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Why Do They Talk That Way?: Teachers' Perceptions of the Language Young Students Bring
into the Classroom

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

Julie Smith-Price

B.A., St. Mary's Dominican College, 1981
M.Ed., University of New Orleans, 1989

May 2009

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my parents, Mathilde Smith and the late Lawrence Smith. They gave me two wonderful gifts, a love for learning and compassion for all of mankind, both of which I credit with my choice to embark upon this path.

It is also dedicated to my husband Keith, and my daughters Blair and Micayla for “hanging in there” through it all.

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ABSTRACT

The language children bring to the classroom (home language) is often different from the language that is expected or accepted in schools. These language differences are often met with a variety of reactions from teachers. The purpose of this research is threefold: (a) to apply a narrative inquiry design to explore how teachers respond to the language that children bring (home language) to the early childhood classroom and the effects this response has on their work with children; (b) to engage in research efforts that will explore how differences in language may affect or be affected by pedagogy, curriculum development, and teachers' expectations; (c) to understand how teachers feel about their preparation and capacity to address the issue of language diversity.

The 4 participants in this study are either current or former teachers of children between the ages of 4 to 8 years. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I have acquired stories from each of the 4 participants. The stories provide insight into these teachers' perceptions of children's language in the classroom. The stories also open discussions on language diversity and the role it plays in early childhood education classrooms as well as how prepared teachers are to deal with language differences.

With this study I hope to contribute to the research that focuses on language and language diversity in early childhood education. I would also hope to prompt further research on issues such as teachers' approaches to children's language differences within the classroom, the affects of different approaches to language diversity on pedagogy and curriculum, and finally on culturally sensitive pedagogy.

Key Words: Early Childhood Education, Language Development, Language Diversity, African American Vernacular English, Culturally Sensitive Pedagogy

CHAPTER 1

Why Do They Talk That Way?

Happily crowded along the back seat of my uncle's 3-year-old 1967 Chevy with four female cousins, we waited to board the Mississippi River Ferry. An occasional breeze from the river tempered the heat of the Louisiana summer sun. While my cousins and I indulged in typical 12-year-old girl talk, one cousin commented, "Rodney like Monique 'cause she got *good* hair." Overhearing the conversation, my uncle intervened saying, "Everybody has good hair. There's no such thing as *bad* hair."

I remember becoming very thoughtful about my uncle's comments. This was one of those rare occasions in my childhood that I was encouraged to embrace something that was natural about me as an African-American girl. Although his remarks were moving and uplifting, the thought of my naturally short, tightly curled hair being *good* would take some getting used to. This hair had earned me paddles with rulers in preschool because it "messed up" during naptime, and it earned me taps with combs when I flinched during weekly hair straightening (hot combing) routines. I had never heard anyone refer to my hair as "good."

It was a commonly accepted notion in the African-American community that the closer the natural texture of your hair resembled that of the hair of Caucasians, the better it was. This hair type was commonly referred to as "good hair." The shorter and tighter the curls were and the closer the hair texture resembled that of one's African ancestry, the less desirable it was, and therefore dubbed "nappy (bad) hair." My uncle's insight was radical. He was able to see the damaging effects this concept had on the self-esteem of African-American children.

The concept that hair can be *good* or *bad* demonstrates a concerted effort to erase the culture and the history of an entire people in America—people of African ancestry (from commercial and media images of beauty to images of corporate success, African ancestry proved to be a disadvantage). The mainstream images of beauty and success were ultimately internalized by African Americans and encouraged them to believe that the closer they resembled the European race, the more appealing they were. The African-American families that accepted these notions undoubtedly loved their children as much as any other cultural group, but felt a need to assimilate with the majority culture in order for their children to have a chance at success. Although these families acted with the best intentions for their children in mind, their actions ultimately led to a lack of pride and confidence in their culture's original state.

My parents did everything in their power to let my three siblings and me know that we could accomplish any goal we put our minds to. Success was ours if we wanted it, but wanting it meant preparing ourselves completely. One part of that preparation was hair grooming, i.e., females keeping their hair clean and “straightened.” Hair texture was simply viewed by most African-American families as one more condition that assured pre-judgment and discrimination. Abiding by our parents' guide for success, my sister and I consistently maintained straight hair styles throughout our childhood, and we continued that trend as adults.

Much like the role of hair in the African American community, *language* incites astounding reactions, both from within and outside the culture. We have seen tremendous progress in the attitudes of American people towards hair since my cousin and I were children. Today, African-American children and adults wear their hair, in its natural glory, proudly. However, although commonly held views toward hair as a gauge for beauty are changing, progress toward the acceptance of language differences among groups of African-American

people has been much slower. Language diversity continues to generate powerful responses not only from the mainstream culture, but also from within the African-American community itself.

For centuries, the language of African-American children has been viewed as a major contributing factor to the achievement gap in schools (Smitherman, 1986). Like hair, the closer children's language resembles the standard English that is more typically spoken by European Americans, the better their chances are of receiving positive academic feedback in the classroom environment (Labov, 1985). Research reports that African-American children who speak standard English are viewed by their teachers as intelligent and well spoken, whereas those who use African American Vernacular English (AAVE) are viewed as less intelligent (Labov; Smitherman).

AAVE is one term used to describe a language form spoken by many African-American people. According to Smith and Crozier (1998), "it has been suggested that AAVE has grammatical structure in common with West African languages or even that AAVE is best described as an African based language with English words" (pp. 113 – 114). The language ability of African-American children whose primary language is AAVE is associated with poor school performance. Although research reports that there is little notable difference in the process of the language development of culturally different children and that of the language development of more mainstream European-American children (Abrahams & Troike, 1972; Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 1998; National Research Council, 2000; Niemi, Poskiparta, Silven, & Voeten, 2007), the propensity to regard the AAVE spoken by many African-American children as a deficiency and/or an indication of low cognitive ability still exists in many classrooms. Such implications often result in either remediation, which provides African-American children with experiences that imitate those of mainstream European-American children, or an authoritarian

approach that supports the need to communicate primarily through directives (Blake, 1993). In other words, many remedial programs are designed to infuse approaches to language that are more commonly used in mainstream European-American communities, yet are less familiar to African-American students. These programs, as well as the more directive approach to remediation, often results in meaningless and confusing experiences for students.

The purpose of this study is three fold: (a) to apply a narrative inquiry design to explore how teachers respond to the language that children bring (home language) to the early childhood classroom and the effects this response has on their work with children; (b.) to engage in research efforts that will explore how differences in language may affect or be affected by pedagogy, curriculum development, and teachers' expectations; and (c.) to understand how teachers feel about their preparation and capacity to address the issue of language diversity.

Ways of Knowing Language

My Own Language Learning at Home

Waiting for my sister Cathy and her family to arrive in New Orleans for the Easter holiday has been interesting. Cathy's teenage daughter, Alexandra, is now wearing dread locks, and her teenage son's hairstyle alternates between an afro and cornrows. My 80-year-old mother has not seen either of these grandchildren since they adopted their current hairstyles. Their intentional effort to highlight the natural texture of their hair is in complete opposition with the intentions that inspired the hairstyles that my mother is most accustomed to. Although my mother is aware of the changes society has made regarding the expression of pride in African-American identity through hairstyle, I am not sure how she has adjusted to these changes. Her attitude remains a powerful influence on my sister and me as we continue to wear our hair

chemically relaxed. My thirteen-year-old daughter, however, does entertain the idea of letting her now relaxed hair go natural. I feel a sense of pride in knowing that she would be comfortable with this decision. It says to me that she is fully aware of her own identity as an African-American female in spite of attending a predominantly white private school.

My mother's influence over language was as powerful as it was over hair. A native of rural Louisiana, my mother grew up in a town where French was spoken as frequently as English. Even today, her Creole accent makes pronouncing /th/ a difficult task. There are times when, in the middle of a conversation with one of her sisters or older relatives, that her language naturally switches from English to French /Creole. This act is always followed with much laughter. Reflections on the language of her childhood bring smiles, but are confined to limited company. My mother and most of her peers were discouraged from using the French/Creole language because it was viewed by the majority as poor grammar and a backward language. This language was strongly denounced in school. Most thought that *not* passing this language on to their offspring was in the best interest of the children and their future. With the exception of two or three words, I know nothing of this language. I have always felt some resentment about being denied this component of my heritage. Language, a very important part of our culture, and what makes my family who we are, has been wiped out of our history. The role of language in a child's life is much deeper than simply communicating. It signifies unity within a group, shared experiences, a shared past, a sense of belonging and acceptance, and finally a sense of confirmation. An effort to take the language of a people away is to strip them of their dignity.

When my mother moved to New Orleans and began to assimilate with the majority culture, she knew she wanted her children to have access to a good education and a successful future. She also knew that the language her children spoke mattered deeply. She instilled

Standard English in us and discouraged AAVE. Once again, she saw the language that was most predominant in her culture as substandard, and she didn't want to pass it on to her children. Just as with the French/Creole, my mother learned to code switch with AAVE and Standard English, and so did all of her children. I grew up believing that the language that was spoken most often in my community (AAVE) was poor grammar.

I was very conscious of my oldest daughter's language and quickly corrected her whenever she switched from Standard English into AAVE. My belief was that it was best not to start a "bad" habit. When I reflect on these feelings, I realize that I was repeating the acts of my mother's generation, the very acts I resented so much. My actions were denying my daughter the opportunity to bond with the rich linguistic culture that is her own. I recognize the need for her to be proficient in Standard English, but this does not necessitate abandoning the language of her culture.

Growing up African American in America, a child must master Standard English in order to function in the mainstream. Standard English is a necessity for effective communication in most organizations, such as school and the work place. It is apparent to me now that my daughter's use of AAVE has not affected her ability to use Standard English. She is free to share the sense of camaraderie that develops between peers who choose to use AAVE as well as successfully communicate in the mainstream, where Standard English is preferred. Now with my second daughter, I am in a comfortable place with the language she chooses to use. I realize that we are all keepers of a rich heritage, and it should not be hidden or denied, but instead accepted and appreciated for all that it represents.

My Language Learning as a Student

Often, thoughts and perceptions are influenced by personal, social, and cultural beliefs. Such beliefs typically precede career choices such as teaching, in which case they are in place when teachers enter the classroom. Teachers have a critical role in the process of language learning at the early childhood level. Their inner thoughts and perceptions tend to reflect their actions in the classroom. What happens when a child of a non-mainstream social or cultural group enters the classroom of a teacher who adheres to the social and cultural norms of mainstream America? An essential part of this child's culture is his/her language. The child's language will typically reflect the language of the cultural group s/he belongs to. How does the teacher respond to this language difference? If the child is to succeed, will he/she eventually face the need to adjust or convert to the culture of the classroom, i.e., the culture of the teacher? Ultimately, the goal is to have a clear understanding of the effects of this cultural conversion on a child's language learning process. However, a first step in accomplishing this goal, and the purpose of the current study, is to comprehend the teacher's perception of the language young children bring to the classroom from home. This study will tell the story of four teachers and their views on their students' language differences.

The language approach that is most vivid from my memories of elementary school is directives. As a student in one of New Orleans's many Catholic schools that was established with the sole intent of educating African-American children in the 1960s, I was shy and used restricted language within the classroom. I was considered a model student and never received anything less than an "A" for conduct grades. The teachers and administrators revered silence among students; silence denoted a well-managed classroom. The only acceptable disruptions to the silence were the teachers' strong voices providing instruction. Instruction usually took on an

approach in which the teachers enforced strict rules that were not open for discussion. The concept of verbal expression of thoughts and ideas was not viewed as a desired attribute in the classroom. The role of teachers was to transmit to the students the wealth of their own knowledge. Students were assured an “A” if they would memorize and regurgitate the teacher’s information on cue.

There was an interesting change as I moved into my middle and high school years. The faculty placed a greater emphasis on dramatic interpretation. This use of language was highly valued by teachers. In my freshman year at an all girl Catholic high school that was run completely by an order of African-American nuns, I began to experience the strength of the African-American voice. When Sr. Leona talked about the history of AAVE, it was an eye-opening experience. It gave *credence* to the language I had always known as “poor grammar.”

Sr. Leona and Sr. Ceira led the speech and drama department. They were two young, energetic nuns that gave the girls at this school the courage to love who they were as African-American young women. They encouraged students to aim for their dreams no matter how challenging. These same nuns are responsible for helping me to realize that there was power in *my* voice. In spite of my painful shyness, and with the support and encouragement of Sr. Leona, I entered a speech and drama competition late in my sophomore year. I won 2nd place! She and Sr. Ceira introduced me to African-American literature I was astounded to learn existed. I became so in tune to language that I waited anxiously every week to rediscover Nikki Giovanni’s poetry on public television.

In a desire to explore a different form of education, I chose to leave the Catholic school system and complete my junior and senior years at a progressive new magnet public high school. This school was the first racially integrated school I had attended. I entered this new environment

fully empowered to join the speech club and went on to become most known in school for my poetry and dramatic presentations. The way I became engaged in the classroom and throughout school had changed drastically. Although my overall personality was still quiet, I suddenly had a powerful voice that was recognized.

Elements of Culture and Language in the Classroom

It is interesting to consider the language stories of others in classrooms throughout the country. I think classroom experiences today are very different from those of my high school experiences. There is a greater emphasis on physical diversity today and less emphasis on addressing the isolated needs of underserved populations. Schools are often required to meet certain racial quotas, fostering the appearance of diversity. However, issues such as social, emotional, and linguistic diversity needs are seldom contemplated or addressed. The lack of attention to these issues may hinder the success of many in underrepresented groups.

Today, teachers work with students from a number of different cultures in one class. Various components of a culture contribute to language learning. Therefore, the differences among cultures could reflect differences in how language is used or exchanged within and across cultures. One example of these cultural differences can be seen in the daily dressing routine between mother and child. In one culture, it may be customary for a mother to *talk* to her young child about routine procedures involved in daily dressing while performing the act. In another culture, this style of *talk* may seem completely unnecessary, and the mother's communications with the child consist of more "necessary" directives and less instructional or conversational type talk. This broad range of approaches reflects the vastness of the language and cultural differences teachers encounter in the classroom. Teachers' understanding of language differences and their abilities to communicate effectively with students from such different backgrounds are crucial.

Overview of Language Diversity

Although most educators will agree that language is an essential component of literacy development, there seems to be some uncertainty as to the exact approach to use for language development in education. The approach becomes even more complex when the language is different from the mainstream Standard English that is promoted in schools. In spite of the admitted importance of language in education, language has historically been addressed in an indirect and often over-generalized manner. Stubbs (in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) argued, “These distinctions between different aspects of linguistic competence . . . show at once that any claim to relate ‘language’ directly to ‘education’ is almost certain to be so oversimple as to be meaningless” (p. 78). Stubbs questioned the thoroughness of the discussion on language differences by asking, “is one talking about: comprehension or production? language structure or language use? prescriptive norms of correctness or appropriateness to social context? grammatical or communicative competence? the child’s language itself or the school’s attitudes to his language?” (p. 78).

The noted complexity of the nature of language differences is often diminished by victimizing rather than understanding those children whose language is different. One example of this is seen when educators continually change the names they use to refer to children whose language does not fit the ideals of mainstream Standard American English. Children’s language has been given such labels as *language deficit*, *under developed language*, and *disadvantaged language*. All ascribe pathology to their language differences with an ultimate goal of “curing” it.

Because it is a highly political and cultural issue, discussions related to an approach to language in education have been minimized to safely avoid conflict. The issues surrounding the

language of African-American children are not new to the education community. Research dating as far back as the 1960s looked at the relationship between the difficulties African-American children had in literacy development (Foster, 1992).

In the 1960s, it was common to assume that the language differences of African-American children (often referred to as *underdeveloped* or *impoverished language*) were reflective of their level of intelligence (Bereiter & Englemann, 1966; Deutsch, 1963; Jensen, 1968). It was at this time that the “deficit theory” flooded the academic research arena. Jensen noted a split of opinion in the academic community regarding the origin of the language differences of African-American children. Some in the community regarded the origin of the language differences as social, whereas others regarded it as cognitive in nature. The argument favoring cognitive origins, stemming primarily from psychologists, became known as the *deficit theorist*. Smitherman (2000) pointed out that psychologists argued that because many African Americans lived in impoverished environments, and the debilitating physical surroundings adversely affected the acquisition and development of language among them, leading to a state of “verbal deprivation”

The views of the deficit theory gave damaging support to an already commonly held public assumption: children who speak in languages different from Standard English are academically inferior to those children whose first language is Standard English. Even though there has been a recent explosion of research that supports the validity of AAVE, the damaging and uninformed public assumptions remain abundant. The area most affected by these assumptions is the American urban classroom. Despite the growing body of research that describes AAVE as a complex, rule governed, functional system for communication (Foster, 1992; Heath, 1983; Labov, 1972; Wolfram, 1971), its use remains unacceptable and quite often

denounced in the classroom setting. Labov viewed the situation as one in which teachers and students are unaware of each other's system, and therefore of the rules needed to translate from one system to another. He stated:

Some teachers are reluctant to believe that there are systematic principles in non standard English which differ from those of standard English. They look upon every deviation from schoolroom English as inherently evil, and they attribute these mistakes to laziness, sloppiness, or the child's natural disposition to be wrong From this point of view, teaching English is a question of imposing rules upon chaotic and shapeless speech, filling a vacuum by supplying rules where no rules existed before. Other teachers are sincerely interested in understanding the language of the children, but their knowledge is fragmentary and ineffective. They feel that the great difficulties in teaching Black and Puerto Rican children to read are due in part to the systematic contributions between the rules of language used by the child and the rules used by the teacher (p. 4).

Design of Study

Establishing a Focus

"Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us" (Dennett, 1991, p. 418).

The purpose of this study is three fold: (a) to apply a narrative inquiry design to explore how teachers respond to the language that young children bring (home language) to the early childhood classroom and the effects this response has on their work with children;(b) to engage in research efforts that will explore how differences in language may affect or be affected by pedagogy, curriculum development, and teachers' expectations and; (c) to understand how teachers feel about their preparation and capacity to address the issue of differences in language.

The focus of this dissertation emerged out of my interest in children's use of language. During my 20 years of work in Early Childhood Education, I have observed vast differences in the ways children use language. The differences were most often correlated with cultural differences. Although I have learned that children's language development capacity is similar across cultures, there seems to be a difference in the ways of knowing and using language based on culture. I intend to explore the extent to which teachers understand this crucial dynamic in children's verbal communication styles. The focus of this study is on teachers and their mode of perceiving their students' use of language.

This study will open a new conversation on the language differences we see in the classroom. It will probe into issues about cultural language differences that we as educators often avoid discussing. An informal survey of the research shows that whereas speech and language specialists are well abreast of this issue, research from educators on this topic is limited. The controversy that has historically surrounded the issue of language diversity in the classroom may explain the hesitancy in approaching the subject, but the need for current research is crucial.

In this research I will capture the stories of teachers of young children and their perceptions of the children's use of language in the classroom environment. Through stories, the knowledge I am seeking will emerge as lived experiences. The stories will allow me to explore responses to relevant cultural linguistics and social behaviors as well as to note incidental acts that might otherwise be eliminated from a more quantitative approach to research. These incidental acts could prove to be viable information in the research. Giving a face and a voice to the teachers in my research allows the cultural content of their students' language use and language learning to be explored in day-to-day life. The idea is to recreate the teacher's reality

of her experiences with children's language use in the classroom. Clandinin and Connelly explain this as looking at research in terms of the daily experiences of everyday life.

If we imagine, as Dewey did, research as the study of experience, what might the plotline for social science research be? The social sciences are concerned with humans and their relations with themselves and their environment. As such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experience. Experience is therefore the starting point and the key term for social science inquiry. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p xxiii)

I am conducting my inquiry using qualitative methodology, the purpose of which is to understand experiences from the perspective and descriptions of the individuals involved (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986). As a narrative inquirer, my research will be based on the lived experiences of teachers of preschool children. Through intense formal and informal interviews and interpretations, I will record these teachers' daily life experiences with their students' language use. My inquiry will be guided by the following questions:

1. How do teachers respond to the language (home language) young children bring to the classroom?
2. How do teachers approach these language differences in the classroom?
3. How well do teachers feel their teacher education programs prepared them to adequately address the language diversity of these children?

Establishing a Design: Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry represents an ideal method for research on teachers' perceptions of the language students bring to the classroom. It allows the natural richness of human experiences to be exposed. It captures a three-dimensional quality of the teacher's experiences through the

teacher's own eyes as opposed to a standardized description that is often presented in the word of someone other than actual teachers. This research is conducted from the perspective described by Carter and Doyle (2003), from which it is no longer assumed that the teacher is simply an instrument in the production of school achievement to a view of the teacher as an intelligent agent in educating children.

I chose narrative inquiry as a methodology because I wanted to understand how teachers internalize the various language experiences in their classroom environments. By engaging in relaxed interviews and in-depth conversations with teachers about their teaching experiences and establishing relationships with the participants, my study becomes a story of lived experiences. This method allows me to tell the stories of teachers as they lived them and not the situations I hypothesize or wish to prove.

Clandinin and Connelley (2004) noted that in narrative inquiry, "our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121), so I begin the process by reflecting on my experiences with the role of language in my community and education. This leads into the experiences of the teachers in my study.

Establishing a Conceptual Framework

My own experiences are a significant component of this conceptual framework. The knowledge I have acquired through lived experiences adds strength to my narrative reporting on my story, but also provides substance to the stories of others. Reflections of the role that language and cultural differences played in my own early encounters have had a tremendous impact on how I perceive these issues. These personal reflections are probably the most powerful influence guiding my research. It has given breath to my story, thus making the stories of the participants in this study more meaningful.

This work is also situated around a Vygotskian (1978) constructivist conceptual framework. Vygotsky understood the crucial role of language in child development. His concern for language acquisition is expressed in much of his work. He showed particular interest in the role of language in the cognitive development of young children. Vygotsky viewed cognitive development as the result of individuals' social interactions within the environment. His recognition of the importance of an individual's social history and culture are key elements of compatibility with this research. Social interactions are noted as an essential factor for language development to take place. He believed that children's communication with other members of their culture leads to language acquisition and cognition. According to Vygotsky, language is thought. The ways in which teachers approach the language children bring from their home and into the classroom are of foremost importance. If in fact "language is thought," as Vygotsky suggests, the approach teachers use to address children's home language is an extremely delicate matter that could ultimately impact school success. The critical nature of this issue must be considered when preparing prospective teachers to enter the classroom.

The works of Catherine Snow and David Dickerson (1991) are key components of my research. They provide the groundwork on the effects of language and language differences on academic success and success in the classroom environment (Snow & Dickerson,). Charity, Scarborough, and Griffin (2004), also contributed to this component. Their work focuses more specifically, however, on African American Vernacular English.

Another work that has influenced my research is by William Labov (1972). Labov took a revolutionary stand in his research on urban African-American youth. As a linguist, he examined the language use and style of these children and found that "Black English" was indeed a high functioning, complex language just as Standard English is. He showed that

teachers often perceived children's use of "Black English" or AAVE negatively and made inaccurate and biased assumptions about their academic abilities based on their language differences. Labov's work came as a complete contradiction to the deficit theory. His research shows that the language differences seen in urban African-American youth is of equal functionality and quality as that of the mainstream.

Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) research has a fundamental role in my study. Her information on the regional and cultural influences on language and language differences are key elements in understanding how children know language. This work has also helped in understanding teacher's perceptions of language diversity. Heath pointed out the importance of incorporating information on language differences in teacher education programs.

Geneva Smitherman (1986; 2000) has been invaluable in the historical portion of this research. Her work and involvement in some of the legal issues surrounding language diversity in schools have informed this research. Smitherman's (2000) writings have also been instrumental in formulating visual images of AAVE as an equal language and not a deficient one.

Organization of the Study

Finding a research method that would allow me to capture the essence of the cultural veracity of my participants and its weight on their perceptions of children's ways of knowing language was a challenge. I had concerns about the idea of focusing my research on one question when I had so many. I needed a venue that would allow me to give a universal voice to those voices that must be heard in order to recognize the needs of those who are so often unheard, silenced, or misunderstood. The voices of teachers who work with young children can give the insight that is needed to help develop operative, culturally relevant classroom pedagogy.

This research tells the story of teachers of young children whose home language may be different from their own. By developing relationships with the teachers in my study, I will be able to construct a picture of their current understanding.

In Chapter One, in an attempt to understand the lived experiences of my participants, I begin by reflecting on my own experiences with language use at home and throughout my elementary and high school years. I also briefly review the history of perceptions of AAVE in educational literature as a way of understanding current approaches to language differences in schools. This chapter discusses the theoretical and conceptual bases of this research.

Chapter Two highlights the growing linguistics, anthropological, and educational literature related to children's language use and development. This chapter includes a review of research on language differences and the effects these differences have on schools. Also included is a review of literature on methods and approaches to language differences in the classroom. Also, I will review the literature on current trends of pedagogy in universities. A discussion that reveals a lack of literature related to teachers' perceptions of young children's language in the classroom is included in this chapter.

Chapter Three describes my methodology. It explains the research that I conducted with teachers of early childhood education classrooms. Chapter Four discusses the findings, and Chapter Five discusses the implications of the findings and situates the findings within the body of previous research related to this topic.

Significance of Research

My curiosity about the level of comfort teachers feel in an environment in which the students' use of language is different from the mainstream language and how effectively teachers communicate with these students in the classroom has guided my work throughout graduate

school. In addition, I am concerned about the impact teachers' approaches to communication have on the success of these children in the classroom. Research on the pedagogy of teachers who are effective in working with children who bring a culturally different language into the classroom in which Standard English is predominant would be valuable to early childhood education curriculum development. This information would also contribute to teacher and caregiver education programs. In spite of the 18 million minority children in America's public schools, there has been little work done on culturally relevant approaches to language at the early childhood level. The methods that are currently used are typically "standard" approaches, which tend to have origins in research that is based on the mainstream American child's experiences. Blake (1993) noted that responses to language differences usually involve remediation that provides minority children with experiences that imitate those of mainstream American children. The significance of this study is to provide qualitative research that looks at teachers' understanding of language differences. This information will help in determining effective culturally relevant approaches to language diversity in the early childhood classroom.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

National Speech Week, 1917

In 1917, the National Council of Teachers of English prepared the following pledge for school students to recite in observance of National Speech Week:

I love the United States of America. I love my country's flag. I love my country's language. I promise:

1. That I will not dishonor my country's speech by leaving off the last syllable of words.
2. That I will say a good American "yes" and "no" in place of an Indian grunt "un-hum" and "nup-um" or a foreign "ya" or "yeh" and "nope."
3. That I will do my best to improve American speech by avoiding loud rough tones, by enunciating distinctly, and by speaking pleasantly, clearly, and sincerely.
4. That I will learn to articulate correctly as many words as possible during the year.

(In Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p.29)

This chapter opens with the commanding words of a speech from 1917. This speech was given to young students to recite and to uphold as their own words. In a typical traditional education format, although the words of this speech did not originate with the children, they were prepared and indoctrinated as truth so that the children could eventually own them. The travesty in this process is that these words, while very powerful, represent only the biased opinions of a group of adults attempting to shape the thinking of children.

This form of indoctrination contributes to a deep-rooted perception of Standard English as a superior language. The practice of acts such as this have led society to a damaged view of language diversity. I will look at how some of the lingering effects of these opinions have shaped our view of language in the classroom, 90 years later.

To investigate the general questions that guided my inquiry, I began with a review of the literature on language diversity. I reviewed literature on language in the classroom as well as cultural influences on language.

The purpose of this study is to: (a) to apply a narrative inquiry design to explore how teachers respond to the language young children bring (home language) to the early childhood classroom and the effects this response has on their work with children; (b) to engage in research efforts that will explore how differences in language may affect or be affected by pedagogy, curriculum development, and teachers' expectations; and (c) to understand how teachers feel about their preparation and capacity to address the issue of differences in language.

A particular emphasis of the literature review will be placed on the language children bring from their homes into the classroom; language use that is often different from the mainstream Standard English that is promoted in classrooms. The more commonly accepted form of English is sometimes referred to as Academic Standard English (Isenbarger & Willis, 2006) or School English (Charity et al., 2004). In addition, I discuss several of the major studies that investigate the dynamics of language diversity and its effects on pedagogy in the classroom. I also review the research related to teachers' perceptions of the language students bring to the classroom. And finally, I will review the literature on the efficacy of teacher education programs that address the needs of students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The organization of this review of literature is designed to provide a thorough analysis of the key components of this study. This review opens with a discussion of perceptions of language and language development in the general population. A particular emphasis is placed on the language children bring from their homes into the classroom.

A review of the research related to teachers' perceptions of the language students bring to the classroom is presented. Although a significant aspect of this research is to learn how teachers perceive their students' language differences in the classroom, it is also necessary to open a discussion on language diversity. I attempt to respond to this need by including a historical view of language and language diversity. Ultimately, I intend for this review of literature to demonstrate the significance of social and cultural language diversity, as well as the importance of teachers understanding the role of language in individual cultures.

In addition, a discussion of several major studies that investigate the dynamics of language diversity and its effects on pedagogy in the classroom are presented. And finally, I review the literature on the effectiveness of teacher education programs in preparing prospective teachers to address the needs of students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Perceptions of Language

General Perceptions of Language and Language Development

The literature on language experiences and development can be perplexing. A great deal of the literature implies that language development is dependent upon parental language style and approach to communicating with young children (Hart & Risley, 1999). It is often stated that the more time parents spend talking with their children, the more rapidly their vocabulary grows. In addition, Hart and Risley noted that "children whose parents talked with them more often were more likely to score higher on IQ tests at 3 years of age" (p. 3). This thought could suggest to some that children whose parents do not talk with them frequently have less language. Ward (1971), on the other hand, argued that there are different styles of talk among cultures:

So-called linguistically deprived children do not exist . . . children lack a familiarity with . . . skills that are the core of formal education; but speak they can. It is a mistake to

confuse the set of verbal skills, including notions of “correct grammar,” which are measured by a limited set of intelligence and achievement tests with a child’s language.

(p. 57)

Pinker (1994) notes that the contradiction happens when attempts to place value on one form of expression as oppose to another occur. He argued,

The words “rule”, “grammatical”, and “ungrammatical” have very different meanings to a scientist and layperson. The rules people learn (or, more likely, fail to learn) in school are called *prescriptive* rules, prescribing how one “ought” to talk. Scientists studying language propose *descriptive* rules, describing how people do talk. They are completely different things, and there is good reason that indent focus on descriptive rules... When a scientist considers all the high-tech mental machinery needed to arrange words into ordinary sentences prescriptive rules are, at best, inconsequential little decorations. The very fact that they have to be drilled shows that they are alien to the natural workings of the language system. (pp. 371-372)

He continued to support the idea that the prescriptive rules of mainstream Standard English are simply self-imposed standards created by the elite. Pinker stated that it is not clear who rightfully sets these standards for “correct English” and where their authority comes from. He noted that “ since prescriptive rules are so psychologically unnatural that only those with access to the right schooling can abide by them, they serve as shibboleths, differentiating the elite from the rabble” (p. 374).

There also seems to be some disparity among researchers about the role of mothers or significant adults in a child’s language success. According to Ward (1971), there are distinct differences in middle class mothers’ and lower income mothers’ perception of their role as

“teachers.” Although both groups of mothers talk with their children, their intent is different. The middle class mother acts with the intentions of assisting the development of her child’s language skills, whereas the rural lower income mothers in Ward’s study do not view themselves as teaching language skills to their children.

Middle class mothers tend to use expansion techniques regularly with their young children while also allowing their children to choose and direct the conversation. The mothers in Ward’s (1971) study who were from low socio economic circumstances did not feel compelled to follow the child’s lead in conversation topics. The mothers instead felt it was their place to select the topic of conversation.

In regards to expansion, the typical lower income mother in Ward’s (1971) study “imitates and expands on her own utterances. The child is a passive recipient of both the models and the data, and in her child rearing philosophy he should be” (p. 55). In spite of these differences, Ward noted that there are no differences in the age or speed of acquisition of such qualitative language development features as phonological discrimination, syntactic rules, and semantic categories. She stated, “Unless deaf, pathologically diseased, or otherwise seriously handicapped, the average five-year old has mastered most of the sound systems, syntax, and many of the semantic categories of his language” (p. 57).

There is confusion in the literature between the understanding of concepts of language development and *standard* verbal expression. Hart and Risley (1999) acknowledged this difference regarding parent talkativeness. They stated, “talkativeness affected the amount the children learned more than the language development of the children: the size of the vocabulary and the range of expression more than the word constructions the children began to use” (p. 5).

However, they also correlate verbal skills with cognitive skills. In a discussion on “optional talk,” Hart and Risley (1999) pointed out that although all of the families in their study spent equivalent amounts of time talking to their children relative to daily routines such as feeding, dressing, and safety, more talkative parents talked with their children beyond the everyday needs. They found that it was this “extra, optional talk that was highly correlated with measures of the children’s verbal/cognitive competence at age 3” (p. 3).

Hart and Risley (1999) regularly paired the concepts of verbal expression with thinking capacity. They noted that “the amount of language experience parents provided their children before the children were 3 years old accounted for all of the correlation between SES (and/or race) and the verbal-intellectual competence of the children” (p. 171). This reiteration that verbal expression equals intelligence leads to the question at hand in this research: Is the literature inadvertently implying that children whose verbal expression is different from the mainstream standard are less intelligent or present slower cognitive growth? Is society and teachers in particular reaffirming this message?

Teachers’ Perceptions of Children’s Language

When children leave the home environment and begin school, a significant transition in their language development and use occurs. One of the factors involved in the outcome of this transition is teachers’ knowledge of language diversity. As noted by Villegas and Lucas (2007), the majority of teachers in the United States are “white, middle class, and monolingual English speaking in most cases, their lives differ profoundly from the lives of their students” (p. 31). Such substantial differences among students and teachers could make relationship building difficult. Forming successful relationships between students and teachers in such diverse environments requires intentional preparation.

Heath (1983) pointed out the importance of a teacher's understanding of her students' ways of knowing language and their culture. In addition, Heath noted that teachers should also know their own ways of knowing language and their cultural background, as this may affect their approach in the classroom. She promotes ethnographies of communication in teacher education programs as a way for teachers to develop an understanding of language differences. Heath stated, "These teachers, in taking social science courses, examined their own habits at home and learned to recognize that they carried these home habits into the classroom just as did their students from other communities" (p. 266). It seems inevitable that teachers will encounter language differences in the classroom. Heath pointed out the need for teachers to equip themselves with knowledge on this topic in order to best serve their students with language differences. She noted it is not the dialect of the children that the teachers in her research struggled with, but "more troublesome were differences in the *uses* of language the children brought to school, a topic rarely discussed in the research literature" (p. 278).

Heath's (1983) study also pointed to a very distinct difference between the way children chose to use their language and their dialect. Some of the areas in which these differences in use of language occurred were in behaviors such as manners and answering adults' questions. It seems the teachers in this study were perplexed by culturally influenced behaviors occurring in classrooms of African-American students. The teachers appeared to have made judgments whenever culturally influenced communication gaps arose.

Heath (1983) stated, "one of the most frequent complaints came from teachers who felt that most black students did not have mainstream or 'normal' manners, and many of the white children were losing the manners they had brought to school" (p. 279). They also complained that "some black children did not know how to answer what seemed 'the simplest kinds of

questions’” (p. 283). In addition, it was reported that these children often gave only minimal answers, no answers at all, or sometimes “smart-alecky” answers. This research suggested that there are substantial language issues involved in the home/school transition of children that use language differently. For example, Heath stated,

factors involved in preparing children for school oriented, mainstream success are deeper than differences in formal structures of language, amount of parent-child interaction, and the like. The language socialization process in all its complexity is more powerful than such single-factor explanations in accounting for academic success. (p. 344)

Language Diversity

Language Diversity and Educational Pedagogy

It is now generally acknowledged that the backgrounds of children entering schools vary. The home experiences of some children are more suited for the mainstream academic methods of schools than others. Although there have been literacy-based programs such as Head Start, Sesame Street, and parenting programs put in place to help prepare some young children that are considered to be at-risk of failing in school, Snow, Tabor, Nicholson, and Kurland (1995) implied that these programs are not enough to make a difference. They suggested that a key ingredient to success in school is the development of *oral language skills*. Snow and Dickinson (1991) argued that the readiness package involves children having control over certain ways of using oral language. Included in these ways of using language is “sophisticated vocabulary, procedures for making information linguistically explicit rather than relying on shared physical and social context, and ways of linking utterances to one another imposed by the presence of extended discourse” (p. 3). Charity et al. (2004) on the other hand, focused on dialect as the key

factor in language differences that affects school success. They examined the relationship between achieving reading skills and dialect differences.

This idea has been studied by Labov (1995) and Rickford and Rickford (1995). Both sets of authors suggested that children whose everyday speech is different from the “School English” (SE) used in academic settings have more difficulty acquiring reading skills. Looking specifically at African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Charity et al. (2002) found that there is indeed a correlation between individual differences in familiarity with SE and reading achievement in young African-American students. They did note however, that these findings are not enough to determine a cause for reading difficulty. This is simply one of the many theories proposed in the research to explain the effects of language differences on the transition from home to school.

Rickford (2006) took into account assessment practices. She noted the disparity in the methods of questioning presented to students based on race and ethnicity. Pointing to researcher Kenneth Chuska finding that questions are one of the major instructional strategies used by teachers in classroom activities as well as in testing, Rickford stated, “Although vital to the process of assessment, these questions often do not give ethnically diverse students the chance to demonstrate their knowledge” (p. 6). She noted that teachers tend to assume that low achieving students are not capable of engaging in higher order thinking questions that “support authentic discourse” (p. 7). If this is the case, then teachers’ approaches to assessing their students’ knowledge and abilities are culturally inaccurate because they do not take students’ current knowledge base into account.

A culturally responsive approach to education would take the students' previous knowledge into account when planning the curriculum. According to Villegas and Lucas (2007), culturally and linguistically responsive teaching uses a constructivist approach:

Learners use their prior knowledge and beliefs to make sense of the new ideas and experiences they encounter in school . . . A central role of a culturally and linguistically responsive teacher is to support students' learning by helping them build bridges between what they already know about a topic and what they need to learn about it. (p. 29)

Villegas and Lucas also pointed out that although it is important to learn about students' cultural backgrounds, culturally responsive teaching does not suggest that teachers learn generic information about specific social and cultural groups, but instead teachers need to know about "their students' family makeup, immigration history, favorite activities, concerns, and strengths" (p. 30).

Villegas and Lucas (2007) further stated that teachers must possess two fundamental qualities in order to work effectively in culturally diverse classrooms. The qualities they suggested are sociocultural consciousness and holding affirming views toward diversity. Their explanation for sociocultural consciousness is "the awareness that a person's world view is not universal but is profoundly influenced by life experiences, as mediated by a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, and social class" (p. 31). They suggested that teachers who lack sociocultural consciousness typically rely on their own experiences "to make sense of their students' lives—an unreflective habit that often results in misinterpretation of those students' experiences and leads to miscommunication" (p. 31).

Villegas and Lucas (2007) also suggested that some of the ways teachers may gain sociocultural consciousness are through investigating and understanding the inequalities in

society. For teachers to best understand the connection between social and educational inequalities, they should be aware of the role schools play in perpetuating these inequalities. Villegas and Lucas suggested that becoming knowledgeable about issues such as the differential distribution of wealth and income in the United States, as well as recognizing the fact that a person's social class is the best indicator of academic success, would lend itself to developing an understanding of sociocultural consciousness.

In terms of holding affirming views about diversity, Villegas and Lucas (2007) pointed to evidence that shows that many teachers view students from socially subordinated groups from a deficit perspective. Teachers must have affirming perspectives and respect the cultural and linguistic differences of students in order to believe that students from non-dominant groups are capable of learning, "even when these students enter school with ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that differs from the dominant cultural norms" (p. 32).

Language Diversity and Teacher Education Programs

Each year, new teachers enter the increasingly diverse public schools of America. Teachers from mainstream America who speak American English are introduced to classrooms of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In order for this union of teacher and students to be successful for all involved, the teacher must be prepared to meet the challenges involved in teaching a diverse student population. Barnes (2006) viewed this challenge as a struggle for many teacher education programs. She explained the reason for this struggle as being "due to interrelated factors such as limited cultural knowledge bases of teacher educators and students, disconnection of theory to practice, and curricula historically grounded in Eurocentric traditional styles of pedagogy" (p. 85). It seems the challenge runs deeper than simply preparing pre-service teachers to work with diverse groups of students, but rather in reviewing our entire educational

systems' approach to culture as a whole. Societal influences on attitudes toward cultural differences also affect teachers and schools in general. J.J. Irvine's research (as cited in Barnes, 2006) stated, "preservice teachers have negative beliefs and low expectations of success for . . . [non White] students even after some course work in multicultural education" (p. 85). Irvine called this cultural discontinuity:

This cultural discontinuity produces negative interactions between teachers and students, thus reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices on both sides . . . cultural discontinuity can cause teachers to 'ignore their students' ethnic identities and their unique cultural beliefs, perceptions, values and worldviews' (Irvine, 2003, p. xvii), thus devaluing students' contributions to the classroom environment. (p. 85)

Delpit, Howard and del Rosaria (as cited in Barnes, 2006), noted that this phenomenon can affect teachers' attitudes and expectations, thus impacting students' academic performance. Thus, Freire noted (as cited in Barnes, 2006) that "these preservice teachers could begin to affirm the notion that what is different is inferior" (p. 85).

As a means of approaching these deep-rooted views toward culturally and linguistically diverse learners, much of the research suggests using culturally responsive teaching (CRT; Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive teaching allows teachers to create learning environments that support the learning styles of all students regardless of cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Gay provided a framework consisting of three dimensions to explain CRT. They are (a) academic achievement—assuring high standards are met; (b) cultural competence—recognizing and facilitating the different ranges of students' cultural and linguistic differences; and (c) sociopolitical consciousness—recognizing the fact that schooling and education are a part of a much larger picture. Villegas and Lucas (2004) argued that a problem continues to exist because

preservice and inservice teachers typically view CRT as an abstract and theoretical process in the theoretical research. Barnes (2006) noted that “this disconnection of theory and practice has caused many teacher education program faculty to reexamine their curriculum—content, materials, and methods—when it comes to preparing culturally responsive pedagogists” (p. 86).

Sheets (2005) suggested that success depends on the teacher’s ability to “perceive diversity as the norm and to view it as fundamental to all aspects of schooling” (p. xxi). She pointed to the learning style of teachers, or “teacher learning,” as the most effective approach to helping teachers become “culturally competent educators” (p. xxi). Sheets stated that teachers learn best through interactions with others; therefore, encouraging dialogue provides teachers with opportunities to share learning and performance.

As the previously mentioned studies show, there are a number of areas to consider when examining the role of language diversity in the school environment. It is a subject surrounded by considerable discussion and controversy. It also seems clear that continued research is needed on this topic in order to reach a more conclusive resolution. In particular, more research could help in developing teacher preparation programs and in further development of culturally sensitive educational pedagogy. Close examination of teacher education programs that *are* providing culturally sensitive pedagogy is necessary to create a more universal approach. Careful and consistent recognition of the Standards Movement in higher education is also crucial.

Standards Movement in Higher Education

Colleges, schools, and departments of education adhere to a specific set of standards that are incorporated to guide the preparation of teachers. A governing body called the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) identifies these standards. A discussion of NCATE’s guidelines is essential to the enrichment of the current study, as it

provides the information necessary to develop an understanding of the guidelines used in preparing prospective teachers.

NCATE

NCATE was founded in 1954 for the purpose of providing an accrediting body for colleges and universities that prepare teachers and other educational specialists (NCATE 2000 Standards, 2000) As an agency accountable for teacher education accreditation, NCATE took the place of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (one of NCATE's founding groups). NCATE was formed by five groups: the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, National Education Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National School Board Association (NCATE 2000 Standards, 2000)

The aim of NCATE is to “ensure that accredited institutions produce competent, caring, and qualified teachers and other professionals who can help students learn” (NCATE 2000 Standards, 2000)

Summary of Standards

NCATE is composed of six standards that speak to the key elements necessary to ensure quality teacher education programs. The standards fall into one of two categories, either Candidate Performance or Unit Capacity. The first two standards fall under Candidate Performance and the last four are Unit Capacity items:

Standard 1. Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions: Candidates know and demonstrate the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help students learn.

Standard 2. Assessment System and Unit: The assessment system collects and analyzes

data on the applicant qualification, the candidate and graduate performance, and unit operations to evaluate and improve its program.

Standard 3. Field Experiences and Clinical Practice: The unit and its school partners design, implement, and evaluate field experiences and clinical practice so that teacher candidates and other school personnel develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn.

Standard 4. Diversity: The unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and experiences for candidates to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn. These experiences include working with diverse higher education and school faculty candidates, and diverse students in P-12 schools.

Standard 5. Faculty Qualifications, Performance, and Development: Faculty are qualified and model best professional practices in scholarship, service, and teaching, including the assessment of their own effectiveness as related to candidate performance; they also collaborate with colleagues in the disciplines and schools.

Standard 6. Unit Governance and Resources: The unit has the leadership, authority, budget, personnel, facilities, and resources, including information technology resources, for the preparation of candidates to meet professional, state, and institutional standards. (NCATE 2000 Standards, 2000)

Standard 4, Diversity

For the purposes of this research it is necessary to examine the fourth standard more thoroughly, which is the standard of diversity. This standard is intended to address the increasing diversity seen in America's schools. It includes a wide range of differences spanning from racial

groups and those with different first languages, to individuals with disabilities. This NCATE standard is an attempt to assure teacher awareness of diversity, as well as to develop educators who can teach from a multicultural view. Some of the stated expectations are that programs design and implement a curriculum that incorporates diversity, that teacher candidates have opportunities to interact with diverse faculty and classmates, and that candidates are given the opportunity to work with diverse students in K-12 schools.

This effort to address diversity in teacher education programs is important to the thoroughness of students' curriculum in K-12 schools. It is, however, limited in its depth. Although the standard discuss what should happen in a general sense, it does not specify areas such as language. Without more specificity, there is a wide range of possible interpretations of the standards. In the case of language diversity in the classrooms, it can very easily be overlooked or not considered at all. It appears there is a need for more specific guidelines for the diversity standard.

Standards of Specialized Professional Associations

Each specialized organization produces its own guidelines and standards. Colleges and universities have to adhere to Specialized Professional Associations (SPA) standards for program approval. I will review the standards for three specific associations that oversee programs that train teachers of young children.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC has set standards for early childhood professional preparation programs that are closely aligned with those of NCATE. NAEYC makes a special attempt to a work closely with other accrediting agencies in specific disciplines to assure high quality professional practices across the early education arena (NAEYC, 2003) .

The initial Standards of 1994 Guidelines underwent complete revisions in 2003.

Although all five of the major categories of standards remain the same, the wording and emphasis has changed. One area of increased emphasis is on linguistic and cultural diversity.

The current standards are as follows:

Standard 1. Promoting Child Development and Learning: Early childhood professionalism is developed around a complete understanding of child development and learning. Emphasis is placed on creating learning environments that are “healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children” (NAEYC 2003, p. 30).

Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships: Candidates are expected to know about, understand, and value the importance of children’s families and communities. This information is used to help teachers develop respectful relationships and include families and the learning process.

Standard 3. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families: Candidates know about the use, purpose, and benefits of assessment. They use assessment in a responsive way that may involve families and other professionals. They know and use observation, documentation and other assessment strategies in a responsible way.

Standard 4. Teaching and Learning: Candidates use their knowledge from relationships with children and families, their understanding of developmentally effective practices and their knowledge of academic disciplines to create valuable experiences for all children.

Standard 5. Becoming a Professional: Candidates uphold the standards of the early childhood profession. They engage in professional development and continuous learning in the field of early education.

NAEYC standards do not have a specific category devoted to diversity, but knowledge of cultural diversity and home languages are mentioned in at least four of the five standards. There is a new emphasis on diversity in the most recent standards.

Council for Exceptional Children and its Division of Early Childhood (CEC/DEC) are organizations that provide standards for early childhood special education teacher candidates. CEC provides guidance for colleges and universities as well as for states planning licensing policies for early childhood special educators. DEC led the effort to develop the most recent standards in 2001. Colleges and universities providing programs in early childhood special education must abide by the CEC program standards. There are 10 standards in all. They are as follows:

Standard 1. Foundations

Standard 2. Development and Characteristics of Learners

Standard 3. Individual Learning Differences

Standard 4. Instructional Strategies

Standard 5. Learning Environments and Social Interactions

Standard 6. Language

Standard 7. Instructional Planning

Standard 8. Assessment

Standard 9. Professional and Ethical Practice

Standard 10. Collaboration (Hyson, 2003)

CEC recognizes cultural diversity and the importance of candidates understanding cultural differences. The more specific recognition of language is interesting. CEC does have one standard dedicated to language, Standard 6; however, it focuses more on the language of

students with exceptional needs. It states the need for teachers to serve as *effective language models*. Although language diversity is mentioned, the emphasis is not specific. It appears that the message could be understood to recognize language diversity and language exceptionalities as equal and in need of the same strategies.

DEC is noted for its promotion of full inclusion for children with special needs in community-based programs. It emphasizes the need for early childhood special education teachers to provide the child's primary caregivers with strategies, interventions, and assessment needs (Hyson, 2003). The DEC's seven recommended practices are as follows:

1. Family participation in personnel preparation
2. Interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration
3. Design and sequence of learning activities
4. Integrating cultural and linguistic diversity throughout personnel preparation programs
5. Developing and maintaining high-quality field experiences
6. Including faculty members from a variety of disciplines in an integrated or interdisciplinary approach
7. Designing and sequencing professional development (i.e., in-service) activities that help professionals learn and grow professionally. (Hyson, 2003)

DEC has an interesting approach to exposing prospective teachers to culture and linguistic diversity. One of DEC's seven recommended practices for personnel preparation is "Integrating cultural and linguistic diversity throughout personnel preparation programs" (Hyson, 2003, p. 141). Hyson noted that students must not limit their exposure to diversity by taking one course, but "integrate ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in meaningful ways

throughout a student's learning experience" (p. 141). The measures taken to ensure these recommendations are interpreted correctly will determine their effectiveness. It is also important to note that these recommendations are assigned to early childhood education professionals and programs serving children with exceptionalities. Although this is a good start, is the direction of diversity recognition of this specificity universal enough to benefit the programs serving a broader range of children such those served through NCATE.

International Reading Association

The International Reading Association is an accrediting organization that sets standards for reading professionals. Standards 2003 are the revised version of the standards. The five standards provide criteria for developing preparation programs for reading professionals. The five standards are as follows:

Standard 1. Foundational Knowledge

Standard 2. Instructional Strategies & Curriculum Materials

Standard 3. Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation

Standard 4. Creating a Literate Environment

Standard 5. Profession Development

The standards acknowledge cultural and linguistic diversity in the first three standards. Standard 1 (Foundational Knowledge) discusses the knowledge of sociological linguistics. It states that the candidate must demonstrate knowledge of language development. The candidate should also be able to articulate developmental aspects of oral language and its relationship to reading and writing. The candidates are asked to summarize the developmental progression of reading acquisition and the variations related to cultural and linguistic diversity.

Standards 2 and 3 also mention the need for candidates to consider cultural and linguistic differences when selecting curriculum materials and assessment information. These approaches are significant in teacher education. However, they lack specific information or instruction on how it looks when programs meet the issue of diversity in education. It appears that while this accrediting agency as well as all the others mentioned has consistently noted cultural and linguistic differences as necessary, there is still a need for more specific detail on effectively preparing teacher candidates to successfully work with language diversity in the classroom.

African American Vernacular English

One aspect of this literature review focuses on a specific language difference known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The hope is that this focus will expose the depth and substance of history that customarily exist in language differences. By presenting the history and depth associated with a form of language that is different from Standard English, I expect to show the legitimacy of this language. I have chosen to focus specifically on AAVE as it relates to culture and education.

Much of the research on the topic of language diversity focuses on African American Vernacular English. AAVE is a prime example of a culturally influenced language that is different from the mainstream Standard English and could therefore serve as a model for further study on the topic of the current research. I will continue this review of literature by concentrating on AAVE as a model of a language difference as viewed in my research.

Historical Overview of African American Vernacular English in Education

This section will address the historical and contemporary development of AAVE in the educational community, including attitudes toward the language over a period of time. Although this exploration is most concerned with language and education, it is impossible to do a complete

review without examining language as a cultural identity and looking at the political influences involved. I will review how these influences affect the school success of urban African-American children.

The language of African-American children has raised concerns among educators and other community members for over a century. As far back as 1884, J. Harrison attempted to detail in a 57-page treatise that the language of “Negroes” was an oddity that only vaguely resembled language at all (Delpit, 2002). Poplack and Tagliamonte (2001) identified the discussion of the origin of contemporary AAVE as one of “the oldest and as yet unsolved questions in modern sociolinguists” (p. 1). Wolfram and Thomas (2002) noted a survey of published research on dialects of American English from the mid -1960s through the mid-1990s that indicated that AAVE has had more than five times as many publications devoted to it as any other variety of English. Wolfram and Thomas also contributed to this discussion of the perplexity of AAVE by highlighting the many name changes of the language over the last 4 decades and noted this as an indication of the “controversy” associated with this variety of American English. They stated,

Over the last half century this variety has been assigned the following labels, listed here in approximate chronological sequence: *Negro Dialect, Substandard Negro English, Nonstandard Negro English, Black English, Vernacular Black English/ Black English Vernacular, Afro-American English, Ebonics, African American Vernacular English, African American Language, Ebonics (again), and Spoken Soul.* (p. XIII)

In this review, I have chosen to use the term *African American Vernacular English* (AAVE) as it clearly affirms the significance of this language variety and is consistent with my

focus in this study. AAVE is often referred to as a dialect. According to Wolfram, Adger, and Christian (1999), dialect is defined as a term used to refer to:

a variety of a language associated with a regionally or socially defined group of people the relative status of a dialect with respect to other dialects of the language (its social standing) does not make one dialect more valuable, or interesting, or worthy of study than another no evaluation is implied, either positive or negative. (p. 2)

They further stated that

Research shows that dialects are all complete linguistic systems, and thus structurally equal, but social evaluation gives some dialects higher status than others . . . the views of the relative merit of a language variety are based on social, not linguistic, grounds. (p. 2).

On the other hand, according to Harris (2003), in an attempt to explain the differences between languages and dialects, European linguist Ferdinand De Saussure claimed that “‘there is a difference of quality not nature between language and dialect.’ He asserts that languages differing only slightly are called dialects” (, p. 8). Harris noted, “other linguists insist that the distinction between ‘dialects’ and ‘languages’ is based on social and political grounds rather than purely linguistic ones” (p. 8).

I have chosen to avoid the use of the term *dialect* when possible because in spite of its neutral technical definition, depending on the interpretation, it often carries a negative connotation. In place of *dialect* I will use the terms *language difference* or *language variety*. Another commonly used term in identifying AAVE is *nonstandard English*. Hilliard (2002) contended that,

To refer to the language of most African Americans as ‘nonstandard English’ is to mislead people, since the implication is that all that is involved is a variant of English.

And yet, like English, the language spoken by African Americans is a fusion of languages *that cannot be understood apart from an appeal to historical origins and to the oppression of slavery.* (p. 94)

Among professionals such as linguists and educators, the preferred term for referring to the speech of some African-American children is *African American Vernacular English* or *African American Language*; however, the term that seems most familiar to the public is *Ebonics*.

Any discussion of AAVE would not be complete without giving some attention to the place that the term *Ebonics* holds in the history of American language. The very mention of this word strikes emotions that could range from resentment to jubilation, from those who remember the events of the 1996 Oakland California School Board debates. This *little* word that sparks such powerful reactions socially, educationally, and politically got its start with Robert Williams in 1973. Williams hosted the “Cognitive and Language Development of the Black Child” conference in January 1973 where he coined the term “Ebonics” in an effort to “define our language” (Williams, 1997, as noted in Baugh 2000).

The original definition refers to a “complex mixture of European and African languages born of the African slave trade” (Baugh, 2000, p. 14). Ebonics derived its name from ebony (black) and phonics (sound of speech, the science of sound). To the African-American scholars who participated in the meeting of minds at the Cognitive and Language Development conference in 1973, this was a vital mission in which they would give legitimacy to the language of their people. They hoped to uplift its reputation, while also assigning a pride-filled name to this language: “We are really talking about the science of black speech sounds of language” (Williams, as noted in Baugh, p. 14).

Harris (2003) noted an air of contention in the term *Ebonics*:

Ebonics,” composed of “ebony” which is Ancient Egyptian and “phonics” which is Greek? Though “Ebonics” has been translated literally as “Black Sounds,” the use of a Kemetic/Greco-Latin expression does not seem so incongruous when trying to connect African American speech to African linguistic bases. (p. 8).

Harris (2003) also pointed out that “there exist varieties of accents, slang, and vernacular rather than a uniform pattern of speech shared nationwide by African Americans” (p. 80). One term that may encompass the variety that Harris speaks of is that coined by the Oakland Unified School District, *Pan African language systems*. According to Harris “‘Pan’ refers to many and it is likely that captured Africans came from a number of linguistic regional backgrounds including the West African region” (p. 12).

The task of determining the most appropriate identifying term for the spoken language of most inner city African Americans is a tremendous one. Despite the series of names applied to the language differences of many African-American speakers, it is necessary to explore points of the Ebonics debates. In Lisa Delpit’s *The Skin That We Speak* (2002), Smitherman expounds on earlier events of *King v. Ann Arbor* in 1979, when

Judge Charles C. Joiner issued a ruling reaffirming the legitimacy of Black English and the existence of its African sub-stratum and mandated that the Ann Arbor School District “take in account” Black English in the educational process of teaching Black Children to “read in the standard English of the school, the commercial world, the arts, science, and professions” (p. 167).

Much like the inception of the term *Ebonics*, and the diligent efforts of Robert Williams and his colleagues to offer linguistic validity to the use of African American Vernacular English

by coining a name, the Ann Arbor decision has not received the public accolades that were initially expected. In December 1996, the Ebonics debates of the Oakland California School Board brought attention to an issue that had gone unrecognized for decades. The decision of the Board to recognize Ebonics as the primary language of its African-American students created an uproar in the media and public opinion. The thought of acknowledging and *accepting* the language that is known to be the mother tongue of many African-American children in inner city schools created a furor. African Americans from all walks of life were incensed at the possible suggestion that their children could only understand *this* language, which is perceived by most as poor grammar. Many were insulted by the attempts to legitimize the language that has been tantamount with ignorance, the very language that had been seen as a major obstacle in achieving educational and professional success within the African-American community.

Even though countless African Americans opposed the use of Ebonics in schools, they would admit to using the language themselves when among friends, and found comfort and pleasure in ‘shootin’ the breeze’ and ‘rappin’ when it was ‘just *us* talking’. Noble Prize-winning author Toni Morrison noted in a 1981 discussion of the key ingredient in her fiction was,

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. Its function is like a preacher’s: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language. It’s terrible to think that a child with five different present tenses comes to school to be faced with books that are less than his own language. And then to be told things about his language, which is him, that are sometimes permanently

damaging. He may never know the etymology of Africanisms in his language, not even know that “hip” is a real word or that “the dozens” meant something.

This is a really cruel fallout of racism. I know the standard English. I want to use it to help restore the other language, the lingua franca. (Morrison & Taylor-Guthrie, 1994).

This love/hate relationship with the very language that defines the African-American story contributes to the severe damage inflicted upon the self-esteem of many African-American children today. Ebonics by any name, be it African American Vernacular English, Pan African Language Systems, Black Language, Spoken Soul, or Black Talk, is more than just a name. It reflects a sense of being. It encompasses the entire culture and history of a people, their capture, their struggle, their religion, their journey, and their freedom. The attempt to erase this entire sense of being from the lives of children can be lethal to the spirit of many African-American children of America’s inner city schools.

Historical Perspective of AAVE in Schools

For several decades, educators, linguists, anthropologists, and psychologists, among others, have conducted research to find answers to the many questions concerning the language differences of many African-American children in American schools. In the 1960s, researchers looked at the relationship between the difficulties African-American children had in literacy development and their cognitive and linguistic deficits (Foster, 1992.). It was typical to assume that the language differences of African-American children (often referred to as “underdeveloped or impoverished language”) were reflective of their level of intelligence (Bereiter & Englemann, 1960; Deutsch, 1963; Jensen, 1968). Jensen concluded that the linguistic behavior of “ghetto

children” in test situations is the principal evidence of genetic inferiority. It was at this time that the deficit theory flooded the academic research arena. Smitherman noted that,

The academic establishment split over the question of whether the language differences were social or “cognitive,” with the latter group coming to be labeled “deficit theorist” The deficit theory, stemming primarily from psychologists, contended that because many blacks lived in impoverished environments, the debilitating physical surroundings adversely affected the acquisition and development of language among them, leading to a state of “verbal deprivation.” (p. 19)

Labov (1972) stated that the ideas of the deficit theory are the notions,

Based upon the works of educational psychologists who know very little about language and even less about black children . . . the notion of verbal deprivation is a part of the modern mythology of educational psychology, typical of the unfounded notions which tend to extend rapidly in our educational system. (p. 201)

The views of the deficit theory gave damaging support to an already commonly held assumption: African-American children are inferior to European-American children. In response to this view, Labov (1972) stated, “the myth of verbal deprivation is particularly dangerous, because it diverts attention from real defects of our educational system to imaginary defects of the child . . . it leads to the hypothesis of the genetic inferiority of black children”(p. 202). While addressing an American Education Research Association (AERA) conference on the topic of *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, Ladson-Billings (2004) described this phenomenon as “pathologizing the [victim] plaintiff instead of the underlying pathology of white supremacy”. In other words, from the view of the deficit theorist, the true problem lies within *all* of the children using AAVE and not within our educational system. Even though there has been a recent

explosion of research that disproves the deficit theory and supports the validity of AAVE, the damaging and uninformed public assumptions remain abundant. The area hardest hit by these assumptions is the American urban classroom. Despite the growing body of research that says AAVE is a complex, rule governed, functional system for communication (Foster, 1992; Heath, 1983; Labov, 1972; Smitherman, 1999; Wolfram, 1971), it remains unacceptable and quite often denounced in the classroom setting. Labov viewed the situation as one in which teachers and students are unaware of each other's system, and therefore of the rules needed to translate from one system to another. He stated,

Some teachers are reluctant to believe that there are systematic principles in nonstandard English which differ from those of standard English. They look upon every deviation from schoolroom English as inherently evil, and they attribute these mistakes to laziness, sloppiness, or the child's natural disposition to be wrong. . . . From this point of view, teaching English is a question of imposing rules upon chaotic and shapeless speech, filling a vacuum by supplying rules where rules existed before. Other teachers are sincerely interested in understanding the language of the children, but their knowledge is fragmentary and ineffective. They feel that the great difficulties in teaching Black and Puerto Rican children to read are due in part to the systematic contradictions between the rules of language used by the child and the rules used by the teacher. (p. 4)

African American Vernacular English and Literacy

Numerous studies strongly support the position that children from low-income and minority backgrounds fall behind their middle-income peers of the majority class in language and literacy (Dickinson & Sprague, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Snow, Tabor & Dickinson,

2001; Strickland, 2001). Inner city African-American children are typically a major part of this group of low-income minority children. However, it is important to note that all African Americans are not a part of one “homogeneous cultural group” (Charity, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004; Taylor & Leonard, 1999). Taylor and Leonard pointed to various aspects that influence the diversity within this culture and the differences in linguistic use and proficiency as, “socioeconomic status, genetic predisposition, educational accomplishment, family constellation, religious affiliation, and cognitive styles of learning (in addition to other factors)” (p. 43). Charity et al. noted a considerable variation among African-American children from low-income families in the degree to which they are familiar with School English (the predominant dialect in written English and often in classroom instruction) in the early years

When we consider the academic achievement gap in literacy, one glaring question is: how does *language* factor into it? As discussed previously, the deficit theory proclaims that students’ use of AAVE contributes to difficulty in literacy development. In search for a more effective approach to investigating low income children’s “school-relevant” skills, Snow et al (1995) found that young children’s oral language skills and language comprehension are better indicators of their academic future than traditionally assessed skills such as letter, shape, color, and number knowledge. They contended that literacy skills develop “when children become aware of the relationships among the various linguistic rule systems and when these relationships become a topic of conversation, play, or problem solving . . . (and) children having control over certain ways of using oral language” (p. 38). Their research did not point to the many differences that may exist between the linguistic rule systems promoted in the language of the school and that of children using AAVE, and the impact these differences would have on literacy skills.

Snow et al. (1995) made reference to the necessary literacy skills that are learned from language interactions that go on within families: “Such features include the use of sophisticated vocabulary, procedures for making information linguistically explicit rather than relying on shared physical and social contexts, and ways of linking utterances to one another imposed by the presence of extended discourse” (p. 38). Labov (1972), on the other hand, saw “no connection between verbal skill in the speech events characteristic of the street culture and success in the school room” (p. 213). He suggested that programs such as

Operation Head Start and other intervention programs have largely been based upon the deficit theory—the notions that such interviews [interviews used for educational testing and evaluation] give us a measure of the child’s verbal capacity and that the verbal stimulation which he has been missing can be supplied in a preschool environment.
(p. 207)

According to Labov, the typical interview used in research to determine a child’s language capacity ends with inaccurate results for most inner city African-American children. Such child/adult, asymmetrical situations are ones in which anything the child says can literally be held against him, and he has learned a number of devices to avoid saying anything in this situation. He also noted that this “monosyllabic behavior” is a response of inner city African-American children to interviewers’ questions to which the answer is obvious

Charity et al. (2004) stated that “dialect differences” can contribute to reading difficulty, particularly in areas such as sounding out words, spelling, and comprehension. They argue that AAVE-speaking children who are not familiar with “school English” (SE) are more likely to have difficulty in reading because SE is the version of English that children encounter in written and spoken forms from teachers in school. Silven (2007) pointed to research studies that argued

that learning to read from one language community does not apply universally to all other languages. She noted Ziegler and Goswami's (2005) work that suggested,

Word reading is about matching the native-language speech units (phonology) to cultural-specific visual representation of these units (orthography). Because the correspondence between phonology and orthography vary from one language community to another, the process of learning to read may also be different for children growing up in diverse societies. (p. 517)

On the other hand, some researchers argue that language differences are not major contributors to the difficulties in literacy, but view the various attitudes toward language within the education system as more substantial contributors (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Labov, 1972; Purcell-Gates, 2002). One specific contributor that Ladson-Billings (1994) pointed out is low teacher expectation or as she terms it "permission to fail"(p. 110). When a teacher deems a child "unworthy" of teaching because of the child's cultural style, form of language, and attitude, the teacher may allow this child to get by without meeting the same level of expectations that are set for the other students. Ladson-Billings (1994) developed a theoretical construct in response to this attitude called *culturally relevant pedagogy*. She stated, "Culturally relevant teaching is designed to help students move past a blaming the victim mentality and search for the structural and symbolic foundations of inequity and injustice" (p. 111).

Another factor that is noted by Hilliard (2002) as contributing to the current achievement gap is the composition of standardized tests. He stated, "the results of standardized testing favor children who speak common American English simply because these children are able to respond to questions that are couched in a familiar language based upon familiar experiences" (p. 98).

Purcell-Gates (2000) viewed the issues that deal with literacy and language as ones of “experiential difference” (p. 130). She contended that educators must learn to interpret the home experience that a child comes to school with as a *difference* and not a *deficit*. She stated that how we interpret experiential differences “depends primarily on our preconceptions, attitudes toward, and stereotypes we hold toward the individual children’s communities and cultures” (p. 130).

Like Ladson-Billings, Purcell-Gates’ (2000) view of the perception of language differences were on not only on an educational level, but also a political level. She stated,

Some people refer to the prejudicial stereotyping involved in nonstandard speakers’ oral dialects for their academic failures as “linguicism.” I agree that the negative attitudes toward non-standard dialects and the resulting misguided instructional attempts to change people’s speech are based on misinformation and ethnocentricity just as are the other “isms” like racism, sexism, and ageism. And, like the other “isms,” linguicism, especially as it impacts literacy development and educational achievement, is responsible for insidious social and political marginalization, resulting in blighted lives and unfulfilled opportunities for legions of people. (p 140)

Finally Wheeler and Swords (2006) suggest “only when we recognize the robust resources that our students offer can we begin to build bridges between cultures that may allow students to add Standard English to their repertoire” (p 25).

African American Vernacular English and Culture

Over 30 years ago, Labov (1972) concluded, in direct contradiction to the common belief of the day, that

Black children in the urban ghettos receive a great deal of verbal stimulation, hear more well-formed sentences than middle-class children, and participate fully in a highly verbal

culture. They have the same basic vocabulary, possess the same capacity for conceptual learning, and use the same logic as anyone else who learns to speak and understand English. (p 201)

One might ask if the contradictions to this statement that existed 30 years ago still exist today. Labov (1972) argued that understanding the social and cultural backgrounds of these children is the key to understanding their language. Blake (1993) supported this move toward the need for social and cultural understanding by noting that while a considerable number of studies focus on the language of African-American children as a key component in their low academic achievement, they fail to address the interactive role of language and cultural experience of the group. Hilliard (1983) stated, "It is common for a speaker of one language to attempt to understand the language of others by reference to his or her own language rules, rules which frequently do not correspond to the rules of other languages" (p. 27). Taylor and Leonard (1999) addressed the cultural components necessary for language acquisition as follows:

The acquisition of AAE [African American English] includes more than the acquisition of a rule system for syntax, morphology, semantics, phonology and pragmatics, but is also influenced by the speaker's orientation and experiences within his or her environment. Children learning language acquire more than just the static components needed to communicate. They also learn those elements of the language that facilitate communicative competence. Children who are native speakers of AAE and have developed communicative competence within their cultural group may have a difficult transition to a novel language system such as SAE [Standard American English]. After all, to fully acquire a second system, an individual must also acquire the unspoken components of that system. In addition, the age of acquisition and the level of

importance the new system has within the child's culture influences the level of proficiency in acquisition and use. (p. 54)

Conclusion

While we continue to see research that addresses language differences as an area of concern when discussing the disproportionate literacy gap between European-American children and minority children, there has been little work that looks at the role of children whose language is substantially different in the early childhood education years. Most of the work that has focused on the preschool-aged child has been done by linguists and not by educators. The need persists for educators to acquire a greater understanding of the role of language-different children in the early childhood care and education environment. Understanding language differences requires knowledge that goes beyond a basic understanding of language development. It requires the in-depth understanding of the history and culture that composes the unique language. This work will attempt to tell the stories of teachers who work with language-different children in early childhood classrooms and the ways they know language. This work will also demonstrate the need for further research on early childhood education pedagogy that encompasses the cultural differences, primarily language that exists among African-American and other minority children. The total identity of these children is included in their language style. The leading methodologies of the American educational system seem to lack recognition of the differences in students' language and culture and the important role these play in curriculum development.

Taylor and Leonard (1999) specified the need for more research as follows:

Because of the misconceptions regarding the language skills of working class African American children in the research literature there is a need for more culturally sensitive information about the linguistic abilities exhibited by these children. Ethnographic and

empirical research methodologies are needed to provide important information about the speech and language skills of working class African American and other groups of children from backgrounds other than white middle class. (p. 47)

CHAPTER 3

Research Methods

One theory in educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms, who, individually and socially lead storied lives. Thus the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

This chapter will explain the methodology and design used in this study. The content will include a discussion of the following: purpose of the research; design of the study; participant selection; data collections procedures; data analysis techniques; strengths of the qualitative study; and the limitations of the study.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is three-fold: (a) to apply a narrative inquiry design to explore how teachers respond to the language that children bring (home language) to the early childhood classroom and the effects this response has on their work with children; (b) to engage in research efforts that will explore how differences in language may affect or be affected by pedagogy, curriculum development, and teachers' expectations; and (c) to understand how teachers feel about their preparation and capacity to address the issue of language diversity.

Young children’s language development has caught the attention of theorists across many fields, including Anthropology, Sociology, Speech Pathology, and Psychology. Although their views may vary considerably, most of them acknowledge that language plays a crucial role in a child’s development. This study assumes that parents, guardians, and teachers/childcare providers are the most capable and significant adults in the child’s life. These adults provide the cultural realities (including language) that a child will eventually make his/her own. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized, “the internalization of culturally produced sign systems bring about

behavioral transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development . . . the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture” (p.75). The key issue in this study is to determine how teachers perceive these forms of individual development in oral language once children enter the classroom and the effects of teachers’ perceptions on their work with children.

My decision to pursue this research emerged out of my interest in children’s use of language. My concern is with how teachers perceive the differences in the language preschool children bring from home into the classroom. Do teachers perceive language differences among children at all? Does the teacher’s perception of children’s language differences influence his/her teaching methods and/or expectations? What methods and strategies do preschool teachers feel are most effective in fostering language development? Do teachers select different strategies based on perceived differences among children? How do teachers feel children react to these methods? How do teachers view the potential success of children in relation to their language?

With this study, I hope to contribute to the research that emphasizes a focus on language development in early childhood education and care programs. This study is also intended to prompt further research on culturally-sensitive pedagogy, as well as to look at teachers’ progression in the area of children’s home language use in the classroom. Addressing these topics will show the need to acknowledge language differences as an essential component of educational design and one that requires more attention in teacher education programs.

Methodological Design

It is hard to tell exactly how long stories have been used as a teaching tool or as a way to make sense of the world. According to Pellowski (1977), “The epic tale, Gilgamesh . . . is

frequently cited in history texts as our oldest, surviving epic tale” (p. 63). Although we know that Jesus Christ used parables to teach his followers in the New Testament, it is noted that Homer’s great epics began around 1200 BC., and were written around 700 BC. They became the textbooks in the schools of Greece (Hamilton, 1993).

It is clear that the use of stories to educate is ancient, and stories are still being used successfully to teach today. More specifically, stories now play a very substantial role in educational research. Carter (1993) noted, “The special attractiveness of story in contemporary research on teaching and teacher education is grounded in the notion that story represents a way of knowing and thinking that is particularly suited to explicating the issues with which we deal” (p. 6).

Carter (1993) reported that qualitative researchers in education have begun turning to teachers themselves as sources for knowledge about education. Qualitative research is perfectly suited to interpret the teachers’ stories used in this study to discover their responses to children’s natural language. Stories are a natural design for capturing the true essence of teachers’ thoughts and feelings. In order to understand the inner thoughts of educators, it is necessary to accumulate a meaningful context of episodes and events that, once combined, form a comprehensive knowledge of ways of knowing, complete with the human emotion that can only be translated by educators themselves. As stated by Elbaz (1991):

Story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense. This is not merely a claim about the aesthetic or emotional sense of fit of the notion of story with our intuitive understanding of teaching, but an epistemological claim that teachers’

knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood in this way.

(p. 3)

Qualitative research that is focused on gathering and interpreting the stories that people use to describe their lives is referred to by various names that fit under the heading of *narrative studies* (Hatch, 2002). This is based on the notion that humans make sense of their lives through story. In narrative inquiry, the researcher collects and analyzes the stories of the participants:

According to Clandinin and Connelly:

Narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction, we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon *story* and the inquiry *narrative*. Thus we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experiences. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 415)

When looking at narrative inquiry as an educational research method, it is important to understand the *experience* component. “The central task is evident when it is grasped that individuals both live their stories in an experiential text and tell their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, p. 265). The researcher has to become immersed in the experiences of the participants. According to Clandinin and Connelly, the researcher becomes a participant, “Thus the two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (p. 265).

I have chosen to apply the narrative inquiry design of educational research as described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994, 2000). The narrative approach to research is one way in

which we use stories to teach and to learn. More specifically, "researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings [rather than stories] and synthesize and configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12).

Bedford and Landry (2006) surmised that the analysis takes place when the researcher constructs the data into a story by asking questions such as "How did it happen?" and "Why did it happen?" and then finding the information that answers these questions. Polkinghorne (1995) added that turning data into a story is actually synthesis, but such synthesis occurs during the analysis phase of a study. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) identified the following methods for generating the data of narrative studies: oral history; annals and chronicles; family stories; photographs, memory boxes, and other personal/family artifacts; research interviews; journals; autobiographical writing; letters; conversations; and field notes and other stories from the field. Narrative studies seek to capture storied knowledge.

Another key element in narrative inquiry is the focus on space, place, and time. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) explained *place* as the scene where the action occurs and the characters are formed and live out their stories and where culture and social context play constraining and enabling roles. They noted that time is essential to the plot. The central structure of time is past-present-future (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 416). All of these aspects combined in research help to bring the inquiry to life and place the researcher face-to-face with the stories of her participants.

I conducted my research on teachers' perceptions of the language young children bring (home language of children) to the classroom and the effects these perceptions have on their work with children by interviewing four early education classroom teachers or former teachers. This process allowed me to explore teachers' feelings about their own experiences with language

in the classroom. A second finding was gaining insight into how well prepared teachers felt they were in confronting issues of culturally influenced language differences in the classroom environment.

The interviewing process took place over a 3-month interval from January, 2007, through March, 2007. Each of the four teachers participated in three 60-minute to 90-minute interviews. Although each interview was tape recorded, I also took notes that included references to things such as facial expressions, body language, and hand movements. The tape recorded interviews were transcribed within 1 to 3 days following each interview in order to maintain clarity. This quick turnaround also allowed me to build on previous interviews in preparation for future interviews. Conducting multiple interviews with each participant allowed me to enter each person's perspective (Patton, 1980).

Through the interviews, teachers revealed information related to their feelings about how language affects success in education. The responses gave clarity to their views of language in the classroom, as well as to their feelings about their own ability to be successful in their responses to students' use of language. Ultimately, these teacher interviews substantiated the need to focus more attention and research on the issues of institutional attitudes to language in the classroom and its effects on student success.

Participant Selection

I selected a purposeful sample for this study in which each respondent was chosen because she has manifested certain behaviors or encountered certain conditions in which, as the researcher, I was interested. Four elementary school teachers were selected for this study. The teachers were recruited by sending letters to the principals of two local urban southeastern schools asking for volunteers that met the following conditions. Teachers responding to the call

for volunteers were interviewed and selected based on four conditions. Participation was entirely voluntary with no extra incentives attached.

Inclusion was based on the following four conditions. The first was that all participants must hold at least a bachelors degree in elementary or early childhood education. I am hopeful that this study will serve as a reference for teacher preparation programs as they consider the need for socially and culturally relevant instruction. This could be accomplished by providing the insight of teachers who have completed college education programs and moved on to apply that education in the classroom. A key element of this study is to understand how teachers feel their teacher education program prepared them to deal with socially and culturally influenced language differences in the classroom environment; therefore, a college degree in education is essential to this study. It is important that teachers are able to reflect on their college experiences and note the effectiveness. The second condition for inclusion in the study was that all participants had taught in an early childhood classroom with children 3-9 years of age. Teachers with this experience would be able to contribute first-hand knowledge. Another condition was that this teaching experience would have occurred in the previous 5 years. Teachers' recall of experiences that date beyond 5 years could possibly have limited clarity and lack accuracy. I think current information is also less likely to be affected by conditions that could be dated. The fourth condition for inclusion in this study was that both African-American and Caucasian teachers participated since this represents the makeup of the teaching workforce of American public schools.

Based on the preceding characteristics, gender, age, location, and socioeconomic status of the participants was not predetermined, but I tried to include participants from diverse backgrounds. Research shows that there are considerable differences in the beliefs about child

development among cultural groups (Garcia Coll 1990; Joe & Malach 1997; Ogbu 1981; Okagaki & Diamond 2000). Language use is included among these differences. Various cultural groups approach language use and development differently. In much the same way, teachers' views on language use and development are different. The diverse backgrounds of the teachers in this study are a valuable asset to the accurate teacher representation of a typical school environment. In this study, I hoped to capture a variety of stories, stories that would undoubtedly be influenced by the cultures of the teachers themselves. As Carter (1993) noted, "The stories we live by are not . . . purely private inventions. We build them from the information provided by experience and from the inventory of stories or 'prepackaged expectations and ways of interpreting' supplied by our culture"(p. 7). Teachers' participation was entirely voluntary.

Exclusion criteria included: teachers who had degrees in disciplines other than elementary or early childhood education. It was important to get teachers' reports on their teacher training for this research. Understanding teacher education programs' role in the teachers' approach to language differences in the classroom is one of the goals of this study. Teachers who never taught in an early childhood education classroom were excluded. Teachers with teaching experience that dates back further than 5 years were excluded.

Participant selection consisted of: 40-50% African American; 40-50% European American; and 100% will hold a degree in elementary or early childhood education.

The information gathered from teachers was used to assist education program directors and managers in developing future purposeful teacher education program, and to expand on current research on language differences in the classroom as well as research on teachers' attitudes toward language in the classroom.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

I have chosen qualitative interviewing as the method of data collection for this study. Qualitative interviewing is an approach to learning in which understanding is achieved by encouraging people to describe their worlds in their own terms (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Merriam (1988) stated that, "Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 72). Rubin and Rubin agreed: "Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate. Through what you hear and learn, you can extend your intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, sex, and geographical divisions" (p. 1). This ability to understand experiences allows one to recreate images of past events or phenomena. In qualitative research, this is helpful for comprehension of the unfamiliar. The strength of interviewing in qualitative research is "the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 65). Furthermore, "It is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education" (Seidman, 1991, p. 7).

With these thoughts in mind, I decided that interviewing was best suited to meet my goal of gaining a clear picture of what guides teachers' responses to the language children bring into their classrooms. While using narrative research methods, my focus in this study was on getting stories from the teachers I interviewed. In order to get the stories these teachers had to tell, I needed techniques that would steer away from the structured question/answer format to a more open-ended, relaxed format that would result in more conversation type interviews to result in a story. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that "The way an interviewer acts, questions,

and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience (p. 110).

Some have pointed out that even with these precautions in place interviewing remains unbalanced or unequal in the sense that the interviewer governs the questions and direction of the interview, whereas the interviewee is a passive participant. Weiss (1994) argued that “qualitative interviewing is always constrained by the goals of the study; it is never free to veer off into any area at all” (p. 207). It is often suggested that the researcher keep the interview neutral and nondirective by keeping the focus on the interviewee. Weiss further argued that qualitative interviews cannot be nondirective; “the interviewer guides the interview through a definite research agenda” (p. 208). Middleton (as cited in Whatley, 1993) agreed, stating that “No interview—whether for counseling, research, or any other purpose—can be entirely nondirective” (p. 70). Middleton suggested the researcher look for ways to overcome the directive nature of the interview process. Anderson and Jack (1991) suggested “shifting attention from information gathering where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on the process” (p. 23).

Considering this approach, I attempted to develop a comfortable relationship with the participants in my study prior to the actual interviews, so that any anxious or apprehensive feelings about the process could be eliminated. I did this by talking about myself and my research in informal terms. I thought that conversations, in advance of the interviews, allowed me to give the participants some participatory control. By engaging in conversations and communication such as discussions about choices for the interview sites, and by reviewing the interview questions ahead of time, I hoped they would be put at ease with the entire process.

Prior to conducting the interviews, each participant received a consent form that contained my research goals. The interview questions were open-ended in an attempt to promote reflective responses to each question and to ultimately result in a story. The interview structure and protocol were designed according to the suggestions of Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Patton (1987), Rubin and Rubin (1995), and Weiss (1994).

The guiding interview questions were reviewed by my faculty dissertation committee which consists of two professionals in language development, one professional in early childhood education, one professional in qualitative methodology, and one professional in literacy development.

For my narrative research, I conducted multiple interviews with each participant as my primary method of data collection. Each participant was interviewed independently in a mutually agreeable location such as the home of the participant or an available office or conference room in a school. I used a tape recorder in conducting the interviews in order to assure accuracy while transcribing and analyzing data. I transcribed the interview tapes myself within 1 to 3 days of each interview. I made analytical notes while transcribing the tapes. Once the interviews were transcribed, I coded the transcripts.

Coding is done to link what the respondent says in his or her interview to the concepts and categories that will appear in the report (Weiss, 1994). The coding process for my study entailed creating a chart of concepts and categories. Each participant's interview was organized into concepts and categories. These were developed as the interviews demanded. As Weiss (1994) stated, "the coding category is developed and defined through interaction with the data (p. 156). This coding process reveals what I felt the material was saying; this is where the analysis of the interview transcripts began. Files were created to further organize the data by themes or

titles of sections of the report. The files were called *excerpt files*. The transcript information was sorted into excerpt files. It was in this stage that the coded information was distributed into units that corresponded to the file names. I looked for pieces of information (words, phrases, sentences, or groups of sentences) within the text that reoccurred throughout, allowing me to develop themes and categories.

The next step was "local integration" (Weiss, 1994, p. 158). In this step, I summarized and interpreted each of the excerpt files. At this time, I also identified differences and similarities in the participants. Glaser and Strauss (1967) noted, "Comparing as many differences and similarities in data as possible . . . tends to force the analyst to generate categories, their properties, and their interrelations as [he, she] tries to understand [his/her] data" (p. 55). The final step in my analysis was what Weiss (1994) called "inclusive integration". In this stage, I brought all of the pieces together into one complete story.

Confidentiality

Several procedures were in place to ensure that all information obtained from participants was kept completely confident or private. First, the access to the data and identifying information of the teachers was restricted. Only approved research staff (Julie Smith-Price and Julie Smith-Price's major professor, Dr. Judith Kieff) had access to the identifying information of the teachers. All people working on the project signed a confidentially pledge in which they agreed that any violation of confidentiality would be cause for immediate dismissal. Second, names were documented on the interviews as identifying information only. After gaining access to an assessment, all identifying information was removed from the data and replaced with an identification number. The data was transferred. Third, all completed analysis was destroyed.

Finally, names of teachers, schools, or other identifying information were not reported in a publication or with the report of the findings.

Strength in Qualitative Studies

In this study, the researcher must have a clear understanding of how teachers perceive the underlying cultural dimensions involved in the language use of young children. Achieving this depth of reality in research does not lend itself to a scientific research methodology in which experiments are conducted and statistics are gathered. Learning behaviors that occur in educational settings are often most appropriately conveyed through qualitative research. In the current study, it is necessary to address the strengths of using qualitative research.

Internal Validity

In determining the strength of qualitative research, a review of internal validity is helpful. According to Merriam (1988), it addresses the issue of a particular match between research findings and reality. Merriam also noted that there are specific approaches to help achieve internal validity.

Triangulation

Denzin (1978) has identified a variety of different types of triangulation. According to Denzin, triangulation often means that researchers use different sets of data sources, multiple types of analysis, multiple researchers, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives to understand one phenomenon. Chenail (1997) commented that “In research, the object of triangulation is for you to locate the meaning of some other phenomenon” (p. 1). Patton (2001) promoted triangulation by stating, “Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative” (p. 247).

Although in my research I only used one method (interviews), I used triangulation by incorporating multiple sources. My sources included four different women whose stories represented a range of viewpoints on the subject of teachers' perceptions of children's language use. Through an analysis of these different perspectives, I was able to locate some meaning and understanding of the phenomenon in review.

Member Check

According to Merriam (1988), member check involves "taking data and interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results were plausible" (p. 169). I used this approach throughout my research. I reviewed information that had been gathered in earlier interviews to assure my understanding and interpretations were correct.

Long-term Repeated Observations

This technique requires the collection of data over an extended period of time. It may also involve repeating observations of a particular phenomenon. I used this technique by interviewing each participant several times.

Peer Examination

This process involves sharing and examining the research findings with a colleague and requesting feedback. I exercised this technique by involving one of my long-term colleagues. I shared my research questions and concerns as well as the interview questions with her. I encouraged her feedback and considered it when appropriate.

Participatory Modes of Research

This concept includes "involving participants in all phases of research from conceptualizing the study to writing up the findings" (Merriam, 1988, p. 169). My participants were involved as much as possible in my research. I spoke with them extensively about my

study. However, due to the circumstances under which my research took place, I did not know each of my participants at the time it was conceptualized. I relocated and had to recruit participants after my ideas were formed. Ideally, I would have involved my participants to a greater degree.

Researcher's Biases

My biases in this research are varied. I have discussed them to some degree throughout this study. I encountered my biases as I prepared for this research project through reflective writing and reading. The bias of most relevance is my preconceived ideas about teachers' perceptions.

External Validity

According to Campbell and Stanley (1963), external validity addresses the question of generalizability. External validity considers which group can be generalized with the study's findings or which of the study's findings pertain to other circumstances. Bedford (in Sheparis, Young, & Daniels, in press) stated, however,

Generalizability is not the goal of the qualitative researcher. Qualitative researchers and especially narrative researchers, select modes of inquiry that will allow them to understand a particular individual or group in depth because they believe that what he learns from a particular situation can be transferred to a new situation. (in press)

There have been some suggestions of ways to help the researcher achieve external validity in spite of the focus of qualitative research. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that one way to achieve external validity is through the use of *thick description*.

Thick Description

According to Holloway (1997), thick description is a detailed explanation of field experiences. The researcher makes the patterns of cultural and social relationships explicit and puts them into context. Lincoln and Guba (1985) implied that by describing an experience in adequate detail, the reader could determine the extent of transferability to other situations. In this research, I used detailed descriptions and explanations of each participant and her career conditions. I achieved thick descriptions by outlining the patterns of cultural and social conditions each participant's professional circumstances.

Typicality of Cases

Merriam (1988) suggested typicality of cases as another method that helps assure external validity. Comparing how characteristic research participants seem with others in similar situations is helpful in determining the relevance of the findings to the reader. In this study, my participants were intentionally selected as a sample representative of the majority of teachers in American schools. Their stories resembled each others' even though they were from different locations and different backgrounds. The diversity of the participants in this study should allow some degree of typicality to most readers.

Reliability

The term *reliability* concerns the ability of different researchers to make the same observations in different studies of the same phenomenon. Some researchers question the relevance of reliability in qualitative research, considering that the test of a good qualitative study is its quality (Golafshani, 2003). Stenbacka (2001) argued that reliability is a concept to evaluate quality in quantitative studies with a "purpose of explaining," whereas quality concepts in qualitative studies have the purpose of "generating understanding" (p. 551). Lincoln and Guba

(1985) pointed to the question: “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (p. 290). They used the terms “dependability” in qualitative research much like “reliability” is used in quantitative research (Golafshani).

Investigator’s Position

The researcher’s knowledge base is an important issue in determining the value of the research (Merriam, 1988). According to Malterrud (2001):

A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions. (pp. 483-484).

Triangulation

Triangulation is a method that uses multiple methods and multiple sources of data to present a phenomenon. This method strengthens the reliability and validity of research because it gives a variety of perspectives of the same phenomenon.

Audit Trail

According to Byrne (2001), an audit trail is a record of the research process: “an external, objective party can examine this audit trail to evaluate the scientific rigor or systematic process of the research study” (p. 1). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that audit trails are one measure that might enhance the dependability of qualitative research. They also suggested that the audit trail comprises every document related to the study, including raw data, interview transcripts, reports on category information, reflective journals, the inquiry proposal, and pilot

studies. In this research, my audit trail consists of my interview transcripts, the inquiry proposal, and a pilot study.

Ethic Issues

According to Hatch (2002):

Qualitative researchers are interested in exploring the world from the perspective of cultural insiders. Their methods are designed to allow them to get close to the action and close to their informants. Most qualitative studies require some level of active involvement by research participants. Many only work when that involvement is extensive, and some studies require involvement at the level of collaboration. We ask a lot when we ask individuals to participate in our qualitative studies . . . We ask a lot, take a lot, and if we're not careful, give very little. (p. 65)

In narrative research, ethical issues are very likely to occur between the researcher and participants. Hatch (2002) noted that when researchers conduct research in educational settings, they have "special ethical responsibilities" toward the participants (p. 66). Merriam (1988), stated that it is the responsibility of the researcher to protect the participants from harm. When considering ethical issues in research, some particular concerns are the participants' rights to privacy, the right to conformed consent, and the right to be protected from deception. In this research, I have adhered to all of these areas of concern. In regards to the right to privacy, I have applied pseudonyms to each of the participants, and the names and locations of their institutions were not provided. I acknowledged their right to conformed consent and protection from deception by providing each participant with a letter of consent explaining the entire study and full disclosure of the intentions of the study. Included in the consent form was a clear statement that participation is voluntary and could be stopped at any time the participant requested it. These

letters were read, signed, and returned to me by each of the participants before any interviews took place.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations or boundaries of this study are associated with my sample selection. I chose four women with diverse personal backgrounds but common elements in their professional experiences. The sample size was small and created the need for further research in this area. The stories are, however, individual and unique to each participant. I think that these stories are an authentic representation of a larger population of teachers.

This study is limited by a reliance on the participants' decisions to answer my interview questions with complete transparency and thoroughness. It is probable that because the content of these interviews were based on people's life stories, there would be responses that participants would consider too personal to share for research purposes. The stories told by each participant were based solely on the information she provided. If participants chose to withhold pertinent information from me, the interviewer, the study is limited to the select information that is provided.

Another limitation is the possibility of a difference in regional perceptions. I began this research in Louisiana and completed it in Kentucky. I cannot be certain that the results would have been the same if the entire process had taken place in one state. Classrooms are populated differently in the two states. There are some language use differences as well. Middleton (1993) stated, "The kinds of narratives that interviewees construct in the course of a life-history interview are informed by the setting in which the interview takes place" (p. 133). Although it is possible that thoughts and perceptions were influenced by the climate of the location in this study, I made adjustments in the questions and conversations with participants to assure they

were relevant to the locale. These adjustments should have minimized the effects of climate change.

Finally, this study is limited by my own personal biases and subjective thoughts, many of which I have referred to throughout this paper. I have made an intentional effort to be discerning in regards to my personal views on the issue being studied. Through my reflections, revisions, and discussions with others, I have attempted to overcome any limitations due to personal bias.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Data

This chapter will include a collection of the stories revealed by my research participants. The stories are constructed through answers given in response to the three separate interviews with each of the 4 participants. I will present data that was collected in interviews and analyzed through content analysis techniques.

The order of the interview questions was designed to give the participants an opportunity to reflect on their classroom experiences and language use within the classroom. Ultimately, the interviews progress to questions that elicit teachers' perceptions of the language students bring into the classroom from their homes.

Profile of Participants

The participants in this study ranged in age from 26-55, and they have a number of things in common: they are all women; they are all living in the Kentucky region; each of them are graduates of a university in Kentucky with at least one degree in elementary education; and they have all worked with children that fall within the early childhood range of 3-8 years of age. They do differ, however, in their experiences with children and their ultimate career paths.

I chose narrative research as my methodology because I felt that telling teachers' stories was a key ingredient in understanding the depth of teachers' perceptions. Understanding how teachers feel about the language their students' bring to the classroom and the role these feelings play in classroom teaching could only be fully achieved through qualitative measures. The first step in this process was getting to know the participants. My opening interview question facilitated the process of getting to know each participant. This helped me to build a profile of each participant based upon their educational backgrounds, their teaching experiences, and their

current professional educational roles. The following paragraphs will describe the initial meetings with each of the participants.

The classroom was lit with the brightness of natural sunlight when I met Alexis for our first interview. The view from the glass wall in her room was one of magnificent green space with seemingly endless trees. We started the interview with my tape recorder running, when suddenly in this otherwise serene environment, there was this continuous interruption by a brilliantly colored red cardinal that appeared to be admiring his own reflection in the glass by repeatedly bumping into it; each bump making an obvious thumping noise. Alexis never once acknowledged this noisy and odd occurrence, and in an attempt not to divert her concentration on my interview questions, I did the same.

Alexis is a 26-year-old, Caucasian, middle-class woman. She has a bachelor's of art degree in elementary education. She is currently working toward a master's degree with a focus on reading. In her final semester of undergraduate studies, Alexis did her student teaching in a second grade classroom at an inner city school, an environment very different from any she was familiar with. She was asked to work as a full time teacher at this school. Immediately after graduating, she became the teacher of the second grade classroom she'd student taught in. The former teacher of this classroom had to leave unexpectedly, so Alexis inherited the classroom and materials just as the first teacher left it.

Alexis recalls feeling that she stood out among the teachers because of her youth and her race. She said an older African-American teacher pulled her aside on her first day of teaching and told her she would never make it at this school. The elder teacher suggested that if she read Ruby K. Payne's (1996) book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, it might help her. Alexis said she went home immediately after work and told her mother that she had to purchase

this book. She went out, bought the book, and read it in its entirety in the bath tub that very night. Alexis did remain at this school for the entire year, but took her current job at a private rural independent school the following year.

I interviewed Alexis in her current third grade classroom. We agreed that these interview questions would refer to her experience as a second grade teacher since that age group falls within the early childhood range of my research (5 to 8 years old).

Glenda is 48 years old. She is an African-American educational administrator whose career started in an elementary school classroom. After teaching for several years, Glenda moved to the county's main office to work in her current administrative position as a Substitute Teacher Coordinator. She has a bachelor's degree in special education as well as one in adaptive physical education. Glenda continued her education by obtaining a master's degree and a Ph.D. in educational administration.

Initially, I was unsure about how Glenda's educational background and work beyond the classroom would impact her views as a classroom teacher. At an early stage of the interview, I detected a sense of uneasiness within Glenda. Her answers began to sound like answers for a job interview. She responded as though she needed to convince me that she would be qualified to do the interviews. This was evident in her response to my first interview question, which asked the participants to tell me about their teaching experience. She stated,

my teaching experience also covers not only students with special needs, but also students who have English as a second language, those students from prominent backgrounds, students who have regular backgrounds, so my experience is from regular ed. students, gifted students, students with special needs, and also students who have

English a second language. So I have a lot of experience in working with the education sector.

I interviewed Glenda in her home, where she had been preparing a presentation on differentiated learning. In discussing her teaching experience, Glenda said that as a physical education teacher she was trained to work with children from ages 3 to 21 years. She had in fact worked with this large range of children. (Just as with the previously mentioned participant, I requested that Glenda relate all interview questions to her classroom work with children under the age of 9. She agreed to focus on her experience with children in the early childhood range.)

Glenda has taught in large school districts in two different states. She has extensive experience in urban public school systems. In one of her jobs, she worked as a teacher in a group home for children who were wards of the state. Although these children were all African American, she stated that her remaining teaching experiences have been in urban schools where the student population is racially diverse but economically depressed.

My third participant was Valerie, a 52-year-old African-American female. She was the only participant with whom the interview location was not the same throughout the three interviews. The first two interviews took place in her home, and the third and final interview was in her second grade classroom, at her request. Our first interview was in the kitchen of Valerie's home. She had just come home from work. She prepared tea for each of us before sitting for the interview. She initially wanted to have this interview in her classroom, but our schedules made meeting at her home more convenient. Valerie had expressed some nervousness about the interview process. She said she wanted to be sure I didn't ask any questions she didn't know the answers to. I attempted to assure her that the goal of the interview questions was to allow her to

tell her own story as a teacher. I am not sure that my attempts to reassure her worked because her uneasy comments continued throughout the interviews.

Valerie is a second grade teacher. Her career began immediately after completing her undergraduate degree in education. Just like Alexis, Valerie was offered a teaching job in the same place that she did her student teaching. She taught at this school for 7 years, stopping when she had her son. After staying home with her son for 9 years, Valerie said, “When I came back to the classroom I came into a different world, I mean it was amazing.” Upon returning, she taught a fifth grade class for 1 year and for several years she alternated between a second/third grades split and second grade. This year is her 20th year teaching.

Valerie describes the make-up of her current second grade class as very diverse. She has 6 African-American children, 3 biracial children, and the remaining 14 are Caucasian. She explained,

There are children here whose parents are professionals; I mean there’s one child whose mom is an attorney. We have kid whose parents are middle class, blue-collar workers.

We’ve got every racial background, every socio economic background, every educational level; it’s a pretty diverse situation.

She went on to explain that the school is located in a pretty liberal, artistic type neighborhood and the school is a reflection of that.

It was the end of the school day when I met Kathy in her office at the private independent preschool she assists in directing. Parents were buzzing through, the telephone was ringing, and teachers dashed in and out of the office to find out *who* goes home with *whom* and at *what* time.

Kathy suggested we find an empty classroom to do the interview, and I agreed. The hallway was

almost as busy as the office, but we found solitude once we located an empty classroom and closed the door. Here is where our first interview took place.

Kathy is a 55-year-old Caucasian female. Her career began 30 years ago when she became a resource teacher of deaf and hard of hearing young children. After 6 years she moved, within the same school system, to a school designed specifically to serve deaf children. She stayed in that position for 20 years. This is where she said she “learned the most in terms of intervention theory.” From this position, she became an Early Childhood Education Resource Teacher for children with special needs, and from that position to her current position, she became Assistant Director at the preschool program.

Finding the Stories

I started this process knowing it would be a narrative analysis, yet I have been haunted by the thought of presenting some sort of scientific report. The ideas of quantitative findings are so ingrained in my educational background that even while engaged in narrative research, I frantically sought this set of magic numbers. During the analysis process, I charted the data from my interviews and became frustrated when the participants’ answers didn’t fit into this neat little numeric package. In my mind there should have been areas where all of the answers matched, and I could list these as my themes. It didn’t happen. Finally, I had to stop and ask myself “what are you doing?” After reviewing the final set of interviews, scrambling for these matching answers, I realized that each of these teachers had very different stories. I was so determined to find the scientific evidence in my data that I was missing the very crucial stories that were before me. In this report of my findings, I will attempt to be true to the stories as they were told by each of my participants. These stories *are* my research; they are the stories of teachers and their perceptions of the language children bring into the classroom.

Children's Language in School

Alexis

My meetings with Alexis always took place in her third grade classroom. The classroom had a subtle brightness about it. A brightness that seems so natural, that you didn't think about it as it enfolded you. The classroom was very orderly with everything seeming to have a place. There were no student desks; instead, there were round tables with chairs placed throughout the room. There were nooks with large colorful pillows, there were words on the walls, children's writings were in another area on the wall, and on one shelf I spotted a jar containing cards, and it was labeled *word jar*. Although there were no textbooks present, there were several chapter books and novels on the shelves. I immediately got the impression that this teacher was very involved in literacy.

The students were traveling to other classrooms at the time of our interviews, so the classroom was quiet (with the exception of the macho cardinal, of course). Alexis sat at her desk working on her computer when I arrived for my first interview. She suggested we move to one of the round tables in the classroom. I explained the need to use a tape recorder during the interview and she seemed to be fine with the idea. She said she wish she'd had one for her graduate class the night before. Her professor went over all of the answers for an upcoming exam, and only half the class was present.

Alexis seemed very comfortable in this setting. Her classroom environment reflected the calmness she exhibited. I got the feeling that although this school environment was relatively new to her, she felt that it was well suited. When she spoke of her earlier teaching experience, a year and a half prior to coming to teach at this small private school, it was very different. She

referred primarily to her earlier teaching experiences throughout the interviews in this research because it was at that time she taught children within the applicable early childhood age range (7 and 8 years old).

Alexis's earlier experience was her first teaching job. It was in the 2003/2004 school year. She inherited a second grade classroom that had already been set up by the previous teacher. It was in an urban school that mainly served the residents of the adjacent housing project. She explained,

Ninety-eight percent of the families received free and reduced lunch. There was one middle class Caucasian student, I think only three other students who paid for their lunch, the rest got free or reduced lunch. I had about six Hispanic children, the rest were African American.

She described the classroom as being very different from her current classroom. "It was crowded. Every space was covered from floor to ceiling. There was no free space." There were desks arranged in rows in the center of the room with a teacher's desk in front. In accordance with the local school district's plan to meet the requirement of the No Child Left Behind regulations, her classroom was run strictly by the packaged script required and the complete direct instruction. When I asked Alexis about her classroom arrangements and the occurrences of students talking to one another, she said she had not thought about it before, but there was almost no class time in which students were free to talk to one another. The only time they were able to engage in free conversation was at recess, and recess was once a week. She recalled physical education also being a time the students might have had occasions to talk freely without adult involvement. Once again, this activity took place once a week.

Talking freely did occur when Alexis's students were at recess. As she recalls, their language was "very different." Sometimes they would use terms that she said she didn't understand, and she would ask them to explain the words. An example was the term "flip flop" car. She said once it was explained to her, she learned that a flip flop car was what she understood to be an iridescent car. She explained,

It's a mode of survival for them to be able to communicate outside of the classroom.

Sometimes they talk to their friends at recess and they are a lot more relaxed. The language they use is different, sometimes they talk really fast and I can't understand what they are saying. Once in a while a child would come up to me and use the language that they would use in the classroom, but not usually.

When asked how she thought the amount of language used by her students varied from other students who used more mainstream Standard English, Alexis said,

Sometimes the students I had, talked more. Especially when they were angry or arguing, their language would get really fast. Sometimes I couldn't understand what they were saying. They would often use really short sentences and they were limited in the vocabulary to express themselves.

Alexis did seem to anticipate a feeling of comfort in her relationship with her students and them with her. She talked about the students asking to comb her hair at recess because her hair was different from theirs, and asking her to jump rope with them. She commented, "They would not ask me to jump rope with them if they did not feel comfortable with me, but at the same time they respected me and were eager to learn." Alexis also addressed this mode of respect inside of the classroom when she said the student might jokingly point out a mistake she may have made on the chalk board by saying "Girl, you made a mistake." She pointed out that

although this may have bothered some other teachers, she said, “This did not bother me. If that was their natural mode of language it was not disrespectful.”

Glenda

The chime of the grandfather clock in Glenda’s dining room was an unintended timekeeper for each of our interviews. It was a very large and quiet house, which made the clock chimes seem like bongs with each ring. We sat at the table in Glenda’s dining room for all three interviews. At our first interview she seemed relaxed and eager to get started.

When discussing students’ language in the classroom, she recalled her students having opportunities to talk to one another during small group activities. These activities were centered on an assigned topic. On those occasions, she would go around the classroom to monitor and guide the discussions. She stated,

The language was different in that many times when students are with their peers then they speak the language that they use in their neighborhoods, which you know, can be termed “ebonics” or they talk like they would talk in the neighborhood or use different slang in their language. When away from that, and it’s just a teacher directed lesson, then they’re speaking in terms of just correct language, you know correct literacy, that’s where their focus is. I guess the good thing about that is they knew the difference.

Glenda also took this opportunity to apply her experience with a wide range of age groups. She noted that as children get older, their language use changes. She explained,

I saw that as they get older, then they seem to be more aware of that [language differences]. I’m not sure if it was because of peer pressure, you know, as they get older they feel like they have to say the things of the neighborhood, that tough language to

appear tough and rough, or what have you. But in teacher directed lessons they didn't use the slang so much.

Glenda concluded that this type of language was used as a sort of survival technique. She cited the conditions of inner city neighborhoods as an explanation for the "pressure" students feel to use a particular language. While speaking about children living in urban neighborhoods she stated,

They don't feel safe, or it's drug infested, or there's gangs, or there's lots of activities going on and they feel like if they're not speaking that rough, tough, street language then they can possibly become a victim Sometimes you have a lot of parents who are, you know, they don't speak correct English and they don't care, and sometimes they are 'street' as well.

Valerie

Even though she agreed to be a participant in the study, Valerie seemed apprehensive about the thought of interviews. She inquired about what type of questions I would ask her. She wanted to be sure they weren't "hard" questions and that she would know the answers. I attempted to reassure her that there would be no right or wrong answers, and that I just wanted her story as a teacher. It seemed that there was nothing I could say to make her believe that these interviews were not going to expose her weaknesses. I felt some ambiguity about scheduling the interviews because she seemed to get nervous about each one. Surprisingly, however, once she began answering the questions, she became very passionate about some of the subject matters.

In spite of asking me to turn the tape recorder off and requesting a review of the questions before hand, Valerie was enthusiastic about discussing her classroom arrangements.

She mentioned on several occasions that I should come and visit her classroom (Eventually I did). With vast details, she described her classroom as follows:

I seat them in groups of eight. Originally, I seated them in groups of four, four pods, but eight works better because of the size of my classroom. I need more space so I've put them all together. So, I've got three groups of eight which allows for communication, and they do a lot of group activities, you know, they do a lot of group work. I encourage them to help each other . . . I have listening tables and then I have a carpet in the front of the room and I have book notes there. Then I (laugh), you've got to see this room, the way I've utilized the space in such a small area, and I think I do pretty well with using the space effectively. Then I have a little word zone in another area. I use a lot of freestanding things, like I have an easel and I use that to display and also to keep some of the other activities on. I change the centers; I don't have the same centers all the time. Then, I have another table for the writing area, and then I use an over head projector and put it in another corner for an over head center. So I use every inch of space. It works out, so you're going to have to come over there. It's easier to show you than to tell you. It's a small space, we've gone to all kinds of workshops to learn how to effectively group your children and the seating arrangements when you've got a small space and you can't do what the diagrams show you in the books, you just have to make the best of it and I think it works. What I've discovered is having seating like that, and I try promoting community, you know we have a small community, and we are a community, and I try to foster that in the classroom and they get to be *very* friendly with each other. So, it

doesn't matter where they are they are going to get chatty, and you're constantly moving them around. So they do use language and they do it very well.

Kathy

Kathy seemed very interested and enthusiastic about participating in my research project. It seemed as though she welcomed the opportunity to just sit and talk about young children and their development. Her enthusiasm was most noticeable at the times she would arrange the scheduling of our next interview before I could get to it. This attitude toward research was encouraging.

Her experience resembled that of a specialist more than of a typical teacher. She had more assignments as a resource teacher working in regular classrooms, specifically with children with special needs in an urban public school system. Much like Alexis, she just recently moved to her current position. She works with a very different population than in her previous positions. She is currently in an affluent private preschool that serves families of upper middle and upper income groups. Since both of her most recent positions were in early childhood education, her responses will refer to both experiences. Kathy expressed her passion for her career while discussing one of her teaching positions. She explained:

I really loved it, that's where I learned the most in terms of intervention theory, what to do if you use the appropriate intervention. I love language and vocabulary and just that whole thing about modality issues . . . I was always trying to figure out another way to make kids learn.

Kathy's discussion about classroom arrangements was a reflection of her early childhood education background. She was not in a position to arrange her own classrooms, but she was responsible for making recommendations for classroom environments to teachers. According to

her suggestions, language was always a priority. She encouraged providing lots of visuals and hands-on activities. She later said however, that this situation could possibly allow young children to circumvent language issues.

Data Collection

The interviews conducted in this research project were designed to answer the research questions asked through this dissertation study. As I noted in Chapter 3, the purpose of this dissertation is three-fold: (a) to apply a narrative inquiry design to explore how teachers respond to language that preschool children bring (home language) to the early childhood classroom and the effects this response has on teachers' work with children; (b) to engage in research efforts that will explore how differences in language may affect or be affected by pedagogy, curriculum development, and teacher expectation; and (c) to understand how teachers feel about their preparation and capacity to address the issue of differences in language.

In order to respond to the purpose presented in Chapter 3, I asked the participants open-ended questions that I hoped would result in a narrative response as opposed to more structured, fact-based answers. The nature of the questions often led to conversations or in depth responses that may have included answers to questions that appeared later in the interview. In preparing this narrative, I often merged responses to multiple questions if together the answers completed a thought or response. I presented the data according to the topic to which it was related.

Once I analyzed the narrative from each of the participants, the themes emerged. In this research process, the information seemed to evolve with the stories. Not only for me, the researcher, but on several occasions, the participants commented that they had never thought about some of these issues before the interview. They seemed as amazed as I to witness knowledge or information coming from within themselves. The information I saw emerge was

only partially what I expected. I also came away from the interviews with an altered view of many of the teachers in the classroom. I still have concerns about how children's language is being perceived in the classroom, but my sensitivities have expanded beyond the students. I now realize a greater need to hear what the teachers are saying. Although this may sound like common sense, it has become more characteristic to blame teachers before truly listening to them. I think this is really important. Through narratives I have observed the following five themes:

1. Participants in this study typically perceived language use that is different from mainstream standard use of the English language as an incorrect use of the English language.
2. Participants in this study often associated children's language differences with learning problems.
3. The participants in this study often allowed students' language styles to influence their opinions of parents' concerns for their children's education.
4. Participants in this study felt that they were not adequately prepared to effectively address the language differences they encountered in the classroom.
5. Participants in this study are passionate about teaching and education.

Theme 1: Correct English?

Interview question: When you listen to the children in your classroom speak, what are your thoughts about their language?

The teachers seemed to have very definite opinions about their students' language use. All but one participant referred to mainstream Standard English use as "correct English" or "correct language," and/ or to students' language differences as "incorrect English" or "incorrect

grammar.” There were times when it seemed that the participants felt the need to apologize for their opinions about language differences. This was indicated either by the tone of voice they used or actual wording. The participants appeared to have felt that the interview dictated a “correct” or “incorrect” response to the issue of students’ language differences. If their response was different from what they assumed to be the interviewer’s “correct” answer, they appeared to feel the need to explain their opinions in a defensive manner. An example of this was when Valerie discussed her stand on the controversial issue of African American Vernacular English being either recognized as a part of students’ identity and therefore embraced, or viewed as a hindrance to their learning. She commented,

A little bit of both but let me explain that. (*Long pause, as though carefully choosing words. Appears very serious about how her answer comes across, or maybe she feels there is a need to defend what she sees as an unpopular choice*) For this age group (second grade), I don’t endorse it, because they’re learning. At this age you want them to learn *proper English*, and know the difference . . . These kids, they don’t know the difference and I just don’t even deal with that. (*Tone becoming stronger and more definite*) I don’t even, I don’t want to hear them speak that way, and I do correct them when they speak that kind of English. I can speak that kind of English if I need to, but they need to hear it spoken the *correct* way because when they go to interview for jobs they can’t speak that.

I think it’s important to remind readers here that Valerie is African-American herself.

In response to the same issue, Alexis, on the other hand, started with a strong approach to her thoughts on this issue, but began to lower her tone and search for words as she continued. She said,

I guess I would be in between. I don't think that you should, or anyone should deny a child their ethnic belief or culture, and that's part of a child's culture. I don't think anybody has the right to say you can't talk like that. Ah,*(voice becomes softer and questioning)* I can see the other school of thought though, where just in our society and our culture, to be successful in your life there is a certain expectancy of how you speak, and the language that you use. And allowing, not just allowing a child to speak that way, but not exposing them to the other side I think would *-would (becomes more confident sounding at this point, seems to be choosing words carefully, like other interviewees, almost in a defensive tone)* decrease their chances of success. Now whether that is wrong or right, that – that's the way our society is, *it's a fact*. That's the way society is. So, I *(deep breath)*, I don't agree with the one extreme of saying that it should be taken out of their vocabulary altogether, but I also, on the other hand, don't agree that not exposing them to anything else and using that as the only means of (unclear), I think you would hinder a child on either end of that.

Glenda took offense to the term African American Vernacular English. She argued: Well I think first of all like when you say the African American language, that is a stereotype because all African Americans do not speak slang or gang or Ebonics. You know, so that's basically stereo typing, but for languages that being spoken by African Americans, and that not all African Americans speak hood or Ebonics. Once they see that they will not be able to say, Oh, you're 'acting White,' they should be able to see African Americans speaking all types of language. Then they can say, 'Oh, okay, it's okay to speak in this fashion and I see Black people speak in that fashion, I mean they're not White. So, if we expose them to different languages spoken by African Americans, I

think that in itself would be an eye opener. Then they could see for themselves that it is not a White thing to speak *correct* English.

Finally, Kathy had a different thought about teachers' response to language differences. She explained,

Well, you know the way I liken that, I told you earlier, in my background with deaf and hard of hearing, speech, and all that, is in that community there is American Sign Language and it has its own context. It has its own – it's very conceptual in nature. Ah, more off the beaten path of typical English, I guess. If you can say anything is typical, but what we think of what happens in school, then Afro American dialect, and the way that I feel about that, I think would probably generalize over to what you're talking about. That is, language is kinda' who people are, and to deny that it exists is to deny part of them. So, I would embrace it. However, I would also know that a big chunk of being successful in school or academics or further academia is literacy. So, that was the way I felt about American Sign Language, is yes that's a part but you still have to learn what's written in the books, what ah, how to write it, ah and all that. But that, I don't think it has to be an either or. I think it can be both, and if we're sensitive to the child, his or her family, as well as the goal of coming to school.

One thing that should be noted is that all teachers deduced that in the end, all children should learn Standard English in order to be successful in school, and ultimately in life. This is particularly interesting because in practically every interview conducted there were instances of participants using language styles that were different from the mainstream standard use. There were times when teachers did not even seem aware of the fact that they were not speaking in Standard English. I realize that in average conversations, few people actually use Standard

English all of the time, but it should be considered when making judgments and setting goals for students.

Theme 2: Language Differences and Student Learning

Interview question: How does the quality or value of the language use of children whose predominant language is standard English compare to that of children with language differences? Explain.

Would you share your thoughts on the issue of language children bring into the classroom from the home in comparison to School English. Does it give you insight into the child's academic abilities? Explain. Does it tell you anything about the child's home life? Does it influence your communication with the child or his/her parents?

The participants discussed language differences from interesting perspectives. I included two interview questions under this theme because this set of questions seemed to generate the common theme. Whether intentional or not, some of the teachers implied an association between language differences and learning problems. There also seemed to be some consistency among participants in the thought that if a child does not talk much in class, or is considered quiet, she consequently has language issues that may need attention. Finally, the teachers appeared to imply that language differences have an effect on students' learning. Once again, there was one teacher of the four interviewed who did not imply these beliefs.

In a discussion of how Valerie viewed children with language differences in comparison to those whose predominant language meets the standards of mainstream English, she suggested,

You can tell the children who are a little bit more, ah (Pause, can't seem to find the words to describe what she wants to say, or possibly she is not comfortable saying what she feels), but they're more comfortable. When they speak they're more comfortable, they are more confident in what they have to say. The children who are less so are not going to speak out, and you have to coerce them into speaking, as a matter of fact I have a little boy who is from New Orleans, and he talks about wanting to go back. He's so sweet, but

very quiet. He never said hardly anything all year long. He's not a real sharp little boy, but he tries *so* hard. Slow and methodical, doesn't say too much, but when he speaks you're always surprised. He's quite sophisticated in his thinking and he's been through a lot, so he's gained a lot of maturity just from experience. One of the things that was so cute, uh, the little boy we've had so much trouble with (*She mentioned this child in another part of the interview*) has made quite an impression on him, because this little boy from New Orleans receives special services, and the teacher (the special services teacher) was telling me that he opened up to her and said 'You know what? I don't know how Ms. V stands that.' You know that he [the child] noticed that this little boy was giving you a hard time. He said, 'He's really bad news,' and I thought, 'he said that?' because I never hear him say anything.

In Glenda's response to this interview question she contended, Well, it [language] gives some insight [into academic ability] because if you have children in the classroom that ah, not necessarily kids who talk a lot but in their conversation, when you have a conversation with them you can detect kids who can read, someone's reading to them, or they're having some meaningful interactions with adults. You are able to pick that up very quickly because it's like "oh"...for students that come with *language barriers*, does that mean that they can't learn? No, it does not. It just means they have a language barrier.

In another discussion on language differences, Glenda commented, I think the ones who have the foundation are better able to express themselves. Those with a foundation can express themselves with the "street" or with Standard English. Those who are struggling they tend to just use "street" and they struggle with Standard

English. I would say maybe 30% have the foundation and 70% don't. It use to be that there were a few kids struggling, but now it is the majority. They keep getting further and further behind.

When asked about her thoughts on the language her students bring from home into the classroom, and whether it gave insight into students' academic ability, Alexis resounded,

Yes, yes, and yes (*laugh*). Absolutely, sad as it is to say, you do make a prejudgment of a child who may be *misusing* the English language. You expect as a teacher that a child who academically gets it would be able to use English *properly*, and that's a bad presumption to make when a child walks into a room. I learned that teaching there (*her former inner city school*) because some of my brightest kids at times would speak and sound very—almost like college students- educated, and then somebody would tick 'em off and they would slip into this other, you know, comfortable language. You can't, you can't judge a child by the language that they use, but it does tell you a lot about how they are spoken to at home.

Kathy's response to the issue of a child's home language in the classroom and its implications on academic ability, was slightly different from the other participants. She was very assured about her opinion on this subject. She explained,

I don't think it typically does. I had a Ph.D. researcher say to me one time, whose son was struggling with some language issues, that if he didn't talk that he must be cognitively deficient. And I said, 'No.' I said, there's plenty of deaf kids running around, that are not talking like you or me, but they certainly are not cognitively deficient. So, I don't think that the language will hold any kind of, it doesn't tell you. To me, it doesn't tell you about that part of them. It does tell you about that culture, what's happening in

the home, you know who the models are. If they can coach, that definitely counted in Deaf Ed. That will tell you some information, but not about their intelligence. That's, I don't think so. But, I also think that when kids come to the classroom and they bring their own personal view, or their own particular skill for language, it's like kids that come and do art, and we say "Oh, you know they have their own expression on a piece of paper," and instead of embracing it the way it is we'll say, "Oh, well if that's a tree you've got to make it green, and the trunk is brown, and why do you have every thing running off the page?" We school the artist out of them, and I think we can do that with language too. Because language is often so colorful, and it has a way of looking at things that comes off, that you know, that draws me in. That gives me another perspective on what they're talking about. I think it's to be embraced and celebrated.

Theme 3: Language and Parents' Concern for Children

Interview Question: Would you share your thoughts on the issue of language children bring into the classroom from the home in comparison to School English. Does it give you insight into the child's academic abilities? Explain. Does it tell you anything about the child's home life? Does it influence your communication with the child or his/her parents? (This same question was listed in Theme 2 because it applies to both themes.)

The participants in this study often allowed students' language styles to influence their opinions of parents' concerns for their children's education. Some of the teachers seemed to associate the style of a child's language with parents' concern for their children's education. In some instances, they appeared to be saying that parents who cared for their children provided the required tools for their child(ren) to successfully use Standard English, and if the parents did not care about their children, they did not provide such necessities.

This perspective was evident in Glenda's description and comparison of two children whose language use stood out in her memory. She explained,

“One young person-- and he was a male, he had a very good grasp of the English language and that was again based on his household. There was a push to say that education’s important. So this young person was 6 years old and you would have thought he was 26 because of his ability to communicate with adults, with peers, being able to speak in front of other adults, ahh, being a part of plays and awards and I think plays and shows and I think that was a result of his mother pushing education, and as a baby they say reading to him in the womb, I’m not sure if that uh, helped any but her push was to make sure he had a quality education. She was going to give him the best education possible. And she wanted that for him . . . he has that thirst and love for reading because of his mother, whereas this other young person struggles with reading. And, in coming from a background where education is not nothing to school, but in terms of providing a quality education or background or foundation, ah, it’s not there. So he has not realized his potential, he struggles . . . that’s just the difference of a home that has a push for knowledge and one who doesn’t.

When asked which of these children represented the norm in her experience, Glenda replied,

I would say being from an urban setting, I would say the norm would be the one who sees school as a social event, and that’s insulting because parenting has changed. There was a time with African Americans that the whole focus was about getting quality education and during the civil rights movement the push was about education is your ticket out. That was the key focus. Now we have parents who don’t know about the movement and don’t care . . . For many of them [students] sometimes they can not put a sentence together. The thing is it’s not because of a lack of potential, it’s because of a lack of

guidance and direction because many times just speaking with them you realize that these are not kids who can't learn, just that they have not been motivated to, they have not been given the guidance or direction or the parenting to say this is a part of who you are or this is important.

Alexis expressed the idea of parents caring when asked what factors influences a young child's language. She said, "Oh, to be cared for after school. I mean they may not necessarily be cared for." In another discussion, she spoke of a child whose language was different from the other students in her class. She explained,

In second grade I had 28 students, all from the housing projects; they all came from the housing projects right behind the school. That school served that community. There were no kids bused in, so as soon as they walked out the door that was their neighborhood. They all knew what each other meant to be an insult or anything. Once, I didn't know what was going on, and they were all laughing their heads off. There was this one little girl that was the opposite of needing language development. Her language was different than the rest of the children. I mean it was as if, if my eyes were closed I would have thought she was raised in a different environment than the rest of the children. Her parents, their children were important, high on their list, their children were number one. It was obvious that her parents were different. And it was reflected in the newspaper last year. There was a little blurb about her and her little brother getting into a drama program. It was another performing event, her parents making that their priority which is the complete opposite of the parents of the other children.

Theme 4: Teacher Education Programs and Language Differences

Interview question: Do you feel that your teacher education program prepared you adequately to effectively address students' language differences in the classroom?

There were a few issues discussed by the participants that received comparable responses. One of these issues was the discussion of teacher educational preparation for language differences in the classroom environment. All of the teachers reported feeling that they did not receive adequate preparation for the culturally related language experiences they encountered in the classroom. Most of these discussions included language differences, but were not limited to language. They seemed to ultimately go beyond language and encompassed cultural diversity as a whole.

Glenda seems to view this as a diversity issue in general, not just language. In her opinion, cultural diversity has become the responsibility of the school faculty and staff. She contended, I don't think universities 5, 10, or 15 years ago have adequately prepared teachers for the diversity that exist in the classroom. That didn't happen. It has to be on the part of the teacher or the school district or the school leader which may be the principal, to look at research based information, and using it in a way that teachers are going to be able to really connect and make a difference with young people. Until universities realize that there are more and more school districts that are now working with universities to look at what we need. We need to make a disconnect between what--how universities are preparing teachers, and once they get out into the school settings, especially in the urban school district. There is a great disconnect, and what happens is the teachers are overwhelmed, and to make sure this doesn't happen again it has to be a connection. I would say that universities did not prepare me or probably individuals for what they are going to truly

face, teaching strategies, multiple intelligences, looking at building relationships with students, classroom management. For me, because I am a strong disciplinarian, I did not have to encounter a lot of that, but I saw a lot of my colleagues. Coming from a sports background I just wasn't having it [discipline problems] because I believe in discipline. But there are people who are not from those backgrounds and it's a struggle for them because they think that, oh-h I have to be nice and what have you, but it's something that you can love 'em to death, but you have to be firm.

She explained that she got most of her knowledge from her classroom experiences.

Glenda said,

I was at schools that had a large population of ESL students as well as students from low socioeconomic backgrounds there were African American and Poor White students. So with those experiences with students who were Black, White, Yugoslavian, Afghanistan, and everywhere else, they were poor students so all of that was valuable experience in terms of diversity.

Alexis seemed to fluctuate in her opinion of her background on diversity education.

When addressing whether her teacher education program prepared her to adequately address the language differences she has encountered in the classroom, she explained,

“Not, really, I attended an in-state college. I feel adequately prepared for everything.

The only thing I didn't feel prepared for was number one, special education, and preparatory education--if a child needs help in this area of language development; this is how you help them. I think this is kind of left to common sense. Going into L---- School, which is an inner city school, because I had been in school with people of different backgrounds, for me to be put in that environment I was very comfortable, very

comfortable with the children, but there were times when I felt that I wasn't the best suited for that environment because it was so unfamiliar to me and I didn't know how to communicate with the parents. It would have been helpful to have been trained, and I did not receive any training.

The information or resources that were most helpful to me were actually asking people when I student taught, which student teaching is a part of your curriculum, so I guess you could count that. But, talking to the family resource people and just talking about different situations, people who had been around in this situation. When I walked in the front door, people looked at me in that way, like "oh no," cause it appeared I guess to them, that I wasn't raised in that kind of situation. I was eager to ask questions and eager to know. I would ask for help when I need it with a child. If I didn't know how to communicate with that child or a parent, absolutely, I would ask for help, for strategies you can use when talking to a parent, strategies to use when talking to a child. One thing that I did find interesting though was when I did try to model, they didn't respond to me at all, but they responded to our security guard though, who very much used the same dialect as theirs.

In regards to teacher education programs, Valerie also expressed that her most valued knowledge of language differences came from working with other informed teachers. She commented,

I don't think your methods courses ever prepare you for what you're really going to deal with. Probably the best resources were other people, other teachers. I think probably that was most helpful for me; being a model for me . . . I think just being exposed as an educator, being exposed to the fact that I am going to be teaching children of diverse

backgrounds. Also you know, all of the professional developments, just in general the things they prepare you for just to go into the classroom. I think helped me tremendously; that along with the fact that we live with a diverse group of people in our neighborhood.

Finally, Kathy seemed to be very sure of her feelings about her teacher education program. She went into considerable depth on this issue. At times, it seemed she was choosing her words carefully, but I felt she eventually said what she wanted to say. Her response also seemed to portray her wealth of experience. When asked did she feel her educational program adequately prepared her to address the language differences she experienced in the classroom, she said,

No, even in my background for special ed, and speech and language pathology and all those type of things, so. I think they give you the theory, they give you the cookbook, but the finesse, the learning how to go in back doors when the front door is locked, ah, all those kinds of things I get on the job training. A lot of them I guess I just figured out, you know. I've worked to be successful at getting kids to learn, so in that mission I was constantly asking myself is there another way, something else I can do, what if I changed this or what if I add that. And by asking those kinds of questions, they're not developing technique. I developed a strategy; I developed the overall picture about how it all works together. I've read in the books about how it all works together, but there is something about just getting in and doing it, that made the difference for me. And, I just might be one of those learners anyway, that on the job training is the best way for me . . . I have an elementary certificate, and in those classes they never talked about anything that might (unclear) term quote, unquote "typical," I mean, much less behavior, much less language

issues. No, that was never brought up”. (*Here she was discussing her view of elementary education programs as programs that did not place any attention on behaviors that were not considered “typical” behaviors among the students, including language differences.*)

As with the other teachers, Kathy said that her hands-on experiences were where she gained her most valuable knowledge about language differences and diversity in general. She said.

Probably on the job training-- there's no probably about it. It was on the job training. Sometimes it was consequences of my own miss steps, where I was trying to do something and didn't realize the entire scope of what I was getting into. Sometimes it was people letting me know. And sometimes it was after I was clued in basically, then I started making some observations and my awareness was raised and I did, hopefully, a better job somewhat down the road. But, it was definitely on the job training, there is no question. After I was alerted to some of the differences then I started asking questions, to people I thought I could trust, and not come across as ah, well I guess judgemental's the word. You know, not to come across that way, just on a fact finding, trying to explore, to do the right thing kind of attitude, and I found several folks who were willing to share that kind of information.

Later she continued to explain what she thought was most helpful to her, she said,

There was an in service I took once that I thought if I'd had that earlier that might have helped, but it was just a piece of the story. It focused on social economic status, and basically how life is for a person who has limited resources and the culture associated

with that. That was helpful, that was in an informative academic kind of setting, you know, so I would recommend something like that.

Kathy expanded on this response with in depth details. She continued,

In terms of the innuendos or dealing with certain (*thoughtful deliberation*), I don't know how to put it, dealing with certain (*pause*) types, its not just dealing, its making an impact. You know, you can deal, a lot of people can deal, but if you want to be able to be in situations, and not just deal, but to form a partnership with a family, to collaborate so that they feel empowered, and that you all become a reciprocal kind of partnership, I don't know, that may just take experience. I probably, I'm a believer in mentors, so if there was someone to sort of open a few doors, let you get your feet wet, in a way that you don't have to know it all to be successful. And a mentor might be able to do that if he or she is good. That seems like it would be a good idea. But, just general reading of stuff, I just, you know, some times it's right off the back, you know? You think you know, but when you get in there and you have a real person sittin' in front of you, and that real person has feelings, and attitudes, and you blame your own feelings and attitude, I mean, you know, sometimes there's no other experience that will help bring it together.

Theme 5: Teaching

Interview question: This theme was not the response to any particular interview question. It emerged throughout the entire interview process.

These participants told the stories of their classroom experiences. They clearly discussed their feelings about the role of language in their classrooms. While each of them asked at some point during the interview sessions, if they were giving me the information I needed, they still managed to tell their own individual stories. The one factor that surprised me most was the

consistent thread of passion that ran through the narratives of each of these participants. They expressed unequivocal passion for teaching and education. At some point each teacher, without prompting, expressed her true fervor for her chosen career. They also seemed to enjoy taking time out to talk about their own personal experiences as teachers. These expressions of sincere passion made me wonder if this opportunity may be indeed missing in the average teacher's experience, the opportunity to tell his/her story about the classroom experience.

Valerie expressed on two separate occasions concerns about how her professional opinion was viewed. In one incident she talked about the way the school system viewed her and in another it was the parents' views that caused some concern. When talking about the schools' view, her speech started in a sort of nonchalant tone, but as she continued her tone seemed to reflect a feeling of frustration. While responding to a question about effective strategies she used to promote language development in the classroom, she said,

I just do what they tell me (laugh). I mean, because you really don't have to think anymore, you know, you don't. You don't have to think. I mean a novice can walk in the classroom and be a teacher. Outside of the fact that they make you have a degree, but when you think about it (*shakes her head indicating hopelessness*) she continues, I mean they give you a script. Like with the literacy program, when we were trained on that, they said don't do anything that's not in here. Don't say anything that's not in here. When you teach it 'here is what you say.' And when they came in, all the head people, when they came in and observed that's what they want to see you do. They wanted to see you saying what the script said, presenting it that way, and when they come in with a checklist of what to look for, so you really . . . [don't have a choice]. Right now

I'm thinking and I think that's some of the frustration a lot of educators are feeling . . . And some of the brightest people, we've got some really awesome people in our school. Some of them have really helped me a lot and I'm saying you just don't know [what these teachers have to offer]. So I don't know, as far as strategies, it's the strategies they tell us to use and they say they work and that they've got proof that they do, so we'll see. We all know we don't all have the same teaching strategies. I mean we all don't have the same learning styles. I don't think every kid is cut out for college. And if he's not going to be college material he can learn to do something and give back to society. I mean you turn on the news and seeing somebody robbed, I mean we're making them like that. We have this No Child Left Behind, but we're leaving these kids behind because we're not making allowances for these children who are not going to be college material. So we're almost defeating the purpose here.

At the conclusion of the interview sessions with Kathy she summed her thoughts about the process with an appreciation for the opportunity to discuss her feeling about education. She concluded,

I've enjoyed talking about this because I don't think it's a topic that comes up enough, everybody just expects you as a professional to just go in and do. And most professionals that I know want to go in and do the right thing and be respectful, but lots of times you don't know what that is. And lots of times you haven't even had time to formulate your own thoughts about your values. I think professionals don't have time to figure out what their values are, you know, much less to be able to articulate them. So, this has been helpful because I think I

carried this stuff around and operated from something, but I'm not sure I've ever had the time or opportunity to articulate it. That was very beneficial.

Discussion and Interpretations

This chapter began as most stories do, with an introduction of the characters (participants) and proceeded with their narratives. The teachers' stories were developed through their answers to my interview questions. Initially, I had some concerns about the validity of the teachers' responses because they seemed so cautious about giving the "correct" answers. Eventually however, they relaxed and gave uninhibited accounts of their views of language use in their classrooms. It did seem on occasion, however, that the teachers felt the need to carefully choose their wording when responding to questions. I think this was an indication of the atypical nature of this topic among teachers. Ultimately, the teachers expressed the *need* to tell their stories.

Early in this chapter I said that my views changed toward classroom teachers and their perceptions of their students' home language use in the classroom. Prior to this research, I must admit I was somewhat harsh in my personal assessment of teachers' perceptions. It seemed to me that teachers were not making any attempts to understand the language students brought to the classroom or their cultural differences. Teachers were teaching from their own cultural standpoint and not recognizing the differences their students may possess, therefore creating a learning barrier. I do believe that this continues to happen in many urban classrooms where the teacher may be of a different cultural or language background than their students, but my understanding of the teachers' intentions is different. In reviewing the themes that developed through this research, it has become apparent that most of the participants were truly concerned about the issue of language differences. It seems that the limited discussion or conversation on

this issue among educators gives some teachers few options. Many teachers have not received training on successfully approaching language differences in their teacher education programs and are therefore left to figure it out on their own.

Many of society's preconceived notions influence classroom teaching. Teachers continue to view language differences as "incorrect grammar" in many cases. Some teachers commented that they have learned that simply modeling Standard English has not worked with their students, but they are not sure what strategies do work. Kathy commented,

There were kids, where if you modeled for them, you know, I didn't get the (*stops short and hesitates, seems to be watching her words*), with the kids that fall in a, I'm gonna' say a lower social economic bracket, those kids didn't pick up the modeling as fast. It's almost as if they were not sure about the whole process of imitating a model and playing with the language, you know.

On the same note, Alexis similarly commented, "One thing that I did find interesting though, was when I did try to model they [her students] didn't respond to me at all, but they responded to our security guard though, who very much used the same dialect as theirs".

All but one of the teachers interviewed referred to their students' language differences as an incorrect use of the English language. This one teacher, Kathy, noted that, "Language is kinda' who people are, and to deny that it exist is to deny part of them." She likens the culturally influenced language differences to that of the deaf and hard of hearing, "not typical, if you can say anything is typical," but simply different. She did not place a value on the difference.

The majority of the participants viewed language differences as a learning disability. The teachers referred to students who were having academic difficulties when citing a child with language differences. They spoke as though language difference and learning problems were

synonymous. Once again, the one teacher who did not make this connection and distinctly noted the difference in the two was Kathy. She stated that in her opinion, the language difference was not an issue unless it interfered with learning or was coupled with a learning difficulty. And maybe this is because Kathy's background is in Special Education and she knows that children who are deaf are not automatically less intelligent.

Most of the teachers in this study made references to a lack of quality in parental care while discussing students' language differences. These associations were subtle, and I don't believe the teachers realized they were making them. However, the references were unmistakably ingrained in the beliefs of these teachers. Their views seemed to be based on societal thoughts and not actual factual information.

All four participants stated that they were not adequately prepared to effectively address the language differences they encountered in the classroom. They each commented that they gained their most valuable knowledge on language differences and cultural differences through experience in the classroom. They did not appear confident that they were successfully addressing language differences. They simply seemed to feel that they were doing their best. It appears that no one questions or even discusses the teacher's abilities in this area. With language being one of the primary indicators of a young child's reading success, how can this issue continue to be ignored?

I think these findings are disturbing because in spite of the seriousness of some of these teachers' perceptions of their students' language, they are not being addressed. It is great that these teachers love what they do for a living. And it is without question that they are providing an invaluable service, but it is time that the issue of culturally influenced language differences in the classroom is addressed. I feel certain that teaching styles are affected by some of these

preconceived judgments of children's language. When a teacher assumes that a child will have learning problems because he has a language difference, there is reason for great concern. Educators can no longer safely avoid this discussion because it is controversial. It is the responsibility of educator to take command of this issue and present it to the public with the urgency it requires.

CHAPTER 5

Findings and Reactions

Reflections of My Own Perspectives

Writing this narrative has been an immense journey. My passion for the topic of language diversity along with the support of my dissertation chair was the fuel that provided me the momentum to continue. Through this passage, I have learned a great deal about the power of words and the power of discernment. The words I chose initially to describe my research goals, words such as African American Vernacular English, had to be avoided in order to prevent offense or discomfort to the Human Subjects Committee. My topic, although seemingly harmless in nature, had to be readjusted in order to assure civility toward the readers and participants.

Battling the limitations sometimes affiliated with research at this level has taught me to be resourceful in finding alternative approaches to telling a story. As a result, this dissertation tells the stories of teachers and their perceptions of the language children bring to the classroom, and not the stories of the children themselves, as previously intended.

Ironically, this change in my research focus from students to teachers has been an enlightening experience. I have learned that I needed to readjust my own thoughts on teachers and their ways of knowing their students. Prior to interpreting my research data and writing Chapter 4, my mental conclusion was very different. I viewed teachers as being solely responsible for misguided judgments of their students' language differences. I have since learned that my own judgment of teachers has been misguided. As I listened to each teacher's interview, I realized that while most of these teachers' perceptions were at times misguided, in my opinion, it was not intentional. There has been nothing in their preparation for the role of teacher that provided alternative beliefs. In the events in which the teachers did seem cautious of

their wording or questionable about their opinions, there was still no reference to an alternative approach. There was no doubt that these teachers wanted the best for their students, but they entered the classroom with the baggage of society's misjudgments about language diversity.

Prospective teachers must be made aware of potential language biases prior to entering the classroom. Villegas and Lucas (2007) noted that many teachers view students from socially subordinated groups from a deficit perspective. They stated that teachers must have affirming perspectives and respect the cultural and linguistic differences of students in order to believe that students from non-dominant groups are capable of learning, "even when these students enter school with ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that differs from the dominant cultural norms" (p. 32).

A likely place for this preparation to take place would be in teacher education programs. Barnes (2006) suggested that although it is necessary for teachers to be prepared to meet the challenges involved in teaching a diverse student population, it is a struggle. He noted that the problems exist "due to interrelated factors such as limited cultural knowledge bases of teacher educators and students, disconnection of theory to practice, and curricula historically grounded in Eurocentric traditional styles of pedagogy" (p. 85). One participant suggested these issues be addressed by opening communications between school administrators and university Departments of Education. Nonetheless, in order to move forward with this research project, I had to first address my own discerning opinions. As noted earlier, discernment can be powerful, but it can also be harmful. Determining people's motives or abilities without obtaining sufficient evidence can result in unfortunate consequences.

Reflections on Home Language

Much like my childhood, I don't believe that any African-American parents ever intended to harm their children when they implied that straighter hair was more attractive than the natural tight curls customarily found in African American hair. These parents adopted the views of society because there was no alternative view in their society that stated otherwise. It took the radical nature of those like my uncle (mentioned in Chapter 1) to dare question society's teachings before these misinformed views began to change. With these questions and discussions, young African Americans began to feel pride in the natural texture of their hair. The older generations, such as my mother's, have begun to slowly understand this message. However, when *any* African American hears a national radio commentator refer to a group of college students as "nappy headed" on the air, it resonates like an echo from the past with immense vibrations. Words can be powerful and they can often be harmful.

I was stunned by the astounding resemblance I found between the roles of hair and language in the African-American community. Hair, like language, has long been a feature used to apply prejudiced and discriminating resolutions. In this research, I have used hair as a metaphor to help demonstrate the complexity of language perceptions in our society. This metaphor also demonstrates how methodically the group that is being pre-judged begins to believe the misguided status that is being applied to them. In the case of language in the African American community, as demonstrated in these narratives, the majority of participants, regardless of race, referred to the language differences of their African-American students as "incorrect grammar" or "incorrect English." Each of the participants acknowledged they understood that language differences reflected the students' culture, and it would be wrong to attempt to take their language away from them. They eventually concluded however, that these

language differences were inferior to the mainstream form of English. The teachers in the study had some notion of what an unbiased perspective of language differences would look like and how it would affect their students, yet it seemed their deep rooted impressions of these differences did not allow them to achieve that position.

Implications of Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study is three fold: (a) to apply a narrative inquiry design to explore how teachers respond to the language that preschool children bring (home language) to the early childhood classroom and the effects this response has on their work with children; (b) to engage in research efforts that will explore how differences in language may affect or be affected by pedagogy, curriculum development, and teachers' expectations; and (c) to understand how teachers feel about their preparation and capacity to address the issue of differences in language.

I used a systematic method of content analysis to analyze the interview transcripts. The interview data in Chapter 4 indicates that the participants perceived the language some children brought to the early childhood classroom to be different from the mainstream English that is typically accepted in school. There were five concurring themes:

1. Participants in this study typically perceived language use that is different from mainstream standard use of the English language as an incorrect use of the English language.
2. Participants in this study often associated children's language differences with learning problems.
3. Participants in this study often allowed students' language styles to influence their opinion of parents' concerns for their children's education.

4. Participants in this study feel that they were not adequately prepared to effectively address the language differences they encountered in the classroom.
5. Participants in this study are passionate about teaching and education.

There was one outlying participant whose interview responses did not coincide with the others. Her responses consistently followed a premise that implied that language differences are of equal value to the more mainstream English commonly accepted in schools. She argued that no implications should be made about a child based on his or her language.

The following discussion is based on the results of my narrative research and the stories collected during the course of this study. It is organized as follows: I will discuss the participants and their answers to the interview questions. This discussion is developed in relationship to the questions covered in Chapter 1. Those questions include:

1. How do teachers respond to the language young children bring to the classroom (home language)?
2. How does language diversity affect the pedagogy followed in the classroom?
3. How well do teachers feel their teacher education programs prepared them to address language diversity in the classroom?

Next, I will present an overview of the collective responses and the implications of those responses, and finally, I will give an overall summary and make recommendations for future research studies.

Themes 1 and 2 were developed in accordance with the first research question. They relate to the discussion on how teachers respond to or view their students' language differences in the classroom. Themes 3 and 4 respond to my second research question: How does language diversity affect teachers' pedagogical approach to education? And finally, theme five is a direct

response to the third research question on teachers' assessment of their teacher education programs' ability to prepare them to address language diversity in the classroom.

Participants and Themes

Question 1: How Do Teachers Respond to, or View the Language Children Bring to the Classroom?

Findings

Theme 1: Language differences are incorrect forms of the English language. Each of the participants' stories was very different, yet they had related thoughts. Most of the commonalities were not obvious at first glance. It wasn't until I reviewed the stories a second time that I began to see themes develop. The one theme that was most recognizable was the teachers' reference to their students' language differences as "incorrect English."

In the classroom, the harmful effects of discernment should be addressed in much the same way it was in the case of *good hair* versus *bad hair*. Teachers, as well as the rest of society, should be made aware of the pervasive effects of misinformed judgments about young children's language. Over 20 years ago, Labov (1985) showed the huge disparity in the way teachers viewed their African-American students who used African American Vernacular English as opposed to those using the mainstream English. Heath (1983) found that the teachers in her study were more troubled with the differences in the uses of language than with the dialects the children used. She stated, "One of the most frequent complaints came from teachers who felt that most black students did not have mainstream or 'normal' manners, and many of the white children were losing the manners they had brought to school" (p. 279). They also complained that, "some of the Black children did not know how to answer what seemed 'the simplest kinds of questions'" (p. 283).

The teachers in the current study displayed some hesitation about discussing their true feelings on the quality of their students' language, but eventually seemed to gain confidence in their opinions. Glenda appeared to be offended by the mere mention of the term *African American Vernacular English* (AAVE). She commented that the term suggested that all African Americans spoke in this way. Her impression of AAVE was negative, and she equated it with what she called "slang," "gang," "Ebonics," and "hood." It was insulting to her to suggest that all African Americans used this "inferior language style." A similar tone was displayed by Valerie when the term AAVE was mentioned. She was adamant about not allowing this style of language with her students. She felt that allowing it would encourage bad habits at a young age.

An interesting point about such strong feelings toward AAVE is that both these teachers, Glenda and Valerie, are African American themselves, and they have admitted to using the language on certain occasions. In both cases, the teachers suggested the need for students to know the "correct" use of the English language. Once again, we see the power of a judgment that has been enforced by society for as long as the language itself has existed. The negative connotation associated with AAVE is piercing, and this is evident in the emotional responses of these teachers.

Implications. The perception presented by the participants in this study is not unusual. A review of the literature shows that AAVE has been viewed as a hindrance in the academic success of African-American students as far back as 1884 (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Throughout history, the controversy surrounding this issue continues. In the current study, the participants' responses to AAVE reiterate the responses of the past. Unlike the role of hair in the African-American community, there has been very little change in views toward language. During the presidential debates for the 2008 presidential elections, a CNN news correspondent commented

that one of the reasons Barack Obama (the one candidate of African decent) was in the lead could be because “he is likable and he is very articulate” (CNN, 2008). It is always interesting yet somewhat annoying to hear successful African Americans referred to as articulate. It comes across as if an African American who uses mainstream American English is such a rarity that it must be acknowledged. This adjective is seldom (if at all) used to describe the speech of the European counterparts. In addition, it implies that someone of color who speaks in a different form of English is not articulate.

If the participants in this study are an accurate reflection of teachers across America, then the role of language diversity in school has to be addressed. The language that children continue to bring from home into the classroom represents an obstacle. The obstacle is that many teachers have a preconceived, negative opinion of these language differences. When a student enters a classroom in which the teacher has discerning views of his/her language, that student enters at a disadvantage. The student’s chances of success are automatically inhibited. The findings of the current study support the research in showing that teachers continue to view students’ language differences negatively. These results suggest the need for further research that would highlight the need for a better understanding of language diversity in educational environments.

Theme 2: Language differences signify limited parent affection. One theme that seemed prevalent in response to the question: *How do teachers view the language students bring to the classroom (home language)?* is that in which participating teachers associated parents’ attention and care for their children with the children’s language use. It was often assumed by the teachers in this study that if a child used the form of English that is accepted in the mainstream classroom, then that child consequently had good, caring, and involved parents, whereas children who spoke

in forms of English that were not so widely accepted in the classroom environment had parents who were not as involved or interested in their children's well being. I surmise the question at hand to be, as stated in chapter 4, "Do teachers perceive children who use any form of English other than the standard form to have uncaring parents?" While translating this concept into these words may sound curious to some, it is reflected through conversations with the participants of this study.

In Glenda's discussion about children's language use she recalled,

One young person, and he was a male, he had a very good grasp of the English language and that was again based on his household . . . So this young person was 6 years old and you would have thought he was 26 because of his ability to communicate with adults, with peers, being able to speak in front of other adults, ahh, being a part of plays and awards and I think plays and shows and I think that was a result of his mother pushing education, and as a baby they say reading to him in the womb, I'm not sure if that uh, helped any but her push was to make sure he had a quality education.

She continued to describe examples that showed how the care of this mother was the primary reason for her child's good use of language. Later, she went on to discuss how "parenting" made the difference.

Alexis was even more direct in her comments on the parents' role in the use of Standard English versus language differences. In response to a question about what factors influence a young child's language, she commented, "Oh, to be cared for after school. I mean they may not necessarily be cared for." Later, she discussed a little girl who stood out in her inner city classroom. She said, "Her language was different than the rest of the children. I mean it was as if, if my eyes were closed I would have thought she was raised in a different environment than

the rest of the children. Her parents, their children were important, high on their list, their children were number one. It was obvious that parents were different.”

Although this theme seemed apparent in the current study, there is little evidence to support this topic in the literature. However, Heath (1983) discussed this idea of teachers’ perceptions of differences in the language of African-American students and Caucasian students. She noted that, “one of the most frequent complaints came from teachers who felt that most black students did not have mainstream or “normal” manners, and many of the white children were losing the manners they had brought to school” (p. 279). This attitude toward African-American children’s manners projects a negative view of one group’s upbringing in comparison to another’s. The thought that the language of the African American children in the class portrayed an upbringing that was less than desirable speaks to the teachers’ perception of the care the parents provide. Heath also pointed out that it is not the dialect of the children that the teachers in her research struggled with, but “more troublesome were differences in the *uses* of language the children brought to school, a topic rarely discussed in the research literature” (p. 278).

In response to the perceived connection between caring parents and language quality, Ward (1971) noted that while both (low and middle income) groups of mothers talk with their children, their intent is different. The middle income mother acts with the intentions of assisting the development of her child’s language skills, whereas the rural mothers in Ward’s study did not view themselves as teaching language skills to their children. Although these culturally different approaches to language may contribute to some language differences according to Ward, the mothers’ care and concern for their children was not different.

Implications. The limited availability of literature on this topic may be an indication of its sensitive nature. The very fact that my original proposal to discuss children's use of African American Vernacular English in preschool was denied by the university human subjects committee, speaks to the precision required when speaking openly about language differences. This all leads to the question: "Are we ready to address any inequalities or injustices that results from this very delicate topic?"

Possibly as a result of the limited research available, I once again am faced with self doubt. Are the teachers in my study right? Am I being too impractical by thinking that children's language use is *not* a good indicator of a parent's care for their children? Is it too idealistic to believe that children who use Ebonics as their primary language could have parents who care *just as much* as those children who are fluent Standard English speakers? Deep inside I know that I am right. It is however incredibly difficult to understand how such ridiculous convictions evolve. These beliefs are not limited to teachers, but are reflections of society. Teachers' acceptance of such ideas does create a growing problem of intolerance and prejudgment. To assume that a parent is not as involved or ambitious about their children or their children's education based on the language the children use opens education to injustice and inequality. Simply addressing this bias and bringing it to the table for discussion could be a start, but not a complete fix. More research is essential to giving this discussion credence.

Question #2: How Does Language Diversity Affect Teachers' Pedagogy?

Theme 3: Language diversity is a sign of a language disability. The next theme I observed suggested that the teachers in this study perceived the language differences of their students to be an indication of learning problems. In most cases, this perception did not seem intentional or deliberate on the teachers' part. The teachers stated they understood the reasons

students used the language they did. The teachers often explained it as a “mode of survival” for children of inner city neighborhoods. They acknowledged that the children’s language was a part of their culture.

When discussing the students’ language in this context, the participants appeared to accept the students’ language differences as equally significant as any other form of language. In spite of this apparent impartial attitude among these participants, with the exception of one, they proceeded by making contradictory remarks that indicated a different attitude. The contradictions evolved over time in conversations about students. They often appeared unintentional. This is evident in Valerie’s comments about a young boy in her second grade classroom,

He’s so sweet, but very quiet. He never said hardly anything all year long. He’s not a real sharp little boy, but he tries *so* hard. Slow and methodical, doesn’t say too much, but when he speaks you’re always surprised.

This type of comment was heard often, suggesting that children who do not use language freely in the classroom environment have limited mental or academic abilities. It seemed as though no attention was given to finding out why this child did not use much language, or to whether or not there were alternative approaches that could lead to more effective communication with him. A more important question would be was whether any consideration was given to finding out this child’s true cognitive ability in spite of his limited language use in the classroom. How often do we all apply the fluent use of “Standard English” as a gauge or a benchmark to determine a child’s intelligence?

In this study, the remarks that suggested a child’s language differences might imply learning problems sometimes came with an apology. This was the case with Alexis’s comments:

Absolutely, sad as it is to say, you do make a prejudgment of a child who may be *misusing* the English language. You expect as a teacher that a child who academically gets it would be able to use English *properly*, and that's a bad presumption to make when a child walks into a room.

She further stated that she knows these perceptions are unfair, but they are typical. She acknowledged that even while knowing this is an unfair assumption, it is so deeply programmed that it overpowers a more logical analysis.

Research suggested that this perception is inaccurate. Ward (1971) noted that there are no differences in age or speed of acquisition of such qualitative language development features as phonological discrimination, syntactic rules, and semantic categories. She stated, "Unless deaf, pathologically diseased, or otherwise seriously handicapped, the average five-year old has mastered most of the sound systems, syntax, and many of the semantic categories of his language" (p. 57).

Implications. It is disquieting to hear teachers make such critical assumptions about their students. It is even more disturbing to hear that their perceptions are accepted as normal. Realizing that the participants in this study were consistent in this frame of thought brings to question the appropriateness of their instruction. If a teacher's belief that her students are having learning problems is based solely on the students' language use, then the teachers could possibly alter the instruction for those students or lower their expectations. In either case, the students are being compromised because of a teacher's perception or prejudgment. I can't help but wonder whether these students' true academic and intellectual aptitudes are being recognized? Are their true learning potentials even emerging in this type of environment?

Heath (1983) pointed to this when stating the importance of teachers understanding their students' ways of knowing language and their culture. She noted that teachers should also know their own ways of knowing language and their cultural background, as this may affect their approach in the classroom. In order for an understanding of the ways of knowing language to make a difference, teachers must first develop a subjective attitude toward differences in language styles. They would have to undo perceptions of inequality and deficiency toward language uses that differ from the mainstream. Teachers ultimately have to recognize the importance of the role of language in their pedagogy. With these factors in place, we could see a positive change in classroom approaches to language diversity.

Theme 4: Participants are passionate about teaching. The last theme I observed in this research was the one that changed my outlook on this entire project. It was the teachers' undying love for what they do that had a profound impact on me. Of the four participants in this study, there was not one that expressed a single glimpse of dissatisfaction with her choice to teach. One teacher did admit that she did not feel she was equipped to continue teaching in her urban classroom. She moved to an environment that she felt was more suited to her and now loves her job.

The literature review in this study did not look at the available research on this topic. I had not anticipated teachers' affection for their chosen profession would have such prominent occurrences.

Implications. It seems that the passion teachers have for their profession is very unique. It is all about their love for children and making a difference in the lives of other. This kind of passion should not be treated lightly. Equipping these individuals with every skill they need in order that they may experience true success is essential.

Question #3: How Well Do Teachers Feel Their Teacher Education Program Prepared Them to Address Language Diversity in the Classroom?

Theme 5: Teacher education programs did not prepare participants to deal with students' language diversity. Up to this point, each of the themes discussed have dealt with teachers' perceptions of the students and their language. That is the focus of this research. Answering the question of how teachers perceive the language children bring into the classroom was the driving force behind my work here, but the answer to this question alone would not be enough. It is equally important that we get a better understanding of why teachers perceive things the way they do.

In an attempt to take a close look at the teachers in this study, I asked them about their teacher education programs and how well they felt the programs prepared them to address the issue of language differences in the classroom. Their stories were shockingly similar. Each of the four participants felt that they had not received adequate preparation in this area. Most felt that while their programs were strong in many ways, addressing language diversity was not one of those areas. They felt that not only did their programs have limited to no discussion on the issue of language differences, but that the subject of diversity overall was virtually non-existent.

It is important to note that 3 of the 4 participants completed their initial teacher education program 10 or more years ago. Alexis completed her program in the last 5 years, and is currently working on a second degree in education. Her comments on her preparation to deal effectively with language diversity in the classroom are basically the same as the older participants. It is also important to note that three of the four participant received their undergraduate degrees in the state of Kentucky and all four participants graduate work was in the that same state.

Although Kathy's responses were notably different than the other study participants, it was interesting to see that her responses were the same on this topic. I expected her response to vary because her educational background includes speech and language as well as special education. These differences seemed to have very little impact on the outcome. When asked did she feel her educational program adequately prepared her to address the language differences she experienced in the classroom, she said:

No, even in my background for special ed, and speech and language pathology and all those type of things, so. I think they give you the theory, they give you the cookbook, but the finesse, the learning how to go in back doors when the front door is locked, ah, all those kinds of things I get on the job training..

Much like all of the other participants, she said her knowledge of this issue comes directly from her hands-on experiences.

These findings are repeated in the literature. As noted by Villegas and Lucas (2007), the majority of teachers in the United States are "white, middle class, and monolingual English speaking in most cases, their lives differ profoundly from the lives of their students" (p. 31). Such substantial differences among students and teachers could make relationship-building difficult. Forming successful relationships between students and teachers in such diverse environments require intentional preparation. Heath (1983) suggested that most teacher education programs are not preparing teachers to respond effectively to their students' culturally influenced language differences. She suggested using ethnographies of communication in teacher education programs as a way for teachers to develop an understanding of language differences. When speaking of the effectiveness of teachers using ethnographies to help them understand their own ways of knowing language, she stated, "These teachers are taking social science

courses, examined their own habits at home and learned to recognize that they carried these home habits into the classroom just as did their students from other communities” (p. 266).

Implications. The overwhelming response says that we are missing a critical opportunity to effect change in teachers’ attitudes, and in turn, in society’s attitude toward the language differences of young children. The National Council for Accreditation and Teacher Education (NCATE) stated its goal to ensure that accredited institutions produce competent, caring, and qualified teachers. They acknowledged diversity by committing an entire standard (Standard 4) to it. The Diversity standard was created to assure teachers’ awareness of diversity as well as to develop educators who can teach from a multicultural view. This focus on educational institutions understanding cultural differences is substantial. It shows a commitment to quality and equal education for all students. It is limited, however, in the sense that it does not specify language diversity. The range for interpretation variance is broad. It is quite possible for institutions to meet the diversity standard without ever addressing language diversity specifically.

The National Association for the Education of the Young Child (NAEYC) revised its standards in 2003 and increased an emphasis on linguistic and cultural diversity. Although there is no one standard dedicated to diversity, *cultural diversity* and *home language* are mentioned in 4 of the 5 standards. This is a powerful approach to assuring pre-service teachers access to knowledge and exposure. It is a positive step in the right direction, and I am sure there are visible changes for teachers completing programs at institutions with NAEYC licensure standards.

The concern remains high, however, for those teacher candidates in institutions that have not specified language differences as a component of cultural diversity. It seems as though some teacher education programs continue to assume either that understanding language differences

happens automatically for teachers or that language differences have so little impact on student success or failure that it is not necessary to implement it into the curriculum. In either case, continuing the absence of language differences in the curriculum for prospective teachers is a grave mistake on many levels. If there is going to be a change in the academic achievement gap, there must be conversations on the language children bring (home language) into the classroom.

It is necessary to point out that there are universities that are preparing their education major for the language diversity that exists in elementary school classrooms. The Department of Education at the University of New Orleans has an exceptional history of addressing language diversity. Barnitz (2009) reports, as far back as 1977 the University implemented courses directed at dialect diversity and “Black English” in the classroom. He served as the language specialist at the University of New Orleans, Department of Education, a role assuring attention to linguistic diversity and literacy in urban education. Further research is needed to determine measures taken in other university settings.

I have concluded that the participants’ perceptions are simply extensions of society’s views. Often appearing a little skewed, the teachers’ outlooks on the language differences students bring to the classroom were not much different from those of the average lay person. These views are so widespread that it was not until careful analysis was applied that I was able to note the implications of these perceptions. Although some of these outlooks have become the norm in society, the norm in the classroom should be held to a higher standard. It is imperative that teachers maintain the integrity of the classroom as a fair and safe place for all students.

Guidelines for Future Programs

The guidelines offered below are based on the primary research efforts made through this study to describe teachers’ perceptions of the language young children bring into the classroom.

Through a narrative inquiry approach, I used the responses to interview questions related to language in the classroom as a guide to future program development. Based on the information obtained through this research, I have concluded that the guidelines should be included in teacher preparation programs for prospective teachers as well as in professional development and in services for veteran teachers.

Guidelines developed through this narrative research:

1. Prospective teachers should be assured access to all of the NCATE Standards including Standard 4: Diversity.
2. Prospective Early Childhood Education teachers should be assured access to all of the NAEYC Standards.
3. Prospective teachers should be required to enroll in 3 to 6 hours of course work in multicultural education. These courses should include current research on culturally based learning styles.
4. Current teachers should be required to participate in professional development that introduces cultural and linguistic diversity.
5. Current teachers of 5 or more years should update training every 5 years.
6. Prospective and current teachers should participate in field-based experiences that provide in depth information on culturally based language differences and the history of these differences.
7. Prospective and current teachers should be required to participate in at least two weekend retreats with urban parents of under-represented social economic and cultural groups. The retreats should focus on communication and trust building between the two groups.

8. Prospective and current teachers should participate in course work or in services that provide information on culturally relevant curriculum development.
9. Prospective and current teachers should participate in special education training that helps them to distinguish between true learning disabilities and cultural differences such as language differences.
10. Mediums such as seminars, focus groups, and round table discussions should be organized to open the discussion between schools and school districts and colleges of education on the issues involved in language differences in the classroom. These discussions should include, but not be limited to, the themes developed through this research.

Recommendations for Further Study

This research employed narrative inquiry research methods. It tells the story of only a small group of teachers. Although their stories are invaluable to the research as a whole, more stories are needed to establish a deeper understanding of how language is viewed in the classroom. This research should be replicated in different geographical areas with specific cultural differences from the mainstream culture. It should also be repeated including groups of teachers with closer experience levels and cultural backgrounds. In the current research, the teachers' experience levels and cultures varied. The suggested study would provide information that tells how culture and experience affect teachers' perceptions of their students' language. It would also be helpful to conduct a study that compares teachers' views of children's home language for both African-American students and native Spanish-speaking or ESL students.

This research suggested that teachers' perceptions may be influenced by different fields of study, such as Speech and Language or Special Education. Further research needs to be done

to see if perceptions are in fact influenced by different fields of study. This would tell us if we can replicate practices that are taking place in a particular field or are encouraging more fact-based and less judgmental perceptions.

The research results show a need for a more in-depth look at each of the issues presented in the themes. The individual themes present significant components of the research topic. In order to effectively address the subject of language differences in the classroom, further research is needed in each of these areas. A look at the relationship between cultural language differences and learning problems is important. This new research would have to focus specifically on the *cultural* component in order to avoid confusing the results with non-culturally related language differences. This research should provide an updated look at culturally related language differences from an educational standpoint, as a separate entity. Then, a look at how and/or if these differences relate to learning difficulties would be needed. It is important to note whether or not learning difficulties, if present, are a result of language differences or a result of the other conditions that may exist in the classroom as a reaction to the language differences.

One of the most difficult concepts to emerge from my study is the one in which parents' ability to care for their children was subject to judgment based upon the children's language. I believe the potential damage from this theme is completely unintentional, on the part of the teacher. Further research is necessary to review the impact of this assumption on children in the classroom.

The one theme that is most approachable and easily reversed is the one that states that teachers feel their teacher education programs did not adequately prepare them to address students' language differences in the classroom. It is important to repeat here that 3 of the 4 participants completed their initial teacher education program 10 or more years ago. The one

teacher who completed her degree within the last 5 years is currently a graduate student in a different education program. Her comments about her preparation in language diversity, even in her current program, are very similar to the older teachers.

More attention to aligning the NCATE and NAEYC standards could help to facilitate this discussion. I believe that, perhaps as a result of NCATE, NAEYC, and other educational accrediting associations, teacher education programs are currently providing course work on diversity and multicultural education. It seems, however, is it not translating easily into the classroom. An approach that integrates diversity into all other education course work would create a framework for culturally relevant pedagogy. Further research that would provide more information on the benefits of understanding cultural learning styles and the disadvantages of teachers not understanding these differences could have an impact on the success teachers have in addressing the achievement gap. Language differences should be a major component of this research.

Finally, further research should be done involving children. Until we actually go into the classroom and get the stories of children, we are limiting our knowledge on this topic. In spite of the risk associated with children in research, it is imperative that we remember the ultimate goal is to improve the education of all children. With carefully planned and implemented approaches, we can gain immeasurable results.

Closing Remarks

As a result of Hurricane Katrina, I relocated to Kentucky. There I had the rare opportunity of working in a private school that serves an affluent rural community. Although this school practices progressive education using a very liberal approach, the diversity of the student population is less than 1%. The crux of the minority population consists of children of Asian

decent that have been adopted by wealthy Caucasian families. This made for an interesting and new work environment for me. Welcoming the opportunity to become immersed in a different culture, I went to school the first day with my pen and pad in hand.

I realized very quickly that indeed *we are all alike, yet we are all different*. Aside from the total progressive approach to education being a learning experience, I observed an attitude toward children that was rare. The difference was subtle and difficult to describe, yet it was all encompassing. This attitude toward children was in all aspects of the school, from the head of schools to the maintenance department, from the architectural design of the structure to the manicured grounds surrounding the structure. There were few if any aspects of this school that did not exude an immense value and respect for children. While this was an amazing experience, it was also somewhat ironic that I happened upon such an environment in the midst of writing this dissertation. Of all the schools I could have become involved with, it was this one that practically found me. There I was, in the midst of researching the perceptions and attitudes toward young children who bring different languages into the classroom, and finding unbelievable prejudgments about these children in my research, while attempting to assimilate the vast differences in these educational styles. It became a bit insulting. It was insulting to know that there are schools in this country where teachers would not dare cast negative judgement on the children they taught, only the highest respect, yet for other children the judgement appears to begin the minute the children open their mouths.

The irony of this post-Katrina experience continues as I embark upon a new job at an urban school in New Orleans. This school serves a population in which over 95% of the children receive free or reduced lunch and 99% of the children are African American. Once again, I entered the school on the first day with my pen and paper in hand. In my first week, I have

encountered a kindergartner who refuses to stay in his assigned classroom where his teacher and teacher assistant are Caucasian and repeatedly escapes to the kindergarten classroom next door where the teacher and teacher assistant are African American. In this same week, it came to my attention that one of the teachers was having a difficult time with the children's behavior, couldn't understand "why do they (the children) *talk* that way," and told one unruly class that they were acting like "hooligans." Although these are isolated incidents, and not representative of the entire school, it does alert me to the work that needs to be done. Working toward a place where *all* school children are treated with reverence and where the children's differences are understood is my ultimate goal. A small start would be to help this teacher and all teachers to understand *why they do talk that way*.

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APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROPOSAL COVER SHEET

**APPLICATION FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH
INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

For office use only

Protocol No _____

Date received: _____

A. FACE PAGE

PROTOCOL TITLE: Teachers' Perceptions of the Language of Preschool Children		
ALTERNATE TITLE:		
TYPE OF REVIEW: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NEW <input type="checkbox"/> RENEWAL If renewal, are there substantive changes? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
Principal Investigator: Judith Kieff, Ph.D New investigator: <input type="checkbox"/>	Department: College of Education & Human Development Curriculum & Instruction	University Affiliation: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professor <input type="checkbox"/> Associate Professor <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Professor <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor <input type="checkbox"/> Other: (Graduate students cannot serve as PI)
Campus Address: College of Education & Human Development ED 342 UNO New Orleans, LA 70148	Phone: 504-280-6527 Preferred e-mail: jkieff@uno.edu	
Co-Investigator: April Whatley Bedford, Ph.D New investigator: <input type="checkbox"/>	Department: College of Education & Human Development Curriculum & Instruction	University Affiliation: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Campus Address: College of Education & Human Development ED 342 UNO New Orleans, LA 70148	Phone: 504-280-6529 Preferred e-mail: awhatley@uno.edu	

Co-Investigator: Julie Smith-Price New investigator: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Department: College of Education & Human Development Curriculum & Instruction	University Affiliation: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Campus Address: Home Address: 11010 U.S. Hwy 42 Goshen, Ky. 40026	Phone: 504-813-4129	
	Preferred e-mail: jprice@uno.edu	

Note: New investigators must submit a copy of their human subjects certification
(<http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asp>)

APPENDIX B
DESCRIPTION OF PROTOCOL FORMAT

B. Project Description

Provide a **brief** description of the **background, purpose, and design** of your research. Avoid using technical terms and jargon. Be sure to list all of the **means you will use to collect data** (e.g., instruments measures, tests, questionnaires, surveys, interview schedules, focus group questions, observations). Provide a short description of the tests, instruments, or measures and **attach copies of all instruments and questionnaires** for review.

C. Data Collection

1. Total **number of participants** that you plan to include/enroll in your study:
2. Age range of participants you plan to include / enroll in your study. 25 to 53 years
3. Will you recruit participants from any of the following groups? (check all that apply)

- Minors (persons under the age of 18)**
- Cognitively or psychologically impaired individuals**
- Prisoners or parolees**
- Specific medical population:**
- Elderly**
- Pregnant women**
- Minority populations**
- UNO students/employees**

If you checked any of the boxes above, describe how you will provide the **special protections** to which these participants may be entitled under federal regulations. (See a description of special considerations at: http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/irb/irb_chapter6.htm. special protections are described at: <http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm>).

Participant from both minority population and the majority population will be recruited. a special effort will be made to have an equal balance in terms of diversity. Neither group will be put at risk at any time during this research. To protect against any breach of confidentiality I will ensure that access to information obtained in interviews is limited to my research committee. Names will not appear in the transcript. In any publication or public statement based on the study, all names, occupation, or other potentially identifying information will be omitted or changed. Two years after the end of the study the tapes will be destroyed.

4. Will the recruitment of participants and/or data collection involve any of the following?:

- Audiotapes, videotapes, photographs**
- Electronic communications (e.g., e-mail, internet)**
- Archival data that is not publicly available.**
- Focus group**

If you checked any of the above, describe how the media will be used (e.g., coded and then destroyed, kept for possible publication or broadcast, etc.).

Audiotapes will be used to assist in recording interview sessions. I will make transcripts from the tapes in order to analyze my data. To protect against any breach of confidentiality I will ensure that all tapes and transcripts are held in the office of the principal investigator and that access to them is limited to my research committee. Names will not appear in the transcripts. In any publication or public statement based on the study, all names, occupations, or other potentially identifying information will be omitted or changed. Two years after the end of the study the tapes will be destroyed.

5. Does the proposed research require that you **deceive** participants in any way? Yes No

If yes, describe the type of **deception** you will use, why deception is necessary, and provide a copy of the debriefing script.

N/A

6. Describe how you will **recruit** participants and inform them about their role in the study. Please attach copies of advertisements, flyers, website postings, recruitment letters, oral or written scripts, or other materials used for this purpose.

This study will utilize a convenience sample. Teachers will be drawn from a variety of schools within the county and surrounding counties of which I live and work.

November, 2006

January, 2007

7. Project Start Date: _____ Project End Date: _____

* Projects lasting more than 12 months must receive continuation approval before the end of the project.

D. Funding Source

1. Have you received any source of **funding** for the proposed research (federal, state, private, corporate, or religious organization support)? Yes No

2. Is this project currently **consideration** for funding (e.g., under review)? Yes No

If your response is "yes" to either 1 or 2, please indicate any source(s) of **funding** for the proposed research (e.g., NIH, NSF, departmental funds, private foundations or corporations).

N/A

3. Do funding source(s) have any potential for financial or professional benefit from the outcome of this study? Yes No

If yes, please explain.

N/A

E. Risks to Participants

1. Consider to both the **actual and potential** risks to the participants that could reasonably be expected to occur during the course of the study. Check all that apply.

Disclosure of the participants' responses may place the participant at risk of **criminal or civil liability**.

Disclosure of the participants' responses may be damaging to their **financial standing, employability, or reputation**.

Participants may encounter **physical risk**.

Participants may be subjected to **stress** beyond that ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Participants may be asked to disclose information that they might consider **personal or sensitive**.

Participants may be asked to reveal **personal information that cannot be anonymous and/or there may be a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to particular circumstances or procedures used in the study** (e.g., focus group or surveys submitted via email).

Participants may be presented with materials that they may consider **offensive, threatening, or degrading** or they may encounter other forms of **psychological or social risk**.

- An individual's participation will be reported to an instructor so that the individual can receive **research or extra credit**.
- As a result of this research, a **permanent record** will be created that will contain information (identifiers) that could reveal a participant's identity

If you checked any risk of these boxes, discuss the risk below. Describe the steps you will take to **minimize risk** to the participant.

N/A

F. Informed Consent

1. Describe the procedures you will use to **obtain and document informed consent and/or assent**. Each participant will receive an informed consent form from me, either by hand delivery or mailed, to read and sign prior to interview scheduling.
2. **Attach copies of the forms that you will use.** The UNO Human Subjects website has additional information on sample forms and letters for obtaining informed consent. (*in the case of secondary data, please attach original informed consent or describe below why it has not been included.*) Fully justify any request for a waiver of written consent or parental consent for minors. **All consent forms must be on current UNO letterhead.**

G. Data Use

1. How will these data be use? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dissertation | <input type="checkbox"/> Publication/journal article |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thesis | <input type="checkbox"/> Results released to participants/parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate honors thesis | <input type="checkbox"/> Results released to employer/school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conference/presentations | <input type="checkbox"/> Results released to agency/organization |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

2. Describe the steps you will take to ensure the confidentiality of the participants and data. Indicate how you will safeguard data that includes identifying or potentially identifying information (e.g., coding). Indicate when identifiers will be separated or removed from the data. Also, indicate where and how you will store the data and how long you plan to retain it. Describe how you will dispose of it (e.g., erasing tapes; shredding data). Be sure to include all types of data collected (e.g., audiotape, videotape, and questionnaire/survey).

Several procedures are in place to ensure that all information obtained from participants is kept completely confidential or private. First, the access to the data and identifying information of the teachers will be restricted. Only approved research staff (Julie Smith-Price) and Julie Smith-Price's major professor, Dr. Judith Kieff) will have access to the identifying information of the teachers. All people working on the project will sign a confidentiality pledge in which they agree that any violation of confidentiality is cause for immediate dismissal. Second, names will be documented on the interviews as identifying information only. After gaining access to an assessment, all identifying information will be removed from the data and replaced with an identification number. The data will be transferred. Third, all completed analysis will be destroyed . Finally, names of teachers, schools, or other identifying information will never be reported in a publication or with the report of the findings.

Protocol Title:

H. Principal Investigator's Assurance

I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and correct.

I understand that as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the study, the ethical performance of the project, the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, and strict adherence to any stipulations imposed by the IRB.

I agree to comply with all UNO policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research, including, but not limited to, the following:

- performing the project by qualified personnel according to the approved protocol,
- implementing **no** changes in the approved protocol or consent form without **prior** UNO IRB approval (except in an emergency, if necessary to safeguard the well-being of human subjects),
- obtaining the legally effective informed consent from human subjects or their legally responsible representative, and using only the currently approved, stamped consent form with human subjects,
- **promptly reporting significant or untoward adverse effects to the UNO IRB in writing within 5 working days of occurrence.**

If I will be unavailable to direct this research personally, as when on sabbatical leave or vacation, I will arrange for a co-investigator to assume direct responsibility in my absence. Either this person is named as a co-investigator in this application, or I will advise UNO IRB by letter, in advance of such arrangements.

I also agree and understand that informed consent/assent records of the participants must be kept for at least three (3) years after the completion of the research.

Principal Investigator Name: (Print)

Signature:

Date:

Department Chair

Name: (Print)

Signature:

Date:

I. Application Checklist

This page is provided to assist you with completing your application.

Do not include this page with your application!

- A. Face Page** (page 3 of this application) with the contact information for all investigators. This information will serve as the official roster of investigators for your protocol. If there are more than 3 investigators, submit two copies of this page and include the protocol title and the Principal investigator on each copy
- B. Project Description.** A brief description of the purpose, background, and methodological design of the study.
 - Estimate how much time that will be requested of each participant.
 - Describe inclusion and exclusion criteria for subjects.
 - Describe instances in which confidentiality is broken.
- C. Data Collection.** A description of the setting or location(s) of where the research will be conducted. If applicable, attach letters of support or agreement showing permission to conduct research at this location.
- D. Funding Source.** Describe any potential financial or professional interest by a funding source in the outcome of the research
- E. Risks to Participants.**
 - Describe any potential **benefits** for participating (including incentives of any type).
 - Describe steps to be taken if the participant becomes upset or distressed as a result off their participation.
 - Describe any potential **risks** to the participants by being involved in this research. Keep in mind that no study is risk free.
- F. Informed Consent.** Forms that will be used to document informed consent and assent. Required unless a waiver of written consent is being requested. a copy of your informed consent form
- G. Principal Investigator's Assurance.** This assurance must be signed by both the PI and the Department Chair.
- Copies of advertisements, recruitment letter(s), telephone scripts, instructions to participants.**
- Debriefing script,** if applicable. Required when deception is used.
- Copies of surveys, instruments or measures, questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group questions, screening questions,** and/or other materials used to collect data (e.g., interview protocols).
- Copy of on-line human subjects certification (new investigators only)**
<http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asprp/cbts/assurance/login.asp>

Please e-mail a copy of the complete application, excluding signatures, to kewalsh@uno.edu.

*Also, mail 1 hard copy of the complete application, including all signatures and all consent forms on letterhead, to the address below:

Dr. Laura Scaramella, IRB Chair
University of New Orleans
Department of Psychology, GP2001
New Orleans, LA 70148

APPENDIX C
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER

Judith Kieff, PI
April Bedford

Julie Smith-Price
ED 342

12/12/2006

RE: Teachers' perceptions of the language of preschool children

IRB#: 06dec06

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines.

Please remember that approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best of luck with your project!
Sincerely,

Laura Scaramella, Ph.D.
Chair, University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research



APPENDIX D

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Principal:

I am writing to invite teachers to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Doctoral Student Julie Smith-Price under the supervision of Dr. Judith Kieff of the Department of Education at the University of New Orleans. The purpose of the study is to learn how teachers perceive the language (home language) that young children bring to the classroom. This study also attempts to learn approaches teachers use in dealing with children whose home language is different from the language that is promoted and encouraged throughout the school environment. Teachers' participation will consist of three interviews that will be conducted in private, mutually agreed upon locations. The interviews will be between sixty to ninety minutes long, and will take place over three week intervals. Approximately five classroom teachers will be asked to participate in the study. The only foreseeable risk that may be involved in this study is the discomfort of being interviewed by someone unfamiliar and the time involved. The teachers are free to decline interviews or any portion of the interview, or to decline to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable. If you or the teachers wish to discuss these or any other discomforts you may experience, you may call the principal investigator, Dr. Judith Kieff, at (504) 280-6527.

Although you or the teachers may not benefit directly from this study, it is hoped that their participation will help others in the future through the development of data that may assist early childhood education leaders, policy makers, and educators in the growth of teacher and care giver preparation programs. The Human Subjects Protection Project Office and the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board may inspect the research records of this study. The data will be kept under lock and key and will be protected to the full extent of the law. Should the data be published you or the teachers will not be identified by name. Teachers' participation in this research is entirely voluntary and they may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

Should you or the teachers have any questions you may call Doctoral Student Julie-Smith-Price, at (504)813-4129 or Principal Investigator Dr. Judith Kieff, at (504) 280-6527. Should you or the teachers have any questions about their rights as participants in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Richard Speaker at the University of New Orleans (504) 280-6534.

Thank you for considering our invitation to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Dr. Judith Kieff

Julie Smith-Price

APPENDIX E
SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

First Interview Protocol

The following are questions that will be asked in the first interview session. These questions are designed to help establish a comfortable interviewing relationship. They are also intended to serve as a base from which future interview questions will be developed.

1. Tell me about your teaching experience.
2. What do you feel are three factors that influence language development of young children? Explain.
3. Thinking about your experiences over the years, describe without using their names, two or three children that stand out in your memory because of their specific language usage or development. How would you describe their language usage and how did it affect their learning in the classroom?

Did their language change through the course of the year? To what do you attribute that change?

4. What language development strategies have you found to be particularly successful with young children? Why do you think this strategy works well?
5. Do you feel that you were adequately prepared by your teacher education program to address the language differences you encounter (if any) in the classroom?
 - A).What information or resources was provided that you found to be most helpful?
 - B). What information or resources was not provided that could have been helpful?

VITA

Julie Smith-Price received her Bachelors Degree from St. Mary's Dominican College of New Orleans in May 1981. She received her Masters degree in 1989 from the University of New Orleans. Ms. Price's areas of interest are understanding language diversity and language development in the early childhood classroom.

Ms. Price has been married to Keith Price, for 19 years and they have two beautiful daughters, Blair and Micayla.