

Preparing Teachers for Dialectally Diverse Classrooms

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Scholarship on dialect diversity in classrooms has yielded two seemingly incompatible lines of research. Although numerous pedagogical approaches have been shown to provide productive alternatives to traditional responses to stigmatized dialects, research on public perceptions and teachers' attitudes suggests that negative beliefs about stigmatized dialects and the students who speak them are deeply entrenched in U.S. society. The authors argue that teacher preparation grounded in sociolinguistic understandings of dialect diversity can help teachers develop productive pedagogical responses to students' language choices. Drawing on previous research and their own work with teachers, the authors present a framework for preparing teachers for dialectally diverse classrooms. Recommendations include anticipating resistance, addressing issues of identity and power, and emphasizing pedagogical applications of sociolinguistic research.

In *Making the Connection: Language and Academic Achievement Among African American Students*, Geneva Smitherman wrote, "As far as language diversity and language attitudes are concerned, the school remains a critical agent of social change" (1999, p. 117). When the authors of the present article organized a panel on literacy

instruction for speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) at the 2006 AERA Annual Meeting, we had Geneva Smitherman's sentiments very much in mind. In our research in predominantly African American K–12 classrooms, we had seen firsthand the damaging effects of widespread beliefs about and pedagogical responses to students who speak AAVE and other stigmatized dialects, beliefs such as "Rajid can't do challenging work—just listen to the way he talks," and pedagogical responses such as repeatedly interrupting a student during oral reading to correct "missing" word endings or "improper" grammar. As researchers and educators, we are fundamentally concerned with addressing the social and educational inequities reproduced in such moments. Likewise, we share a commitment to studying and implementing innovative ways to challenge existing beliefs about dialect diversity and to provide literacy instruction that meets the needs of students who speak stigmatized dialects. However, research on language attitudes and language-related controversies has demonstrated that negative beliefs about the grammaticality, logic, and even morality of stigmatized dialects are widespread in U.S. society and difficult to change (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Perry & Delpit, 1998).

Linguistic research defines a *dialect*, or *language variety*, as a variety of a language that is associated with a particular regional or social group. Contrary to popular understanding, *dialect* does not mean a lesser, informal, or ungrammatical way of speaking; in fact, long-established linguistic research has demonstrated that all dialects are equally structured and logical, though they may vary in pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammatical patterns (Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999). In this article, we use the terms *stigmatized dialects* and *vernacular dialects* interchangeably to refer

to the varieties of English often devalued in schools, business, government, and the media. The term *stigmatized* highlights the prejudicial social attitudes that mark these dialects and the people who speak them. In the United States, highly stigmatized dialects include AAVE, Appalachian English, Chicano English, and many others. We use the term *Standard English* to refer to the dialects of English valued in school, business, government, and the media because it is the term most commonly used in educational and linguistic research. Scientific research on language demonstrates that standard dialects are not linguistically better by any objective measures; they are socially preferred simply because they are the language varieties used by those who are most powerful and affluent in a society. In addition, although schools often refer to Standard English as if it were a single dialect, there are numerous regional standard dialects in the United States and around the world, as well as significant structural differences between written and spoken Standard Englishes.

In this article, we argue that teacher education grounded in linguistic research and principles can change teachers' dialect-related attitudes and practices, and we offer research-based suggestions for effective teacher education on dialect diversity. Our article is limited to research conducted in U.S. contexts, though we recognize that important scholarship on sociolinguistic diversity in education has been conducted elsewhere (Siegel, 1999). In addition, our article draws primarily from research conducted on teachers' responses to and beliefs about AAVE, the dialect of English spoken in many African American communities, because AAVE is the most extensively researched dialect of American English in linguistic and educational scholarship. However, we believe that this article and

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the research it reports have implications and offer solutions for preparing teachers for a variety of dialectally diverse classrooms. Although we do not wish to suggest that the needs of all learners are interchangeable, we do believe that all students benefit from a teacher who is prepared to approach student language from a sociolinguistic perspective that expects, values, and affirms diverse ways of speaking.

The Critical Role of Teacher Education

Why should educational researchers and teacher educators make it a priority to prepare teachers to develop more appropriate responses to dialect diversity? The most important reason is that the dominant pedagogical responses to stigmatized dialects are damaging and counterproductive. A substantial body of scholarship has demonstrated strong connections between teachers' negative attitudes about stigmatized dialects, lower teacher expectations for students who speak them, and thus lower academic achievement on the part of students (Bowie & Bond, 1994; Ferguson, 1998). For example, teachers are more likely to give lower evaluations to work presented orally by African American students, even when that work is equal in quality to work presented by White students (Crowl & MacGinitie, 1974; Taylor, 1973). Furthermore, language use contributes to more general teacher expectations and evaluations. Studies demonstrate that White teachers negatively evaluate the intelligence, social characteristics, and academic potential of children who speak in a recognizably African American style (Cazden, 2001; Scott & Smitherman, 1985). Numerous studies have also documented how teachers underestimate or overlook the linguistic abilities of students who speak AAVE, Puerto Rican English, and other vernacular dialects, even though researchers have documented the breadth of such students' linguistic repertoires and their awareness of code-switching (switching between dialects) and style-shifting in various social contexts (Alim, 2004; Godley & Minnici, 2006; Zentella, 1997). Finally, the work of Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggests that teachers' negative beliefs about AAVE contribute to African American students' oppositional stance toward school culture. Thus we know that failure to recognize the value and grammaticality of AAVE and other stigmatized

dialects is harmful to the academic success of students who speak these dialects. Insisting that teachers understand and respond appropriately to AAVE and other stigmatized dialects is an essential component of any effort to eradicate the continuing academic "achievement gap" between students of color and White students (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999).

In order to successfully prepare teachers for dialectally diverse classrooms, teacher educators and educational researchers must begin by responding more vigorously to Alim's call "for a critical interdisciplinary dialogue between educators and sociolinguists" (2005, p. 25). Language informs every aspect of the teaching-learning dynamic, yet nearly one third of members of the leading language arts professional organizations have never taken a course on language diversity or linguistics (Smitherman & Villanueva, 2000). Furthermore, few studies of teacher preparation for dialect diversity can be found in the educational or linguistic literature (Rickford, Sweetland, & Rickford, 2004). There are, however, encouraging studies that provide valuable insight into paths to teacher change. Ball and Muhammad (2003) documented the positive changes in teachers' belief systems about language as a result of university coursework involving critical discussions of language and power. Other studies have demonstrated that teachers who are exposed to basic sociolinguistic principles are more likely to reject the most extreme stereotypes associated with stigmatized language varieties (Bowie & Bond, 1994; Pietras & Lamb, 1978). The results of a recent survey of the members of the two leading language arts organizations, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), revealed that teachers and professors who had taken courses in American dialects or on AAVE reported less prescriptive attitudes toward stigmatized dialects (Smitherman & Villanueva). These studies, and our own experiences, affirm that teaching teachers about sociolinguistic diversity is not in vain.

Curriculum and Pedagogy for Teacher Education on Dialect Diversity

Drawing on previous research and our collective experience, we highlight three themes that might serve as a foundation for courses

and programs on dialect diversity for in-service or preservice teachers: (a) anticipating and overcoming resistance to dialect diversity; (b) addressing issues of language, identity, and power; and (c) emphasizing practical, pedagogical applications of research on language variation. In the following sections, we explore the methods and dilemmas associated with a sociolinguistic approach to dialect diversity in the classroom.

Anticipating and Overcoming Resistance

The task of persuading and preparing teachers to support alternative approaches to stigmatized dialects is a difficult one. Two challenges stand in the way. First, negative attitudes toward the use of stigmatized dialects are not limited to teachers. Assumptions about the ungrammaticality, undesirability, and inappropriateness of AAVE, for instance, are widespread in U.S. society (Baugh, 2003; Lippi-Green, 1997). Often these commonsense beliefs, or *language ideologies* (Wassink & Curzan, 2004), are grounded in standard language ideology (Milroy, 2001), a set of beliefs holding that standard varieties of English are logically, stylistically, and even morally superior to stigmatized dialects. Standard English ideology relies especially on the role of teachers, who are often positioned by institutions, students, parents, and themselves as privileged authorities on language. English Language Arts teachers often believe that part of their responsibility is to guide students to a "correct" understanding of the English language—an understanding that often frames language as monolithic, static, and prescriptive (Milroy). In the face of such widespread misconceptions about AAVE and other stigmatized dialects, it can be difficult to gain the political, public, and long-term institutional support that is essential to effective programs of professional development.

The second barrier to preparing teachers for dialectally diverse classrooms is the difficulty in changing teachers' beliefs (Blake & Cutler, 2003). Teachers' beliefs tend to be stable over time (Kagan, 1992) and may be particularly resistant to change when deeply held and related to issues of personal identity (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Research suggests that this sort of deeply entrenched system of beliefs encumbers teachers' attitudes toward pedagogy, students of

color, and language (Bol & Berry, 2005; Terrill & Mark, 2000). Scholarship on the language ideologies surrounding stigmatized dialects and teachers' beliefs (Cross, DeVaney, & Jones, 2001; Smitherman & Villanueva, 2000) paints a gloomy picture of the potential for changing pedagogical responses to dialect diversity. Blake and Cutler reported that the urban K–12 teachers whom they surveyed considered AAVE “inappropriate for the classroom and, moreover, unprofitable for its speakers. . . . Few support programs for [stigmatized] dialect speakers or learning strategies employing AAE as a tool” (p. 188).

However, assuming that teachers will be resistant to the naturalness of dialect diversity or portraying teacher beliefs about language as monolithic can be counterproductive. Preliminary research suggests that close readings of teachers' views about stigmatized dialects reveal a variety of beliefs about dialect diversity. Carpenter and Minnici (2006) found that preservice teachers often expressed contradictory and complex attitudes toward AAVE and its relation to schooling. For instance, when a preservice teacher asserted, in a posting to an electronic discussion board, that teachers “should be careful not to dismiss the intelligence of students who speak ebonics because that is the language they have been raised to speak,” another preservice teacher replied:

I agree that it is just how some kids talk. And it's hard to correct them because they might get embarrassed and not talk in front [sic] of the class anymore. So I think that schools that have a problem with this should make a class dedicated to helping them learn proper english [sic].

Carpenter and Minnici concluded that the preservice teachers' use of modality (such as “I think” and “should”) and other linguistic features in their electronic postings positioned them along a continuum of beliefs about AAVE and its place in schooling. The authors argued that the teachers' beliefs about AAVE and education, although typically unsupportive of a dialectally diverse classroom, were still open to debate and change. Their research suggests that fine-grained analyses of teachers' statements about stigmatized dialects and pedagogical responses to them may be more valid indicators of teachers' beliefs than the quantitative surveys often employed in research on language attitudes.

Another promising approach for overcoming teachers' resistance to language diversity is to ask teachers to study the variation present in their own linguistic repertoires (Wilson, 2001). Differences between informal oral and formal written language are well documented (Biber, 1991; Schleppegrell, 2004). Thus, even when teachers identify themselves as speakers of Standard English, they can learn to recognize varied patterns of language use in their oral and written versions of stories (Krauthamer, 1999) and to view their own language use as varied and context-dependent. In Godley's (2006) work with high school English teachers, she found that comparing oral and written versions of stories led teachers to notice how their own oral narratives used less formal, more repetitive vocabulary, more coordinating connectors such as “and,” and the mixing of verb tenses. Teachers realized that their spoken language was not as “standard” as they had thought: “This is the most pitiful thing to read. I can't believe how I sound,” noted one teacher. Another responded, “But I think it could be any one of us telling the story.” The point of such an exercise is not to critique teachers' ways of speaking but rather to demonstrate the naturalness of language variation and the flaws in standard language ideologies. Teachers can also compare their telling of the same story to two different audiences to learn how their own language use varies according to audience and purpose (Wilson). When teachers who self-identify as Standard English speakers recognize that they themselves vary their style of language from setting to setting, they may view students' language variation more positively.

Another way to counter resistance to the message of dialect equality is to place written and spoken Standard English in the context of a wider range of language choices that all speakers make according to context, purpose, and audience. In so doing, we can de-center, rather than devalue, the role of Standard English while making room for other “ways with words” (Heath, 1983). The metaphor of “language as repertoire” may prove especially powerful, particularly because U.S. schools often recognize only one legitimate variety of the English language—written Standard English (Dyson, 2004)—even as educational researchers call attention to the many

forms and uses of language in our lives (Luke, 2004).

Finally, the most common recommendation for overcoming teacher resistance is simply to teach teachers about the natural variation found in any language (Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999). Without an understanding of language as varied and context-dependent, teachers will be unable to view stigmatized dialect speakers as successful language and literacy learners, even if they are told that students' dialects are rule-governed. Teachers may not develop more effective responses to dialect diversity until they understand and are convinced of the basic sociolinguistic principles of language/dialect diversity, language change, linguistic conceptions of grammaticality, and the social value of vernacular dialects. But teacher education and outreach must focus explicitly on affirming the value of vernacular varieties in order to have the most impact. Smitherman and Villanueva (2000) found that general courses on language (they refer, for example, to courses such as “Introduction to the English Language” and “Linguistics for Teachers”) had no observable effect on teachers' self-reported language attitudes and practices.

Whatever the method chosen to overcome teacher resistance to sociolinguistic principles of dialect diversity, public responses to language controversies and our own experiences suggest that the careful selection of terminology is crucial. The uproar following the 1996 Oakland school board's decision to recognize “Ebonics” as the primary language of the district's African American student population provides one cautionary tale. In some cases, teachers may be more open to accepting that their students' vernacular dialects are rule-governed and to incorporating these dialects into language and literacy learning if the dialects are not initially discussed with racialized terminology such as AAVE. Indeed, Wheeler has found that teachers and school and central office administrators will listen to and learn sociolinguistic approaches *only* when she uses race-neutral terms such as “Informal English” or “Everyday English.” Furthermore, research has demonstrated that links between socio-cultural and linguistic identities are complex (Alim, 2004); not all African American students view their identification as African Americans as central to their way of speaking, instead viewing other aspects of their

identities (such as age, music, and neighborhood affiliations) as equally or more important (Godley & Minnici, 2006).

Addressing Issues of Language, Power, and Identity

Although teacher educators must plan appropriately for resistance to a sociolinguistic perspective, we agree with Cochran-Smith (1995) that teachers must address the dysfunctional system of schooling head on by recognizing that teaching is “a political activity” and that teachers should embrace “social change as a part of the job” (p. 494). Responding productively to dialect diversity in the classroom requires that teachers become willing to teach for social change, as the very act of affirming vernacular language runs counter to mainstream language ideologies. For these reasons, explicit discussions of dominant language ideologies, their logic, and their presumptions may contribute to preparing teachers for dialectally diverse classrooms (Ball & Muhammad, 2003). Some researchers believe that such discussions are essential to programs intended to change public perceptions of AAVE and other stigmatized dialects. Advocates of Critical Language Awareness (Fairclough, 1999) have called for a language curriculum that addresses the ways that language choices shape societal structures and conditions, particularly oppressive ones. Wassink and Curzan (2004, p. 175) argued that, “if ideological stances are ignored or left until a later point in the dissemination of information around AAE, then a critical step in the endeavor to make the information relevant and valuable to the public’s will has been missed.”

A small but growing body of research provides a guide for conducting critical discussions of dominant language ideologies with students (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; Godley & Minnici, 2006). Effective classroom discussions have drawn productively on multimedia representations of language attitudes, such as the documentary films *American Tongues* (Alvarez & Kolker, 1987) and *Do You Speak American?* (Cran, 2005), to demonstrate how language is used to reinforce stereotypes and exert power over others. Successful critical approaches to learning about dialect diversity have also asked students to think about the connections between language attitudes and other societal systems of power (e.g., racism) and

to reflect on their own beliefs about language (Ball & Muhammad, 2003; Okawa, 2003). Preparing teachers to engage their own students in these kinds of discussions—which challenge powerful ideologies of standard language and color-blindness—is a formidable endeavor. Therefore, teacher education programs must provide multiple opportunities for teachers to examine and challenge their own beliefs about language use. On the same note, we suggest that the role of language be incorporated into teacher preparation courses that already examine societal and educational inequities from other perspectives.

In addition to preparing teachers to think critically about the role of language in social stratification, teachers should also be pushed to consider the pedagogical implications of the link between language and personal and cultural identity. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) have argued that negative teacher responses to AAVE, as well as a monolithic insistence on Standard English, may contribute to some African American students’ disengagement with the culture of U.S. schools. When teachers engage in the teaching of Standard English, it is important that they frame Standard English as an addition to students’ linguistic repertoires, rather than as a more prestigious, more “correct” substitution for the varieties that students already speak.

Emphasizing Pedagogical Applications of Research on Language Variation

Educational research on pedagogical responses to stigmatized dialects suggests a number of curricular and pedagogical approaches that improve students’ academic success, particularly their literacy learning (Alim, 2005; Rickford, 1999). Less often discussed in the literature is the necessity of including information on these effective practices in teacher education. It is well documented that practitioners may not link theory to practice without specific guidance (Edmundson & Greiner, 2005). For example, Alim (2004) demonstrated how a teacher who was well versed in concepts of dialect diversity still viewed her students’ use of vernacular English in class as reflective of students’ inability to code-switch and as something to “combat” through teaching more Standard English grammar (pp. 185–186). Cross (2003) presented the results of interviews with White teachers who had participated in courses

designed to prepare them to teach in racially and linguistically diverse classrooms. Although the findings initially appeared encouraging because teachers frequently recalled the theme of respecting student language, Cross suggested that much of the teachers’ learning was superficial:

When asked if they were taught how to integrate language diversity into their teaching, the teachers responded no. They stated they were simply taught to avoid put-downs (i.e., public, negative labeling of non-standard English as slang, ghetto, or bad English) and correcting students. They could not recall being taught, for example, how to use the students’ language as a bridge for teaching Standard English, connecting to the students’ culture, examining issues of the social production of language, or to use English as a tool of power and social control. (p. 206)

Thus, if teachers (like the rest of us) are presented with information that does not seem to apply to them, they are likely to disregard it. Only relevant information anchored in practice is likely to affect teacher practice significantly.

Capitalizing on teachers’ orientation to practically relevant information can also lead to changes in language attitudes. Ingram (1989) suggested that teachers who have seen firsthand the positive results of dialect-based instruction develop more liberal views toward language use. Spanjer and Layne (1983) found that teachers trained in “process” approaches to writing developed fewer prescriptive views toward language. Sweetland (2005) demonstrated that inservice programs about sociocultural diversity and the grammatical patterns of AAVE have a greater impact for teachers when paired with hands-on practice. In her study, teachers participated in a 3-day training workshop centered on the principles of sociolinguistic diversity that support culturally sensitive teaching for students who speak AAVE. The workshop incorporated learning activities designed to raise teacher awareness of linguistic prejudice, such as discussing the film *American Tongues* and critiquing teaching scenarios that illustrated desirable and undesirable responses to student language. Throughout the workshop, new information about language variation was connected to classroom teaching. In particular, the technique of teaching Standard English in context through contrastive analysis—the explicit comparison

of the patterns of various dialects—was recommended as a best practice and illustrated through a training video (Los Angeles Unified School District, 1998).

The results of a language attitude survey administered before and after the program demonstrated that all of the teachers' self-reported attitudes toward AAVE improved significantly, but also that a subgroup of teachers who incorporated these dialect awareness activities in their classrooms showed even greater gains. Exit interviews revealed that teachers appreciated the project's emphasis on connecting the theory of dialect equality to pedagogical practice. As one fourth-grade teacher noted, "This project has been really influential for me. I had some linguistics before. . . . I got what they were trying to say, but I didn't know what to *do* with it. They never explained how I was supposed to *change*. This made everything very clear. I know what to do now, and I can see that it works" (Sweetland, 2005).

If changes in attitude can follow from changes in practice, then the classroom implications of sociolinguistic perspectives on dialect diversity should be highlighted in teacher education. Here, we present a few of the pedagogical approaches that we believe could be fruitfully incorporated into professional development opportunities for teachers.

Dialect diversity is a resource, not a deficit. Teacher preparation coursework should emphasize that effective teachers build on students' linguistic resources, including the vernacular dialects they bring to class, in order to develop students' mastery of academic concepts and practices. At a minimum, teachers should be expected to refrain from labeling AAVE or other dialects as ungrammatical, illogical, or slang, as all these terms frame dialect diversity as a deficit. Teachers should be familiarized with approaches in which students draw on vernacular dialects to excel in academic literacy practices such as essay writing and literary analysis (Ball, 1995; Lee, 2006). There are also many examples of *teachers'* using vernacular discourse patterns, such as call-and-response, to enhance instructional delivery (Boone, 2003; Foster, 2001). Linguistic research clearly demonstrates that AAVE should not be merely tolerated in academic settings but should be used as an instructional resource.

Students benefit from learning about dialect diversity. Earlier, we discussed the critical role of dialect awareness for teachers. Preliminary studies suggest that explicit discussions of the natural variety of dialects and styles found within English are beneficial to students, too. A small but growing body of research has demonstrated that teaching students to think like linguists helps them to develop their metalinguistic awareness of how and why language naturally varies according to context (Godley & Minnici, 2006; Sweetland, 2006; Wolfram & Christian, 1989). Godley and Minnici's (2006) study of the implementation of a curricular unit on language variation demonstrated that high school students became more aware of their own code-switching and developed more positive attitudes toward language diversity after viewing *American Tongues* and discussing their own language choices in various contexts such as school, conversations with parents, and visits to other neighborhoods and regions. A teacher who led the unit also reported coming to a better understanding of students' use of language and a more positive view of students' academic potential:

Something that I used to say, but I'm not sure that I totally believed, is that these kids, this particular demographic, are as smart as *any* kids. And when I went through the unit, I realized that the complication of their ideas, the complexity of their thought process, was just as high, just as critical, just as analytical as any other method of communication. It's just a different way of communicating. So I'm talking about, you know, Ebonics and Black English. . . . And so I think that's kinda big because that's breaking down some of my own stereotypes, you know? (Godley, 2006)

The work of Wolfram and his colleagues, who have regularly provided dialect awareness lessons for middle- and high-school students, has provided a model for dialect awareness programs, with a wealth of anecdotal evidence and at least one evaluation (Messner, 1997) demonstrating the program's positive reception. Sweetland (2006) extended this work in dialect awareness to the elementary context. Teachers were provided with a detailed curriculum that included a seven-lesson, kid-friendly unit on language variation. As African American children aged 9 to 11 engaged in children's-literature-based lessons that placed AAVE

in the broader perspective of regional, situational, and social language variation, the students began to articulate pro-AAVE stances that could serve as a means of "linguistic self-defense" (Hilliard, 1983, p. 32) against dialect stigmatization. In addition, such "linguistics for kids" approaches help teachers to meet NCTE standards for the English Language Arts, which stipulate that students should understand and respect sociolinguistic diversity.

Dialect patterns should be distinguished from errors in writing and addressed through a contrastive approach. Operating under a dominant language ideology (Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, in press), teachers often incorrectly assess student writing performance. When a student writes, "My goldfish name is Scaley," or "I play on Derrick team," teachers often believe they see error, student confusion, and missing word-endings (Wheeler & Swords, 2006; Shaughnessy, 1979). Yet if teachers are led to observe student writing as "data" and to seek and describe underlying patterns, they can discover that students' vernacular language is grammatically structured, not broken (Wheeler & Swords, 2004, 2006). Consequently, teacher education for dialect diversity should emphasize the patterns that characterize student vernacular and provide practical methods of building on these patterns to improve students' mastery of written Standard English. One promising approach for doing this is contrastive analysis, which Rickford (1999) considers the most important technique recommended by linguists.

Recent work in Virginia demonstrated how this technique can be introduced in elementary and middle school contexts (Wheeler, 2006; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). In weekly workshops with three eighth-grade teachers, Wheeler used discovery activities to demonstrate to teachers that their students were not making mistakes in Standard English but instead were using another grammar. Teachers learned to collect examples of frequently occurring dialect-based patterns from their students' essays and moved through a cycle of inquiry in which they categorized and described student grammar. Teachers learned to use contrastive analysis, a compare/contrast strategy, to lead students in a similar discovery of the differences between vernacular and Standard English grammar rules.

Teachers undertook a parallel exploration of the ideological assumptions underlying the traditional “red pen approach” and the linguistically informed “code-switching” approach (Wheeler & Swords, 2006) by examining how the terms they used (*error*, *mistake*, *correct grammar*) reflected an ideology that devalued students’ language. Teachers then took steps to begin using descriptive, rather than prescriptive, terms (*grammar pattern*, *choosing the features to fit the setting*), communicating that they were building on, rather than replacing, students’ robust language competence.

Over a 2-year period, the students of one teacher who extensively implemented this code-switching method significantly improved in their overall writing performance, increasing their overall pass rate on the state’s standardized writing assessment from 60% to 79% to 94% (personal communication, March, 2006). Several other studies of contrastive analysis have found that students increase their mastery of written Standard English when taught using this technique (Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Schierloh, 1991; Sweetland, 2006; Taylor, 1989). Teacher preparation for dialect diversity should, therefore, emphasize the positive achievement gains associated with the contrastive approach.

Conclusion

At the outset of this essay, we argued for a renewed and sustained effort to prepare teachers for dialectally diverse classrooms by appealing to the literature that documents the negative effects of uninformed beliefs about language variation. We close on a more positive note, envisioning the alternatives possible when dialect diversity is acknowledged as regular, natural, and even desirable. The kind of teacher education we are proposing challenges researchers and educators to look squarely at difficult issues and expand their scope of inquiry and expertise. Additional research is needed that follows preservice and inservice teachers into the classroom to see how their teaching practices are affected by the teacher preparation that we call for and by revised language ideologies. However, existing research and our experience have suggested that the fruits of such labor are substantial—reducing inequities in educational outcomes and fostering the best aims of education: maintaining high expectations for

all students, recognizing students’ talents and giving them the tools to develop even further, and affirming the rich variety of human cultures and experiences. Teacher preparation that draws on sociolinguistic understandings of dialect diversity can also foster school cultures and academic identities that are inclusive of all students’ “ways with words” (to echo Heath, 1983). We think that teacher education can and should make a difference in the way that teachers are prepared for dialect diversity. They can learn that dialect diversity is a natural characteristic of every community of learners and a rich resource for academic learning.

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