

“YOU MUST LEARN”: A CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS APPROACH TO
WRITING INSTRUCTION FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN LANGUAGE–SPEAKING
STUDENTS IN COMPOSITION COURSES

By

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ABSTRACT

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The writing of African American students from the African American Language (AAL)-speaking culture has primarily been identified as substandard (Applebee & Langer, 2006; Ball, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Rickford, 1999; Smitherman, 1994). While hegemonic language attitudes and practices have been pinpointed as a contributing factor for this identification (Ball & Lardner, 2005; Charity-Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Baugh, 1999), the larger concern—how to teach writing in ways that lead toward favorable experiences and outcomes for AAL-speaking students remains inadequately addressed; especially in composition.

This study aimed to address the preceding concerns by applying critical language awareness (CLA) pedagogy to the design of a series of instructional units which sought to improve AAL-speaking students’ critical consciousness of language, writing, and society. The innovative series of instructional units employed African American-centered literature, novels, poetry, hip-hop, and new media in order to teach AAL-speaking students about language, linguistic variation, discourse, and power. To understand the possibilities and accessibility of the CLA approach to writing instruction, one composition instructor participated in a one-day critical language awareness teacher preparation program and subsequently implemented the series of instructional units with several AAL-speaking students in composition courses at a public, urban, research university over a six-week time span.

Multiple types of qualitative data (oral, textual and visual) were collected in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the one-day critical language awareness teacher preparation program and the CLA approach to writing instruction. Analyses of essays, questionnaires, and classroom discussions reveal how the: (1) composition instructor was able to become more aware of the social and cultural contexts of AAL and more conscious of her own linguistic prejudices; thus providing the composition instructor with the tools to resocialize her hegemonic and oppressive dispositions toward language into pluralistic and emancipatory dispositions toward language, and (2) AAL-speaking were able to become more aware of writing processes and practices and more conscious of their own writer's identity; thus providing the AAL-speaking students with the tools to work critically within and across a variety of languages, including AAL, mainstream language, and code-meshing language, and enhance their writing in several areas, including ideas, voice, language facility, and conventions.

Overall, this study highlights the possibilities (and challenges) of fashioning CLA pedagogy into accessible and relevant writing curricula for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

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This dissertation is dedicated to
my beautiful daughter, Ariyana,
who is indeed a blessing from God.
I love you immensely!

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CHAPTER 1

“How We Got Here”: On the Makings of a Writing Performance Gap Between African American Language-Speaking Students and “Success”

For a number of decades, sociolinguists have argued that African American students from the African American Language (AAL)¹-speaking culture would greatly benefit from pedagogical material grounded in critical linguistic principles (Alim, 2010; Baugh, 1999; Smitherman, 1972); yet educators have been slow to adopt such pedagogical material. One obvious area of concern is composition. In the past few decades, composition pedagogies have been criticized for their hegemonic tendencies; ostracizing the rich linguistic features that some AAL-speaking students employ in writing, and as a result, hindering their writing experiences and outcomes (Richardson, 2003; Ball & Lardner, 2005).

This study aimed to address the preceding concerns by applying critical language awareness (CLA) pedagogy to the design of a series of instructional units which sought to improve AAL-speaking students' critical consciousness of language, writing, and society. The innovative series of instructional units employed African American-centered literature, novels, poetry, hip-hop, and new media in order to teach AAL-speaking students about language, linguistic variation, discourse, and power. To understand the possibilities and accessibility of the CLA approach to writing instruction, one composition instructor participated in a one-day critical language awareness teacher preparation program and subsequently implemented the

¹ Also called Ebonics, Black Language, Black English (BE), African American English (AAE), and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). It's important to note that I theorize African American speech as a “language” (see Smitherman, 2006), and as such, will use the term African American Language (AAL) in this dissertation.

series of instructional units with several AAL-speaking students in composition courses at a public, urban, research university over a six-week time span.

This study draws insight from the prolific hip-hop group, Boogie Down Production, theory of “You Must Learn.” “You Must Learn,” a track released from Boogie Down Production’s 1989 iconic album *Ghetto Music: The Blueprint of Hip Hop*, calls attention to hegemonic classroom practices that hinder African American students’ success. As such, the artists advocate for teaching that focuses on the historical, cultural, and social contexts of African American literate lives—noting that this type of teaching is most applicable and beneficial for African American students, and that this type of teaching has the potential to mitigate cultural stereotypes and subversions. Furthermore, this study draws insight from research I conducted with a former student of mine named Aaron²—an African American male from inner-city Detroit, MI. Aaron’s linguistic performance correlates with his African American sociocultural background. As such, when Aaron speaks, he often uses words that symbolize his lived linguistic experience. When Aaron writes, he often uses syntactical and lexical features that are symbolic of this experience as well. Taken together, these two understandings provide insight into the exigencies and possibilities of affirming the social and cultural contexts of AAL.

1.1 African American Language: Historical Background

Historical discussions about the origin of AAL often start at the mid-1700 slave trade era.³

² Pseudonym

³ Debates concerning the origin of AAL have been in effect for almost a half-century. See Lisa J. Green’s *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (2002), Marcyliena Morgan’s *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture* (2002), and Walt Wolfram’s “The African American English Canon in Sociolinguistics” (2011) for an extensive overview of these debates which often fluctuate between an Anglicist hypothesis perspective and Creolist hypothesis perspective.

As such, it is considered:

a language forged in the crucible of enslavement, US-style apartheid, and the struggle to survive and thrive in the face of domination. Ebonics is emphatically *not* “Broken” English nor “sloppy” speech. Nor is it merely “slang.” Nor is it some bizarre form of language spoken by baggy-pants-wearing Black youth. Ebonics *is* a set of communication patterns and practices resulting from African appropriation and transformation of a foreign tongue during the African Holocaust.” (Smitherman, 2000b, p. 19)

Combining both verbal and nonverbal communication tools from English and their own native languages, enslaved Blacks developed a type of counterlanguage (i.e., oppositional speaking pattern and practice) during the mid-1700s. This counterlanguage, which has evolved and is still used today, allowed enslaved Blacks to maintain a culturally unifying means of communication. “Given these historical processes and the various purposes that US Ebonics serves, it is only logical that 90 percent of the African American community uses one or more aspects of the language some of the time” (Smitherman, 2000b, p. 19).

1.2 African American Language: Key Features

AAL “is a logical and systematic variety...that has stylistic, phonological, lexical, and grammatical features that distinguish it from academic as well as mainstream American English” (Ball & Lardner, 2005, p. 145). These features include, but are not limited to:

- Optional Copula
- Invariant *Be*
- Unstressed *Been* and Stressed *BEEN*

- Double Negatives⁴

As such, for many African Americans, AAL is a personally and culturally valued language that “symbolizes racial solidarity” (Baugh, 1999, p. 5). Given that AAL is a key component in the personal and cultural lives of African Americans, of course it also matters and can often show up in their written lives as well. This oral and written connection is certainly not unusual. Sapir (1933) calls language a primary “system of phonetic symbols for the expression of communicable thought and feeling” (p. 155). According to Sapir, from a historical perspective, writing emerged as a secondary component to language, and through its emergence, writing became an imitation of spoken language (p. 155). Dyson & Smitherman (2009) forward a similar belief—drawing on the work of Bakhtin to call writing “a cultural extension of speech” (p. 975). See Chapter 2 for further discussion of AAL stylistic, phonological, lexical, and grammatical features.

1.3 African American Language: Teachers’ Attitudes and (Mal)Practices

AAL-speaking students are often perceived “as being communicatively impaired” (Green, 2002, p. 227). This mislabeling is often associated with inappropriate comparisons between AAL and mainstream language (Green, 2002; Weddington & DeBose, 1998). Alim (2010) highlights this point in “Critical Language Awareness.” When describing the communication patterns of African American students at a San Francisco high school, a teacher states:

Teacher: I mean, I think the thing that teachers work with, or combat the most at Haven High, is definitely like issues with standard English versus vernacular English. Um, like, if there was like one of the *few* goals I had this year was to get kids to stop sayin, um, ‘he

⁴ see Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of these features.

was, she was...’

Alim: They was?

T: ‘They was. We be.’ Like, those kinds of things and so we spent a lot of time working with that and like recognizing, ‘Okay, when you’re with your friends you can say *whatever you want* but...this is the way it is. I’m sorry, but that’s just the way’ (pp. 209-210).

As Alim (2010) accurately points out at the end of the dialogue, “What many teachers [like this one] are probably not aware of is how their genuine concern can be interpreted as enacting Whiteness and subscribing to an ideology of linguistic supremacy” (p. 212).

In “Preparing Teachers for Dialectally Diverse Classrooms,” Godley, et. al. (2006), highlight problematic instructional practices that occur as a result of cognitively deficient AAL perspectives. According to the authors:

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. (p. 31)

Similarly, Johnson and VanBrackle (2012) found that writing assessment raters are more likely to give lower evaluations to written work with features of AAL present. The authors attribute the lower evaluations to biased and error-based perceptions of AAL.

1.4 Strategies for Teaching Writing to African American Language-Speaking Students: An Overview of the Struggle

To counter “cognitively deficient” perceptions of AAL, some literacy and language researchers have recommended the inclusion of linguistics in teacher preparation programs and curriculums. The following is a brief overview of three major linguistic intervention methods that have been recommended over the years:

- **Contrastive Analysis:** The contrastive analysis method, used to help AAL-speaking students distinguish the difference between standard American English (SAE)⁵ and AAL, was used most extensively during the late 20th Century. Although some studies, such as Taylor’s (1991) study, have highlighted the potential of the contrastive analysis method to help AAL-speaking students reduce the occurrence of AAL in writing, it has been criticized for its tendency to forward “negative attitudes about AAL and its speakers” (Kirkland & Jackson, 2008, p. 137).
- **Code-Switching:** Code-switching pedagogies, used to help AAL-speaking students understand the relevant contexts for using home and school language, was used most extensively during the late 20th Century and early 21st Century. Although some studies, such as Wheeler and Swords’s (2004) study, have indicated that code-switching pedagogies help linguistically-diverse students gain a better understanding of the oral and written context for using language, it has been criticized for its tendency to: 1) teach AAL-speaking students to value their language of nurture as “lesser” in quality, 2) promote a segregationist approach to literacy, and 3) force AAL-speaking students to

⁵ Also called standard English (SE), mainstream American English (MAE), mainstream language, general American English (GAE), dominant American English (DAE), and language of wider communication (LWC); these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

write in an “artificial” and often unproductive manner (Gilyard, 2011; Young, et. al, 2014).

- **Dialect Awareness Approach:** The dialect awareness approach, used to help AAL-speaking students understand and respect the diversity in language across culture, ethnicity, and geography, was popularized in the late 20th Century (Wolfram, Adger, and Christian, 1999) and is still often used today. Although some studies, such as Sweetland’s (2006) study, correlate results with this approach when used in oral and written contexts (e.g., understanding of language variation and improvement in several traits of writing), it has been criticized for ignoring “issues of ideology, subject positioning and power” in spoken and written language (Clark and Ivanic, 1999; p. 63; also see Alim, 2005).

The three methods identified above aim to support AAL-speaking students in both oral and written contexts; however, the strategies employed do not go far enough into challenging hegemony and understanding issues of language, exclusion, and human rights as proposed by current scholarship on critical language awareness (CLA).

1.5 Sociolinguistics and the Call for Critical Language Awareness

In *Out of the Mouths of Slaves: African American Language and Educational Malpractice* Baugh (1999) asserts, “If we ever hope to overcome linguistic ignorance and uninformed assumptions about race and language...then educators must participate in systematic reforms that will ensure educational equality. Toward this end it is necessary to update outmoded thinking on these matters” (p. 15). CLA, a growing area of specialization in sociolinguistics that draws from the traditions of Language Awareness and Critical Discourse Analysis (see Clark & Ivanič, 1999 for an overview), takes up Baugh’s call for systematic reform and

counterhegemonic thinking by necessitating a critical conception of education and schooling—one that equips educators and learners to “recognise, challenge and ultimately contribute to changing social inequities inscribed in discourse practices, and thus to be more responsible citizens” (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, p. 63). The advantages of CLA for both educators and learners—particularly, second and foreign language learners has been recognized for example by Alim (2010), Case, Ndura, & Righettini (2005), Godley & Minnici (2008), Kirkland & Jackson (2009), Reagan (2009), and Wharton (2011); however, much of this work has concentrated on CLA in relation to speech and reading and has largely ignored *writing* (see Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Janks, 1999; and Janks & Ivanič, 1992 for exceptions to this). This study aims to contribute to this gap in knowledge by putting into practice a CLA approach to the teaching and learning of composition and is primarily concerned with the effect that this approach has on the writing of AAL-speaking students in specific.

1.6 Research Context and Methods

This study sought to address the following primary and secondary research questions:

- *Primary Research Question:* How might teaching that pays special attention to critical language awareness enhance the writing performance of AAL-speaking students in composition courses?
- *Secondary Research Question:* How might teaching that pays special attention to critical language awareness enhance the language and writing attitudes and perceptions of AAL-speaking students in composition courses?

To investigate these questions, I:

1. developed a series of instructional units that combined principles and techniques of CLA with contemporary writing instruction;
2. prepared one composition instructor to implement the series of instructional units by providing the instructor with the necessary background on language, linguistic variation, discourse, and power, and training in CLA pedagogy;
3. supported and monitored the instructor as the instructor implemented the series of instructional units with several AAL-speaking students in composition courses; and
4. evaluated the effectiveness of the CLA approach to writing instruction by assessing participants' essays, questionnaires, and classroom discussions.

Several⁶ AAL-speaking students in ENG 0050⁷ courses were recruited to participate in this six-week study during the summer of 2015 (July 10, 2015-August 14, 2015).⁸ ENG 0050 is a preparatory college composition course designed to help conditionally admitted students in the Summer Academic Bridge program (SAB)⁹ successfully transition into college composition the following semester at Metropolitan University (MU)¹⁰ (a public, urban, research university located in a large Midwestern city in the United States). Sixteen AAL-speaking students volunteered to participate in the study; each student (n=16) was selected to participate in the study. Each participant was exposed to the series of instructional units. A detailed overview of the series of instructional units is provided in Chapter 3.

⁶ n=20

⁷ Pseudonym

⁸ Twenty students is analogous with CCCC guideline which states, "No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class" ("Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing," 2015).

⁹ Pseudonym

¹⁰ Pseudonym

One composition instructor was selected to participate in the six-week study. The instructor participated in a one-day critical language awareness teacher preparation program before implementing the series of instructional units with the selected student participants. The instructor received support throughout the study.¹¹

A qualitative case study methodology was used for this study. This methodology employed various analytical methods in order to make sense of the data collected from participants' essays, questionnaires, and classroom discussions. While a qualitative case study methodology is most relevant to this study, it is important to note that this study was also committed to a participant action research (PAR) methodological stance and a humanizing methodological stance. A detailed overview of the methodologies and methods is provided in Chapter 3.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

Linguistic and Stylistic Properties of African American Language (Morgan, 2002; Smitherman, 1977), Critical Composition Theory and Scholarship (Gilyard, 2011; Kirkland, 2004; Morrell, 2008), and Critical Language Awareness Pedagogy (Alim, 2010; Clark & Ivanič, 1997) provided the conceptual framework for the CLA approach to writing instruction that I implemented for this study. I describe this conceptual framework below.

1.7.1 Linguistic and Stylistic Properties of African American Language

The work of Morgan (2002) and Smitherman (1977) offer insight into the linguistic and stylistic properties of AAL. "The Black communication system," Smitherman (1977) writes:

is actualized in different ways, dependent upon the sociocultural context—for instance, "street" versus "church"—but the basic underlying structures of this communication

¹¹ I trained and supported the instructor.

network are essentially similar because they are grounded in the traditional African world view. In brief, that view refers to the underlying thought patterns, belief sets, values, ways of looking at the world and the community of men and women that are shared by all traditional Africans. (p. 74)

Furthermore, “The rich discourse and interaction practices typical in African American communities,” Morgan (2002) points out, “extend beyond issues of speech and discourse style to include linguistic and grammatical structure. Though speakers are not always aware of the grammatical relationships and systems in their repertoire, by the time they’re adults they know that there is something unique about African-American speech” (p. 63). And this uniqueness, Morgan indicates, includes: linguistic “reductions, deletions, and alternatives” such as, “appositive or pleonastic pronouns: *My principal, he crazy.*” and “direct questions without inversions: *Why I can’t have none?*” (p. 77), as well as, stylistic verbal play such as signifying (verbal dueling intended to arouse emotions; for example, if you knew what you looked like in that shirt you would burn it), and playing the dozens (generally consists of “yo mama” statements; for example, “Yo mama so fat that when she took a selfie and tried to upload it to Instagram, it crashed”). Important in Smitherman’s (1977) and Morgan’s (2002) statements is that everyday experience and background makes up African Americans linguistic and stylistic choices.

To address issues related to educational inequality among African American students, Smitherman (2006)¹² suggests that teachers expose African American students “to the study of African American Language—its systematic properties, its history, the connection between AAL and African American life and culture” (p. 142). Smitherman’s recommendation guided the

¹² Also see Carter G. Woodson (1933) iconic text *The Miseducation of the Negro* for more on centering the linguistic history of African Americans within educational contexts.

design and development of the material for this study. The material for this study highlights linguistic and stylistic properties of AAL as forwarded by Morgan (2002) and Smitherman (1977) and situates it within the context of African Americans historical, social, and cultural realities.

1.7.2 Critical Composition Theory and Scholarship

Critical composition theorists draw heavily from the work of Freire (1970), and as such, push against unitary approaches to teaching writing such as the process approach to teaching writing. The process approach to teaching writing, which has dominated K-University curriculums for the past decades, asks students to engage in writing by: 1) brainstorming or developing an outline of their ideas—i.e., *prewriting*, 2) using those ideas as a heuristic for developing a first draft—i.e., *writing*, and 3) continually revising that first draft (typically through peer/teacher workshops for feedback purposes) in order to produce a polished, albeit not perfect, final draft that has the possibility to be revised further—i.e., *rewriting* (Murray, 1972; also see Atwell, 1998; Elbow, 1973, 1980 for a description of the writing process). The problem with this approach, according to critical composition theorists, is its hegemonic, singular and orderly set of ideologies for writing that largely ignores “the multiple ways that students can apprentice as writers” (Morrell, 2008, p. 86). As an alternative, Morrell offers a fluid and flexible approach to teaching writing—one that is “centered within the existential experiences of people” (p. 116).

In their scholarship Gilyard (2011), Kirkland (2004), and Morrell (2008) provide an overview of not only the theoretical, but also the practical aims of critical composition pedagogy. According to Kirkland (2004) critical composition pedagogy links the teaching and learning of writing to students’ languages and lives. As such, it challenges dominant notions about talk and text, and as a result, recognizes “the intertextual and dialogic nature of the writing act” (p. 88).

Critical composition pedagogy, Kirkland also explains, supports the multitextual lives of all students (especially marginalized students) by recognizing and emphasizing three primary forms of textual expressions: visual expressions (e.g., graffiti), musical expressions (e.g., rap), and multilingual expressions. Furthermore, as Morrell (2008) indicates, critical composition pedagogy recognizes and emphasizes the writing of personal and political stories and poems and the production of personal and political films/media. Morrell also proposes five core tenets for critical composition pedagogy:

1. *Historicity*. Critical composition pedagogy must begin with students' experiences as citizens of the world.
2. *Problem-posing*. A critical composition of pedagogy must embrace, as its curriculum, the real world problems and struggles of marginalized people in the world.
3. *Dialogic*. A critical composition pedagogy must entail authentic humanizing interactions with people in the world.
4. *Emanicipatory*. A critical composition pedagogy must confront individual alienation and social justice and have as its project liberation from oppressive realities.
5. *Praxis*. A critical composition pedagogy must be about action and reflection upon that action. (p. 116)

Morrell asserts that these tenets are crucial and valuable when teaching writing to marginalized students (such as the AAL-speaking students in this study) in urban metropolitan educational institutions (such as the educational institution where this study was conducted). These tenets, Morrell reveals, have the possibility to help increase marginalized students' language and literacy skills.

Critical composition pedagogy, according to Morrell (2008) and Gilyard (2011), should also turn toward CLA. In fact, when asked about the state and future direction of first-year composition during an interview with *Writing on the Edge*, Gilyard stated:

I think that what's at stake is this notion of critical language awareness, this deepening of awareness about language, this deepening of perspective, this idea of the liberal arts contributing to the public good, this notion of us serving as more than agents of corporate expediency. To me, the role of the first-year composition course is really to promote this notion of critical language awareness more than anything else. When students are invested in the process in certain ways, the other things will fall into place, the technical concerns and so forth. (Gilyard, 2011, p. 152)

CLA, Gilyard believes, helps students have a deeper understanding of how discourse operates across cultural, social, and institutional contexts. Furthermore, including CLA within the context of critical composition pedagogy, Morrell (2008) and Gilyard (2011) contend, can be advantageous for marginalized students because it has the possibility to help them develop skills needed (e.g., analyzing and reflecting) to facilitate disciplinary and cross-disciplinary academic success.

Critical composition theory and scholarship (Gilyard, 2011; Kirkland, 2004; and Morrell, 2008) influenced my theorization of how writing should be taught.

1.7.3 Critical Language Awareness Pedagogy

The third and final part of the conceptual framework, CLA pedagogy, provides the overall structure that supports the framing of this study's research questions, research design, and interpretation of findings. The term Critical Language Awareness was coined by Clark, Ivanič, and their colleagues at Lancaster University over 25 years ago—"at the time when there was

considerable interest in increasing the amount of explicit ‘Knowledge About Language’ in the curriculum in British schools” (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p.8). CLA theorists, such as Fairclough (1992), criticize dominant academic discourse practices (due to its tendency to dehumanize second and foreign language learners), and instead, advocates for pluralistic academic discourse practices that are rooted in a social, political and ideological awareness of language and language variation. This type of practice, Fairclough, (1992) indicates, leads toward equity and access (i.e., democratic citizenship) for second and foreign language learners.

For this study, I used the CLA pedagogy (i.e., methods and material) recommended by Clark & Ivanič (1997) and Alim (2010). According to Wallace (1998) CLA pedagogy allows second and foreign language learners to significantly draw on and extend their existing linguistic repertoire. It also allows them to cultivate their critical literacy skills, thereby, allowing them to successfully and critically engage with talk and text in wider academic and social arenas. Furthermore, according to Clark & Ivanič, CLA pedagogy is advantageous in writing classrooms because it allows students to be placed within the context of *real writers* and *real readers* that have a “greater sense of their own agency and ability to engage in action to challenge and transform the educational and wider social world within which they operate” (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, pp. 68-69). Moreover, the authors claim that CLA pedagogy has the potential to help writing students improve their critical thinking, and thus, writing performance. Clark & Ivanič (1997) recommend a set of principles that should foreground a CLA approach to teaching writing. These principles include:

- *Take a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) approach to the teaching of writing;*
- *Raise consciousness about issues of power and status in relation to writing;*
- *Discuss differences between speaking and writing;*

- *Raise consciousness about how writing is embedded in social context;*
- *Demystify writing processes and practices;*
- *Allow time for thinking, discussing and drafting in order to engage with meaning;*
- *Ensure that writing in pedagogic settings has communicative purpose;*
- *Raise awareness about the importance of identity in all types of writing;*
- *Pay attention to the role of the reader in writing; and*
- *Take a critical approach to correctness is appropriacy.* (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, pp. 230-239)

I took up these principles and practices and used them as a guide when designing and developing the teacher preparation and instructional material for this study.

I also used principles and practices outlined by Alim (2010). To begin with, Alim (2010) claims that CLA pedagogy has “the potential to help students and teachers abandon old, restrictive and repressive ways of thinking about language and to resocialize them into new, expansive and emancipatory ways of thinking about language and power” (pp. 227-228). This potential, according to Alim, is illuminated when CLA pedagogy is also infused within the context of teacher training programs. The teacher preparation program for this study used Alim’s two prominent teacher training recommendations as a guide. These recommendations include: 1) educate teachers about critical language issues, and 2) engage teachers in reflexive analyses. The series of instructional units for this study used Alim’s CLA pedagogical framework as a guide.

Alim’s CLA pedagogical framework consists of four units and exposes students to the following:

- sociolinguistic variation
- ethnography of speaking¹³

¹³ See Dell Hymes (1964, 1972)

- hip-hop lexicon
- linguistic prejudice and discrimination

What's important to note is Alim and Smitherman (2012) claim that “if critical approaches are gonna be effective and relevant, they must be continuously adapted to reflect youths’ social worlds” (p. 178). As noted in Chapter 3, modifications to the research design were made when necessary to reflect the social realities of the students in this study.¹⁴

Although Linguistic and Stylistic Properties of African American Language (Morgan, 2002; Smitherman, 1977), Critical Composition Theory and Scholarship (Gilyard, 2011; Kirkland, 2004; Morrell, 2008), and Critical Language Awareness Pedagogy (Alim, 2010; Clark & Ivanič, 1997) are the primary tenets for the conceptual framework for this study, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012), in many ways, influenced the conceptual framework for this study as well. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy “uses student culture in order to maintain it and transcend the negative effectives of the dominant culture. These negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one’s history, culture or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing...[it] distorted” (Ladson-Billings, p. 17). One of the central aims of this study was to show representatives of AAL-speaking students’ history, culture and background by employing African American-centered literature, novels, poetry, hip-hop, and new media texts and curricular resources, as well as, show these texts and resources in a positive, humanizing light. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, on the other hand, “requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires

¹⁴ I used “Funds of Knowledge” (Moll, et. al, 1992) data from a prior study I conducted on AAL-speaking students and writing in the geographic region of which this study was conducted in order to make modifications when necessary that reflect the social realities of the students in this study.

that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). This was another aim that this study sought to take up as it sought to support the AAL-speaking students in sustaining and extending their linguistic repertoire.

1.8 Organization of this Dissertation

Chapter 1, “‘How We Got Here’: On the Makings of a Writing Performance Gap Between African American Language-Speaking Students and ‘Success,’” has introduced some of the theory and research that not only preludes, but also influences this study. It has also presented the research questions that frame this study and briefly sketches the methodology and methods employed for this study.

Chapter 2, “African American Language and Composition Studies: Where We’ve Been, Where We’re At, and What’s Needed Next,” begins the process of illuminating the connection between AAL and composition studies. In this chapter, I describe some of the central AAL research that has advanced over the last six decades. I begin by exploring some of the core theoretical premises that have governed the description of AAL in an attempt to describe the nature of it. Thereafter, I examine some of the practical premises that have governed the description of AAL—particularly as it relates to composition studies. I conclude by claiming that a CLA approach to writing instruction would be most beneficial for AAL-speaking students and teachers alike.

Chapter 3, “Getting On the Case *with* African American Language-Speaking Students in Composition Courses: A Methodological Overview,” details the methodologies I put into practice for this study. It also summarizes the research site and participants, the teacher

preparation program and instructional unit, the types of data collected, the types of methods used to analyze the data, and the strengths and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4, “‘Why Can’t Writing Courses Be Taught Like This Fo Real’: On the Impact of a CLA Approach to Writing Instruction on the Writing of AAL-Speaking Students,” and Chapter 5, “‘The World Has to Stop Discriminating Against African American Language’: On African American Language–Speaking Students Experience Learning About Language, Writing, and Democratic Citizenship,” reveals the data results for this study; specifically, focusing on a CLA approach to writing instruction effect on: 1) AAL-speaking students writing performance, and 2) language and writing attitudes and perceptions. By doing so, I illustrate how such an approach has the potential to heighten AAL-speaking students’ language and writing confidence, consciousness, and competence.

Chapter 6, “‘Where Do We Go From Here’”: Closing the Writing Performance Gap Between African American Language-Speaking Students and ‘Success,’” synthesizes the previous chapters in order to offer educational implications, insight into the benefits and limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. It concludes by providing suggestions for closing the writing performance gap between AAL-speaking students and “‘success.’”

CHAPTER 2

African American Language and Composition Studies: Where We've Been, Where We're At, and What's Needed Next

The language, only the language...It is the thing that black people love so much—the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It's a love, a passion...The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language.

Toni Morrison (Interview with Thomas LeClair, 1981)

Sociolinguists, such as Baugh (1999), Rickford & Rickford (2000), and Smitherman (1977, 2000b, 2006), have extensively described the linguistic (e.g., phonological, lexical, and syntactical) and stylistic (e.g., rhythm, tone, and other rhetorical genres) features of AAL. Yet, this knowledge has not led to a status of acceptance in some academic fields, such as composition studies. AAL, I posit, is of special importance to composition studies. Those who study and serve as practitioners of composition are often bestowed the privilege of describing and interpreting the writing conventions and genres that are a part of postsecondary writers' composing process. Since African American linguistic conventions and genres often play a role in African American students' composing process (Ball, 1999; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Perryman-Clark, 2010), it's essential for composition specialists to have a comprehensive understanding of the nature of AAL—in theory and practice. In this chapter, I describe some of the central AAL research that has advanced over the last six decades. I begin by exploring some of the core theoretical premises that have governed the description of AAL in an attempt to describe the nature of it. Thereafter, I examine some of the practical premises that have governed the description of AAL—particularly as it relates to composition studies. While I mention some theoretical premises of AAL, my emphasis in this chapter is on practical premises of AAL and

composition studies¹ from 1968 to present day. As such, I seek to examine: What's needed next?

1.1 African American Language Ain't Nothin New

The first wave of scholarship on AAL provided insight into the history and structure of AAL. In 1972, one of the most influential voices on the study of AAL, William Labov, forwarded insight into the common set of structural features that represent AAL. According to Labov, these structural features, such as optional copula and double negatives are “the product of [a] historical development” (p. 66). Furthermore, Labov indicates that these structural features are used by many African Americans in the U.S. (primarily young African Americans), and is used most frequently in inner city areas such as New York, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Using data from prior and current ethnographic-based studies with African Americans from inner-city environments,² Labov proves that AAL is a legitimate language with social, cultural, and historical ties. Although Labov's renowned text has been criticized for claiming linguistic uniformity across region, it has no doubt been highly influential. In fact, it is one of the most cited books on AAL.

Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States by J.L. Dillard (1972) came along soon after, and similar to Labov, this book based on Dillard's study of African American speech patterns, remains a highly influential book today. In this book, Dillard provides a detailed account of Black English—from its proposed beginning to the 20th century. According to Dillard, there is little direct evidence of Black speech before the 1700s. Black speech, in the form of language-mixing, became most noticeable in the mid-1700s, during the slave trade era. During

¹ Analogous with this study, this chapter surveys composition studies at the college level only.

² *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* contains earlier, albeit revised, articles as well as new articles.

this time (mid-1700s), the majority of enslaved Blacks were using an auxiliary language, and in specific, Pidgin English³ as a L2 (second language), while their children learned Pidgin English primarily as a L1 (mother tongue). This shift from L2 to L1 later moved Pidgin to a language status—Creole. By the early 18th century, the vast amount of slaves were using an Africanized Pidgin English (West African Pidgin English), Plantation Creole (used primarily by field working slaves), SE (used primarily by Black slaves who learned the speech of their master through house servant duties), or two or more of these varieties. In the mid-18th century, according to Dillard, Blacks began using a non-Creole English (thus, decreolization began to occur) called Black English.

Most words in Black English are derivatives of pidgin languages (like West African Pidgin English which is a mixture of English and West African Niger-Congo Languages). As Dillard states, “It is not completely impossible that the United States will become a bidialectal nation in the near future”; however, this “would involve giving a certain amount of recognition to Black English” (p. 115). Dillard also provides an overview of Black English in the 20th century. During this time, around the late 1960’s in specific, “eighty percent of the Black population of the United States [spoke] Black English,” and the extent of this usage varied based on factors such as socioeconomics, age, and gender (pp. 229-239). Though Dillard claimed that the extent of Black English used during this time varied based on the factors noted above, he still believed that “Black English is the most homogeneous dialect of American English” (p. 262).

"Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth: African Words and Gestures in New World Guise," by John R. Rickford and Angela E. Rickford came along in 1976. In this article, the authors provide an overview of the nonverbal forms of African, African-Caribbean, and African American

³ Pidgin English, “which is classified as an ‘English Creole’” (Dillard, 1973, p. 76), was popular primarily because of its ability to be used for cross-cultural communication.

communication; namely, “cut-eye” and “suck-teeth”. Based on a study that the authors conducted in the U.S., Caribbean, and Africa, the authors found that “cut-eye” and “suck-teeth” were common nonverbal forms of communication used by Africans, African-Caribbeans, and African Americans, and that these forms of nonverbal communication had associative meanings. According to the authors, “cut-eye” (which involves a specific type of eye movement) is a form of put-down and it happens more commonly between women. “Suck teeth” (which involves teeth, tongue, and mouth movement; the authors found this most often used in Guyana) is often used when one is annoyed, impatient, or angry. Though these are nonverbal acts (forms of bodily expression), John R. Rickord and Angela E. Rickford call these lexical items. The authors conclude the chapter by stating, “there is more to be done with “Africanism”” for understanding purposes (p. 171). Also see Thomas Kochman, ed., 1972, for further insight into African American nonverbal forms of communication).

In 1977, Renowned sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman furthered the conversation regarding the history and structure of AAL. In *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* Smitherman situates AAL within an Afrocentric context (also see Carol Blackshire-Belay–1996, for further insight into using an Afrocentric approach when studying and representing AAL). According to Smitherman, “The Black communication system is actualized in different ways, dependent upon the sociocultural context—for instance, ‘street’ versus ‘church’—but the basic underlying structures of this communication network are essentially similar because they are grounded in the traditional African worldview” (p. 74). In this book, Smitherman goes beyond the AAL grammatical features that primarily encompassed earlier work; she provides insight into African American proverbial traditions as well. Smitherman’s iconic work is still highly referenced today. Over the years, it has been used across disciplines to

shape theory (see Baugh, 1983; Gates Jr., 1983; Morgan, 1994) as well as practice (see Banks, 1993; Gay, 2010). It also played a significant role in the famous 1979 King v. Ann Arbor case (more commonly known as “The Black English Case”).

John Baugh provided in-depth insight into the speech patterns of urban African Americans in 1983. In *Black Street Speech: Its History, Structure, and Survival*, Baugh shares data from his linguistic research with African American adults in urban communities (Los Angeles, Austin, Houston, Philadelphia, and Chicago). According to Baugh, urban African Americans tend to use grammatical features like –ed morpheme reduplication (ex: loveded), multiple negation (Ex: “It ain’t no way no girl can’t wear no platforms to no amusement park”), and aspectual *steady* (generally occurs with progressive verbs; ex: “She steady be runnin her mouth”) (pp. 65-68). Baugh uses this data as a heuristic for debunking myths that are often associated with urban African Americans—myths that revolve around illiteracy and unintelligibility. “[T]hat street speech is bad, ignorant, illogical, or inferior” is a misconception Baugh asserts (p. 134).

The late 20th Century and early 21st Century brought about a new wave of AAL scholarship—scholarship that provided in-depth insight into AAL words, phrases, and expressions. In 1994, Clarence Major’s comprehensive dictionary of AAL words, phrases, and expressions was published. In *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang*, Major provides an overview of the words, phrases and expressions used by African American jazz musicians, pimps, gang members, youth, and more. He also discusses how these words, phrases, and expressions were used by west coast regions, southern rural regions, northern city regions, and more; for example, fat cat, a word used when referring to an “impressive, wealthy person” was used in the early and late 1900s by southern and northern African Americans (p. 166).

Major's text, essentially an update of his 1970 publication *Dictionary of Afro-American Slang*, essentially provides insight into the linguistic roots of African Americans speech. Also see Smitherman, 1994, revised 2000a, for an additional comprehensive dictionary of AAL words, phrases, and expressions.

"From Dead Presidents to the Benjamins: The Africanization of American English," the introduction to *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (Smitherman, 2000a) provides insight into the different terms used to describe African American people and language over the years, the different grammatical features used by speakers of AAL, and the "four critical forces that have played a role in shaping the direction and evolution of Black Talk" (African languages and cultures, the traditional black church, black music, and servitude and oppression). Furthermore, Smitherman reveals that America is still in a hegemonic era. According to Smitherman, the unequal societal treatment of AAL provides context for this point. As explained in this chapter, whites get to borrow (or as David Claerbaut states, "steal") AAL and (mis)use it without culturally stigmatized or oppressive consequences. Yet, when African Americans use their own language (i.e., AAL), they are deemed "ignorant, uneducated," and the like. This unequal treatment proves that "Whites get the 'nigga metaphor' at bargain basement prices. They don't have to pay no dues" (p. 32), but ironically, African Americans, don't receive "bargain basement prices" when using their own words or phrases. They have been paying and still do pay a very high price for doing so, and that price is generally unequal treatment. Also see Alim & Smitherman (2012) for further insight into AAL and linguistic crossover.

In 2000, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* was also published. In this book, John R. Rickford and Russell J. Rickford forward a vision of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as "Spoken Soul" (a word used by Claude Brown)—which according to the authors is a

dynamic and rich linguistic form (p. 109). The authors use data from their past research with African American speakers to show that AAL has distinct grammatical features that consists of, but are not limited to:

- Optional Copula (a copula, such as “is” or “are,” may be omitted⁴); ex: *He Ø going*.
- Marking plurality with *dem* (instead of them, these or those); ex: *Get dem books*.
- Invariant “Be” (one of the most studied and celebrated grammatical features). The most common invariant “Be” is via the omission of “will or would”; ex: *He must be good*.
- The unstressed been and stressed BEEN. The stressed BEEN is used for emphasis as in the phrase—*I BEEN ready*.
- Double Negatives (a negative verb is used with a negative pronoun); ex: *She wasn’t no cheerleader*.

Similar to Dillard, John R. Rickford and Russell J. Rickford indicate that these types of grammatical features are more common in black lower working class speakers and less common in Black middle upper class speakers. Furthermore, the authors indicate that black teenagers and males are more likely to use these grammatical features.

Like Dillard, and Rickford and Rickford, Denise Troutman (2001) shows that AAL shifts across gender. In her article "African American Women: Talking That Talk," Troutman forwards data from a study she conducted on the linguistic behavior of women. As such, she notes that African American Women’s Language (AAWL) has some features that differ from white women’s language and African American men’s language, and thus, should be viewed separately (in the interest of examining its uniqueness). Troutman also notes the verbal strategies that these women use like signifying, capping, and smart talk (assertive language).

⁴ The presence or absence of the copula depends upon discourse factors.

In 2002, Lisa Green provided a description of AAL from a Chomskyan theoretical perspective. In *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction*, Green uses data from research she conducted to provide insight into the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical features of AAL—features in which according to Green, differs from mainstream and classroom English. Similar to Rickford and Rickford, Green notes regional differences between speakers of AAL; for example, speakers of AAL from different regions “will produce the vowel sounds in words such as here and hair differently” (p. 2). Green also references African American speech events such as woofing, toasting, and preaching. Green concludes her book by providing reading, writing, and speaking classroom strategies for students who use AAL to communicate.

Four years later, Geneva Smitherman (2006) provided an extensive overview of African American verbal play. In *Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans*, Smitherman notes that African Americans have a long-standing history of preachin, prophesyin, and signifyin, and this verbal play can be traced back to the era of enslavement—when “Adults and children were expected to provide entertainment for their masters” (p. 67). Today, African Americans can be heard using the following forms of verbal play:

- preachin and prophesyin: consists of repetition and poetic devices such as alliterations;
- signifyin: consists of humorous, double meaning statements;
- playing The Dozens: consists of hyperbolic, blunt, raw, jokes that often begins with “Yo momma...”; and
- selling wolf tickets: consists of aimless, intimidating talk that is generally used in order “to get in another person’s head.”

Some of these verbal plays, according to Smitherman, can be heard in hip-hop music. Hip-Hop, “neither strictly music, nor narrowly song, is a rich, postmodern Black art form.” It was (and sometimes still is) used rhetorically—in order to carry political and social messages (p. 84-96).

Although all of the works mentioned above can stand alone as highly influential and groundbreaking in regards to the theoretical underpinnings of AAL, I would be remiss to move forward without mentioning *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* by Lorenzo Dow Turner (1949). In this book, Turner, “the first African American with professional training in linguistics” provides insight into the Creole language (Gullah) used by African Americans in South Carolina and Georgia. According to Turner, Gullah has a systematic set of grammatical features (for example, extensive use of verbal adjectives, word and phrase repetition, and lack of distinction with singular/plural use)—features that contain African elements. Furthermore, intonation plays a major role in Gullah language. In a declarative sentence “the final syllable frequently takes a high or mid tone” (p. 249). Turner’s pioneering book, initially published in 1949, has been said to have inspired future research (like those mentioned above) on African and African American Languages. Turner’s book highlights his extensive research with Gullah speakers in South Carolina and Georgia (it’s believed that Turner obtained and transcribed around 100 wire recordings), and as such, is important to AAL scholarship since Gullah and AAL “share some ingredients” (p. xxxiii).

1.2 African American Language and Composition Studies: Where We’ve Been

Language established itself as a concern in writing during the mid-20th century. In 1950, college enrollment nearly doubled, with roughly 76.1% students enrolled in college as opposed to the 50.7% that was enrolled in the 1930s (Gold, Hobbs, and Berlin, 2012, p. 244). The

increase in student enrollment brought about a need for structural changes in the writing classroom—primarily changes to accommodate the diverse social and economic backgrounds of the burgeoning postwar and rural student population. No longer would current-traditional rhetoric⁵ or the liberal cultural ideal⁶ apply (two popular methods of writing instruction during the early twentieth century). Now, in order to meet the needs of the postwar and rural students, writing instruction would need to focus on acknowledging students “as individual persons, as member of social groups, as citizens, and as workers”—a recommendation put forth by NCTE’s 1952 *English Language Arts* guide (Gold, Hobbs, and Berlin, 2012, p. 245). While some writing teachers were debating NCTE’s recommendation (primarily due to curricular stakes and the diverse approaches forwarded by NCTE—researching, reading, speaking, listening, writing, grammar, and vocabulary in conjunction with acknowledging the individual student), other writing teachers were arguing for the place of structural linguistics and sociolinguistics in writing instruction, and these arguments were primarily taking place in composition’s own journal, *College Composition and Communication* (CCC) where the most frequently cited authors during the 1950s and early 1960s were linguists (Gold, Hobbs, and Berlin, 2012, p. 246). These distinctive conversations along with the new racial population of students entering college during the 1960s and early 1970s (primarily as a result of the Civil Rights movement which led to open admission for students of color to colleges and universities) brought about a specific type of language discussion in CCC—that of AAL. In the late 1960s, amidst the African American Civil Rights Movement, Black literacy educators and activists such as Ernece Kelly, Sarah Fabio, and

⁵ Berlin (1987) defines current-traditional rhetoric as a positivist and scientific approach to writing. Current-traditional rhetoric instruction focuses on arrangement, style, clarity and correctness in discourse.

⁶ The belief that literary texts are prestige connectors to writing instruction and human nature (Berlin, 1987).

James A. Banks⁷, urged compositionists to not only pay attention to, but also embrace the richness of AAL (Smitherman, 2003, pp. 13-16). These appeals along with the CCCC Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) document—which “sought to enlighten on language attitudes, promote the value of linguistic diversity, and convey information on language and language variation that would enable teachers to teach more effectively” (Gold, Hobbs, and Berlin, 2012, p. 247)—were said to influence some of the Late-20th Century research on AAL. In what follows, is a review of this research—particularly as it relates to composition studies.

In 1968, Beryl L. Bailey presented spoken and written data from 100 African American “pre-freshman” at Tougaloo College. According to Bailey, “the language of students entering college each year fell well below national norms,” and this, “was in large part due to the influence of the local dialects” (p. 575). In this 1968 article, Bailey shares many examples of the relationship between African American students speech and writing. For example, Bailey indicates when it comes to phonology, some African American students in certain areas (especially urban areas) have difficulty discerning the difference between “a final/f/ and a final/th/”. As a result, words like *with* would be pronounced *wif*, and often this oral difference in pronunciation would lead to written differences in spelling (p. 571). “While not a pedagogical intervention as such, Bailey’s Tougaloo research is significant because it was one of the first language education studies to investigate the question of the relationship between AAL students’ speech and writing” (Smitherman & Quartey-Annan, 2011, p. 260).

Roughly ten years later, in 1977, one of the most renowned texts was published—*Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* by Mina Shaughnessy. In this book,

⁷ See Ernece Kelly’s “Murder of the American Dream” reprinted in the May 1968 issue of *College Composition and Communication* (CCC); see Sarah Fabio’s “What Is Black?” and James A. Banks’s “A Profile of the Black American: Implications for Teaching” printed in the December 1968 special issue of CCC entitled “Intergroup Relations in the Teaching of English”

Shaughnessy highlights the written patterns of nonmainstream speakers of English. Divided into eight chapters (1–Introduction, 2–Handwriting and Punctuation, 3–Syntax, 4–Common Errors, 5–Spelling, 6–Vocabulary, 7–Beyond the Sentence, 8–Expectations), Shaughnessy uses data from approximately 4,000 placement essays to explain how and why these students, such as African American students, write as they do. Though Shaughnessy’s book has been criticized over the years for focusing concretely on grammatical instruction and “errors,” it remains a pivotal text in composition studies.

Standard English, Black English, and Bidialectalism: A Controversy, by Hanni U. Taylor was published in 1989. In the book, Taylor presents data from research she conducted with inner-city African American students in a predominantly white college. In specific, in the book, Taylor recounts “Project Bidialectalism”—a one semester long (11 weeks) project which she instituted for inner-city African American students at Aurora University in Chicago. “Project Bidialectalism” contained a control group (this group used the traditional first-year writing curriculum) and an experimental group (this group used the “Project Bidialectalism” culturally and linguistically relevant curriculum). Though Taylor’s study didn’t yield impactful results, “Taylor’s study is significant for its creative use of cultural materials as well as its philosophical, sociocultural perspective” (Smitherman & Quartey-Annan, 2011, p. 272).

The 1990’s brought about a burgeoning of scholarship on AAL and composition studies. In 1992, Thomas Fox called teachers to look toward African American literary theory for writing pedagogy strategies. According to Fox, African American literary theory provides insight into the social, cultural, and historical contexts of AAE—contexts that can help teachers and students see AAE as legitimate instead of illegitimate. To this extent, Fox indicates in “Repositioning the Profession: Teaching Writing to African American Students,” that teachers

should bring pre-twentieth century to contemporary literary texts into the classroom. These texts, according to Fox, can “provide historical and political contexts within which African American student writers can position themselves” (p. 300).

One year later, in 1993, Valerie M. Balester’s *Cultural Divide: A Study of African American College-Level Writers* was published. In this book, Balester highlights oral (such as African American women politeness conventions) and written (such as the use of African American rhetorical strategies like signifying in writing) data from eight African American college students across various socioeconomic groups. By doing so, Balester highlights the difficulty African American students may encounter when engaging in college-level writing courses. Though Balester’s text has been criticized for equating the oral and written traditions forwarded in the book with all African American students, it serves as a resourceful guide for composition educators—as it shows the tension between academic discourse and African American discourse.

Elaine Richardson (1996) recounts her quasi-experimental research project with twenty-four African American students in “An African Centered Approach to Composition: Freedom Through Culturally Relevant Literacy Instruction.” Grounded in five theoretical frameworks—Afrocentricity, politicizing literacy and difference, position, signifyin(g), and bi-dialectal/contrastive approach to teaching academic writing, Richardson’s self-designed and implemented African-centered composition curriculum asked students to not only engage with African-centered course content, but to compose three essays: a pre-course essay, a “polished” essay, and a post-course essay. The data results from Richardson’s study showed that students

who began the study as “low achieving” made the most progress.⁸ As such, according to Richardson, an African-centered approach to teaching writing has the possibility to motivate African American students “to develop and sharpen their [writing] skills” (p. 153).

"Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond" Mistakes, "Bad English," And "Wrong Language"" was published in 1999. In this article, Peter Elbow shows how the writing classroom can be a safe place for speakers of nonmainstream varieties of English. According to Elbow, teachers can allow students to use their mother tongue (language of nurture) in earlier writing drafts like pre-writing and first drafts. Elbow believes that offering students an opportunity to use their mother tongue in earlier drafts assuages written language stigmatization. He indicates that later in the writing process (during the final draft) teachers can help students produce writing that conforms to standard Written English (SWE). This in turn, according to Elbow, can help students learn and be attentive to SWE conventions. Although Elbow's approach has been criticized, primarily for requiring students to produce writing that conforms to SWE in final drafts, Elbow sees this process as most practical because it does two things: 1) provide students with a space for their own language, 2) help students understand and learn how to use SWE.

Scholars began recommending cultural and critical-based pedagogies in early 2000s (see Arthur Palacas, 2001; Kermit E. Campbell, 2007)—most notable was *African American Literacies Unleashed: Vernacular English and the Composition Classroom* by Arnetha Ball and Ted Lardner. In this book, the authors address the “underachievement plague” that often affects African American students in composition courses. According to the authors, composition pedagogies and policies privilege SE writers, but oppresses AAL writers; thus, the authors ask

⁸ “The ‘low achievers’ were those whose prose on the pre essay did not conform to the conventions and demands of college level academic discourse” (Richardson, p. 151).

composition administrators, teachers and researchers to reverse the “cycle of underachievement” that plagues African American students by first considering their own knowledge deficit and attitude of AAL and second considering how that knowledge deficit and attitude (if inadequate), can be counteracted. The authors six chapters primarily centralize on two concepts: teacher efficacy (“a teacher’s belief in her or his ability to connect with and work effectively with all students”) and reflective optimism (“a teacher’s informed expectation that all of his or her students have the potential to succeed”). The authors conclude by providing suggestions for writing program administrators, composition teachers (as well as teachers from other disciplines), and researchers.

1.3 African American Language and Composition Studies: Where We’re At

In the most recent decade AAL and Composition Studies scholarship has centered on pedagogical interventions—primarily at the intersection of SRTOL. Staci Perryman-Clark (2010) highlights the expository writing of African American students in a first-year writing course. Perryman-Clark’s qualitative, empirically-based teacher research study sought to understand how African American students employed Ebonics-based linguistic and stylistic features in writing. Furthermore, her study sought to understand how a linguistic-focused Afrocentric curriculum could benefit both African American and non-African American students. To this extent, Perryman-Clark designed and implemented a linguistic-focused Afrocentric curriculum. Perryman-Clark’s study found that students were able to make successful linguistic choices under this curriculum (choices that involved both Ebonics and SE). Though Perryman-Clark’s study had limitations (such as lack of student interviews—in order to understand why and how

students made linguistic choices), it provided insight into the potential effectiveness of an Afrocentric curriculum for first-year writing.

Adam Banks also contributed pedagogical scholarship in 2010. In *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, Banks discusses the advantages of linking oral, print, and digital productions of knowledge. Working at the intersection of African American rhetoric and composition studies, Banks shows how considering the context of the DJ—an example of a digital griot—helps teachers and students re-imagine what writing is and what writing can do. Ultimately, Banks shows the advantages of using a culturally relevant pedagogical approach—not only for African American students, but for all students in the teaching of writing in a multimedia age.

In 2013, Carmen Kynard, Keith Gilyard, and Scott Wible forwarded political visions for composition pedagogies. In *Vernacular Insurrections: Race, Black Protest, and the New Century in Composition-Literacies Studies*, Kynard examines literacy from an activist point of view. In this text, Kynard provides a detailed overview of the Black Freedom Movements. These movements, as argued by Kynard, provide insight into the rhetorical, linguistic and literate workings of past and present day African Americans. Kynard uses knowledge from various sources (Black Caucus, Black Studies, and more) to advocate for a shift in composition's curriculums and pedagogies. In specific, Kynard advocates for “an alternative awareness, ideological approach, and set of critical practices” that correlate with Black Rhetorical Traditions (and rhetorical traditions in general) and are situated and delivered in cultural modes instead of Eurocentric modes (p. 19). Kynard believes that these type of curriculums and pedagogies could help dismantle problematic racial ideologies that prevent African American and other marginalized students from excelling in what Kynard calls “composition-literacy.”

Keith Gilyard, a prominent AAL and composition studies scholar, provides an extensive overview of AAL and culture in *True to the Language Game: African American Discourse, Cultural Politics, and Pedagogy*. Using new and previously published material (such as selections from *Voices of the Self: A Study of Language Competence*—1991), Gilyard discusses such matters as the social, cultural, rhetorical, and political underpinnings of AAL. Furthermore, he shows how AAL is artistically and effectively employed in African American literary works such as *Mumbo Jumbo* by Ishmael Reed, *The Temple of My Familiar* by Alice Walker, and *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. According to Gilyard, acknowledging and embracing this knowledge leads to a fair, democratic education for African American youth—a type of education that would allow African American youth to be seen as equally literate beings.

In *Shaping Language Policy in the US: The Role of Composition Studies*, Scott Wible revisits CCCC's primary language policies (the 1974 SRTOL resolution and the 1988 National Language Policy)—in order to understand the possibilities that these policies offer to composition studies. In Chapter 1, Wible references the Language Curriculum Research Group (LCRG). The LCRG enacted a culturally and linguistically responsive writing curriculum. According to Wible, the pedagogical material developed by the LCRG proves that the SRTOL resolution has the potential to lead to pedagogical innovation. In Chapter 2, Wible provides a historical account of the 1988 National Language Policy—particularly as it relates to its efforts to counter English-Only ideologies. In Chapter 3, Wible provides a critique of the “critical need” statement forwarded in the U.S. National Security Language Policy. Ultimately, Wible believes the 1974 SRTOL resolution and the 1988 National Language Policy still serve as effective guides for composition studies—guides that could help composition studies move toward more democratic curriculums and pedagogies.

In 2014, Vershawn Ashanti Young, Rusty Barrett, Y'Shanda Young-Rivera, and Kim Brian Lovejoy challenged earlier work that proposed code-switching as a solution for African American students (see Peter Elbow, 1999; Rebecca Wheeler & Rachel Swords, 2006). In *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy*, Young responds theoretically and pedagogically to the following question, "Is code-meshing, merging language variations, a better alternative than code-switching, separating languages according to context?" (p. 1). According to Young, code-meshing is a better alternative than code-switching for numerous reasons—especially in the context of teaching writing to African American students. While code-meshing allows African American students to speak and write in a context similar to the language of their nurture, Young believe that code-switching does not. In fact, Young believes that code-switching is harmful to African American students—as it essentially: 1) teaches them to value their language of nurture as of a "lesser quality" than SE, and 2) forces them to write in an "artificial" and often unproductive manner. The book, divided into four parts, advocates for and provides pedagogical strategies for code-meshing. Adopting Suresh Canagarajah's (2011) view of code-meshing as a pedagogy of learning and a pedagogy of teaching (p. 10), the authors forward a pedagogy that would not only humanize African American students, but would humanize all speakers and writers of marginalized languages.

Students' Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook came along in 2015. It provides insight into "what educational institutions should do" about the diverse language habits that students bring into the classroom. (p. 1). To this extent, the authors of this edited collection discuss "Foundations" (Part One), "The Politics of Memory: Linguistic Attitudes and Assumptions Post-SRTOL" (Part Two), "The Special Case of African American Language" (Part Three), "Pluralism, Hybridity, and Space" (Part Four), "Critical Language Perspectives and

Reimagining SRTOL in Writing Classrooms" (Part Five), and "Lingering Questions" (Part Six). In "CCCC's Role in the Struggle for Language Rights" (Part One), Geneva Smitherman provides an account of CCCC's role in the fight for language rights over the years. Citing: 1) CCCC's own 1974 SRTOL resolution—which was adopted by CCCC, 2) CCCC's own 1988 National Language Policy, and 3) controversy that took place primarily in CCCC's own journal (*College Composition and Communication-CCC*) during the early 1950's to late 1980's, Smitherman shows that although CCCC has had limited influence on classroom pedagogies, it certainly has been an "advocate for those on the linguistic margins" (58). In "Race, Literacy, and the Value of Rights Rhetoric in Composition Studies" (Part Two), Patrick Bruch and Richard Marback states, "winning the struggle *for* language rights requires that we struggle *over* rights" (p.169). As such, the authors spend their chapter theorizing about this prospect-essentially calling for composition to "struggle over how literacy can contribute to a multicultural democracy committed to group equity and social justice" (p. 184). In "Students' Right to Possibility: Basic Writing and African American Rhetoric" (Part Three), Keith Gilyard and Elaine Richardson discuss their research with fifty-two African American students enrolled in four Afrocentric basic writing classes from 1996-1998. Examining the rhetorical modes of expression that were prevalent in these students' writing, Gilyard and Richardson found that students who used more Black rhetorical modes of expression fared higher among writing specialist raters than students who used less. (The authors asked a diverse group of writing specialist to rate these students essays.) The results were comparable to the study results that Smitherman forwarded in "African American Student Writers in the NAEP, 1969-88/89 and 'The Blacker the Berry the Sweeter the Juice'" (also presented in Part Three of this book). In "The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued" (Part Four), A. Suresh Canagarajah forwards a need for composition to

make space for World Englishes in the classroom and in writing. According to Canagarajah, making a space for World Englishes can be done via a code-meshing approach. In "From Language Experience to Classroom Practice: Affirming Linguistic Diversity in Writing Pedagogy" (Part Five), Kim Brian Lovejoy, Steve Fox, and Katherine V. Wills provide insight into how language diversity can be enacted in the classroom (primarily by dismantling English-Only ideologies and engaging with students home languages). The last section of the book, Part Six, asks composition teachers to reflect on the original intention of SRTOL. "What Should College Teachers Teach?," (by Stanley Fish), "What if We Occupied Language?," (by H. Samy Alim), and "Where We Go From Here" (by Arnetha F. Ball and Ted Lardner) is presented as guides. Ultimately, Part Six helps composition teachers (and beyond) understand "how to affirm student[s] language right[s], and do so in ways that might lead to learning" (p. 2).

1.4 African American Language and Composition Studies: What's Needed Next

The AAL scholarship reviewed in this chapter has certainly been revolutionary; however, its impact on composition studies has unfortunately been minimal. (Certainly, not at the fault of the scholarship.) To this extent, more research needs to be done—primarily research that uses practical evidence to promote "wide-ranging, effective changes in writing and composition classrooms" (Ball & Lardner, 2005, p. 28). This type of research could turn toward CLA principles and practice as proposed by Gilyard (2011) and Richardson (2010)⁹. There is a very small but growing body of research that provides clear evidence of the positive, and in some cases transformative, influence of CLA pedagogy on both AAL-speaking students (Alim, 2010;

⁹ See Elaine Richardson "Steppin' Out on Faith" electronically published through Ohio State University's *Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* (Retrieved from <http://daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/1160>)

Godley & Minnici, 2008; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009) and teachers' (Godley, Reaser & Moore, 2015) language acquisition, attitudes, and perceptions; however, much of this research has largely ignored *writing*. This study aimed to contribute to this gap in knowledge by putting into practice a CLA approach to writing instruction. In Chapter Three, I detail the methodological choices that guided the design for this approach.

CHAPTER 3

Getting On the Case *with* African American Language-Speaking Students in Composition Courses: A Methodological Overview

This study aimed to investigate the implications of centering a CLA approach to writing instruction with AAL-speaking students. As such, this study sought to address the following primary and secondary research questions:

- *Primary Research Question:* How might teaching that pays special attention to critical language awareness enhance the writing performance of AAL-speaking students in composition courses?
- *Secondary Research Question:* How might teaching that pays special attention to critical language awareness enhance the language and writing attitudes and perceptions of AAL-speaking students in composition courses?

A qualitative case study methodology was used for this study. This methodology employed various analytical methods in order to make sense of the data collected from participants' essays, questionnaires, and classroom discussions. While a qualitative case study methodology is most relevant to this study, it is important to note that this study was also committed to a participant action research (PAR) methodological stance and a humanizing methodological stance.

This chapter details the methodologies used for this study. It also summarizes the research site and participants, the teacher preparation program and instructional unit, the types of data collected, the types of methods used to analyze the data, and the strengths and limitations of the study.

3.1 On the Case: The Methodology

The qualitative case study approach has a long-standing history (early 1900s) in the social science, psychology, anthropology and ecology discipline; however, its popularity has increased in recent decades within education in general (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stake, 1995), and language and literacy studies in specific (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In order to understand how AAL-speaking students respond to a CLA approach to writing instruction, I employed the qualitative case study methodology for language and literacy research outlined by Dyson and Genishi (2005). According to the authors, a qualitative case study methodology is beneficial for language and literacy researchers who seek to understand and reveal how social activities such as speaking, writing, teaching, and learning are enacted within a particular case—that is “any objective situation—a lesson, an elementary classroom, a day-care center, a community writing program or theater project” (pp. 1-2). The overall goal for language and literacy researchers using a qualitative case study approach is to explore and illuminate human realities—social, cultural, and educational—as they are practiced orally and textually by individuals, groups, and communities. As such, language and literacy researchers who employ a qualitative case study methodology must hold a commitment to collecting and analyzing data that is symbolic of what Heath (1983) coined “literacy events.”¹ This type of data includes: field notes, audio/video recording, and participant interviews.

While the qualitative case study methodology outlined by Dyson and Genishi (2005) is most relevant to my study, it is important to note that I was also committed to a PAR methodological stance (Irizarry & Brown, 2013) and a humanizing methodological stance (Paris,

¹ The term literacy events was coined by Shirley Brice Heath (1983) and refers to any oral or written event in which an individual or group makes meaning (e.g., an individual drafting an outline for an essay; a group negotiating the meaning of a written text).

2011). According to Irizarry & Brown (2013), “PAR researchers often strive to conduct investigations that directly disrupt the ways formal schooling reproduces social inequality” (pp. 63-64). As such, “PAR is an empirical research methodology in which representatives of the focus population(s) participate as co-researchers. PAR projects can utilize qualitative...data collection and analysis methods. [Overall,] PAR has an explicit goal of ‘action’ or intervention into the problems being studied” (p. 64). It also has an explicit goal of conducting investigations and taking action “with” people and not “on” people—a goal that I was committed to adhering to throughout the study. According to Paris (2011), a humanizing methodological stance is necessary—especially when working with marginalized or oppressed groups. A humanizing methodological stance, which shares a similar set of theoretical, ethical, and methodological principles with PAR, places dignity and care at the forefront. It also ensures the presence of ethical codes of conduct—codes that I was committed to adhering to throughout the study.

3.2 Research Site and Participants

3.2.1 *Research Site*

The participating research site for this study, MU, is a public, urban, research university located in a large, metropolitan city in the Midwestern U.S. MU, founded in 1868, is a member of the Coalition of Urban Metropolitan Universities (CUMU).² It draws a majority of its students from a tri-county area. The average overall student enrollment at MU is 28,000, and the average African American student enrollment is 5,000 (“MU Factbook,” 2015).³ MU is reported to have one of the largest African American student enrollment populations of any four-year colleges in

² CUMU is an international organization comprised of public, urban, research universities located in metropolitan areas with populations of 450,000 or more.

³ The average student enrollment and average African American student enrollment includes undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.

the U.S. (and more than half of these students are reported to be from low-income households). MU also holds a reputation for having one of the widest black-white graduation gaps (around 34%) among all four-year colleges in the U.S. (“JBHE Analysis of U.S. Department of Education Data,” as cited in “College Graduation Rates,” 2010).

The research site was chosen because of my own experience as a bilingual (AAL and SAE) African American teaching postsecondary composition courses (i.e., preparatory college composition, basic composition and first-year composition) to African American students at MU for more than ten years. Predictably, a significant amount of the African American students I instructed were speakers of AAL. (Prior studies have shown that African Americans from lower-income households use more features of AAL in speech than African Americans from middle or higher income households—Baugh, 1983; Rickford and Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000b, 2006). Furthermore, a notable amount of these AAL-speaking students used features of AAL in writing. (Prior studies have shown that this is a common occurrence as well—Ball, 1999; Ball & Lardner, 2005; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009.) These factors, along with the history of failure and mis-education that often marked the writing experiences of this population of students at MU, made it a rich site to conduct this study.

3.2.3 Students

Several⁴ AAL-speaking students in ENG 0050 courses were recruited to participate in this six-week study during the summer of 2015 (July 10, 2015-August 14, 2015).⁵ ENG 0050 is a preparatory college composition course designed to help conditionally admitted students in the

⁴ n=20

⁵ Twenty students is analogous with CCCC guideline which states, “No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class” (“Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing,” 2015).

Summer Academic Bridge program (SAB)⁶ successfully transition into college composition the following semester. SAB is an eight-week intensive educational program designed to offer a group of University referred freshmen applicants with a GPA and/or an ACT/SAT score that is slightly below the University's requirements with a network of support (i.e., advising, workshops, tutoring, and academic courses designed to bridge the gap between high school and college) in order to help strengthen their academic skills. Students who successfully complete the SAB course requirements with a C average or better are then admitted into the Department of Pathways Toward Success (DPTS) which provides this population of students with continued and enhanced support. Students who successfully complete the DPTS course requirements with a C average or better for three semesters (36 credit hours) will then transition into regular undergraduate admission status at MU. Most of the students in SAB program were African American (and from low-income households).

Sixteen students volunteered to participate in the study; each student (n=16) was selected to participate in the study and agreed to meet one day a week (Fridays) for one hour a week (1-2 p.m.) inside of a traditional classroom (selected specifically for this study) on MU campus for the duration of the six-week study. Of the 16 students selected, ten were female (62.5%) and six were male (37.5%). Although most students identified themselves as African American/Black (69%), two students identified themselves as African (12.5%), one student identified himself as Black Jamaican (1%), another student identified himself as Biracial (6.25%), and another student identified herself as Multiracial (6.25%). More than half of the students grew up in predominately African American neighborhoods (81.25%). The remaining students grew up in predominately Anglo neighborhoods (12.5%) and Mixed neighborhoods (6.25%). Twelve

⁶ Pseudonym

students (75%) identified as AAL-speaking students, while four students (25%) identified as SAE-speaking students. The Table 1.1 below displays the demographic background of the students who were selected to participate in this study.⁷

Table 1.1

Student Demographics

<u>Name</u> ⁸	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Neighborhood</u>	<u>Language</u>
Tasha	F	Black	Mostly AA ⁹	AAL
Bianca	F	Multiracial	Mostly Anglo	SAE
Ayana	F	African	Mostly AA	AAL
Simone	F	AA	Mixed	AAL
Jamarr	M	Biracial	Mostly AA	AAL
Tyson	M	AA	Mostly AA	SAE
Clayton	M	African	Mostly AA	SAE
Star	F	AA	Mostly AA	AAL
Devan	M	Black Jamaican	Mostly AA	AAL
Ammer	F	AA	Mostly AA	AAL
Brandy	F	AA	Mostly AA	AAL
Nekole	F	AA	Mostly AA	AAL
Cynthia	F	AA	Mostly Anglo	SAE
Darius	M	AA	Mostly AA	AAL
Xavion	M	AA	Mostly AA	AAL
Ericka	F	AA	Mostly AA	AAL

3.2.3 Instructor

One composition instructor was recruited to participate in this study.¹⁰ Two composition instructors from MU requested more information about the study, but were unable to volunteer to participate due to time commitment involved. One composition instructor from Tri-County College (TCC) volunteered and was selected to participate in the study. The instructor, an

⁷ Although 16 students were selected to participate in the study, only 12 students completed the study. Cynthia, Darius, and Xavion did not complete the study in its entirety. (Each of these students did not participate in the week six study session.) For personal reasons, Ericka needed to leave the study. (She only participated in the week one study session.)

⁸ All names are pseudonyms.

⁹ AA=African American

¹⁰ Composition instructors from local universities and colleges were recruited through email.

African American female, had over thirteen years experience instructing postsecondary composition courses (e.g., basic composition, first-year composition) at various colleges and universities (e.g., TCC and MU). The instructor self-identified as a SAE speaker and participated in a one-day critical language awareness teacher preparation program (see section 3.3 below) before implementing the series of instructional units (see section 3.4 below) with the selected student participants.

3.2.4 Relationship with the Research Site

My history with MU made my research entry slightly easy in some cases; however, tension, and in some cases resistance, did occur when proposing my study to a small amount of administrators. (I speculate that the tension and resistance was primarily due to the CLA approach to writing instruction under study.) Overall, however, my insider status was quite helpful when building rapport with students, teachers, advisors, and administrators; nonetheless, I do not believe that my insider status had any significant impact on the research process or results.

3.3 Teacher Preparation Design

The instructor participated in a one-day (July 8, 2015) critical language awareness teacher preparation program before the commencement of the study. The program aimed to help the instructor develop gain critical consciousness about language, linguistic variation, discourse, and power, and training in CLA pedagogy. Although the instructor's data for this program was collected, the instructor's "Post Critical Language Awareness Teacher Preparation Program

Questionnaire” was analyzed only. (Excerpts will be presented below.)¹¹ In what follows, is an overview of the activities included in the program.

Linguists have long established that AAL is a rich, complex, linguistic system that differs, but is certainly not deficient, from SAE (Baugh, 1983; Labov, 1972; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1977). For example, the SAE linguistic system requires adding an *s* for third person singular verbs (e.g., He *stares* too much); however, in AAL contexts, the *s* is often omitted (e.g., He *stare* too much)—and the frequency of this omission is higher among lower working-class speakers of AAL (Baugh, 1983; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Since teachers’ lack of knowledge and attitudes about AAL still remains a prevailing concern (Ball & Lardner, 2005; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Haddix, 2015; Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999), this critical language awareness teacher preparation program used a modified version of Fogel & Ehri (2006) exposure, strategies, and guided practice (ESP) concept¹² which according to the authors, proves to be the most effective strategy for preparing SAE-speaking teachers (such as the SAE-speaking instructor enrolled in this study) to teach AAL-speaking students. The authors further note that the “(a) exposure to text written in AAE, (b) instruction in dialect transformation strategies, and (c) guided practice with feedback in the use of these strategies in writing tasks” orientation of this concept, has the potential to not only improve SAE-speaking

¹¹ This dissertation seeks to focus on the central questions that guide this study. Thus only core data from student participants was thoroughly analyzed and will be presented in the results chapters (Chapters 4 and 5).

¹² The teacher preparation program used Fogel & Ehri (2006) ESP concept as a baseline, but modified it to align with Alim (2010) recommendation to 1) educate teachers about critical language issues, and 2) engage teachers in reflexive analyses. In regards to the former, at the end of session three of the teacher preparation program, the instructor examined a list of critical language issues that directly affect AAL-speaking students in the writing classroom (e.g., AAL is improper). In regards to the latter, at the end of sessions one-three of the teacher preparation program, the instructor engaged in a reflexive analysis process, and as such, answered questions such as: In what ways have you kept alive the “standard American English is best” myth in the writing courses that you have instructed?

teachers understanding of AAL, but their attitudes as well (p. 467); this ultimately leads to positive academic experiences and outcomes for AAL-speaking students.

The one-day critical language awareness teacher preparation program was separated into three 45-minute sessions. *Session One: Reading AAL* was primarily dedicated to exposing the instructor to texts (excerpts) written in AAL. *Session Two: Learning AAL* mainly focused on detailing the six syntactic features of AAL¹³ most commonly used in the writing of AAL-speaking students in the geographic region of which the study was conducted.¹⁴ *Session Three: Playing with AAL* revolved mostly around guided language transformation practice (from SAE to AAL); however, An examination of the critical language issues that directly affect AAL-speaking students in the writing classroom also occurred during this session. A reflexive analysis¹⁵ followed each session and a thirty-minute introduction of the goals and methods of the series of instructional units (see section 3.4) followed the latter session. The instructor completed a “Post Critical Language Awareness Teacher Preparation Program Questionnaire” (see Table 2.1 below) and participated in a “Critical Language Awareness Teacher Preparation Program Exit Interview” at the close of the program.

¹³ Plural *s*; past tense *ed*; third person singular verb *s*; possessive *s*; Ø copula; and double negatives.

¹⁴ Based on writing samples I collected and analyzed from a prior study I conducted on AAL-speaking students and writing.

¹⁵ According to Alim (2010), “Teachers...can benefit greatly from reflexive analyses of their own language behaviors and ideologies. In fact, it is only once teachers develop a meta-ideological awareness that they can begin to work to change them—and be more fully prepared to teach all students more effectively” (p. 223).

Table 2.1

Post Critical Language Awareness Teacher Preparation Program Questionnaire

Questions
1. Take a moment to reflect on the Critical Language Awareness Teacher Preparation Program sessions (I-III). Do you feel as if you acquired new knowledge (e.g., language, exclusion, and human rights)? Please explain.
2. Do you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions?

Overall, the instructor responded favorably to the teacher preparation program. The “Post Critical Language Awareness Teacher Preparation Program Questionnaire” that the instructor completed at the close of the program revealed her newfound understanding (and receptiveness) of AAL. It also revealed her confidence in her ability to successfully implement the series of instructional units. Most notable, however, was the instructor’s response to *Session Three: Playing With AAL*. The instructor implied that the guided language transformative practice and reflexive analysis was the contributing factor in helping her resocialize her homogenous and oppressive dispositions toward language into pluralistic and emancipatory dispositions toward language, sensitizing her to the “difficulties that some student writers from this environment must face when attending college in an environment different from that in which the student was acculturated. I have gained the perspective that I need to continue to understand the challenges that AAL students face when writing Standard English essays.” This is an understanding, the instructor claims, she will take into the wider academic and social arenas.

3.4 Instructional Unit Design

One of the primary goals for this study was to design a series of instructional units that could be integrated into the existing ENG 0050 curriculum and climate at MU. The existing

ENG 0500 curriculum at MU focuses on orthodox objectives and mainstream curricular frameworks. Here, for example, is one of the ENG 0050 course learning objectives: “Write college-level texts using an appropriate academic style and conventions of language use.” As evidenced, this objective focuses on conformist principles that silence the lived linguistic experiences of AAL-speaking students. Here, for example, is one ENG 0050 curricular frameworks: “[W]e will place a heavy emphasis on the process of drafting, work-shopping, and revising the various essays required for the course.” This curricular framework is based on the process approach to teaching writing which focuses on hegemonic, singular and orderly set of ideologies for writing that largely ignores “the multiple ways that students can apprentice as writers” (Morrell, 2008, p. 86). And lastly, as indicated in ENG 0050 course description, ENG 0050 places a large emphasis on reading. However, none of the texts used in the course are from African American authors or about African American life—despite, as stated in the section above, the high percentage of African American student enrollment in this course. These types of objectives and frameworks, as indicated by Richardson (2010), devalues the linguistic and literate realities of AAL-speaking students and by extension their educational outcomes. The history of failure that marks AAL-speaking students in composition courses at MU, as mentioned in the earlier section, is a testament of Richardson’s statement.

The series of instructional units was comprised of four fundamental units¹⁶:

- Unit One: Sociolinguistic Variation in the U.S.
- Unit Two: Writing as a Socio-Political Commitment
- Unit Three: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Identity
- Unit Four: Countering Linguistic Prejudice and Discrimination

¹⁶ The series of instructional units for this study used Alim’s (2010) CLA pedagogical framework as a guide. See Chapter 1 for an overview of this framework.

Analogous with ENG 0050, the series of instructional units placed an emphasis on three primary tenets and two primary academic genres. The three primary tenets included: reading, discussing, and writing. The two academic genres included: summary and response. A brief description of the four fundamental units, which equally took up the tenets and genres mentioned above, is provided below.

Unit One: Sociolinguistic Variation in the U.S. sought to expose students to the different ways that African Americans manipulate language across gender, age, region, and socioeconomic status, and invite students to consider their own language practices across home, school, and community contexts. Essentially, this unit strived to help students gain an understanding of the “structure and systematicity of spoken speech”; by doing so “[s]tudents are not only learning about the sociolinguistic variation of spoken language, but they are also being introduced to a curriculum that introduces it as a viable modality for learning” (Alim, 2010, p. 216).

Unit Two: Writing as a Socio-Political Commitment introduced students to writing “as a social practice consisting of a complex set of physical, socio-political, cognitive, and affective elements” (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p. 81). During this session, students learned to “use language [in writing] that...align[s] them with sociopolitical values, beliefs and practices to which they are committed” to expressing (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, p. 66). More specifically, this session sought to encourage students to consider writing processes and practices in ways that were relevant to “who they are and how they would like to position themselves within the discourse community” (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, p. 66). This unit also invited students to use a variety of languages (e.g., AAL, mainstream language, and code-meshing language) to compose multigenre snippets in response to the politics of language and education in the U.S.

Unit Three: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Identity had two main objectives, to: 1) expose students to the social, economic, and political evolution of hip-hop, and 2) invite students to begin archiving “the lexical innovations within hip-hop culture” (Alim, 2010, p. 218) within the geographical region in which this study was conducted. The overarching goal for this unit was to further validate “the language practices that students engage in outside of the classroom – for example *rappin* or *battlin* – by allowing the students to see their speech behavior taken as a subject of analysis” (Alim, 2010, p. 218). As Alim (2010) further points out, this in turn leads to higher levels of metalinguistic awareness.

Unit Four: Countering Linguistic Prejudice and Discrimination invited students to think about the complex issues surrounding language and power—especially as it relates to linguistic prejudice and discrimination. The primary goal of this unit was to not only expose students to the meaning and affect of linguistic prejudice and discrimination, but also to provide them with the tools to counter them. An overview of the pedagogical resources for each unit can be found in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

Overview of Instructional Units

Unit	<u>Pedagogical Resources</u>
Unit One: Sociolinguistic Variation in the U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readings/Viewings: James Baldwin’s “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?”; Geneva Smitherman’s <i>Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans</i> (excerpt); Zora Neale Hurston’s <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> (excerpt); Toni Morrison’s <i>Beloved</i> (excerpt); Jamila Lyiscott’s “3 Ways to Speak English” • Class Activity: Exploring “How We Use Language” (See Appendix A) • Writing: Rita Dove’s “Parsley” Summary and Guided Response
Unit Two: Writing as a Socio-political Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readings/Viewings: CCCC’s Students’ Right to Their Own Language; CCCC’s Statement on Ebonics (excerpt); NCTE’s “Resolution on the Student’s Right to Incorporate Heritage and Home Languages in Writing” (excerpt); Vershawn Young, et.al’s <i>Other People’s English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy</i> (excerpt); Clark & Ivanič <i>The Politics of Writing</i> (excerpt) • Class Activity: (Re)Writing the U.S. Educational Language Policy¹⁷: Multigenre Writing Snippets • Writing: bell hooks’ “Writing is my Passion” Summary and Guided Response
Unit Three: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readings/Viewings: Geneva Smitherman’s “I Used to Love H.E.R.” (excerpt); H. Samy Alim’s “Hip Hop Nation” (excerpt); NPR/Todd Boyd’s “‘Thug Life’ and the Effect of Hip-Hop on Language” (excerpt); Marc Lamont Hill’s <i>Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity</i> (excerpt) • Class Activity: <i>Black Talk Revisited</i>: Using Detroit Hip-Hop to Develop an AAL Dictionary (see Appendix B) • Writing: Student’s “Self-Selected Hip-Hop Artifact” Summary and Guided Response

¹⁷ To be sure, the U.S. does not have an “official” national language policy. But as Trimbур (2006) notes, the U.S. has a deeply-rooted English monolingual language ideology “making language policy a matter of custom rather than law” (p. 576). Thus the students, more so, were invited to take a stance and compose multigenre snippets in response to what they believe should be the U.S education language custom and/or policy.

Table 3.1 (cont'd)

<p>Unit Four: Countering Linguistic Prejudice and Discrimination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readings/Viewings: <i>American Tongues</i> (excerpt); “20/20 Linguistic Profiling”; Cara Shousterman’s “Linguistic Prejudice is a Real Prejudice (and Has Real Consequences)” • Class Activity: Linguicism Skits, Reflection, and Discussion • Writing: Leah Zuidema’s “Myth Education: Rationale and Strategies for Teaching Against Linguistic Prejudice” Summary and Guided Response
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Students were introduced to the study during week one of the study. During this Week One: Introduction session, students completed the following data sources: Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire and Preliminary Essay. After completing these data sources, students were provided with the syllabus for the study which detailed the instructor, location, time/day, and required material for the study; description and objectives for the study; themes and calendar for the study; and key terms for the study. Students also participated in a brief interactive discussion about AAL in oral and written contexts. Next, during weeks two-five of the study, students were exposed to the four fundamental units identified above. Lastly, during the Week Six: Wrap-Up, students completed the following data sources: Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire, Post Essay, and Exit Interview Questionnaire. After completing these data sources, students reviewed and reflected on the objectives and themes for the series of instructional units.

3.5 Data Collection

Several data sources inform the results of this study (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). The data sources include: 1) students’ language and writing attitudinal questionnaires, 2) students’ essays, 3) students’ exit questionnaires, and 4) field notes. Below, I describe my data collection process and briefly discuss the purpose of the data. It is important to note, here, that I strived to

collect data that would not only provide insight into contemporary African American literacy events (as symbolic of language and literacy research that employs a qualitative case study methodology), but also data that could potentially address issues of educational equality and achievement among AAL-speaking students in writing courses. As prior scholarship has noted (e.g., Baugh, 1999; Rickford, 1999; Smitherman & Quartey-Annan, 2011), this largely ignored subject demands serious attention.

3.5.1 Students' Attitudes and Self-Perceptions

Student participants were asked to complete a pre-and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaire. The questionnaires were used to uncover students' language and writing attitudes and perceptions. The Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire asked students about their language and writing attitudes and experiences in-and-outside of school contexts. The Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire asked students to reflect on their learning and post-study language and writing attitudes and perceptions. Both questionnaires were used not for comparative purposes, but rather for descriptive purposes—i.e., to illuminate and describe how much students' language and writing attitudes and perceptions may have changed over the course of the study. A total of 12 pre-and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaires were collected; however only 8 students (66.6%) data sources are included in the analysis. All of the students in this pre-and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaire analysis pool identified themselves as AAL-speaking students (100%). I choose these 8 from the larger set of 12 because they not only represented the AAL-speaking student target population that is under study, but because they also engendered clear and distinctive responses. These questionnaires can be found in Appendix C and D.

3.5.2 *Students' Essays*

The Preliminary Essay and Post Essay were collected from students. The pre-and post essays were fairly similar, however, there was one small and subtle difference. For the Preliminary Essay, students were asked to respond to a prompt that revolved around AAL as highlighted in an excerpt from June Jordan's *His Own Where*. For the Post Essay, students were asked to respond to a prompt that also revolved around AAL as highlighted in an excerpt from June Jordan, but the June Jordan excerpt used for the Post Essay was "Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan." This small and subtle modification was made in order to lessen the possibility of students acquiring, retaining, and repeating responses (i.e., testing effect). Thus the pre-and post essays were designed to acquire results that can be attributed to student learning—not memory. Both essays were used not for comparative purposes, but rather for descriptive purposes—i.e., to illuminate and describe students' writing before and after the study.

Four students essays were analyzed. Of the four students for whom data was analyzed, two were female (50%), and two were male (50%). As such, the essay data analysis pool was split fairly evenly between females and males. All of the students in this pre-and post essay analysis pool identified themselves as AAL-speaking students (100%). I choose these four from the larger set of 12 pre-and post essays that were collected because they not only represented the AAL-speaking student target population that is under study, but also because of the nature of the writing produced. (These four students completed sufficient pre-and post essays.)

3.5.3 *Students' Exit Questionnaires*

In order to understand students' perception of the study, an Exit Interview Questionnaire was administered and collected at the close of the study. The Exit Interview Questionnaire asked

students to discuss their reaction to the study. A total of 12 Exit Interview Questionnaires were collected; however only 9 students (75%) data sources are included in the analysis. Although most of the students in the Exit Interview Questionnaire analysis pool identified themselves as AAL-speaking students (66.6%), three students identified themselves as SAE-speaking students (33.3%).¹⁸ Overall, these 9 were chosen because of the thoroughness of their responses.

3.5.4 Field Notes

No matter how much electronic technology we use to record what participants do in the spaces we choose to focus on, we still rely on field notes to construct a case. These notes are organic; they take on a life of their own and grow with the study over time.

Ultimately they help to give an audience of readers a mostly verbal depiction of the site—an ethnographic sense of being in the world we call our case. (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 63)

For this study, I produced *descriptive* and *reflective* field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; as cited in Dyson & Genishi, 2005). During each 60-minute class session, I created descriptions and portraits of the research site, participants, and activities. Immediately after the close of each class session, I took notes for an additional 60 minutes. The post-session notes were reflective-based and primarily consisted of my ideas and experiences as an observer (and sometimes participant-observer), my thoughts and feelings about specific teaching and learning moments, and my contemplation of what I believed the data might be revealing.

¹⁸ In order to understand and address the effect that the CLA approach to writing may have on SAE-speaking students as well, I relied on these three SAE-speaking students' exit questionnaires.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed at three levels: the open coding level (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), the holistic, selective, and detailed level (Van Manen, 1990), and the Critical Discourse Analysis level (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). Each level of analysis helped me gain “insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon being studied,” as well as, “understand how the phenomenon matters from the perspective of the participants” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 81). As such, each level of analysis helped me address the central questions that guided this study.

My data analysis process was strictly qualitative. However, I relied on some quantitative measures when analyzing students’ essays. Although I relied on quantitative measures when analyzing students’ essays, it’s important to note that the quantitative measures were correlated with descriptive rather than prescriptive aims.

3.6.1 *Open Coding*

Students’ pre- and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaires and Exit Interview Questionnaires were analyzed using the open coding method. I began analyzing the questionnaires shortly after receiving them. Analogous with Dyson & Genishi (2005), I began the open coding analysis process by brainstorming potential information that was pertinent to the secondary research question. In specific, I “read through the data line by line, noting any words, phrases, or patterns of behavior that seem relevant” (p. 85). I started off by creating a running list of categories (about 10-14 categories and sub-categories); however, over time, these categories were “reorganized–collapsed, eliminated, related hierarchically, or further differentiated–to develop a more focused category system for coding” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.85). For example, for the pre- and post questionnaires, I began with the following 10 categories: gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social status, discourse pattern, problem solving (i.e., to affiliate, to

exclude), double consciousness, equity issues, and whiteness. Eventually, I collapsed the categories into 4 common themes. In Chapter 4, I discuss 2 of these themes: changes in students' language attitudes and changes in students' writing attitudes.

3.6.2 Holistic, Selective, and Detailed Approaches

In order to understand how a CLA approach to writing instruction might enhance the writing performance of AAL-speaking students, I analyzed students' pre- and post essays at the holistic, selective, and detailed level. I began by analyzing students' pre- and post essays at the holistic level shortly after receiving them. That is, I examined—as a whole—each student's pre- and post essay in order to capture the overall meaning and understand the trajectory of learning. In regards to the latter, I used a modified version of ENG 0050 Learning Outcomes (see Table 4.1). Modifications were made in order to fit the context of the pre- and post essay, as well as, this study. For example, the ENG 0050 Learning Outcome #4 reads, “Use reflective writing to develop metacognition of self as a learner within an academic discourse community.” This study sought to help students “to develop metacognition of self as a learner” in various discourse communities. Thus I revised Learning Outcome #4 to, “Use reflective writing to develop metacognition of self as a learner in various discourse communities (e.g., societal, academic).”

Table 4.1

ENG 0050 Learning Outcomes

• Create well-organized and effective summaries of and responses to college level texts
• Develop a flexible writing process consisting of effective strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing essays, paragraphs, and sentences
• Write college-level texts using an appropriate academic style and conventions of language use
• Use reflective writing to develop metacognition of self as a learner within an academic discourse community

To address questions related to AAL-speaking students and AAL syntax in writing, I next analyzed students' pre- and post essays at the selective level (i.e., word, statement, and phrase level). Here, I analyzed every word, statement, and phrase in order to uncover and make note of any of the six syntactic features of AAL most commonly used in the writing of AAL-speaking students in the geographic region of which the study was conducted (plural *s*; past tense *ed*; third person singular verb *s*; possessive *s*; Ø copula; and double negatives; see Section 3.3. for a further explanation). Each student's pre- and post essay was given a holistic score on a scale from 4 (highly discernable AAL syntax essay) to 1 (not highly discernable AAL syntax essay). Each essay received two AAL syntax ratings: one AAL syntax rating for the pre- essay, and another AAL syntax rating for the post essay.

Lastly, I analyzed the essays at the detailed level (i.e., sentence level). At this point, I analyzed every sentence in order to uncover and make note of any African American discursial features. I used a modified version¹⁹ of Gilyard & Richardson (2001) African American Discourse Scale for this level of analysis.²⁰ In specific, I looked for the following African American discourse features:

1. **Rhythmic, dramatic, evocative language** (use of metaphors and/or vivid imagery);
2. **Proverbs, aphorisms, Biblical versus** (use of popular adages or biblical verses);

¹⁹ Modifications were primarily made to align with the most commonly used African American discursial features in the writing of AAL-speaking students in the geographic region of which the study was conducted. (Based on writing samples I collected and analyzed from a prior study I conducted on AAL-speaking students and writing.) For example, "Tonal semantics "repetition of sounds or structures to emphasize meaning" and Topic association "a series of associated segments that may seem anecdotal in character, linked implicitly to a particular topical event or theme, but with no explicit statement of the overall theme" (Gilyard & Richardson, 2001) were both omitted from my African American Discourse Scale—as neither were identified as common discursial features in the prior writing samples I analyzed.

²⁰ See Smitherman (1994) for the original African American Discourse Scale

3. **Sermonic tone reminiscent of traditional black church rhetoric**, especially in vocabulary, imagery, metaphor;
4. **Direct address, conversational tone** (speaking directly to the audience in a conversational manner);
5. **Cultural references** (reference to cultural items or icons that generally carry symbolic meaning in AAL communities);
6. **Ethnolinguistic idioms** (language that bears specific meaning in black communities);
7. **Verbal inventiveness**, unique nomenclature;
8. **Cultural values—community consciousness** (expressions of concern for the development of African-Americans; concern for welfare of the entire community, not just individuals);
9. **Field dependency** (involvement with an in immersion in events in situations; personalizing phenomena; Lack of distance from topics and subjects);
10. **Narrativizing** (dramatic retelling of the story implicitly linked to the topic, to make a point. Reporting of events dramatically narrated);
11. **Signifying** (use of indirection to make points. May involve oppositional logic, overstatement, understatement, and/or reliance on reader's knowledge of implicit assumption that is taken to be common knowledge);
12. **Call/response** (writer returns repetitiously to the product as a structural device, checking for constant connection with the question or text at hand. A repeated invocation of the language from the prop, manifested as a refrain); and
13. **Testifying** (telling the truth through story; bearing witness to the righteousness of a condition or situation).

Similarly, each student's pre- and post essay was given a holistic score on a scale from 4 (highly discernable African American discourse essays) to 1 (not highly discernable African American discourse essays). Each essay received two African American discourse ratings: one African American discourse rating for the pre- essay, and another African American discourse rating for the post essay. The scores were then evaluated for change. A description of the results for the selective and detailed level is provided in Chapter 5.

3.6.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

I concluded by performing a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of my field notes; focusing specifically on class discussions. CDA emerged from a critical theory of language (namely, critical linguistics) and "is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 352). I used Fairclough's (1992, 1995) CDA model to analyze the class discussions. This model consists of three central dimensions:

1. Text Analysis (Description)
2. Process Analysis (Interpretation)
3. Social Action Analysis (Explanation)

The three-point dimensional framework, according to Fairclough, offers analytical insight into the sociopolitical contexts that might be at play within text and talk. Using CDA to perform a close textual analysis of class discussions helped me illuminate and describe the relationship that exists between students' discourse practices and social practices (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). I provide an explanation of my CDA process below.

When analyzing the class discussions, I looked for moments that detailed students' use or experience with AAL—in and outside of the classroom. I also looked for points that described learning—especially when these moments were connected to excitement, silence, confusion, displeasure, and so forth. I then reflected on these moments and placed them within the larger contexts of the study—that is the CLA approach to teaching writing, data sources (essays and questionnaires), and institutional practices in order to make connections and offer recommendations situated in notions of equity for writing and writing pedagogy (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Although I collected audio recordings for this study (i.e., recorded every session), I did not analyze the audio recordings. However, it's important to note that I referenced certain audio recording timestamps, when necessary, to ascertain the accuracy of my field notes (i.e., interpretations).

Open coding (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), holistic, selective, and detailed (Van Manen, 1990), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 1995) were the primary tenets for data analysis for this study. However, in many ways, Critical Race Theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings, 1998), which critically examines race and racism from a legal stance, influenced my analytical process as well. There were moments where I sought to illuminate and describe issues of racism, white privilege, and counter-storytelling, when present, in the data sources. These themes correlate with CRT, thus, it's important to recognize its influence in my data analysis process.

3.6.4 Reliability of Findings and Interpretations

According to Glesne (1999):

The credibility of your findings and interpretations depends upon your careful attention to establishing trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe prolonged engagement (spending sufficient time at your research site) and persistent observation (focusing in

detail on those elements that are most relevant to your study) as critical in attending to credibility. ‘If prolonged engagement provide scope, persistent observation provides depth’ (304). With each, time is a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data. Time at your research site, Time spent interviewing, and time building sound relationships with respondents all contribute to trustworthy data.” (p. 151)

Over the course of the study, I paid careful attention to trustworthiness. As the observer for this study, I ensured that I focused on every important aspect of the study—oral, textual, behavior, and beyond. To build rapport with participants, I used the three humanizing research strategies recommended by Paris (2011). To this extent, I: 1) allowed for natural, meaningful relationships to develop, 2) shared deep and personal experiences when necessary, and 3) actively participated when necessary²¹. Similar to Paris (2011) my goal was to form genuine connections of trust, caring and respect—connections that lead to valuable data and lasting relationships. I also used two common triangulation techniques to facilitate the credibility of my data: multiple kinds of data sources (i.e., field notes, questionnaires, essays) and multiple theoretical frameworks (see Chapter 1). Lastly, the instructor for this study audited portions of my field notes, and as such, made adjustments to some of my interpretations.

3.7 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study brought together many of the most important and successful elements of CLA to address the under-investigated, and important, research questions that guide this study. This study is unique because it represents an effort to document, at the postsecondary level, a CLA

²¹ While Paris notes that there are times to be an observer quietly taking notes in the back of the room, there are also times to function as a participant-observer or simply participate. Paris argues that working along this continuum, when necessary, allows for quality relationships and data to emerge.

approach to writing instruction for AAL-speaking students. As such, it includes a complete record of a teacher preparation design and an instructional unit design. As of yet, no such record exists. Thus this study has the potential to make a significant impact in the fields of composition, African American linguistics, and CLA. Furthermore, it has the potential to provide a model from which future studies at the intersection of writing and linguistics can build upon.

This study aligns with the CCCC Students' Right to Their Own Language (1974) document, CCCC Guideline on the National Language Policy (2015), and CCCC Statement on Ebonics (2016). The SRTOL document and National Language Policy calls for the development of pedagogical resources that honor, preserve, and protect the oral and written language used by *all* students; regardless of their linguistic heritage. The Statement on Ebonics makes a similar call—with a particular focus on the development of pedagogies that honor, preserve, and protect the linguistic background of AAL-speaking students. This study sufficiently addresses these calls by offering a series of instructional units that affirms and enhances the linguistic realities of AAL-speaking students in specific.

One significant limitation of this study is the amount of instructional time. The series of instructional units were quite immense and thought-provoking. (The students often needed more time than allocated to complete designated tasks. Furthermore, the students found the study discussion questions to be stimulating, and as such, often stayed after the study session time to continue the discussion.) In future qualitative studies on AAL, CLA, and composition, I will designate more time for each session. I will also extend the length of the study beyond six weeks. These adjustments will allow students the necessary time to fully engage with all aspects of the study material. These adjustments will also allow me to follow the development of students' writing over an even longer period of time.

A second area of limitation arises from the amount of data that this study produced. Although the data I collected and analyzed (see section 3.6 above) allowed me to answer the research questions that guide this study, I had to spend a significant amount of time exploring the appropriate data to analyze in order to effectively answer the research questions. Although I did not analyze the audio recordings, most of the non AAL-speaking students data sets, or most of the instructor's data sets, in the future, the first place to start will be with analyzing this data, so I can address the questions posed below:

1. How might teaching that pays special attention to critical language awareness enhance the writing performance of non AAL-speaking students in composition courses?
2. What does insight from the critical language awareness teacher preparation program suggest about the most effective way to structure a critical language awareness teacher preparation program for SAE-speaking teachers?²²

Another drawback to the data is in relation to the student essay analysis process. Although I aimed to ensure inter-rater reliability by recruiting two experts in the fields of AAL and composition to analyze the essays with me, due to time constraints, I was unable to do so. In future studies of this caliber, I will plan to implement this protocol.

Despite these limitations, this study allowed for a rich and insightful exploration into the effects of a CLA approach to writing instruction for AAL-speaking students. In Chapter 4 and 5, I will discuss the results of this study.

²² During the Q & A portion of the "Critical Language Awareness Teacher Preparation Program Exit Interview," I vividly recall the instructor asking questions in reference to employing the series of instructional material in a traditional semester course and working at an institution with white students, teachers, and administrators who may be resistant to such an approach. These type of thought-provoking questions may suggest the need to extend CLA preparation programs beyond one-day, so additional content, scenarios, and dilemmas can be addressed.

CHAPTER 4

“Why Can’t Writing Courses Be Taught Like This Fo Real”: On the Impact of a CLA Approach to Writing Instruction on the Writing of AAL-Speaking Students

As discussed in Chapter 1, the advantages of a CLA approach for learners—particularly, second and foreign language learners—has been investigated and recognized; however, much of this work has concentrated on CLA in relation to speech and reading and has largely ignored *writing*. This study aimed to contribute to this gap in knowledge by putting into practice a CLA approach to the teaching and learning of composition and is primarily concerned with the effect that this approach has on the writing of AAL-speaking students in specific.

A pre- and post essay was used in order to address the primary research question under study: How might teaching that pays special attention to critical language awareness enhance the writing performance of AAL-speaking students in composition courses? This chapter reveals the findings that emerged from four AAL-speaking students pre- and post essays. Before doing so, however, this chapter provides insight into the political act of writing.

4.1: Writing and Politics

According to Clark & Ivanič (1997), “All writing is located within the wider socio-political context; this means that issues concerning writing, the values attached to it, and its distribution in society, are all essentially political and bound up with the way in which a social formation operates” (p. 20). This operation essentially regulates and privileges “what gets written and how, who gets to write, and the roles writers play or are not allowed to play” (Clark & Ivanič, p.21). As Clark & Ivanič accurately point out, “Society is not homogeneous,” (p.21); yet, writing courses are taught as if it is so. Traditionally, the individuals who are bestowed the privilege to

write are individuals from the white, middle class, racial orientation—especially, according to Bloom (1996), in freshman composition. “[F]reshman composition in philosophy and pedagogy, reinforces the values and virtues embodied not only in the very existence of America's vast middle class, but in its general well-being—read promotion of the ability to think critically and responsibly, and the maintenance of safety, order, cleanliness, efficiency” (Bloom, 1996, p.655). Freshman composition courses, Bloom further indicates, are so permeated with white, middle class values, theories, pedagogies, and content that it makes it difficult for an individual outside of this normative orientation to operate-access-succeed.

AAL-speaking students are disproportionately placed in remedial (Lamos, 2008, 2009; Rose, 1989) and basic (Smitherman, 2000) composition courses. Furthermore, AAL-speaking students are disproportionately scored lower on essays; this in turn, leads to lower grades or failure for this population of students (Ball, 1999; Ball & Lardner, 2005). While these two factors are problematic—and the problematic nature, for the most part, points back towards the white, middle class values that make up college composition—my goal here, is to not spend too much time problematizing composition and the nature of African American underachievement, but rather problematizing composition and the nature of achievement.

According to Perry (2003), “The task of achievement... demands that you be capable of bringing to the task who you are socially and emotionally and physically. And the only way you can do this is to bring your full sociocultural person to the task. The task of achievement requires that you and others believe that the intellectual work that you engage in affirms you as a social being and is compatible with who you are” (pp. 5-6). Thus in order for “achievement” to manifest for AAL-speaking students in composition courses, they have to be able to bring—in oral, textual, and digital spaces—their language and their lives.

A CLA approach, I argue, has the potential to not only dismantle the homogenous, white middle class values that make up college composition, but to help AAL-speaking students bring “to the [writing] task who” they “are socially and emotionally and physically” in order to achieve (Perry, 2003, pp. 5-6). By doing so, I argue, AAL-speaking students will be placed within the context of *real writers* that have a “greater sense of their own [written] agency and ability” (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, pp. 68-69).

4.2 Students’ Essays: Brief Overview

The pre-and post essays were fairly similar, however, there was one very small difference. For the Preliminary Essay, students were asked to respond to a prompt that revolved around AAL as highlighted in an excerpt from June Jordan’s *His Own Where*. For the Post Essay, students were asked to respond to a prompt that also revolved around AAL as highlighted in an excerpt from June Jordan, but the June Jordan excerpt used for the Post Essay was “Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan” (see Table 5.1) This small and subtle modification was made in order to lessen the possibility of students acquiring, retaining, and repeating responses (i.e., testing effect). Thus the pre-and post essays were designed to acquire results that can be attributed to student learning—not memory.

As discussed in Chapter 3, students were asked to complete the Preliminary Essay during the Week One: Introduction study session. Students were given 25 minutes at the beginning of this study session to complete this essay. Students were also asked to complete writing tasks¹ during weeks two-five of the study. Students were given 25 minutes at the end of these sessions

¹ Analogous with ENG 0050, the writing tasks placed an emphasis on reading, summarizing, and responding.

to complete these writing tasks.² Lastly, students were asked to complete the Post Essay during the Week Six: Wrap-Up session. Students were given 25 minutes at the beginning of this study session to complete this essay.

Table 5.1

Pre- and Post Essay Prompt

<p><i>Pre- Essay Prompt</i></p> <p><u>Directions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Read</i> the passage (attached) from June Jordan’s book <i>His Own Where</i>. 2. <i>Compose</i> a college-level <u>summary and response essay</u>.
<p><i>Post-Essay Prompt</i></p> <p><u>Directions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Read</i> the passage (attached) from June Jordan’s essay “Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan.” 2. <i>Compose</i> a college-level <u>summary and response essay</u>.

4.3 Writing as a Sociopolitical Commitment

In order to understand how a CLA approach to writing instruction might enhance the writing performance of AAL-speaking students, I analyzed students’ pre- and post essays at the holistic, selective, and detailed level. I began by analyzing students’ pre- and post essays at the holistic level shortly after receiving them. That is, I examined—as a whole—each student’s pre- and post essay in order to capture the overall meaning and understand the trajectory of learning.

In regards to the latter, I used the ENG 0050 Learning Outcomes.³ Below, I provide a descriptive

² Because CLA entails discussions of oppression and privilege at the intersection of liberation, it was important for “listening as well as talking, storying, and authoring” to be positioned at the forefront in order to operationalize an environment of “trust, care, and ethics” (Kinloch & Pedro, 2013, p.28). Frequently, students would bring deep-rooted and very personal conversations regarding poverty, inequity, and discrimination to the study session. As such it was necessary to allow students to spend time narrativizing their stories (to begin the act of healing) rather than completing tasks during weeks two-five. Thus, often, the writing task completion timeframe during these weeks were reduced.

³ Modifications were made (see Chapter 3).

account of how Ayana's, Jamarr's, Star's, and Devan's ways of writing were interrelated with the sociopolitics of the classrooms.

During this study, students learned to “use language [in writing] that...align[s] them with sociopolitical values, beliefs and practices to which they are committed” to expressing (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, p. 66). To provide further context, the CLA approach to writing employed for this study “did not aim to tell students how to write their assignments; rather to provide a critical forum for raising issues and considering alternatives”; as such, students were able to “consider the ideological implications of writing in...ways that more closely relate to who they are and how they would like to position themselves within the [wider social and political] discourse community” (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, p. 66). In the case of Ayana, Jamarr, Star, and Devan, their ways of writing, particularly their post study ways of writing, gave rise to counter-narratives and spaces for hope for African American racial and linguistic realities. These counter-narratives allowed these students to not only “provide alternative perspectives to social injustices” (Ladson-Billings, 2003) about African American race and language, but also allowed them to have a “voice.” Voice, an author's distinctive style of expression, is “very popular in discussion[s] of writing and learning to write” (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p.151). At the forefront of this discussion is helping students negotiate ways of writing that place their real, authentic presence (i.e., identity), ideas and beliefs at the forefront (Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Elbow, 1998). These students' post study ways of writing that employed notions of counter-narratives and voice, were often linked to ongoing class discussions about issues of language, exclusion, human rights, and by extension, race. For example, in Jamarr's Post Essay, he raised the issue of human rights when he felt excluded from speaking.

Jamarr

1. June Jordan argues that Black English is not a “linguistic Buffalo.”
2. When she use this term linguistic buffalo, she refers to Black english/African American Language.
3. Buffalo’s are usually hunted and killed off so refering to our language as a linguistic buffalo is basically saying the dominant culture is trying to kill of our way of communicating.
4. I find this to be true due to the fact that all my life I was told “That’s not how you are suppose to speak.”
5. If you grow up communicating with one culture and have a different way of saying things, you shouldn’t be left out or discriminated against for your origin of words.
6. Jordan says that “White standards control our official and popular judgments of verbal proficiency and correct or incorrect language skills.”
7. I believe and witnessed this, the Dominant culture says whats right and whats wrong and as “Afro-Americans” we just have to take it as that.

Notice how Jamarr narrates his experience with being, in many ways, excluded from speaking in sentence #4. In sentence #5, however, he makes note of and advocates for language rights. Thus Jamarr skillfully narrates his personal experience with language, provides a counter-narrative, and thereby, gives rise to his own voice and agency in writing.

Ayana’s, Jamarr’s, Star’s, and Devan’s post essay ways of writing also revealed the ways in which they were able to grow as writers in all four of the ENG 0050 Learning Outcomes (see Table 6.1 and Table 7.1). What’s important to note is that the students’ pre- essays were ranked “Improvement Needed” in all four of the ENG 0050 Learning Outcomes. Thus, as illustrated, the

students were able to grow as writers in all four areas of the ENG 0050 Learning Outcomes by the end of the study.

Table 6.1

Evaluation of Students' Preliminary Essay

Learning Outcome	Meets	Meets Most	Improvement Needed
Create well-organized and effective summaries of and responses to various texts (e.g., literary, fiction, nonfiction)			X
Develop a flexible writing process consisting of effective strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing essays, paragraphs, and sentences			X
Write college-level texts that demonstrate competence with using language(s) that is suitable for the purpose and audience			X
Use reflective writing to develop metacognition of self as a learner in various discourse communities (e.g., societal, academic)			X

Table 7.1

Evaluation of Students' Post Essay

Learning Outcome	Meets	Meets Most	Improvement Needed
Create well-organized and effective summaries of and responses to various texts (e.g., literary, fiction, nonfiction)		X	
Develop a flexible writing process consisting of effective strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing essays, paragraphs, and sentences		X	
Write college-level texts that demonstrate competence with using language(s) that is suitable for the purpose and audience	X		
Use reflective writing to develop metacognition of self as a learner in various discourse communities (e.g., societal, academic)	X		

Other significant areas of improvement were in relation to word count and the micro and macro level of writing. I provide a brief overview below.

4.3.1 Word Count

Table 8.1

Pre- and Post Essay Word Count Results

<u>Name</u>	<u>Produced More Words in the Post Essay</u>	<u>Produced Less Words in the Post Essay</u>	<u>No Change</u>
Ayana	X		
Jamarr	X		
Star	X		
Devan		X	

As revealed in Table 8.1, the majority of the students produced more words in their post essay. There are several possibilities for the increase, however, I will reflect on two. When the preliminary essays were administered (week one), students quickly completed and submitted their essay; in most cases, not utilizing the 25-minute timeframe allocated. Overall, they showed little interest in writing. During the course of the study (exposure to the series of instructional units), I noticed some of the students' willingness to write gradually increase. When the post essay was administered, most of the students wrote diligently for the entire 25-minute timeframe, and some students asked if they could have more time. What this may suggest is that a CLA approach to writing instruction may have the potential to encourage students to write. This hypothesis was further supported by findings from students' post language and writing attitudinal questionnaire. When asked, "Will you continue to develop your writing skills and write for yourself as well as the improvement of society," Ayana, Jamarr, and Star each responded in ways

that revealed their motivation to continue cultivating their writing skills.⁴ Take for example the following excerpts from Question #5 of Star's post language and writing attitudinal questionnaire:

Star:

Yes I will continue to develop my writing skills and write for myself as well as the improvement society because our society is so use to writing in DAE and when writing in AAL it is considered as poetry and it does not get recognized for being an actual language to write out.

Furthermore, analogous with ENG 0050, the pre- and post essays and writing tasks placed an emphasis on reading, summarizing, and responding. Thus the results may also suggest that students are more motivated to complete reading and writing tasks when the reading and writing tasks relate to students socio-cultural lives (languages, genres, knowledge, technologies).

4.3.2 Macro and Micro Level of Writing

Composition curriculums are often invested in interests of the macro (i.e., arrangement/organization) and micro (i.e., sentences) level of writing. Another significant finding that emerged from the holistic evaluation of students' essay is the extent in which their post essays showed an improved command of the macro and micro level of writing. The majority of the students showed greater command of the development of ideas and the organization of ideas in their post essay than their preliminary essay. Furthermore, the majority of the students showed greater command of language facility and conventions (see Table 9.1). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2010), "These broad features [development of ideas, organization of ideas, and language facility and conventions] are consistent with state

⁴ See Chapter 5 for a broader discussion of the results from this questionnaire.

learning standards and reflect what most states evaluate in their direct writing assessments at grades 4, 8, and 12. They are also consistent with expectations for postsecondary preparedness” (p. 10). Thus these broad features, which were used as a heuristic to help measure the efficacy of students’ writing at grades 4, 8, and 12 in the most recent 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Writing Assessment, are considered characteristics of effective writing across state and national levels.

Table 9.1

Pre- and Post Essay Macro and Micro Level of Writing Results

<u>Name</u>	<u>Showed Greater Command of the Development of Ideas in the Post Essay</u>	<u>Showed Greater Command of the Organization of Ideas in the Post Essay</u>	<u>Showed Greater Command of Language Facility and Conventions in the Post Essay</u>
Ayana	X	X	X
Jamarr	X	X	X
Star	X	X	X
Devan			

Take for example Jamarr’s essay. His Preliminary Essay reads:

I believe it was good poetic piece. The way she writes catches your attention. Some words were left out but it shows that it was purposeful. Almost as if the author wanted this passage read out loud more than anything.

His Post Essay reads:

June Jordan argues that Black English is not a “linguistic Buffalo.” When she use this term linguistic buffalo, she refers to Black english/African American Language.

Buffalo’s are usually hunted and killed off so refering to our language as a linguistic buffalo is basically saying the dominant culture is trying to kill of our way of communicating.

I find this to be true due to the fact that all my life I was told “That’s not how you are suppose to speak.” If you grow up communicating with one culture and have a different way of saying things, you shouldn’t be left out or discriminated against for your origin of words. Jordan says that “White standards control our official and popular judgments of verbal proficiency and correct or incorrect language skills.” I believe and witnessed this, the Dominant culture says whats right and whats wrong and as “Afro-Americans” we just have to take it as that.

Notice how Jamarr’s Preliminary Essay: 1) lacks command of the development of ideas, 2) lacks command of the organization of ideas, and 3) lacks command of language facility and conventions. His post essay, however, shows significant improvement in all three of these areas. This suggests that a CLA approach to writing instruction has the potential to heighten AAL-speaking students awareness of the macro and micro level of writing; thus providing AAL-speaking students with a support structure for their writing. Furthermore, it suggests that a CLA approach to writing instruction has the potential to improve students’ competency. Similar to Jamarr, Ayana and Star failed to complete the summary orientation of the summary and response writing task for the preliminary essay. However, in their post essay, a summary as well as a response was present.

As noted above, noteworthy gains were evident in students’ post essay. However, overall, the holistic evaluation ranking suggests that a longer study is needed (beyond six-weeks) in order to measure statistical significance in growth in students’ writing. It also points to the need for a possible longitudinal study in order to understand if the students are able to *sustain* and *transfer* the knowledge they gained during the course of this study. While the holistic evaluation results certainly evidences benefits with a CLA approach to writing instruction, as substantiated with

Devan's data, which shows the least amount of growth across all areas of writing, not all AAL-speaking students may benefit from such an approach.

4.4 Language, Discourse, and Power

To address questions related to AAL-speaking students and African American syntax and discourse in writing, I next analyzed students' pre- and post essays at the selective level (i.e., word, statement, and phrase level) and detailed level (i.e., sentence level). Here, I analyzed every word, statement, and phrase in order to uncover and make note of any of the six syntactic features of AAL most commonly used in the writing of AAL-speaking students in the geographic region of which the study was conducted (plural *s*; past tense *ed*; third person singular verb *s*; possessive *s*; Ø copula; and double negatives), and then, every sentence in order to uncover and make note of the thirteen primary African American discursual features identified in Chapter 3. Below, I shed light on how Ayana, Jamarr, Star, and Devan used AAL syntax in their post essays to "talk back" (hooks, 1989) to social inequalities and African American discourse in their post essays to engage in "consienciser" (Fannon, 1952⁵).

4.4.1 AAL Syntax

Although research has shown that African American students use of AAL syntax has declined since 1969—particularly in imaginative and narrative essays, the question of the nature of AAL syntax is still an important question to address; given the still concurrent "negative teacher attitudes and the stigma attached to features of Black English in writing" (Smitherman, 2000b, p.166).

⁵ Also see the 2008 translated version of this book cited on the reference page.

As evidenced in Table 10.1, the students' preliminary essay and post essay AAL syntax results correlate with Smitherman's finding (2000b; also see, Chaplin, 1987; Scott, 1981)–“BEV speech patterns are only minimally reproduced in writing” (p. 167-168).

Table 10.1

AAL Syntax Evaluation

<u>Name</u>	<u>Preliminary Essay AAL Syntax</u>	<u>Post Essay AAL Syntax</u>
Ayana	1	1
Jamarr	1	1
Star	1	1.5
Devan	1	1.5

As far as the “minimally reproduced” AAL syntax in students' essays, what's significant to note, is that Third person singular verb *s* (ex: It *seem* like we are late), possessive *s* (ex: *David* book is insightful), and past tense *ed* (ex: She *pass* her brother on the bike) were the most commonly used AAL syntactical feature in students' pre- and post essays. These results are analogous with Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Baugh (1983) findings that African American youth tend to use these features more often, and the presence of third person singular verb *s* and possessive *s*, in specific, tends to be used more often by urban African American youth.

What's also significant to note is the ways in which the students strategically used AAL syntax in their post essays to employ notions of what bell hooks calls “talking back” (hooks, 1989)–“that is, no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject–the liberated voice” (p. 9). Take for example, the AAL syntax used at the end of Star's post essay. She conclusively states, “We going to fight for our linguistic rights”–purposefully and strategically employing an African American syntactical feature (copula omission) and discoursal feature (field dependency) to “talk back,” and thereby, give voice to

issues of language, exclusion, and human rights. Devan also purposefully and strategically used an African American syntactical feature at the end of his Post Essay—stating, “Don’t nobody speak that language” (double negative plus inversion) to similarly “talk back,” and thereby, give voice to issues of language, exclusion, and human rights. Thus, although Star and Devan produced slightly more AAL syntax in their post essay than their preliminary essay, I account this slight increase to Star and Devan purposefully drawing on AAL syntax to situate themselves as *real writers* that have a “greater sense of their own agency and ability to engage in action to challenge and transform the educational and wider social world within which they operate” (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, pp. 68-69). This further provides evidence for the value and possibilities of: 1) using a CLA approach to writing, and 2) using AAL syntax as a pedagogical resource in order to engage “students’ writing in different academic rhetorical situations” (Perryman-Clark, p. 470).

4.4.2 *African American Discourse*

According to Smitherman (2000b) “The topic of African American Verbal Tradition—both its discourse modalities and its grammar—is frequently at the heart of discussion and concern about African American student writing” (p. 177). Of particular concern are a couple of issues; however, this study sought to simply investigate the nature of African American discourse (AAD) in students’ writing.

As illustrated in Table 11.1, the majority of students produced more AAD features in their post essay than their preliminary essay. While the post essay’s assigned reading may have influenced the increased number of AAD features in students’ post essay (“Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan” is certainly more political in nature than *His Own Where*), it may also provide evidence for a CLA approach to writing instruction’s

ability to help students learn to engage with language(s) for meaning and purpose (Clark & Ivanič, 1999).

Table 11.1

African American Discourse (AAD) Evaluation

<u>Student</u>	<u>Preliminary Essay AAD</u>	<u>Post Essay AAD</u>
Ayana	1	2.5
Jamarr	1	2.5
Star	1	1.5
Devan	2	1.5

Similar to Gilyard & Richardson findings (2001) “Field Dependency” emerged as one of the most commonly used AAD features in students’ post essays; however, “Testifying” and “Narrativizing” emerged as highly used AAD features as well. As far as the presence of these features in the students’ post essays, what’s significant to note, is the ways in which they employed AAD to engage in what Frantz Fanon coined in his 1952 book, *Black Skins, White Masks*,⁶ “consienciser,”—a bringing of the unconscious to conscious and an orientation toward social change. Let’s return, for example, to Jamarr’s Post Essay:

1. June Jordan argues that Black English is not a “linguistic Buffalo.”
2. When she use this term linguistic buffalo, she refers to Black english/African American Language.
3. Buffalo’s are usually hunted and killed off so refering to our language as a linguistic buffalo is basically saying the dominant culture is trying to kill of our way of communicating.

⁶ Also see the 2008 translated version of this book cited on the reference page.

4. I find this to be true due to the fact that all my life I was told “That’s not how you are suppose to speak.”
5. If you grow up communicating with one culture and have a different way of saying things, you shouldn’t be left out or discriminated against for your origin of words.
6. Jordan says that “White standards control our official and popular judgments of verbal proficiency and correct or incorrect language skills.”
7. I believe and witnessed this, the Dominant culture says whats right and whats wrong and as “Afro-Americans” we just have to take it as that.

As evidenced in sentence #4, Jamarr uses “Narrativizing” to shed light on his personal experience with language and exclusion. Then he skillfully uses sentence #5 to strategically advocate for social change. He uses “Testifying” in sentence #7 to provide a testimonial account and bring to awareness issues of hegemony. Ayana also uses “Testifying” to bring the unconscious to conscious and advocate for social change, stating “I’ve observed the white man trying to kill our language, but too bad though we know the power we have in our language and will continue to speak it.” This finding not only evidences AAL-speaking students ability to develop metacognition, but also their ability to cultivate a critically conscious voice that carries their “intensity and glues together the information that the reader needs to know” (Murray, 1989, p. 150)—information that gives rise to notions of linguistic liberation—i.e., a setting free of linguistic subordination (Baugh, 2000) and spaces of hopes. These findings, furthermore, evidences the value and possibilities of using a CLA approach to the teaching of writing. Most importantly, these findings: 1) align with prior research that claims that African American students skillfully use AAD in writing (Balester, 1993; Perryman-Clark, 2013; Richardson, 1996;

Williams, 2013), and 2) suggest that AAD can be used as a powerful curricular resource. This includes:

- Linking AAD to the teaching of supporting details in writing;
- Linking AAD to the teaching of voice and tone in writing;
- Linking AAD to the teaching of subject-positioning and audience in writing;
- Using AAD to promote literacy engagement;
- Using AAD to promote democratic engagement.

Making curricular use of AAD, I argue, would be beneficial not only for AAL-speaking students, but for *all* students.

4.5 Conclusion and Implications

As Delgado (1989) reminds us, “Stories humanize us. They emphasize our differences in ways that can ultimately bring us closer together. They allow us to see how the world looks from behind someone else's spectacles. They challenge us to wipe off our own lenses and ask, “Could I have been overlooking something all along?” (p. 2440). As noted above, the AAL-speaking students’ Post Essay ways of writing gave rise to counter-stories and spaces for hope for African American racial and linguistic realities. Counter-stories that we, as educators, can use to address issues that we might have been overlooking, like issues of linguistic rights in educational contexts. Overall, The data results revealed in this chapter provide valuable insight into the primary research question: How might teaching that pays special attention to critical language awareness enhance the writing performance of AAL-speaking students in composition courses? I reflect on this insight below.

The results show that a CLA approach to writing instruction has the possibility to help AAL-speaking students:

- Create well-organized and effective summaries of and responses to various texts (e.g., literary, fiction, nonfiction);
- Develop a flexible writing process consisting of effective strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing essays, paragraphs, and sentences;
- Write college-level texts that demonstrate competence with using language(s) that is suitable for the purpose and audience;
- Use reflective writing to develop metacognition of self as a learner in various discourse communities (e.g., societal, academic); and
- Enrich their writing in the following areas: development of ideas, organization of ideas, and language facility and conventions.

Furthermore, the results show that a CLA approach to writing instruction has the possibility to help AAL-speaking students develop a socially constructed writer's identity (Clark & Ivanič, 1997) and critically conscious voice. The findings, for the most part, suggests that not only are AAL-speaking students more likely to be inspired to write when engaging in a CLA approach to writing instruction, but also that they are more likely to be inspired to write when the topic relates to their socio-cultural lives. To further attest to a CLA approach's possibility to motivate AAL-speaking students to write, I highlight one student's week six classroom statement: "Why can't writing courses be taught like this fo real?"

The examples of students' writing in this chapter and a discussion of how a CLA approach to writing instruction may help AAL-speaking students' become critical thinkers and critical composers is significant to composition studies because composition studies highly

prioritizes the theory and practice of helping students learn to think critically about textual, visual, and digital material. Thus a CLA approach to writing instruction provides an advantageous opportunity for teachers to discuss the processes and practices of writing in ways that may lead to academic success for AAL-speaking students.

In the next chapter, I reveal the ways in which a CLA approach to writing instruction affected the language and writing attitudes and perceptions of the AAL-speaking students in this study.

CHAPTER 5

“The World Has to Stop Discriminating Against African American Language”: On African American Language–Speaking Students Experience Learning About Language, Writing, and Democratic Citizenship

In this chapter, I explore AAL-speaking students’ language and writing attitudes and perceptions as reflected in their pre- and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaire responses and exit interview questionnaire responses. In specific, I address the secondary research question that underpins this study: How might teaching that pays special attention to critical language awareness enhance the language and writing attitudes and perceptions of AAL-speaking students in composition courses? As discussed in Chapter 3, I relied on:

- Eight AAL-speaking students’ pre- and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaires. These questionnaires were designed to uncover students’ language and writing attitudes and perceptions.
- Six AAL-speaking students’ exit interview questionnaire. I also relied on three SAE-speaking students’ exit interview questionnaire.¹ This questionnaire was designed to decipher students’ perceptions of the study.

This chapter reveals the findings that emerged from these data sources.

5.1 Language and Society

In order to offer insight into how the public media and education often influence AAL-speaking students’ language and writing attitudes and perceptions, and as such, may have

¹ I relied on three SAE-speaking students’ exit interview questionnaire in order to understand and address the effect that the series of instructional units may have on SAE-speaking students as well.

influenced some of these students' pre-study language and writing attitudes and perceptions, I offer a brief language and society overview.

5.1.1 *Language and Public Media*

To speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization.

Frantz Fanon (2008)

“Language,” according to Pinker (1994), “is so tightly woven into human experience that it is scarcely possible to imagine life without it” (p. 3). Despite scholarship that provides insight into the rich context of language, identity, culture, and diversity (Lippi-Green, 1997; May, 2012; McCarty, 2010; Pennycook, 1995), societal stereotypes and prejudices about nonmainstream languages still exist. According to Kirkland & Jackson (2009):

At the societal level, language attitudes, if not language itself, works to manufacture what Smitherman and Van Dijk (1988) call *symbolic racism*. For them: [S]ymbolic racism allows for subtlety, indirectness, an implication. It may, paradoxically, be expressed by the unsaid, or be conveyed by apparent ‘tolerance’ and egalitarian liberalism. Whereas the racial slur, the graffiti, or the old movie may be blatantly racist, many other present-day types of talk may communicate racism in a more veiled way. Speakers of such discourse may go to great lengths to dissimulate the deeper, underlying beliefs, social models, opinions, goals, values, interests, that is, ideologies, concerning ethnic minority groups in society. (p.145)

The authors further assert, “It is within this heated atmosphere that so many of us, too many of our students, are learning, perhaps have already learned, to despise AAL and its speakers (p. 145). This can be seen in “The most powerful covert teacher of white supremacy...mass media” (hooks, 2013, p. 12). Although progress has been made over the years, “Persistent examples in

the public media reveal that ignorance about the systematic nature of AAL is still with us today” (Smitherman, 2006, p. 134). Take for example Rachel Jeantel’s testimony during the nationally broadcasted summer 2013 State of Florida v. George Zimmerman trial. Jeantel, the key prosecuting witness who was on the phone with Trayvon Martin during the Zimmerman and Martin deadly dispute, provided an oral account of the events that took place before and during the dispute. Although other prosecuting witnesses testified during this trial, Jeantel “generated more commentary in the media” simply because of her speech (Rickford, para. 2, 2013). “On talk shows and social media sites, people castigated her ‘slurred speech,’ bad grammar and Ebonics usage, or complained that, ‘Nobody can understand what she’s saying’” (Rickford, para. 3, 2013). One commentator even said, “‘You could swap her out for a three-toed sloth and get the same witness value and response’” (Rickford, para.7, 2013). To be sure, not all news commentators made witty or disparaging comments about Jeantel’s speech, which is a fluent representation of AAL, but a significant amount did. Also, take for example one of the most eloquent, style-shifting speakers of our generation, President Barack Obama. Over the years, President Obama has received a few disparaging comments about his speech; especially when saying things like “Nah we straight.” However, as Alim & Smitherman (2012) accurately points out, “Nah we straight,” is characteristic of AAL—with “nah,” representing a word with a low monophthong vowel sound (akin to the vowel sound in ‘not’) as well as a word that is often “associated with the speech of Black folks”; “straight” representing a Black lexicon expression meaning “OK,” “fine,” “alright”; and “Nah we straight” representing a copula omission (Nah we Ø straight”) (pp.7-8).

5.1.2 Language and Education

The public media isn't the only culprit of AAL shaming, "education has played a key role" too—"facilitating, and at times enforcing, the...majority 'national' language" (May, 2012, p. 15), and thereby, placing AAL within "improper," "incorrect," and "wrong" contexts. Alim (2010) highlights this point in "Critical Language Awareness." When describing the communication patterns of African American students at a San Francisco high school, a teacher states:

Teacher: I mean, I think the thing that teachers work with, or combat the most at Haven High, is definitely like issues with standard English versus vernacular English. Um, like, if there was like one of the *few* goals I had this year was to get kids to stop sayin, um, 'he was, she was...'

Alim: They was?

T: 'They was. We be.' Like, those kinds of things and so we spent a lot of time working with that and like recognizing, 'Okay, when you're with your friends you can say *whatever you want* but...this is the way it is. I'm sorry, but that's just the way' (pp. 209-210).

As Alim accurately points out at the end of the dialogue, "What many teachers [like this one] are probably not aware of is how their genuine concern can be interpreted as enacting Whiteness and subscribing to an ideology of linguistic supremacy" (p. 212). Smitherman (2000b) provides another example of AAL shaming within educational contexts. Take for example an English Instructor's comments on an African American student's essay at Wayne State University:

[**Assignment:** Take a position on the war in Viet Nam and present arguments to defend your position.]

I think the war in Viet Nam bad. Because we don't have no business over there. My brother friend been in the war, and he say it's hard and mean. I do not like war because it's bad. And so I don't think we have no business there. The reason the war in China is bad is that American boys is dying over there. (Smitherman, 2000b, p.131)

As Smitherman (2000b) states, "The paper was returned to the student with only one comment: Correct your grammar and resubmit" (p. 131).

As one could probably guess, these type of comments have the potential to negatively affect AAL-speaking students—causing them to believe that their language, and by extension their culture, is inferior. It could also lead them toward engaging in what Geneva Smitherman has coined "linguistic push-pull"; that is, "loving, embracing, using Black Talk, while simultaneously rejecting and hating on it" (Smitherman, 2006, p.6).

5.2 AAL-Speaking Students' Language Experiences

As discussed above, beliefs that AAL is "bad," "stupid," "dumb," "incorrect," "improper," and "inferior to SAE" has long been ingrained in societal contexts. These types of ideologies often get fixed into the mindset of AAL-speaking students. As such, one of my aims was to understand if a CLA approach to writing instruction, which strives to help students gain critical consciousness of language, linguistic variation, discourse, and power, could counter such problematic and subordinate ideologies about AAL. Below, I illuminate and describe this possibility. I begin by illustrating the AAL-speaking students' pre-study experience with language, as well as, their attitudes and perceptions about African American speech in academic settings. I then move toward illustrating the findings that emerged during and after the AAL-speaking students exposure to the CLA pedagogy.

5.2.1 *Sounding “Dumb”*

The following account is representative of the AAL-speaking students’ pre-study experience with AAL, as well as, their pre-study attitudes and perceptions toward African American speech in academic settings; specifically, as revealed in their Question #1 responses on the Preliminary Language and Writing Attitudinal Questionnaire and their Week One:

Introduction interactive class discussion.

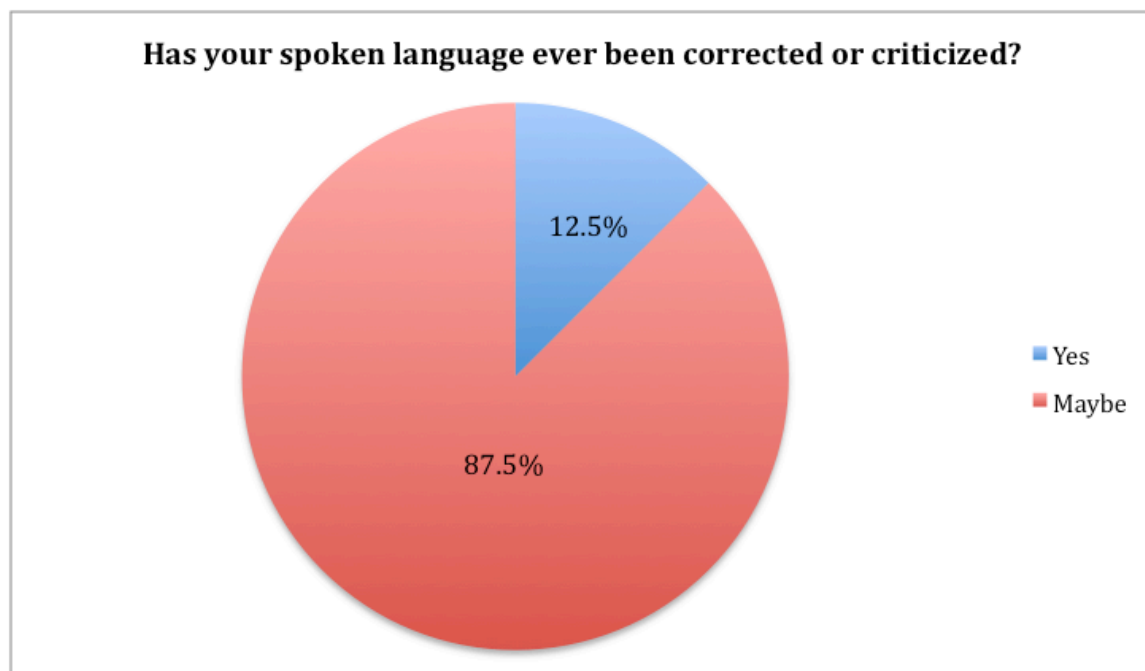
Question #1 on the Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire asked:

- Has your spoken language ever been corrected or criticized? If so, can you describe this experience?

The majority of the students reported experiencing language correction or criticism (see Figure 1.1 below).

Figure 1.1

Pre- Questionnaire Responses: Language Correction and Criticism



Most of the students who reported experiencing language correction or criticism indicated being corrected by teachers or parents. Take for example the students' excerpts provided below:

Tasha:

...my slang/improper ways of talking has been corrected by teachers because they were really sticklers on grammar.

Simone:

Yes, my mom always said speak properly no one wants to talk to someone who sounds dumb.

Jamarr:

Yes, my 10th grade ELA teacher would always tell me "aint, aint a word"

Devan:

My mother corrected me as a child because she hated hearing words like "finna" and "fo."

Ammber:

Yes I can only really remember my mom criticizing me on some things I may say, but I don't really remember exactly what I said.

Furthermore, as Star reveals below, language correction and criticism can also be directed toward an individual's racial identity:

Star:

Yes, my spoken language has been corrected and criticized. It was mainly when I was going to a majority white school out in Farmington Hills. People used to say that I was ghetto.

These findings correlate with what DeBose (2005) calls “visceral reactions to nonstandard language.” According to DeBose, “The association of the idea of ‘Bad English’ with low social status is so firmly entrenched in the hearts and minds of the American people that the mere presence of certain features in a person’s language is sufficient to elicit a strong and visceral reaction of disapproval” (p. 5). Furthermore, according to DeBose:

The tendency for Americans to react viscerally to nonstandard language in general, and African American language in particular, is based on the commonsense notion that it consists of mistakes committed by persons attempting to speak “correctly.” Such a characterization of nonstandard language happens to be at odds with the current state of linguistic knowledge, according to which all human language is systematic and rule governed. (p.5)

This “visceral reaction to nonstandard language,” interestingly, was apparent in some ways among the AAL-speaking students themselves. However, the students’ tendency to react viscerally was usually within a linguistic push-pull context. For example, as noted above, Tasha identified her own language as “slang/improper” and used the same type of terminology (e.g., “wrong”) during the Week One: Introduction interactive class discussion on African American speech and the academy. Although Tasha identified her own language as “slang/improper,” she also revealed that she used AAL quite often. Similarly, Nekole displayed evidence of linguistic push-pull before the students were exposed to the series of instructional units. For Question #1 on the Preliminary Language and Writing Attitudinal Questionnaire Nekole stated:

Nekole:

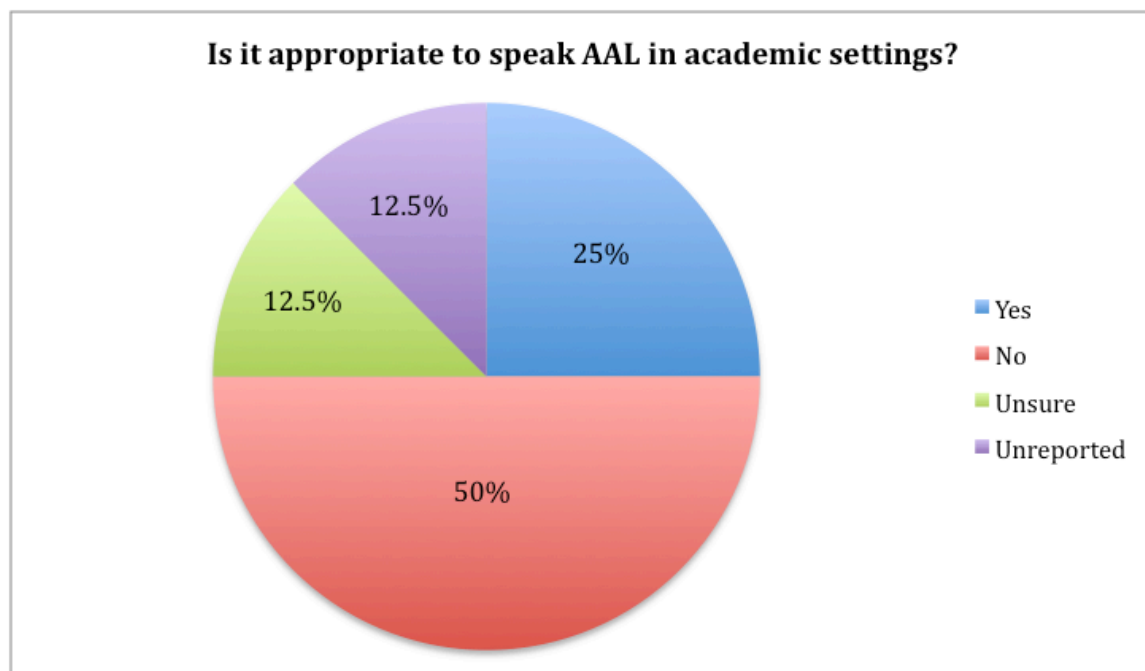
Maybe once or twice when I would be playing/Joking around in front of a teacher, but I am usually the one to correct or criticize. I have been known to be a bit of a grammar nazi.

As Nekole also revealed during the Week One: Introduction interactive class discussion, she uses “AAL around friends and family,” but believes that “standard English is the correct way to speak” in academic settings.

These pre-study findings reveal not only the AAL-speaking students experience with AAL, but also their attitudes and perceptions toward AAL. Overall, during the Week One: Introduction interactive classroom discussion about African American speech and the academy, the majority of the students responded in ways that were symbolic of linguistic subordination (DeBose, 2005; Lippi-Green, 1997); see Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1

Class Discussion Responses: African American Speech in Academic Settings



5.2.2 Linguistic Liberation and Cultural Revitalization

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection.

Paulo Freire (1970)

Below, I describe how the CLA approach to writing instruction affected the AAL-speaking students' language attitudes and perceptions; specifically, as revealed in their responses to Question #1 on the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire and their class discussions during weeks two-six of the study.

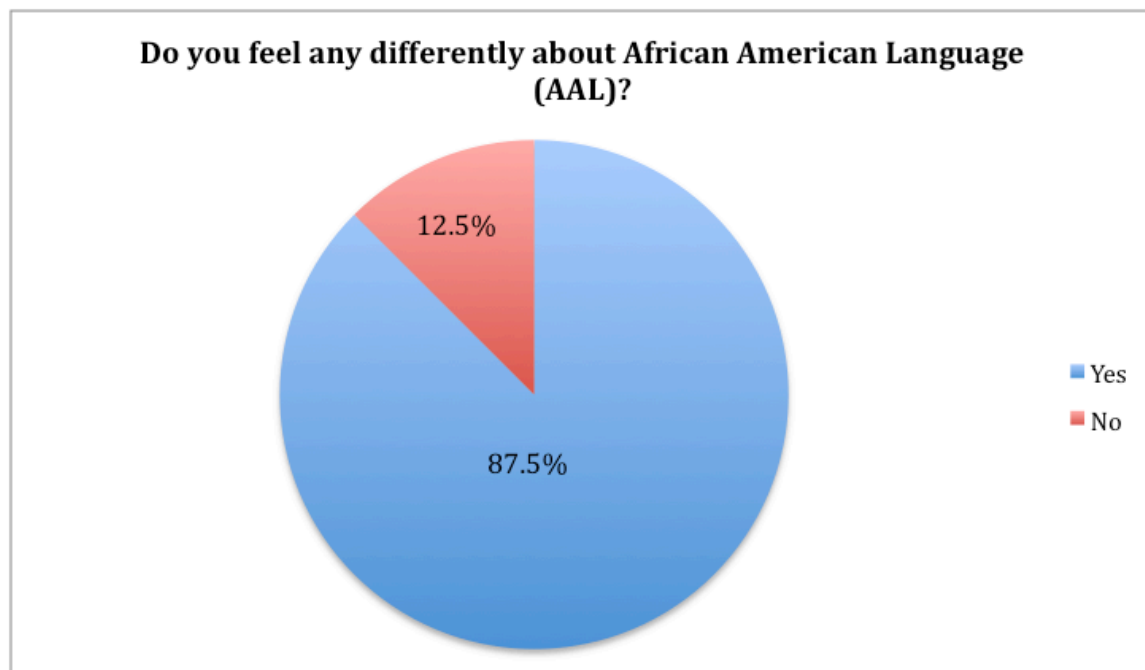
Question #1 on the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire asked:

- Do you feel any differently about African American Language (AAL)?

The majority of the students answered “yes” (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1

Post Questionnaire Responses: Change in AAL Attitudes and Perceptions



What's most notable, here, is Ayana and Nekole responses. Ayana entered the study as a self-proclaimed "Pro-Black" AAL conscious female. Throughout the study, Ayana exuded confidence when speaking "positively" about AAL and culture. The other participants (the students and the instructor) often listened intensely when she spoke and often looked to her for answers when classroom questions about language and power were posed. For Question #1 on the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire Ayana responded, "My attitude about AAL changed slightly. I am even more proud that I speak the way I do." Ayana consciousness and positive perception of AAL before² and during the course of the study supports a theoretical underpinning of CLA that proposes the more an individual is conscious about his or her language, the more positive views he or she will have about that language (Fairclough, 1992). As reported by Ayana during a Unit Three: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Identity interactive class discussion about hip-hop and identity, "They taught us all about AAL in high school, so I already know about the connection between AAL and hip-hop. Plus I'm a hip-hop head!"

Nekole, on the other hand, reported "yes" to feeling differently about AAL; however, similar to her Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire, she exhibited signs of linguistic push-pull in her response. Furthermore, she expressed an alternate language identity. For example, she stated, "Yes. Because I now understand the qualities of speaking and writing in AAL. It makes you unique in your own way, although I don't think I could ever pull that off." Furthermore, during a Unit Four: Countering Linguistic Prejudice and Discrimination interactive class discussion on linguicism, Nekole stated, "I'm a standard English speaker and I will probably always speak that." What this may suggest is that a CLA approach to

² As reported in her Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire

writing instruction might not alter all AAL-speaking students attitudes and perceptions about AAL, but it will help heighten their awareness about their own language practices.

What's important to note is that Nekole was the only student who displayed signs of resistance toward AAL at the end of the study. The remaining students that answered "yes" for this question responded in ways that pointed toward Linguistic Liberation—i.e., a setting free of linguistic subordination (Baugh, 2000) and Cultural Revitalization—i.e., "the reconstruction of negatively defined identity traits in positive terms that imbue [African Americans] with a sense of dignity and worth" (DeBose, 2005, p. 21). To highlight this finding, I will share responses from Star, Jamarr, Tasha, and Devan:

Star:

Yes, my attitude have change drastically towards AAL, this class has opened my eyes to a certain way of thinking and realization. There was so many things that has happened in my life and others around me that we was too ignorant to notice or realize but, with this class it helped me pick up on certain things that I would not have before. Now when something happen I will speak up.

Jamarr:

Yes, at first I didn't realize I used it in my daily life, so to learn that I do made me consider that our english (AAL) is a language and is effective as DAE.

Tasha:

Yes, I feel differently I didn't really know AAL was a real language. Now I know that there's nothing wrong with anybody using AAL because it's legit. I feel like I'll also help other people know this.

Devan:

Yess I feel more proud of AAL. Than ever. I once felt irritation when people used AAL in “inappropriate” settings, because I thought it made us look bad as a collective. But this class has changed that.

Furthermore, as Simone enthusiastically expressed during the Unit Four: Countering Linguistic Prejudice and Discrimination interactive class discussion, “Now I gotta tell my momma that she be discriminatin against me when she say I talk dumb and that ain’t cool.”

5.3 AAL-Speaking Students’ Writing Experiences

Ball (1996) describes her student’s experience with composing a creative story about a shoe. The student was very proud of this story and truly believed that “it was a masterpiece” (p. 27). However, according to the student:

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. (Ball, 1996, p. 27)

Over the years, I too, have had some students provide accounts of teachers’ negativity toward their skillful integration of their lived linguistic repertoire into their writing. These accounts were so deeply-rooted in these students’ minds that it caused them to: 1) hold negative attitudes and

perceptions about writing, 2) lack a motivation to write, and 3) in some cases, similar to Ball's student, refrain from taking creative risks in writing. Thus another one of my aims was to understand if a CLA approach to writing instruction, which has an explicit goal to introduce students to writing "as a social practice consisting of a complex set of physical, socio-political, cognitive, and affective elements" (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p. 81), could counter such tension. Below, I illuminate and describe this possibility. I begin by illustrating the AAL-speaking students' pre-study experience with writing, as well as, their attitudes and perceptions about writing. I then move toward illustrating the findings that emerged during and after the AAL-speaking students exposure to the CLA pedagogy.

5.3.1 Writing "Right"

The following account is representative of the AAL-speaking students' pre-study experience with writing, as well as, their pre-study attitudes toward AAL in *modes of discourse* (i.e., exposition, description, narration, and argumentation)³; specifically, as revealed in their responses to Question #2 on the Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire and their Week One: Introduction interactive class discussion.

Question #2 on the Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire asked:

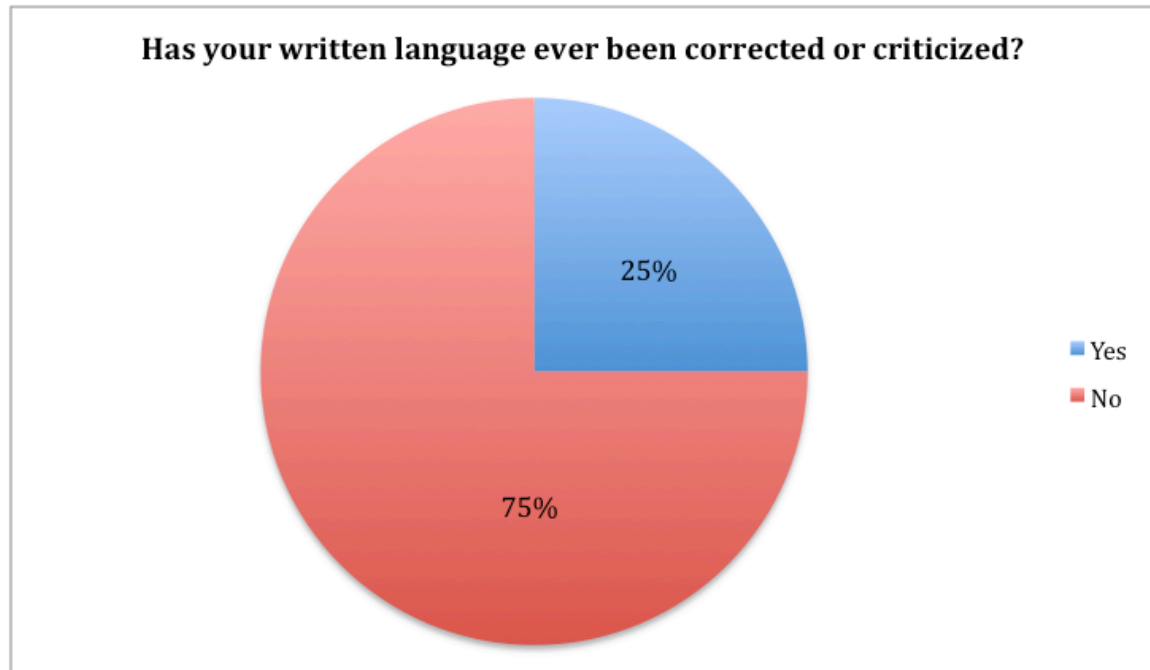
- Has your written language ever been corrected or criticized? If so, can you describe this experience?

The majority of the students answered "no" (see Figure 4.1).

³ According to Nordquist (2016) "In composition studies, the term modes of discourse refers to the four traditional categories of written texts: narration, description, exposition, and argument" (para.1).

Figure 4.1

Pre- Questionnaire Responses: Writing Correction and Criticism



Most of the students who answered “no” for Question #2 on the Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire alluded to using a SAE writing style. Take for example the students’ excerpts provided below:

Ayana:

No. I write completely different from how I speak. I took AP classes in high school so my essays and other writing assignment have to be flawless.

Jamarr:

No, because I try to right everything in proper english.

Devan:

No, I normally write really proper.

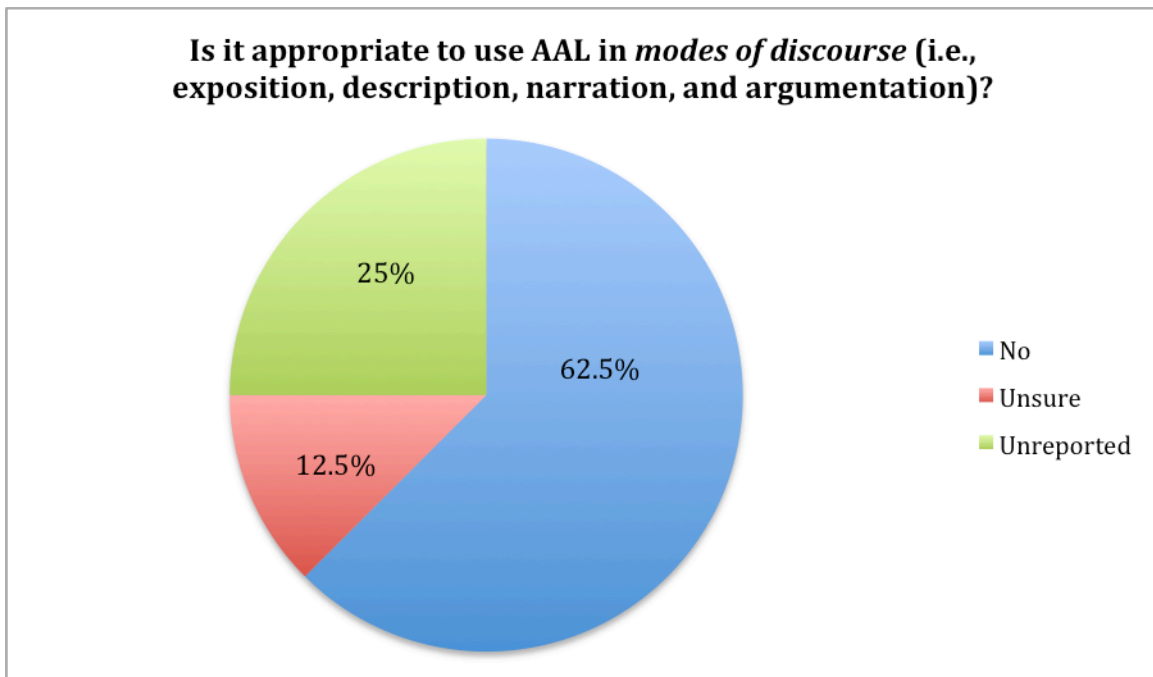
These responses were surprising for one primary reason: Ayana, Jamarr, and Devan used features of AAL in writing before, during, and after exposure to the CLA approach to writing instruction.⁴ For example, at the end of Devan’s post essay, he conclusively states, “Don’t nobody speak that language” (double negative plus inversion) to “talk back” to issues of language, exclusion, and human rights. In many ways, this finding correlates with Palacas’ (2001) account. According to Palacas, AAL-speaking students “have incomplete knowledge of standard English, it is not surprising, for example, to find them using forms that they believe to be standard but that are nevertheless at variance with the standard, forms that can be seen, to use Spears term, as ‘camouflaged’ Ebonics grammar” (p. 347). Only through AAL instruction, Palacas claims, can AAL-speaking students gain sufficient knowledge of the difference between AAL and SAE.

Another interesting finding that emerged was in reference to the AAL-speaking students’ pre-study attitudes toward AAL in *modes of discourse* (i.e., exposition, description, narration, and argumentation). When asked if it was appropriate to use AAL in such discourse, during a Week One: Introduction interactive class discussion on AAL and writing, the majority of the students responded, “no” (see Figure 5.1 below).

⁴ See Chapter 4 for an overview of their pre- and post essay results.

Figure 5.1

Class Discussion Responses: AAL in Writing



Of significance is Ayana’s response. Although Ayana reported positive perceptions of AAL in its speech form before and during the course of the study, she did not appear to report positive perceptions about AAL in its written form. During the class discussion, Ayana pushed against notions of using nonmainstream language in writing—despite the fact, once again, that she consistently reported positive perceptions of AAL, in its speech form, before and during the course of the study. Also of significance is the AAL-speaking students report of being “taught” that SAE is the “proper,” “correct,” or “best way to write.” For example, Ammber stated, “I was told you always have ta write like that.” This being “taught” to write this way emerged many times in other class discussions; especially during the Unit Two: Writing as a Socio-Political Act class discussions. Despite students interest in the Multigenre Writing Snippets (which invited students to use a variety of languages—such as AAL, mainstream language, and code-meshing

language—to compose multigenre snippets in response to the politics of language and education in the U.S.), most of the students still alluded to having a “SAE is the proper way to write” ideology at the end of the session. Perhaps bell hooks (2013) says it best when referring to the work of Ivan Van Sertima. “In his work on decolonization, Ivan Van Sertima continually insisted that both our minds and our imaginations have been colonized. This colonization of mind and imagination has been one of the primary reasons many black folks remain wedded to white supremacist thought and practice” (hooks, 2013, p. 187).

These pre-study findings reveal not only the AAL-speaking students experience with writing, but also their attitudes and perceptions toward writing. Overall, during the Week One: Introduction interactive classroom discussion about AAL and writing, the majority of the students responded in ways that were also symbolic of linguistic subordination.

5.3.2 Writing as Engaged Citizens

Below, I describe how the CLA approach to writing instruction affected the AAL-speaking students’ writing attitudes and perceptions; specifically, as revealed in their responses to Question #4 and Question 5 on the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire and their class discussions during weeks two-six of the study.

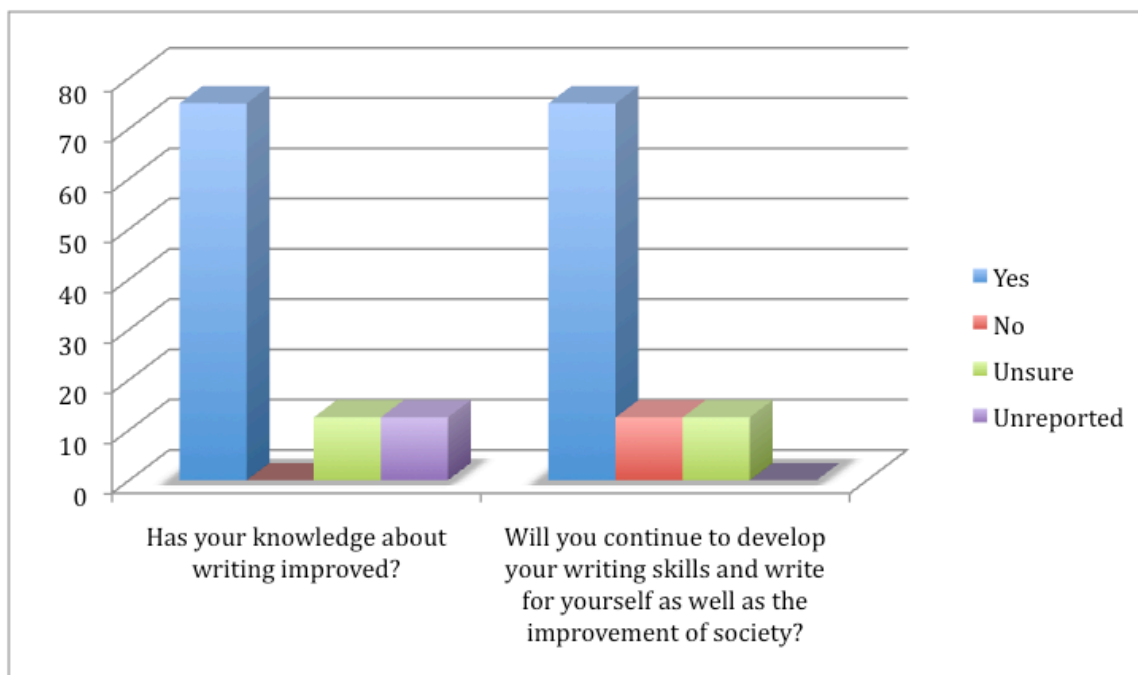
Question #4 and Question #5 on the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire asked:

- **Question #4:** Has your knowledge about writing improved? Why or why not?
- **Question #5:** Will you continue to develop your writing skills and write for yourself as well as the improvement of society? Please explain.

The majority of the students answered “yes” for both Question #4 and Question #5 (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1

Post Questionnaire Responses: Change in Writing Attitudes and Perceptions



Most of the students who responded “yes” to Question #4 reported increased awareness of employing language(s) in writing for purpose and audience. One student (Jamarr) even reported being more aware of SAE writing in specific. Most interesting, here, were students’ responses to Question #5. Some of the students responded in ways that pointed toward their motivation to “prepare for writing lives as engaged citizens and not just university students or future professionals” (Morrell, 2008, p.115). Take for example Star, Simone, and Ammber responses below.

Star:

Yes I will continue to develop my writing skills and write for myself as well as the improvement society because our society is so use to writing in DAE and when writing in

AAL it is considered as poetry and it does not get recognized for being an actual language to write out.

Simone:

Yes. People need to learn so I think everybody needs to write to make a change in this world. I will write about things I feel are unfair and things that have happen to me.

Ammber:

Yes, I will write more for myself and society. It is important to write things that you are passionate about so society can have a better knowledge like language rights.

What's important to note is that all of the students who responded "yes" to Question #5 were not motivated to take on engaged writing lives. Devan, for example, stated, "I will continue writing songs but not to improve society. I am not a concience artist." Furthermore, as noted in the *Writing "Right"* sub-section above, most of the students held strong to their "SAE is the proper way to write" ideology throughout the study. Thus although most of the students reported higher levels of awareness of writing processes and practices for Question #4 on the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire and most of the students reported an increased motivation to write for themselves as well as the wider social arena for Question #5 on the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire, only one student (Star) alluded to actually using an AAL or code-meshing writing style. This could merely be a result of the structuring of the questions on the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire, or it could merely be that students held strong, in some ways, to their "SAE is the proper way to write" ideology. Essentially, this could point to a need to expose AAL-speaking students to a CLA approach to writing instruction for a longer period of time (beyond six-weeks) in order for it to potentially counter their hegemonic "SAE only in writing" mindset. Although

the effect of the CLA approach to writing instruction on AAL-speaking students' writing attitudes and perceptions aren't so clear, cut, and dry, I do believe the results suggests earlier (i.e., elementary) CLA teacher training/preparation initiatives in order to begin the process of dismantling teacher's hegemonic language and writing attitudes, perceptions, and practices—attitudes, perceptions, and practices that as shown above ultimately gets ingrained in the hearts and minds of AAL-speaking students.

5.4 The Take-Away Message: Students' Post-Study Reflections

In order to understand students' perception of this study, an Exit Interview Questionnaire was administered and collected at the end of the study. The Exit Interview Questionnaire asked students to discuss their reaction to the study. Below, I share students' reflections on the ways in which a CLA approach to writing instruction was beneficial to them:

Bianca:

It was better than any writing class I've ever been in. This study helped me understand AAL and writing a lot because I actually use AAL a lot and didn't even know it. I learned that I can use different languages depending on my writing situation. I also learned the difference between DAE and AAL and when I should be using them. I enjoyed it. I hope I can do it again.

Ayana:

I guess you could say I was happy. I am very much pro-Black and anything that relates positively to my people has my support. This research study is good because it's going to serve as proof that AAL isn't remedial. Furthermore, whether other cultures and races

will admit it, they are intrigued by the way we speak, and so they try to speak like us. We deserve recognition for that.

Simone:

It has helped me see that AAL isn't bad and we have to keep letting people know that it's not. AAL is everywhere. People talk it and people write it and it's okay. The world has to stop discriminating against AAL. Writing teachers have to see that this is legitimate and it's okay to use when the writing situation calls for it.

Jamarr:

It was past awesome, enlightening, different (in a good way), and overall enjoyable.

Tyson:

I had negative views of AAL. But I also had negative views of all languages before this study. This study helped me see that there is not anything wrong with AAL. Although I speak and write in SAE which is the professional language, there wouldn't be anything wrong if I spoke AAL.

Clayton:

Fantastic. This is really informative and honestly can build on some peoples awareness of the world-change worldview. I really enjoy this research, hopefully this can be translated into a class. Students need to know to be conscious about others ways of speech whether it's AAL or something else. I occasionally speak AAL so I couldn't relate like the other participants but I still had an open mind and I expected that I would learn something from this. I've been prejudice to AAL speakers when I was a kid because that's just how I was raised. The media told me to not speak that way because it's ghetto and my teachers thought that it's improper and inappropriate. However, with this

program I've learned that just because someone speaks AAL, and this can be applied to any language, that doesn't mean that they should be looked down upon language doesn't see how a person is.

Star:

My reaction to this research study was confusion when first learning about this subject. I was not sure what it was going to be about but it seemed interesting. I learned so many things that I did not think that I would learn. But they are all beneficial and broadened my thinking.

Devan:

I loved it. I initially got involved for the girls but I really enjoyed learning about my culture's language and my culture.

Nekole:

I feel this research was very helpful. Before it, I didn't know a thing about AAL. Now I do. I notice when it's spoken and how it's spoken. I even now pay attention to when I do it, which is when I'm at home or with friends and I am trying to make myself feel on the outside like I do on the inside.

Students' responses reveal the potential of a CLA approach to writing instruction for both AAL-speaking and SAE-speaking students. Most notably, though, it suggests that AAL-speaking students are more likely to develop into confident, conscious, competent citizens of the world and word when CLA is centered in writing instruction.

5.5 Conclusion and Implications

Through revealing the results of AAL-speaking students' pre- and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaires and exit questionnaire, I aim to contribute in a number of ways to the ongoing discussions about education in general and language and writing in particular. My first aim, here, is to counter visions of language and writing—both teaching and learning—that are rooted in narrow, unitary, hegemonic ideologies; ideologies that essentially make literacy learning and access a viable entity for SAE-speaking students only.

The series of instructional units for this study sought to use CLA as a basis for not only enhancing AAL-speaking students writing performance, but also to inspire change in their language and writing attitudes and perceptions. To incite this change, specific material that covered issues of language (oral and textual), exclusion, and human rights as proposed by contemporary CLA scholarship was selected and scaffolded.

In sum, AAL-speaking students' responses to both the Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire and Exit Interview Questionnaire reveal how they have begun scratching the surface with respect to language, literacy, and democratic citizenship. In regards to a CLA approach to writing instruction and the possibilities thereof, these questionnaires reveal that a CLA approach to writing instruction has the potential to counter AAL-speaking students hegemonic language attitudes and perceptions and thereby move them toward notions of what Baugh (2000) calls “linguistic liberation” and DeBose (2005) calls “cultural revitalization.” Furthermore, the results show that a CLA approach to writing instruction has the potential to encourage AAL-speaking students to assert their linguistic rights in educational contexts—linguistic rights that have been advanced in the CCCC Students' Right to Their Own Language document (1974), CCCC Guideline on the National Language Policy (2015), and CCCC

Statement on Ebonics (2016). And last, but not least, a CLA approach to writing instruction has the potential to enhance AAL-speaking students ability to “learn to work in their writing within, on, among, and across a variety of Englishes and languages, not simply to (re)produce and write within the conventions of a particular, standardized variety of English” (p.3)—as proposed by scholarship on composition in Horner, Lu, and Matsuda, ed. (2010). To provide further insight into what AAL-speaking students’ responses on the questionnaires reveal, I will go back to Simone’s Exit Interview Questionnaire comment: “The world has to stop discriminating against AAL.”

In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I have offered a reflection of students and their interaction with the CLA approach to writing instruction. While there are certainly some benefits associated with implementing a CLA approach to writing in composition courses, similarly, there are some weaknesses. First, as I personally experienced, proposing to implement a CLA approach to writing instruction causes intense negative reactions—among educators, administrators, and students. For example, three students⁵ in this study resisted the notion of such an approach in writing.⁶ I suppose that the intense negative reactions are for various reasons, however, I will list a couple: 1) As discussed in previous chapters, the teaching of writing has a long canonical, hegemonic history; thus the ideology that there is only one way to teach and learn writing is so entrenched in the hearts and minds of educators, administrators, and students that to purpose an alternative approach causes what DeBose (2005) calls a visceral reaction. 2) CLA is invested in interests of equity and rights which mean that power relations are shared equally between students and teachers in the classroom. This poses another issue as teacher positionality has always been invested in acts of authority.

⁵ One AAL-speaking students and two SAE-speaking students

⁶ These students, however, were more receptive to such an approach in speech contexts.

Overall the vast amount of students in this study benefited from this approach. Thus I believe this study offers beneficial implications for the implementation of a CLA approach to writing instruction for AAL-speaking students in composition courses. I explore some of these implications in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

“Where We Go From Here”: Closing the Writing Performance Gap Between African American Language-Speaking Students and “Success”

This study aimed to link theory to practice in order to challenge and transform established notions of what it means to teach writing to AAL-speaking students. For this study, I designed, developed, implemented, and evaluated a series of instructional units which sought to improve AAL-speaking students’ critical consciousness of language, writing, and society. What educators can gain from the results, as covered in Chapters 4-5, is that language(s) can be presented as a resource in which students can draw upon rather than a set of unitary rules that limit students’ writing possibilities.

In this chapter, I briefly review some of the major findings that emerged from this study. I then turn to offering implications for composition studies before revealing limitations to the research design and providing recommendations for future research. I conclude by offering some final thoughts.

6.1 Summary of Major Findings

There were several positive outcomes associated with participating in this study. I summarize these positive outcomes below:

The CLA Teacher Preparation Program

- The composition instructor reported an increased awareness of AAL. Furthermore, the composition instructor revealed more positive attitudes toward AAL.

The CLA Approach to Writing Instruction: Writing Performance

- The AAL-speaking students displayed greater awareness of writer’s identity.

- The AAL-speaking students demonstrated writing performance growth in the following areas: ideas, voice, language facility, and conventions.

The CLA Approach to Writing Instruction: Language and Writing Attitudes and Perceptions

- The AAL-speaking students reported greater awareness of AAL. Furthermore, they revealed significantly more positive attitudes toward AAL.
- The AAL-speaking students reported greater awareness of writing processes and practices. Furthermore, they revealed more favorable attitudes toward writing.

6.2 Composition Studies: Implications

This study offers strong implications for theories, curricula, and pedagogies for the field of composition studies. It also offers important implications for composition policymakers, administrators, and educators concerned with advancing recent calls for greater educational equity. Below, I discuss some of these implications.

Design Instruction and Material with Language Diversity in Mind

The teaching and learning of writing should not be invested in hegemonic, unitary aims. It should, rather, be connected to students' socio-cultural lives. Most importantly, it should align with the CCCC Students' Right to Their Own Language (1974) document, CCCC Guideline on the National Language Policy (2015), and CCCC Statement on Ebonics (2016). The SRTOL document and National Language Policy call for the development of pedagogical resources that honor, preserve, and protect the oral and written language used by *all* students; regardless of their linguistic heritage. The Statement on Ebonics makes a similar call—with a particular focus on the development of pedagogies that honor, preserve, and protect the linguistic background of AAL-speaking students. This study sufficiently addresses these calls, as well as calls made by Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

(Paris, 2012), by offering a series of instructional units that takes into account the linguistic realities of AAL-speaking students in specific. Furthermore, this study provides an example of what it means to design instruction and material with language diversity in mind.

Emphasize That Writing Entails Engaging with Language(s) for Purpose and Audience

AAL-speaking students should receive instruction on how to use language for purpose and audience in writing. The “Unit Two: Writing as a Socio-Political Commitment” session for this study introduced students to writing “as a social practice consisting of a complex set of physical, socio-political, cognitive, and affective elements” (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p. 81). During this session, students learned to “use language [in writing] that...align[s] them with sociopolitical values, beliefs and practices to which they are committed” to expressing (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, p. 66). As noted in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, this unit helped guide students toward making successful and strategic linguistic choices in writing. Thus, the possibilities associated with using a CLA approach to writing instruction to meet these aims are evident as revealed by the AAL-speaking students’ responses. Analysis of the AAL-speaking students pre- and post essay and pre- and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaires reveal that the AAL-speaking students were able to become more aware of writing processes and practices and more conscious of their own writer’s identity; thus providing the AAL-speaking students with the tools to work critically within and across a variety of languages, including AAL, mainstream language, and code-meshing language, and enhance their writing in several areas, including ideas, voice, language facility, and conventions.

Incorporate Critical Language Awareness Themes Into Existing Writing Curriculums

According to Wallace (1998) CLA pedagogy allows second and foreign language learners to significantly draw on and extend their existing linguistic repertoire. It also allows them to

cultivate their critical literacy skills, thereby, allowing them to successfully and critically engage with talk and text in wider academic and social arenas. Furthermore, according to Clark & Ivanič, CLA pedagogy is advantageous in writing classrooms because it allows students to be placed within the context of *real writers* and *real readers* that have a “greater sense of their own agency and ability to engage in action to challenge and transform the educational and wider social world within which they operate” (Clark & Ivanič, 1999, pp. 68-69). Moreover, the authors claim that CLA pedagogy has the potential to help writing students improve their critical thinking, and thus, writing performance. As this scholarship reveals, and as results from this study reveals, there are numerous benefits associated with incorporating CLA themes into existing writing curriculums.

Foster CLA-Raising in Composition Teacher Preparation and Development Programs

CLA teacher training/preparation initiatives should be established in order to sensitize composition educators to AAL and the role they must play and allowing AAL-speaking students voice in oral and written contexts. During the preparation/development session, teachers should also be trained on how to select material and resources that are symbolic of these students’ lived lives; especially since “the lack of diversity” in course content (readings, lessons, etc.) remains a critical issue. The CLA teacher preparation program I developed and implemented is a start—as the composition instructor responded positively to the teacher preparation program. Analysis of the composition instructor’s Post Critical Language Awareness Teacher Preparation Program Questionnaire revealed that the composition instructor was able to become more aware of the social and cultural contexts of AAL and more conscious of her own linguistic prejudices; thus providing the composition instructor with the tools to resocialize her hegemonic and oppressive dispositions toward language into pluralistic and emancipatory dispositions toward language.

Bridge the Gap Between Composition Research and Practice

The students' pre- and post essays and pre- and post language and writing questionnaires reveal the work that the field of composition still has to do in respect to language rights. Most notable, is the hegemonic language attitudes and perceptions that teachers uphold. These type of attitudes and perceptions, as one could probably guess, have the potential to negatively affect AAL-speaking students—causing them to believe that their language, and by extension their culture, is inferior. This points to the need for the field of composition to work more vigorously toward addressing the obvious gap between research and practice in order to counter visions of language and writing—both teaching and learning—that are rooted in narrow, unitary, hegemonic ideologies; ideologies that essentially make literacy learning and access a viable entity for DAE-speaking students only.

The list of implications offered above are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather a more focused call to the field of composition to attend to its commitment to implementing, in good faith, its announced value of students' right to their own language. As such, although the implications I offer are for AAL-speaking students in specific, they are applicable and beneficial, I posit, for *all* students. Furthermore, although the implications I offer are for composition studies, they are applicable and beneficial, I posit, for rhetoric and literacy studies.

6.3: Revisiting the Study Design: Limitations

This study brought together many of the most important and successful elements of CLA to address the under-investigated, and important, research questions that guide this study. This study is unique because it represents an effort to document, at the postsecondary level, a CLA approach to writing instruction for AAL-speaking students. As such, it includes a complete

record of a teacher preparation design and an instructional unit design. As of yet, no such record exists. Thus this study has the potential to provide a model from which future research at the intersection of writing and linguistics can build upon. Although this study offers rich insight into the effects of a CLA approach to writing instruction for AAL-speaking students, there are some limitations. I reflect on some of these limitations below.

One significant limitation is the amount of instructional time. The series of instructional units were quite immense and thought-provoking. (The students often needed more time than allocated to complete designated tasks. Furthermore, the students found the study discussion questions to be stimulating, and as such, often stayed after the study session time to continue the discussion.) In future qualitative studies of this caliber I recommend that more time be allocated for each session. I also recommend that the length of the study be extended beyond six weeks. These adjustments will allow students the necessary time to fully engage with all aspects of the study material. These adjustments will also allow for the following of the development of students' writing over an even longer period of time.

Another limitation of this study is in relation to data sources. First, my pre- and post essays and pre- and post language and writing attitudinal questionnaire were different. For example, for the Preliminary Essay, students were asked to respond to a prompt that revolved around AAL as highlighted in an excerpt from June Jordan's *His Own Where*. For the Post Essay, students were asked to respond to a prompt that also revolved around AAL as highlighted in an excerpt from June Jordan, but the June Jordan excerpt used for the Post Essay was "Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan." This small and subtle modification was made in order to lessen the possibility of students acquiring, retaining, and repeating responses (i.e., testing effect); however, perhaps, my claims regarding AAL-

speaking students' writing performance could have been better supported if the essays didn't vary. The Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire asked students about their language and writing attitudes and experiences in-and-outside of school contexts. The Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire asked students to reflect on their learning and post-study language and writing attitudes and perceptions; however, perhaps, my claims regarding AAL-speaking students' language and writing attitudes and perceptions could have been better supported if the questionnaires didn't vary widely. Thus in future studies of this caliber, I recommend employing similarly designed pre- and post data sources. Secondly, I aimed to ensure inter-rater reliability by recruiting two experts in the fields of AAL and composition to analyze the essays with me, due to time constraints, I was unable to so. Thus, also, in future studies of this caliber, I recommend implementing this protocol.

6.4 Moving Forward: Future Research

Although this study offers powerful insight into AAL-speaking students' writing practices under a CLA pedagogy, much research also remains to be done on topics of multilingualism and computer mediated task-based writing. First, this study sought to investigate the implications of centering a CLA approach to writing instruction with AAL-speaking students. However, one surprise that occurred was the shift in language identity that occurred among three of the students in this study whom self identified as AAL speakers. At the mid-point of the study (week three) three of the students (Ayana, Jamarr, and Devan) began taking up a multilingual identity—establishing a linguistic connection with AAL, Jamaican Pawah, and

DAE.¹ At large, is another limitation—allowing students to self-identify their language before the study commenced, but it also suggests a need to explore the possibilities of such an approach to writing instruction with multilingual African Americans. This type of research could address the dearth of scholarship on pedagogies and curricula for multilingual writers in composition courses (Matsuda, 2012). Second, this study didn't afford the opportunity for students to engage in any computer mediated task-based writing. (The study was held inside of a traditional college classroom.) Thus I was unable to explore the possibilities of digital productions of knowledge under this CLA approach to writing instruction. However, this also is an important area to understand. As Hart-Davidson, et. al (2005) points out, “[I]f teachers of writing expect to intervene usefully to help students with their writing processes, they have to engage in students’ production, which are now mostly computer mediated” (p. 3).

Arguably, the design, development, and implementation of a CLA pedagogy in writing presents more of a challenge than a convincing rationale. As I personally experienced, proposing to implement a CLA approach to writing instruction causes intense negative reactions—among educators, administrators, and students. For example, three students² in this study resisted the notion of such an approach in writing.³ I suppose that the intense negative reactions are for various reasons, however, I will list a couple: 1) As discussed in previous chapters, the teaching of writing has a long canonical, homogenous history; thus the ideology that there is only one way to teach and learn writing is so entrenched in the hearts and minds of educators, administrators, and students that to purpose an alternative approach causes what DeBose (2005) calls a visceral reaction. 2) CLA is invested in interests of equity, rights, politics, and advocacy which mean that

¹ Each of these students revealed that they had a parent of Jamaican descent during classroom discussions.

² One AAL-speaking students and two SAE-speaking students

³ These students, however, were more receptive to such an approach in speech contexts.

students are placed as authoritative equals in the classroom and taught to assert themselves in oral and written contexts; thus, in essence, teachers would have to relinquish most of their authority. This poses another issue as teacher positionality has always been invested in acts of authority. As revealed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, the vast amount of students in this study benefited from this approach. Thus I will remain committed to such an approach, but what this intense negative reaction to CLA pedagogy reveals, is that additional studies on CLA pedagogy and writing is necessary—in order to counter these negatives attitudes and perceptions about CLA pedagogy.

6.5 Closing Thoughts

“Educational deficiencies are generally defined as emanating from students rather than from the system that is supposed to serve them” (Nieto, 2011, p. 198). I hope this study has convinced the reader to reject the theory that AAL-speaking students are primarily the culprits for the history of failure that often marks their writing experiences, and instead, accept the notion that hegemonic writing policies and practices are primarily what’s at play. Furthermore, I hope this study has convinced the reader that a CLA approach to writing instruction may help us begin the process of closing the writing performance gap between AAL-speaking students and “success.”

In closing, I would like to reflect on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2012). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), a score of 173 (on a 300 scale) is considered proficient on the 12th grade NAEP writing exam. Of all of the races identified, African American students scored the lowest (many scoring in the below 25th percentile which is below a score of 127), and among this African American student population,




urban African American students scored even lower. This study, I argue, can offer insight into mitigating this concern—insight that can account for powerful and productive interactions and practices that can lead to academic success in writing for this population of students. In closing, I would like to also synthesize the results from the data presented in Chapters 4-5: Learning about language, exclusion, and human rights powerfully and productively impacts AAL-speaking students and their teachers institutional and societal lives.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Exploring “How We Use Language”

Directions: For this activity, I want you to reflect on your language use in each setting. 1) Identify the language(s) you use in each setting: AAL, DAE, both, or other, 2) Provide actual examples of words or sentences that you use in each setting, and 3) Explain why you use the identified language(s), words or sentences in each setting.

<p><u>Home</u></p> 	<p><u>School</u></p> 
<p><u>Community</u></p> 	<p><u>Other</u></p>

APPENDIX B

Black Talk *Revisited*: Using Detroit Hip-Hop to Develop an AAL Dictionary

An Overview

In 1994,¹ Geneva Smitherman's book *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* was published. *Black Talk* "provides definitions of words, sayings, and popular expressions from all segments of the African American community"² (essentially, it is considered an AAL dictionary). For this activity, we are going to do a similar concept—using **words**, **sayings**, and **popular expressions** from Detroit Hip-Hop artists such as (a short list):

1. Big Sean
2. Dej Loaf
3. Mae Day
4. Detroit Che
5. Stretch Money

You may choose to go beyond Detroit hip-hop and use African American **words**, **sayings**, and **popular expressions** from hip-hop in general, T.V., a book, your neighborhood, your school, and/or your community. In a nutshell, your goal here is to develop a contemporary list of African American **words**, **sayings**, and **popular expressions** that can potentially be distributed to others (such as educators or non-AAL-speakers) for language awareness purposes.

Directions: *Part A*

Respond to the Following:

Name: _____

Do you listen to Hip-Hop? Yes or No

If so, how often:

If so, who are your favorite artists:

Do you write hip-hop lyrics? Yes or No

¹ A revised (updated) edition was published in 2000. The revised edition includes more than 300 new words and phrases.

² Backcover

Directions: Part B

Complete the Following Task:

For each number below, provide: **(1)** an African American **word**, **saying**, or **popular expression** used in Detroit hip-hop (again, you may choose to go beyond Detroit hip-hop), and **(2)** a correlating definition.

Example from Hip-Hop: Dime—A very attractive female, a "10".

Example from the book *Black Talk*: Cock Sucka—A man who is weak, passive, emasculated.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

APPENDIX C

Student Language and Writing Preliminary Attitudinal Questionnaire ¹

Name: _____

1. Has your spoken language ever been corrected or criticized? If so, can you describe this experience?
2. Has your written language ever been corrected or criticized? If so, can you describe this experience?
3. What specific style of speech do you typically use and why? Do you believe this style of speech is suitable to be used anywhere? Why?
4. What specific writing style do you typically use and why? What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this specific writing style?
5. Do you consider yourself to be a good writer? Why?
6. What type of writing do you like to do?
7. Do you write outside of school? If yes, what kind of writing and how often? If no, why not?

¹ This questionnaire was adapted (with modifications) from “Back to the Classroom: Afrocentricity and Teacher-Research in First-Year Writing” by Staci Perryman-Clark (2010) and “An African Centered Approach to Composition: Freedom Through Culturally Relevant Literacy Instruction” by Elaine Richardson (1996). It will be distributed to student participants during week one of the study.

APPENDIX D

Student Language and Writing Post Attitudinal Questionnaire ¹
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Name: _____

- 1) Do you feel any differently about African American Language (AAL)?

- 2) Now that you've had some practice with AAL and Dominant American English (DAE) what do you see as the difference?

- 3) Was it harder or easier for you to write in AAL? Why?

- 4) Has your knowledge about writing improved? Why or why not?

- 5) Will you continue to develop your writing skills and write for yourself as well as the improvement of society? Please explain.

¹ This questionnaire was adapted (with modifications) from "An African Centered Approach to Composition: Freedom Through Culturally Relevant Literacy Instruction" by Elaine Richardson (1996). It will be distributed to student participants during week six of the study.

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