer of the text above. The text was written in an informal writing session at a pizza party. The students had been asked to write an informal letter to someone they felt comfortable communicating with. Again, the students were allowed to select their own topic, audience, and purpose in writing the piece. This student chose to write a letter to her girlfriend describing her reflections on self-destruction.

1 Dear Michell,
 2 Hey girl *what's up?* I'm *sittin'* here *talkin'* to you for an assignment. I
 3 guess I *wanna* talk to you about Self Destruction. Personally I don't know anyone
 4 who *use* drugs but I do know people who are *hard-headed and ignorant*. And we
 5 both know girls who are always in trouble, excluding us of course. To many girls
 6 out there are getting pregnant, and using drugs at the same time they don't even
 7 care. And all *this Stupid Stuff w/colors*, you know, *Red & Blue, Crips & Bloods*,
 8 that's all *B.S. Just another reason to shoot a brother*. It's like *Kool Moe Dee* said
 9 "I never even ran from the Ku Klux Klan and I shouldn't have to run from a black
 10 Man cause that's Self Destruction." And it's *a serious* trip how most violence to
 11 Blacks is done by blacks! And then theres discrimination between blacks because
 12 of lighter and darker shades. Like, when people call me white girl, before of
 13 course I got this tan. I'm *sorta* glad I'm not that light anymore. but I'm still *__[judged]*
 14 by the way I talk because it's too proper, but that's *just the way I was brought up*.
 15 Whenever I'm talking on the phone to Marcus when his friends talk to me they right
 16 away assume I'm white. But I don't get mad, I'm used to it. It get's me mad when
 17 they think that I think that I am better than them. But I don't think that. I guess it's
 18 from growing up in Smithtown, *all white* very few blacks. And another thing I hate
 19 is drugs. That's stupid too. Drugs ruin peoples life and it's even worse that people
 20 are willing to die for them.
 21 Well I guess I'll be going now, I'll call you when I get home tonight.
 Love Always,
 Ayana
 "The one & only"

This text illustrates one of the many instances where the students interspersed a brief narrative in the body of their texts to enrich their expository writing. In this text, the student produces a letter to her friend as part of a summer writing assignment. She selects a topic familiar to most inner-city residents: self-destruction. She draws heavily on a common awareness of life experiences around gangs and incorporates jargon and slang terms immediately identifiable

by anyone who shares her day-to-day experiences (lines 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 13, and 14). She even draws on familiar songs that she assumes her reader will immediately identify with (line 9/10). She then adds a brief personal story to emphasize the point she is trying to make about discrimination. Dyson and Genishi (1994) spoke of the "need for story" for individuals across cultures and communities for providing "some kind of social connection and feeling of mutuality" (p. 5). Dyson also suggested that stories serve a basic function in connecting the diverse sociocultural landscapes of our country and that they have potential for becoming a powerful tool for sharing and interpreting cultures in our classrooms. Erickson (1984) documented the use of stories in the form of narratives, anecdotes, and parables by AAEV speakers as a strategy for giving "a metaphorically concrete manifestation of an underlying abstract point or moral" (p. 91). This coherence device or strategy is used by AAEV speakers to link a text together around an underlying similarity of point.

In my analyses of the case study files collected on these students over the course of the 1-year study, I noted that all four students interspersed narratives within their texts as a strategy for implicitly linking their topics through a singular or series of personal anecdotes. Sometimes, when using this strategy, the themes of their texts were not overtly obvious to the casual reader. As explained by Erickson (1984), this is a characteristic feature of AAEV that asserts that it is not necessary to state the underlying point of the story explicitly—indeed, it would be inappropriate—because the culturally informed receiver could be counted on to get the point based on the receiver's assumed communicative competence. Other readers who shared the writer's background could immediately understand the message as logical and well formulated. I noticed, however, that when these students completed academic writing assignments they generally made explicit associations among topics and marked their topic shifts with terms such as *then*, *but*, and *on the other hand*.

Taken together, this analysis of the four students' formal and informal texts revealed that, just as they have demonstrated an

ability to skillfully manipulate AAEV, mainstream, and academic English during their oral discussions—style switching with ease—they have also demonstrated an ability to intersperse culturally influenced literacy patterns into their expository writing. They have skillfully demonstrated their ability to incorporate into their writing what Smitherman (1977) referred to as African American modes of discourse, namely, interactive inclusion of the audience when they feel it appropriate by using phrases such as “You know what I’m saying? You know” and style shifting to create an atmosphere of involvement with their audience. Variations in the level of formality in their word choice, sentence length, sense of engagement, distance or detachment with the audience, and incorporating the use of narratives to establish a personal link with the topic were the most widely used strategies to incorporate culturally influenced strategies in their texts. In many cases, the writers left their readers with some final word of advice or challenge. The second Emerson essay left the audience with the challenge, “He urged us to find our true talents and to use them to the fullest”; the Malcolm and Martin piece leaves us to ponder, “That’s what white man’s been doing”; the third Emerson essay closes with, “I’m sure he was also a misunderstood individual. I will leave *you* with this little bit of information to conclude my report”; and Mendacity leaves the reader with the challenge, “This same thing exists now, but how will you handle it?”

These strategies appear to be used deliberately, chosen to establish a particular mood. This is especially evident because they are more generally found in the student’s informal writing. The students appear to strategically choose literacy devices they feel are appropriate for different audiences. These students also incorporated folk idioms, patterns of repetition, and other traditionally African American styles of expression in their writing. I noted, however, that a broader range of discourse patterns and text representations were evident in the students’ informal texts and on classroom assignments when the teacher allowed the students to select their own topic and audience.

DISCUSSION

This study supports Graves's (1983) contention that students bring to the classroom a great deal of competence and natural aptitude for producing academic and nonacademic texts. Halliday (1978) argued that the problem of educational failure is not a linguistic problem, if by linguistic we mean a problem of different urban dialects. Rather, educational problems associated with language use have not been understood as difficulties with joining unfamiliar discourse communities (Bartholomae, 1985). Academic failure and high drop-out rates are associated with students' failing to adapt to the language use patterns dominant within the academic discourse community. It is often suggested that language-minority students perform poorly in school because they lack the ability to deal with language in an analytic manner. These students may, however, be experiencing difficulty in school for other reasons. They may exhibit their knowledge and skills in ways not readily identified by mainstream teachers. Certain types of literacy practices may be culturally appropriate within the student's own community but judged as inappropriate elsewhere. However, these culturally distinct ways of using language do not suggest deficiencies in mental ability. Heath (1983) suggested that the problems African American children of low socioeconomic status encounter in school are directly related to (a) the language and literacy practices required in the school that differ from those used in their homes and (b) the inability of the school to recognize many of the language and literacy skills diverse students bring to school with them.

The objectives of this article were to expand the notion of available resources that can be used in classroom learning and to provide teachers with information that will help them to reconceptualize instruction and create richer, more productive curricula. The first goal was accomplished (a) by demonstrating explicit specific instances when academically successful African American students included culturally influenced strategies and styles of expression in their writing and (b) by illustrating how these inclusions can be identified so they can then be viewed as positive stylistic strategies rather than random instances of poor writing. Some of the culturally

influenced writing strategies these students used include repetition to create formulaic patterns, establishing a link or sense of rapport with the audience through the use of inclusive lexical terms such as *we're*, taking on a quality of performance in the style and delivery of the text, using orally based patterns to organize their ideas, using interactive dialogue with the audience with phrases such as "You know what I'm saying? You know," using common African American idioms that assume mutual understanding based on similar cultural experiences, and linking topics through the use of personal anecdotes.

The second goal of this article can be accomplished as teachers embrace an additive model for language learning and language use. This model helps teachers to see each student's culturally influenced styles of expression as resources and to encourage the maintenance of such styles as students gain proficiency in the use of other discourse patterns. To embrace this model, teachers must recognize that students participate in many discourse communities (home, school, workplace, etc.) and that each of these communities may have preferred norms (i.e., specialized vocabulary, politeness norms, organizational patterns, etc.). Teachers must also come to value the language and literacy practices used by diverse students. A sociocognitive view of language acknowledges and supports the notion that different cultures may value and use particular language and literacy behaviors not practiced in other discourse communities. The academically successful AAEV speakers in this study were able to move comfortably within at least two discourse communities. The fact that they are academically successful means that they have mastered the specialized literacies and rhetorical conventions of academic discourse. Their continued acceptance as members of the AAEV-speaking community means that they have developed proficiencies in the literacy skills necessary for both communities. They are effective code switchers. For them, the social environment determines the appropriate register to use at any particular time. These students recognize that the consequence of not making the required social and cognitive adjustments and of failing to adopt appropriate language use patterns within different discourse communities could result in academic failure within the

school setting or being labeled a "lame" within their informal vernacular speaking discourse communities. These students recognize that acknowledging the influence of social factors is essential for developing effective interactions within the various discourse communities they come in contact with on a daily basis.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Over the past 20 years, the development of a narrowly defined range of accepted text design patterns and forms of expression that students are taught for comprehending and composing academic texts has been coupled with educational reports documenting the school's failure in the area of writing instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1986; Mullis, Owen, & Phillips, 1990; National Assessment of Education Progress, 1990). Although many African American students demonstrate strengths in the use of narrative structures early in their educational careers (Heath, 1983), they are required to demonstrate increasing expertise with varying types of expository discourse, generally without receiving much instruction on how to handle these materials. Some students are able to learn organizational patterns of exposition from materials they read or hear and are able to transfer this knowledge when composing expository texts. Other students either are not able to absorb and/or transfer this knowledge or they choose not to, preferring rather to maintain the use of their community-based vernacular patterns regardless of the discourse community they find themselves in.

In response to this realization, educational reformers are calling for changes in the ways educators think about teaching expository writing. No longer encouraged to view writing as a mechanical skill, writing instructors are turning to the resources and challenges found in multicultural education philosophies as lenses for viewing writing as "participation in a dialogue." Bakhtin (1981) has argued that the voices—or articulations of consciousness—are shaped by particular social and cultural histories. He emphasizes the dialogic, or multivoiced, nature of language and suggests that we create

meaning as a new whole that is achieved in dialogue between the self and others. Bakhtin reminds us that our words are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels us to remember that they will always belong in the mouths of others in time and space. This makes us consciously aware of the importance of respecting the voices of others. As educators and researchers acknowledge the presence of diverse voices, they can then have the

knowledge and skills needed to help transform the curricular canon as well as the hearts and minds of their students. Only then will students in our schools and colleges be able to attain the knowledge, skills, and perspectives needed to participate effectively in next century's mainstream society. (Banks, 1991)

The key, therefore, to future directions for educational practice and research in expository writing lies in the notion of multiple voices—with an emphasis on acknowledging the value in diverse voices and in cultivating a desire to actually “hear” those voices. Within traditional writing classrooms, however, exposition continues to lack broad participation of diverse voices in identifying, constructing, and formulating the knowledge we expect all students to master. The presence of voices representing literacy practices among African Americans, both past and present, are particularly absent. Yet anthropologists, social historians, folklorists, and this research have detailed the rich verbal tradition characteristic of this culture (Heath, 1989). The research reported on in this article further suggests that African American students bring rich resources to the classroom in the form of text design patterns and styles of expression previously unrecognized in academic settings. Resources also lie in students' abilities to interactively include audiences in their writings, to draw on culturally based idioms and expressions, and to use personal anecdotes to enrich their work and implicitly link their topics. To translate these devices into practices that promote strategic school change, innovations must take place at several levels—the classroom, teacher training, and in research (Cummins, 1986).

At the classroom level, African American adolescents' preferred text design patterns and modes of expression should be included in the curriculum not only as a building block for bridging African

American students' community-based experiences with academic-based text design patterns and expressions but also as a rich resource of knowledge that all students should know as they broaden their abilities to express their ideas in a variety of forms. The inclusion of these devices into the writing curriculum is a strategy that is in keeping with other approaches that have successfully used the experiences of the students to enrich learning experiences. Heath's (1983) *Ways With Words*, Moll (1988) and Moll, Amani, Neff, and Gonzalez's (1990) *connecting homes and classrooms*, Hawaii's Kamehameha Early Education Program (Au & Jordan, 1981), and Lee's (1993) *use of signifying as a scaffold for literary interpretation* are examples of noteworthy projects in which the children's background, language, and culture are used as the basis for their education. Rather than avoid the students' experiences, these programs consciously seek them out and use them as the major source of the curriculum. The results are positive.

At the teacher training level, programs require radical change so that teachers gain an appreciation for the role they must play in allowing diverse voices to be heard, to be legitimized, and to be leveraged. A radical shift of priorities in the use of time within teacher preparation programs would eventually have to occur if such perspectives are to take hold among future teachers. Teachers must be trained in the selection and allocation of instructional resources, materials, and methodologies that are representative of a wide variety of different ethnic and cultural group experiences (Gay, 1988). In order for classrooms to become places where hearing diverse voices becomes a natural and constant phenomenon, teachers must demonstrate how it is done; they must be initiators of dialogues in which the presence of diverse voices are appreciated and rewarded. To do this, they must engage personally in activities that make their own lives and communities more culturally sensitive and diverse. Ideally, this training should begin in teacher preparation programs, while preservice teachers are still receiving the support needed for experimentation with new ideas and techniques. Then classrooms can become places where diverse voices and, yes, even Fine's (1987) "disruptive voices" will be a welcome and celebrated sound.

Finally, at the research level, work must move forward within an interdisciplinary arena in which the diverse voices of researchers come together to validate expressions of diversity. As Dyson and Freedman (1991) pointed out, we must all take significant and positive steps toward building a more powerful theoretical framework for writing research and instruction by expanding our framework to

include more analytic attention to how the complex of sociocultural experiences enter into literacy learning experiences that have roots in social class, ethnicity, language background, family, neighborhood, and gender. Without serious attention to the unfolding of this wider cultural frame in literacy learning, our vision of the whole remains partially obscured. (p. 4)

The research reported on in this article contributes to this sociocultural framework, allowing insight not simply into the diversity of our student populations but more critically into the diversity of resources students bring to the classroom. The research helps to increase our understanding of students' natural expository patterns and strategies for self-expression useful for academic success. It also identifies linguistic resources within the cultural diversity of student populations that can empower students and enrich school curricula. This investigation reveals how academically successful African American adolescents actualize a sense of self by synthesizing creative contributions within their texts. As Smitherman contends, these organizational discourse structures appear to be derived from a mutually understood notion of the African American modes of discourse within the African American community. The analysis included here provides illustrations of how these students use a variety of culturally influenced patterns, styles, and strategies to express their ideas.

IMPLICATIONS

Today's multicultural society challenges educators to reconceptualize instruction as part of a broad-based school reform movement (see Abdullah, Kamberelis, & McGinley, 1992; Banks, 1991; Gay, 1988; Nieto, 1992). The challenges call for richer and more

productive learning environments, diverse instructional strategies, and a more profound awareness of the role culture and language play in education. Within such contexts, writing classrooms for culturally diverse students can become places where multiple voices are both heard and legitimized, including the voices of students whose cultural practices have been transmitted by oral as well as by written traditions. To have a meaningful impact, this reconceptualization must consist of more than mere token inserts of ethnicity, gender, and class into existing curricular structures and paradigms. Rather, more radical transformations of the curriculum must take place—transformations that validate the cultural and intellectual resources of students and motivate them to interpret literacy from varying critical perspectives. These transformations must encourage the acquisition of knowledge and understanding that reflect the broad spectrum of interests, experiences, hopes, and voices of a diverse society (Banks, 1991) and must revolve around the identification and transformation of ideologies and social conditions that undermine the struggle for creating a better future for all (Giroux, 1987). Under old paradigms of instruction, those who defined knowledge and decided what was most important in the classroom generally selected materials that reflected the dominant culture and societal views and made curricular and pedagogical choices that manifested their own backgrounds, education, and experiences. Thus the instruction that most students receive represents only a fraction of currently available knowledge, depriving them of background knowledge relevant to changing trends in today's mainstream society. According to Nieto (1992), what is needed is the expansion of what we define as basic by opening up the curriculum to a variety of perspectives and experiences and by charting new directions for instruction.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, S., Kamberelis, G., & McGinley, W. (1992). Literacy, identity, and resistance within the African-American slave community and some reflections for new forms of literacy pedagogy. In National Reading Conference (Ed.), *Literacy, research, theory, and practice: Views from many perspectives. Forty-first yearbook* (pp. 379-391). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

- Abrahams, R. (1970). *Deep down in the jungle: Negro narrative folklore from the streets of Philadelphia*. Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates.
- Abrahams, R. (1976). *Talking Black*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Anderson, E. (1981). Language and success. *College English*, 43, 807-817.
- Applebee, A., Langer, J., & Mullis, I. (1986). *The writing report card: Writing achievement in American schools*. Princeton, NJ: National Assessment of Education Progress.
- Au, K., & Jordan, C. (1981). Teaching reading to Hawaiian children: Finding a culturally appropriate solution. In H. Trueba, G. Guthrie, & K. Au (Eds.), *Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography* (pp. 139-152). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ball, A. F. (1992). Cultural preference and the expository writing of African-American adolescents. *Written Communication*, 9, 501-532.
- Ball, A. F. (in press). Errors, expectations, or efficacy: Evaluating the writing of culturally and linguistically diverse students—The case of the African American English speaker. In C. R. Cooper & L. Odell (Eds.), *Evaluating writing* (2nd ed.). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Banks, J. A. (1991). Multicultural literacy and curriculum reform. *Educational Horizons*, 69, 135-140.
- Bartholomae, D. (1985). Inventing the university. In M. Rose (Ed.), *When a writer can't write: Studies in writer's block and other composing process problems* (pp. 134-165). New York: Guilford.
- Baugh, J. (1981). Design and implementation of writing instruction for speakers of non-standard English: Perspectives for a national neighborhood literacy program. In B. Cronnell (Ed.), *The writing needs of linguistically different students*. Los Alamitos, CA: SWIRL Research and Development.
- Baugh, J. (1988). Review of twice as less: Black English and the performance of Black students in mathematics and science by Eleanor Wilson Orr. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 395-403.
- Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). *Turning point: Preparing American youth for the 21st century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation.
- Cazden, C., & Leggett, E. (1981). Culturally responsive education: Recommendations for achieving Lau remedies II. In H. Trueba, G. Guthrie, & K. Au (Eds.), *Culture and the bilingual classroom: Studies in classroom ethnography* (pp. 69-86). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Chafe, W., & Danielewicz, J. (1987). Properties of spoken and written language. In R. Horowitz & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *Comprehending oral and written language* (pp. 83-113). New York: Academic Press.
- Collins, J. (1985). Some problems and purposes of narrative analysis in educational research. *Journal of Education*, 167, 57-70.
- Cook, W. W. (1985). The African American griot. In C. K. Brooks (Ed.), *Tapping potential: English and language arts for the African-American learner*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Cook-Gumperz, J., & Gumperz, J. J. (1981). From oral to written discourse: The transition to literacy. In M. F. Whiteman (Ed.), *Variation in writing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(1), 18-36.
- Delpit, L. D. (1992). Acquisition of literate discourse: Bowing before the master. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(4), 296-302.
- Dyson, A. H. (1991). *The case of the singing scientist: A performance perspective on the "stages" of school literacy* (Tech. Rep. No. 53). Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Writing.
- Dyson, A. H., & Freedman, S. W. (1991). *Critical challenges for research on writing and literacy: 1990-1995* (Tech. Rep. No. 1-B). Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Writing.
- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (1994). *The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Erickson, F. (1984). Rhetoric, anecdote, and rhapsody: Coherence strategies in a conversation among African-American American adolescents. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Coherence in spoken and written discourse* (pp. 81-154). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Fine, M. (1987). Silencing in public schools. *Language Arts*, 64, 157-174.
- Gay, G. (1988). Designing relevant curricula for diverse learners. *Education and Urban Society*, 20, 327-340.
- Gee, J. P. (1985). The narrativization of experience in the oral style. *Journal of Education*, 167, 9-31.
- Gee, J. P. (1989a). Literacy, discourse, and linguistics: Introduction. *Journal of Education*, 171(1), 5-17.
- Gee, J. P. (1989b). What is literacy? *Journal of Education*, 171(1), 18-25.
- Gee, J. P. (1990). *Sociolinguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. New York: The Former Press.
- Giroux, H. (1987). Critical literacy and student experiences: Donald Graves' approach to literacy. *Language Arts*, 64, 175-181.
- Golden, J. L., & Rieke, R. D. (1971). *The rhetoric of African-American Americans*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.
- Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing teachers and children at work*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1978). Language as a social semiotic. In *Language in urban society*. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1989). Oral and literate traditions among African-American Americans living in poverty. *American Psychologist*, 44, 367-373.
- Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in sociolinguistics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Irvine, J. (1990). *Black students and school failure*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Kochman, T. (1972). *Rappin' and stylin' out: Communication in urban Black America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Kochman, T. (1981). *Black and white styles in conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kohl, H. (1991). *I won't learn from you! The role of assent in education*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.
- Labov, W. (1969). The logic of non-standard English: Report of the 21st Annual Round Table on Linguistics and Language Studies. In J. E. Altis (Ed.), *Monograph series on language and linguistics* (Vol. 23). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Labov, W. (1972). *The design of a sociolinguistic research project*. Mysore, India: Central Institute of Indian Languages.

- Ladsen-Billings, G. (1992). Culturally relevant teaching: The key to making multicultural education work. In C. Grant (Ed.), *Research and multicultural education* (pp. 106-121). Washington, DC: Farmer.
- Lee, C. (1993). *Signifying as a scaffold for literary interpretation: The pedagogical implications of an African American discourse genre*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Michaels, S. (1985). Hearing the connection in children's oral and written discourse. *Journal of Education*, 167, 36-71.
- Moll, L. C. (1988). Some key issues in teaching Latino students. *Language Arts*, 65, 465-472.
- Moll, L. C., Amani, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1990). *Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms*.
- Moss, B. J. (1988). *The Black sermon as a literary event*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Chicago.
- Mullis, I.V.S., Owen, E. H., & Phillips, G. W. (1990). *America's challenge: Accelerating academic achievement. A summary of findings from 20 years of NAEP*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- National Assessment of Education Progress. (1990). *The Writing Report Card, 1984-88: Findings from the nation's report card*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Nieto, S. (1992). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. New York: Longman.
- Pollard, D. S. (1993). Gender, achievement, and African-American students' perceptions of their school experience. *Educational Psychologist*, 28(4), 341-356.
- Quality Education for Minority Project. (1990). *Education that works: An action plan for the education of minorities*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Rosenberg, B. A. (1988). *Can these dry bones live? The art of the American folk preacher*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Smitherman, G. (1977). *Talkin and testifin: The language of African-American America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Smitherman, G. (1994). The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice: African American student writers. In A. H. Dyson & C. Genishi (Eds.), *The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community* (pp. 80-101). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Whiteman, M. F. (1976). *Dialect influence and the writing of African-American and White working class Americans*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.
- Wolfram, W. A. (1969). *A sociolinguistic description of Detroit Negro speech*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.