


**Strategies to Support Students Who Use African American Vernacular English**

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**Goals**

- Define and dispel the myths regarding African American Vernacular English (AAVE)
- Discuss the impact of linguistic bias toward AAVE in the school culture
- Provide strategies and suggestions for instruction
- Explore teacher preparation and practices

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**Reflection Activity**

Reflecting on Your Personal Understanding of African American Vernacular English (AAVE):

- In your group(s), take five minutes to briefly introduce yourself and share your understanding of AAVE.
- Listen carefully to the “understandings” of your group members.
- We will end the day with another activity connected to this one.

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## 2002 RLA/ELD Adoption



In 2002, California adopted new program requirements that were revolutionary in concept for the Reading/Language Arts - English Language Development textbook adoption.

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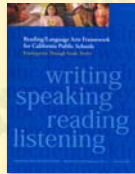
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## 2008 RLA/ELD Adoption



For the 2008 Reading/Language Arts -English Language Development textbook adoption, teachers and school leaders requested that comprehensive instructional materials:



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## 2008 RLA/ELD Adoption (continued)



- Ensure the successful academic achievement of African American students, English learners, and students at risk of academic failure; and

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**2008 RLA/ELD Adoption**  
(continued) 

- Provide new components and improved instruction to efficiently and effectively address their instructional needs.

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**2008 RLA/ELD Adoption**  
(continued) 

Improvements to the new instructional programs to reduce the achievement gap include:

- Increased practice and instruction to improve academic vocabulary and language skills

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**2008 RLA/ELD Adoption**  
(continued) 

- Intensive advanced oral vocabulary and language development for children in kindergarten through grade three

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## 2008 RLA/ELD Adoption (continued)



- Inclusion of instructional materials and additional instructional support for students who use African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

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## What Is AAVE? (African American Vernacular English)



AAVE is a separate, but equivalent language system, and rule governed as Standard English (Labov, 1972, 1998; Turner, 1949).

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## What AAVE Is NOT!



AAVE (African American Vernacular English) is not an impoverished version of Standard English dialect.

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## Disclaimer Regarding AAVE (African American Vernacular English)



- Not all African American Students use all the forms of AAVE if at all (Green, 2002 and Rickford, 1999a, 1999b).
- Among the youth culture, students of all races, not only African Americans, use the pattern of the language variety.

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## Features of AAVE (African American Vernacular English)



Common Main Sound Patterns:

- Initial /th/ pronounced as /d/  
this, then, these, mother
- Middle /th/ pronounced as /v/  
brother, breathe

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## Features of AAVE (continued)



- Final /th/ pronounced as /t/ or /f/  
month becomes "munt"  
breath becomes "breaft"
- /r/ problematic with AAVE and other vernaculars

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**Features of AAVE**  
(continued)

- Subject-Verb Agreement
  - Present tense adds –s to the verb when 3<sup>rd</sup> person
  - The verb *to be*  
He be, she be, we be, they be

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**Features of AAVE**  
(continued)

- Past Tense
  - Past tense pronounced with two syllables such as pickted (picked)

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**Contrastive Analysis Chart**

Imagine It!  
Strategic Support Guide  
Appendix, pp. 68-70  
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**Contrastive Analysis Activity** 

Using the Contrastive Analysis Chart handout provided online, rewrite the excerpt from the poem, *Signs of the Times*, by Paul Laurence Dunbar in Standard English.

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**Contrastive Analysis Activity**  
(continued) 

**“Signs of the Times”**  
By Paul Laurence Dunbar

Pumpkin gittin’ good an’ yallah  
Mek me open up my eyes;  
Seems lak it’s a-lookin’ at me  
Jes’ a-la’in’ dah sayin’ “Pies.”

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**Assumptions and Attitudes**  
About African American Vernacular English 

*“We assume that English is Standard English. We assume that Standard English is Right with a capital R, and anything other than Standard English is pretty much not English. These are the assumptions that lead us to correct our students’ language.”*

Rebecca S. Wheeler and Rachel Swords (2004)  
*Code-switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms*  
(Theory and Research Into Practice)

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**Assumptions and Attitudes**  
About AAVE (continued) 

**Correctionist Model of Language**

- Correct our students' language  
(Wheeler and Swords, 2004)

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**Assumptions and Attitudes**  
About AAVE (continued) 

**Eradicationist Approach**

- Hope to repress or eradicate the language of the home and replace it with Standard English, the language of the school  
(McWhorter, 1998 and Nieto, 2000)

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**Assumptions and Attitudes**  
About AAVE (continued) 

**Communication-Deficient**

- Label students coming to school speaking AAVE as "communication-deficient"  
(Chesebro, Berko, Hopson, Cooper, & Hodger, 1995)

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## School Culture and African American Vernacular English



- Attribute lower learning capacity to these students
- Have negative expectations for their educational success
- Provide less instruction to these students

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## School Culture and AAVE (continued)



- Lower quality and quantity of reading instruction
- Failure to distinguish dialect difference from true reading errors in oral reading

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## AAVE and Reading



When a student's dialect differs substantially from Standard English, there will be many mismatches between one's oral and written forms.

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**Strategies and Suggestions  
for Instruction** 

- Aural and Oral Language Development – receptive and expressive
- Phonological Processing
- Recognizing Acoustical Approximations

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**Strategies and Suggestions  
for Instruction (continued)** 

- Fluency
- Vocabulary Development – Academic (Methodologies for Building Schema)

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**Teacher Preparation & Practices** 

- Characteristics of proficient and poor readers
- Socioeconomic and environmental factors influencing reading competence

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**Teacher Preparation & Practices**  
(continued) 

- Knowledge of language structures and their application to practical skills of instruction

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**Teacher Preparation & Practices**  
(continued) 

- Practical skills of instruction (research, oral language development, concepts of print, letter recognition, phoneme awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, writing)

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**Teacher Preparation & Practices**  
(continued) 

- Assessments that are valid, reliable, and efficient in informing classroom instruction
- Classroom management skills
- Instructional delivery that is focused, active, exploratory, and engaging

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### Reflection Question #1



How does what I learned today about African American Vernacular English differ from my previous understanding?



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### Reflection Question #2



How will my “new” understanding of African American Vernacular English make a difference in my teaching or team planning?



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### Reflection Question #3



What steps can I take to make the most of what I have learned about African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to support students who might use AAVE?



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*"These are all our children and we will benefit by or pay for whatever they become."*

James Baldwin  
Retrieved April 22, 2009, from <http://protecttheclassroom.org>

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*phonics*  
*assessment*  
*phonemes*

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