



Dialogue

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How Far is Four Miles?

Laura Pribyl—SDAWP 2009

There are many things that make it difficult to be a teacher. Without doubt, any teacher could sit down and generate a lengthy list of challenges in minutes, both unique to them and universal to the profession.

"If a doctor, lawyer, or dentist had 40 people in his office at one time, all of whom had different needs, and some of whom didn't want to be there and were causing trouble, and the doctor, lawyer, or dentist, without assistance, had to treat them all with professional excellence for nine months, then he might have some conception of the classroom teacher's job."

—Donald D. Quinn

Possibly one of the most insidious aspects of all is that with few exceptions, most teachers work in a fairly constant state of isolation.

"What does it mean to go through a work day with no sustained personal contact with another adult? Being and talking with children is not psychologically the same thing as being and talking with peers—and I am not suggesting that one is necessarily more satisfying than the other; only that they are different. I am suggesting that when one is almost exclusively with children—responsible for them, being vigilant in regard to them, "giving" to them—it must have important consequences. One of these psychological consequences is that teachers are psychologically alone, even though they are in densely populated settings."

—Seymour Sarason, *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change*

"Not only does isolation limit professional growth, but prolonged isolation reinforces a solitary orientation to one's work and often breeds defensiveness and finger pointing."

—Thomas L. Good, *21st Century Education A Reference Handbook*

One of the effects of this isolation is that many teachers within a district, even those who have been in it for years, have absolutely no idea what teaching is like at sites other than their own. We simply don't know how the other half lives. Most teachers never mingle with those from other schools, perhaps only once a year at a Summer Academy workshop. This ignorance of life on the other side of the fence spawns the most egregious assumptions and stereotypes, and certainly the above-mentioned defensiveness and finger pointing. I experienced these personally when I moved from the least affluent school in our district to the most affluent. The former, located in the inner city, is known in the "lingua franca" of our district as a "valley school." I will refer to it as The Hood. My current site in suburbia, known as a "rim school" in the local district parlance, I will term The Burbs.

I, too was a victim of the ignorance isolationism creates. When I was in The Hood I assumed that my colleagues in The Burbs didn't care about disadvantaged kids, that they sat in their privileged corner with perfect students who came to school clean and well fed, who were effortless to teach because they had hundreds of books, computers, cell phones and automatic toothbrushes; because they had had thousands of hours in museums, art

galleries, zoos, and exotic vacation locales; because they spoke English; because their parents disciplined them, taught them manners, helped them with homework, and personally built their Mission Projects, Leprechaun Traps, and Science Fair entries; and because they didn't miss God-knows-how-many-days a year because of lice in their hair. I imagined the legions of parent volunteers who did everything for these teachers, short of brushing their teeth, and who treated them to lavish gifts at Christmas, including the much-rumored-about three-figure gift card to Staples. They had it made. I thought.

I thought I knew. But I didn't know.

I didn't know about the shrill, demanding sorts of parents who insisted on seeing your resume before the first day of school was over to ensure that you were qualified to teach their future Ivy-League scholar. The parents who insisted the birthday cupcakes had to be served NOW at 10:15 in the morning, because you couldn't POSSIBLY be doing anything more important than celebrating Junior's birthday. I didn't know that when you

wrote a grade on a paper, homework, or a report card, that you would be called to defend it with nothing less than your life. That GATE testing was taken as seriously as a cancer biopsy. That if a child wasn't doing well, the only possible explanation was simply your incompetence. I didn't know the hours you needed to put in planning over-the-top sorts of projects because the parents in your room who were helping were also watching everything you did and reporting it to everyone who wanted to listen. I didn't know that sometimes your principal would call you into the office and recite the complaints against you, and that would literally be the first you'd heard of anything because many parents would never "waste their time" going to you directly. I found out that having a lawyer on call couldn't hurt.

On the other side of the fence lies The Hood.

Most of my peers in The Burbs assumed this meant a class full of poor, dirty, unruly students virtually impossible to teach because they couldn't speak English; because their parents didn't value education and never returned homework or permission slips or set foot on school grounds, not even for parent-teacher conferences; because they were plagued by poverty, substance abuse, gangs, incarcerated or absent parents, homelessness, and inadequate parenting skills; because they were drug babies; because they were unmotivated; because they had the kind of behavior problems that required a degree in psychiatry to remedy; because they were in and out of school for a myriad of reasons, frequently because they had lice in their hair.

When I transferred to my school in The Burbs, the stereotypes were waiting. Many of my colleagues assumed I would not be able to teach "high" children, that my expectations would be in the cellar, that GATE children at my old site were as rare as unicorns and that I wouldn't recognize one if it poked me with a horn, that I should be assigned only the ELD students, struggling readers, and behavior problems because that's what "I was used to," that I would not be able to communicate with educated parents with the re-

quired diplomacy.

They thought they knew. But they didn't know.

They didn't know about The Hood. The parents who never saw the school because they were working three jobs to pay the rent in the filthy, neglected apartment or because they'd never had the chance to go to school in the country they'd emigrated from or their education had been interrupted by war or oppression or growing up in poverty as well. They didn't know that the ma-

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majority of students were completely capable of learning if you just took the time to plug the gaps; that some of them were GATE qualified too, if you knew how to look; that they had survival skills an Army Ranger would value; that with most of them a lot of love, patience, humor, and above all structure could circumvent the behavior problems; that they brought amazingly interesting tidbits of their culture to share; that in the course of a school year, you would come to mean more to them than you could ever know; that years later you would wonder why you still can't throw out the cracked candle holder with the half-melted candle inside that you got for Christmas.

I liken this mutual ignorance to the "Mommy Wars" phenomenon,

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where stay-at-home mothers on one side and working mothers on the other fling the barbs back and forth in a battle that isn't real in a war that can't be won. The same dynamics are in play in The Hood vs. The Burbs. What the hell are we doing to each other? In a profession that's as difficult as they come, why aren't we simply helping each other, and by extension, our students? If you are truly dedicated to teaching, and are passionate about children, does it matter WHERE you are working? Can't you make a difference anywhere, just in different ways?

Why is this critical?

In 1954 Brown vs. Education was passed to desegregate the schools. "Blacks and Hispanics are more separate from white students than at any time since the civil rights movement and many of the schools they attend are struggling, said the report by the Civil Rights Project at the University of California" (Matthew Biggs, Reuters, 2007).

The 2007/2008 data from the STAR (School Accountability Report Card) tell the "Tale of Two Schools" in my particular case.

| Category | My "Hood" School | My "Burbs" School |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| African | 12% | 1.5% |
| Hispanic | 60% | 9% |
| White | 20% | 69% |
| Multiple or No Response | 6% | 17% |
| Socio/Economically-Disadvantaged | 83% | 8% |
| ELD | 66% | 10% |
| Proficient in English/Language Arts | 26% | 82% |

These two schools are exactly four miles apart.

What else happens in four miles?

When I changed sites, I remained at second grade, which allowed me to see even more spectacularly the profound difference four miles made. To begin with, I had to throw out everything I'd brought with me and start over with new materials. In The Hood, the spelling test had ten words on it, in The Burbs, twenty-five

(and three dictation sentences)—an additional four-hundred-and-fifty words by year end. In The Hood, only half the students exit barely reading at grade level; in The Burbs, the lowest children read at the highest level reached by students in The Hood; most are reading at least one or more years above grade level. In The Hood, several students came in every year not even knowing their letters or sounds; in The Burbs, this is unheard of.

In The Hood, I had to race to complete the entire math curriculum by year-end; in The Burbs, I not only completed it, but had time for enrichment and early third-grade activities. In The Burbs, my students did an animal project that consisted of a written report, a speech, and a diorama of the animal's habitat. For many reasons, that project could only have been done in class in The Hood, and certainly never to the same extent. In The Hood, homework was a four-page packet that the students could complete independently; in The Burbs, it was an eight-page packet with lengthy reading passages and comprehension questions that required written responses that were frequently completed with parent

support. In The Hood, we often did not do science or social studies as time was devoted to language arts; in The Burbs, we completed all units of each subject.

In The Hood, I kept peanut butter and crackers on my desk all year for students without a snack; in The Burbs, my students brought fresh fruit and vegetables for recess. For three years in The Hood, we had no P.T.A. In The Burbs, the P.T.A. puts on a Halloween carnival complete with

a haunted house using set décor that would rival anything in Hollywood; in The Hood, the teachers put on a Fall Festival that featured face-painting and a few homemade games. In The Burbs, the P.T.A. can raise an average of \$23,000 in one night at a fund-raising event. In The Hood, the P.T.A. fund consisted of what the teachers contributed. In The Hood, I never had a room mother or chaperones on field trips; in The Burbs, I had an army. In The Hood, at least ten or twelve students would leave at some point in the year, replaced by other students in a constant, revolving door; in The Burbs, only one student moved in the three years I've been there. For seven out of my ten years in The Hood, the playground was a dirt field full of red ants and the only grass was a small patch in front of the office; in The Burbs, there are three playgrounds, and one is the size of a football field.

The terrible disparity between the second grade I knew at one site and the second grade I found four miles away is gut wrenching. Once you see it, you can't ignore it. But how do you see it if you never have any meaningful contact with colleagues from other sites? If you remain in that isolation that breeds the ignorance and the stereotypes and the assumptions? If it's still Us vs. Them? Should teachers be rotated among schools as principals usually are?

This country needs to address the stunning inequities in education that fifty-five years after Brown are as egregious as ever. "Almost two-thirds of African-American children attend schools that are 'minority majority.' About 40 percent of them learn in classrooms that are 90 to 100 percent black. In our major cities, the numbers are even starker. In Washington, D.C., for example, 93 percent of public school students are black and Latino; only about five percent are white. In the nearby suburb of Bethesda, Maryland, several minutes by car or public transportation from downtown D.C., 62 percent of public high school students are white" (Dana Goldstein, "Segregated Schools Leave Children Behind," 2007, *The American Prospect*).

While the fight is waged, though, what one teacher can do in the meantime needs to become what all

(Pribyl, continued on p. 17)

When *Personal* Essays Get Very *Personal*

Ann Zivotsky—SDAWP 2010

My class wasn't buying it.

My students—more than half with families and histories in Mexico—weren't agreeing to a sentence we just read in Pam Munoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising*: Lighter skin makes fuller stomachs.

Darker faces looked back at my white face, shifting uncomfortably in their seats, and swore I was wrong.

The story crosses racial and economic lines as Esperanza, a rich, spoiled girl in 1930's Mexico, moves with her mother to California to find jobs as pickers because the family fortune is stolen. For the first time, Esperanza faces racism from white Americans and prejudices from other Mexicans because of her lighter skin and wealthy background.

"Isn't that still true?" I asked. "Aren't the actors and actresses in telenovelas often lighter, sometimes with blonde hair?"

Darker faces looked back at my white face, shifting uncomfortably in their seats, and swore I was wrong. Talking about race isn't easy for the adults in this country, and it's not any easier for 10-year-olds. The truth may set us free, but it can be a messy path to freedom.

We talk a lot about racism and prejudice in class, prompted by the books we read: *Number the Stars*, *The Cay*, *The Sign of the Beaver*, *Out of the Dust*. I believe talking about our understandings and misunderstandings of each other is essential if my multicultural students are going to be prepared for the world and what

it may throw at them. I want them to succeed, so I'm truthful with them about how I've worked to change my own negative beliefs when I realize I have them.

My students and I talked that morning about the subtle prejudices that happen within racial groups. It wasn't easy for the students—Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander and African-American—to verbalize the pride they have in their culture and then to acknowledge that the actors and singers they watch often have lighter-colored skin.

A few days later, Vanessa* and I talked about the final writing assignment for the year—a persuasive essay. Vanessa and I were comfortable discussing serious subjects. We had a long talk about the pointlessness of getting so angry at a classmate from the neighborhood that she lashed out with a fist upon arriv-

I want them to succeed, so I'm truthful with them about how I've worked to change my own negative beliefs when I realize I have them.

ing at school, and we also discussed the inappropriateness of telling a student with Asperger's, who tested everyone's patience, that he was stupid. Vanessa and I had these talks each time before she had to leave school on a suspension.

I know that on the days Vanessa is in a bad mood, or acts out, she is missing her mother. It must be difficult to be approaching puberty, and girl cliques, and first dates without

Immigration Law

By Vanessa*—5th Grade

I'm not a U.S. citizen, and I disagree with the Arizona immigration law. People have the right to live here and to be free. The police shouldn't be able to stop people and ask them for their papers because they look Mexican or any other race.

In my opinion, this law should not be allowed. I say this because I know how people feel when they are separated from their families. My mom and baby sister were taken from our family. I feel sad when I think about them, but I hope that one day we will be together again. Every time I talk to my mom on the phone, I remember the day that I woke up and she was gone. I asked my dad where she was, and he told me she was forced to go back to Mexico. It was over a year ago that she was taken away, but I will always remember that morning.

A way to improve the situation is to find better ways to help more people to get their papers. The immigration patrol and Arizona immigration laws are tearing families apart and hurting people. People are being treated like dogs. If dogs don't have a collar, they take them to the pound, and if people don't have papers, they take them to jail and then send them back to Mexico away from their families. That's the most harmful way they can take anyone out of the state. The reason I don't like this law is because people will get hurt. It's not working for us. People are protesting because there is too much violence in this law. I don't want other families to be torn apart like mine was.

*A pseudonym

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a mom to talk to. I had a vague idea of why Vanessa's mom was gone, so when she asked me what she should write about in her persuasive essay, I mentioned Arizona's new immigration laws, and she cautiously brightened at the idea of writing about something she cared a lot about. But researching the facts to support an argument wasn't thrilling her. So we talked it out.

"Should everyone who wants to come to the United States be allowed in?" I asked.

Vanessa thought so. I asked her about our own homes, and if we would help someone else. We both agreed we would feed anyone who needed a meal, and even let them sleep on our couch for a few nights if they were homeless. What if more and more hungry, homeless people came to our houses, would we let them in? No, Vanessa said, we would run out of food and room and would have to shut the door.

"So," I continued, "your mom was sent back to Mexico?"

Vanessa nodded her head. Her family entered the country illegally and lived here for several years. One year ago, the INS deported her mother. Her family can't afford to pay a coyote to help mom re-cross the border, and her mother can't apply for legal entry to the United States because entering illegally once gives her mother a criminal record and disqualifies her. Vanessa can't visit her mother in Mexico because Vanessa is still illegally in the country and her family is afraid she'll be stopped at the border re-entering the States.

I encouraged Vanessa to tell her story through her persuasive essay, and my satisfaction came in seeing that some of her anger and frustration lessened with the realization that writing about the situation would give her a voice. The moment in our conversations that still makes me smile is when Vanessa handed in her essay and asked, "Do I still have to write a persuasive essay?" I laughed. "No, this is your persuasive essay. It may be the most persuasive essay I've ever read by a student."



michezo colore cor kulay warna szines spalva kolore barva koloryt
kolore colore hifa farge

The Language of Color

Rob Meza-Ehlert—SDAWP 2009

barva farve color ngiyra litur kolore kulay cor dath couleur coloris lliw tint

My ninth-grade students were working in pairs, trying to make sense of some fairly complex data on the shifts in immigrant demographics throughout history. I knelt down to listen in on one conversation. Karla, a quiet Latina who fastidiously hides her GATE status from her peer group, was having a discussion with DeJone, a bright and gregarious young man of African-American descent.

"Well," said Karla, "I guess the big difference now is that so many more colored people are coming to the United States."

"Whoah! You can't say that!" responded DeJone. "Mr. M-E, can she say colored people? Isn't that kind of like old-school racist stuff?" I fumbled for a response. "Um, well. DeJone's right that most people consider it racist if you use the term colored people. The phrase we use today in academic writing and discussion is people of color."

After a brief pause, DeJone's face took on a look of exasperation as he said, "Now that's dumb. Those two mean exactly the same thing. Who came up with that?"

Talking about race and ethnicity is a tricky business, whether inside school or in society at large. Since ethnicity itself is so complex, any concrete terminology we invent to try to describe it will naturally be an oversimplification that is fraught with inaccuracies. Race and ethnicity are often highly charged, emotional concepts that go deep to the roots of self-identity and sense of community. Furthermore, the historical and present-day realities of racism make discussion of cultural identity all the more problematic.

Despite the challenges involved, racial and ethnic heritage are such

important parts of most people's sense of identity that we need to find constructive ways to talk about these aspects of our lives. Child psychiatrist Neha Bahadur points out that, "The awareness of race doesn't come from the inside. You don't think of it until somebody else comes along and tells you that you're different" (3). The fact that our identities are formed largely through what is taught to us creates the exciting possibility that we might be able to raise children in a society without racial and ethnic divisions. However, since this seems at best a distant possibility at this point in human history, my


Talking about race and ethnicity is a tricky business, whether inside school or in society at large.

thinking on this issue is grounded much more in a pragmatism that has grown out of more than a decade in the high school classroom. By the time students reach my class they have internalized countless messages about race and ethnicity, and they possess at least a basic sense of which groups are their groups.

By no means does this imply that a person's identity is simply inherited and becomes set in stone by age fifteen. To the contrary, Dr. Carmen Guanipa-Ho states that, "Ethnic identity formation is a very complex process...involv(ing) an interaction of contextual and developmental factors" (1). Students (and often adults) are actively engaged in an ongoing process of reflection and adaptation of cultural viewpoints as they figure out where they stand

in our society. The language we use to talk about race, ethnicity and culture in our classrooms should promote this identity exploration in positive ways.

I am committed to helping students talk about race, culture, and ethnic heritage in ways that affirm who they are without marginalizing the backgrounds of others. This is a commitment that all teachers in our increasingly diverse society need



What color are they, then? Are they somehow less Latino than other mixed children who end up with darker skin or more stereotypically Mexican features?

to make. We must pay attention to what is said, how it is delivered, and even what goes unspoken in our classes, because those choices can greatly impact our students' sense of identity. Perhaps because we've all had some bad classroom experiences, a commonly held belief is that our education system is failing. Many people believe teachers are often unable or unwilling to impact students' lives, a viewpoint mirrored in countless jokes with "teacher" as the punch line ("What do you call someone who keeps talking long after everyone has stopped listening?" comes to mind). In contrast to this low status, educators actually hold an immense amount of power in the lives of young people. There are the amazing achievements of super-teachers such as Jaime Escalante or Rafe Esquith, but most of us can point to at least one teacher who embraced, inspired, and challenged us, even if they never made headlines. Sadly, we can also recall those teachers who, through harsh words, racism, or simple neglect, stole our joy or damaged our identity. Even well-intentioned teachers can pass on culturally destructive messages by the way they design and implement their curriculum. In the essay "How School Taught Me I Was Poor," Jeff Sapp laments an educational system in which, "More is caught

than is taught" (5).

Since we wield such power in our classrooms, it is vital that as educators we support students of all backgrounds as they explore and discuss issues of race, class, and culture.

Moving our dialogue beyond the phrase "people of color" is a key step towards creating inclusive, supportive learning environments. It's not that the phrase is patently offensive or destructive. It doesn't even make my list of banned terms for my classroom, which typically directly target people's gender, race, class or sexual orientation. "People of color" is a loaded term in much more subtle ways. While DeJone pointed out that it is grammatically nearly identical to the pejorative "colored people," we need to ask what we mean by "color" in the first place.


Color obviously references the pigmentation in peoples' skin that can be seen when we look at one another, but the concept is altogether more complicated than what can be ascertained through a mere cursory glance. Peter Gomes, a theologian at Harvard University, is an influential African-American author and preacher. Having a Black identity has been an important part of his life in the United States. However, he recalls that when his parents married on the island of Cape Verde, they were considered to be a mixed race couple despite the fact that by our modern American standards they both were Black. By the standards of that time and place, his more light-skinned father was considered White. Definitions of whiteness and blackness, it seems, are more slippery than many of us think (Gates). When one of my former students wanted to let me know that I was "cool" he announced to the class, "Mr. M-E is alright, he's actually black. He's just high yellow." His reference to the hierarchical skin color designations within the black community was both entertaining and disturbing, hingeing as it does on proximity to whiteness and the ability to "pass." My own children are half-white and half-Latino, yet they inherited my skin and eye color (rather than my wife's black hair and brown eyes) and would fit into the class photos at some Scottish primary school without too many questions. What color are they, then? Are they somehow less Latino than

other mixed children who end up with darker skin or more stereotypically Mexican features? If they are half "people of color" do we really mean to teach them that they have another side devoid of color? Are there really any colorless people?

What is meant by color, then, is something closer to "ethnicity" than actual skin pigmentation (though the latter can affect how others might attempt to categorize specific individuals). Ethnicity, like culture, is a tough word to narrow down into one short phrase. Eriksen's definition of ethnic identity is a helpful starting point:

"Ethnic identity is...marked by...common cultural, linguistic, religious, behavioral or biological traits, real or presumed, as indicators of contrast to other groups" (261).

We all have "color" because each of us comes from a unique set of cultural characteristics that help make us who we are.



In this sense, every single human being has an ethnicity. We all have "color" because each of us comes from a unique set of cultural characteristics that help make us who we are. In this way, the fair-skinned person from Scandinavia brings just as much "color" to the table as the brown-skinned Peruvian. Once we start thinking of all the genetic mixture that has taken place through centuries of human civilizations, it becomes a mind-boggling oversimplification to narrow peoples' whole identity down to "of color" or white. Moving beyond pigmentation, then, requires leaving behind the antiquated language that reifies racially divisive categories. In a culturally diverse classroom, when I ask, "So, how do students of color in the room feel about this quote?" I am by default telling some students in the class that they have color, while others are deemed colorless, cut off from their own roots in a specific cultural identity. This sends inaccurate and damaging messages to everyone involved. In its most benign form,

this may simply reinforce for students who identify as White that they are “just American,” devoid of any unique cultural heritage. At its worst, it might fuel the type of search for roots in White supremacy groups disturbingly described by James Ridgeway in the book *Blood in the Face*.

Some may argue that White Americans shouldn't be surprised to see a term like “people of color” since Caucasians created (and benefited from) the very system of racial segregation based on skin



...I am encouraged that this generation seems more poised to do this type of transformative work than any previously in our country.

color. Indeed, scholars such as Gail Anderson, at New York's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, trace the phrase at least as far back as French-speaking colonies in the early 1800's where the term *gens de couleur libres*, which translates as “free people of color,” was used to describe people of African ancestry who weren't slaves (Safire 1). The phrase was used similarly in the United States more than two hundred years ago, as a relatively positive term to denote those Blacks who were not slaves. However positive it may have been at the time, the terminology we use to describe ourselves in the twenty-first century shouldn't be encumbered by the racially-biased idioms of colonial life over two centuries ago. We have slowly taken steps towards a more fully inclusive democracy, so the very words we use should reflect these changes. Rinku Sen, racial justice advocate and publisher of *ColorLines* magazine, sums up this point superbly when she argues, “It seems that now we need a new term, as this nation changes with the globe and changes the globe” (2).

Another potential problem with using the phrase “people of color”

is that it assumes a relatively similar shared experience of being something besides “White” in America. While this may be the case, peoples' experiences can also be so vastly different that it is disingenuous to categorize the experience of millions of individuals with one all-encompassing phrase. Whiteness itself has been something of an elusive target over the centuries in America, as any student of the experience of the Irish, Italians, Eastern Europeans or other groups now viewed as “White” will show. Just as people of European ancestry have had vastly different experiences on America's shores, non-Europeans have certainly not shared one monolithic experience in the United States.

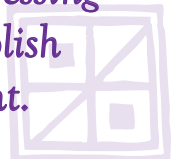
Spike Lee skillfully illustrates this point in *Do the Right Thing*, one of the most powerful and controversial films ever produced about race in America. In the climactic scene, an angry group of mostly Black residents responds to the police killing of the revered Radio Raheem by torching area businesses, including the pizzeria that served as a social hub for the neighborhood. When the mob turns its attention towards a Korean-owned fruit stand, the proprietor fends off his attackers with a broom, shouting all the while, “Me no white. Me no white. Me Black. Me Black. Me Black.” After a few tense moments, one of the leaders of the group, Sweet Dick Willie, says, “Korea is OK, man. Let's leave him alone.” The mob is persuaded to move on without destroying his store, but shouts from the crowd mockingly echo, “Him no white. Him Black.”

This extraordinary scene, complete with all of its racial stereotyping, illustrates just how complicated group dynamics are when it comes to shared experiences. On the one hand, Lee writes his characters in such a way that they recognize, even in the hazy thinking associated with mob violence, that there is some shared experience between these individuals from such different backgrounds; both groups have had to deal at some level with White racism. Despite significant differences in language, culture, historical roots, and even class, there is a bond between the Black and Korean characters because of the fact that none of them identify as White. Lee's brilliant writing, however, captures the

limitations of this solidarity; while the mob moves on without destroying the fruit stand, their mocking affirmations of the store owner's “blackness” make clear that he certainly isn't a part of their group's experience on so many other levels. The bridge that links them is just strong enough to walk across in the moment, but couldn't possibly hold the shared weight of so many people dwelling together for very long.

The implications for the classroom are profound. I want to encourage students to see that there are indeed many shared experiences of discrimination and hardship for Americans based on race; I'm pleased when these observations lead groups of students to an increased sense of solidarity. However, I don't want to gloss over a multitude of differences and make students feel as if they should be united simply because our phrase *du jour* is one that lumps so many different backgrounds together. More impor-

So, what to do with the phrase “people of color?” There is no pressing need to abolish it outright.



tantly, I believe twenty-first century citizenship means striving to build these bonds of solidarity across all dividing lines, including race and ethnicity. Rather than strengthening traditional divisions, my goal is to help students take a good hard look at discrimination, past and present, and then figure out how to unite to increase justice and equality. Walking through my campus at lunchtime and often observing students of so many different backgrounds socializing together, I am encouraged that this generation seems more poised to do this type of transformative work than any previously in our country.

So, what to do with the phrase “people of color?” There is no pressing need to abolish it outright. It is clear that to many people it has become more than just the phrase most commonly used in our society

(Meza-Ehlert, continued on p. 19)

Moving Beyond Tolerance

The Linguistic Difference Between Saying We Care & Showing We Care

Christine Kané—SDAWP 2004

Standard English is not the speech of exile. It is the language of conquest and domination; in the United States, it is the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues, all those sounds of diverse, native communities we will never hear; the speech of the Gullah, Yiddish, and so many other unremembered tongues.

—bell hooks

As a collective entity of educators, administrators, specialists, and researchers we have undertaken the task to improve the overall instructional quality and services rendered for our African American students. Numerous research studies have indicated that providing quality instruction from qualified teachers will improve the educational opportunities afforded to all students in the classroom, including African

reading achievement, rather than whether or not the student speaks African American Vernacular English. This finding leads us to wonder whether students who demonstrate a strong relationship with African American Vernacular English should be promoted toward monolingual Mainstream Academic English for academic purposes, delineating their relationship to African American Vernacular English, or if these students should receive instruction in both language systems in order to promote the inherent linguistic benefits of bilingualism.

A study conducted by Craig & Washington (2004) revealed that the shift students make moving away from a strong relationship with African American Vernacular

English acquisition for African American students. We know that these same students are exposed to daily print in Mainstream Academic English textbooks and instruction delivered by teachers whose primary discourse is also Mainstream Academic English. In recent light of No Child Left Behind requirements, the majority of these teachers have more than likely received some training in the strategies best applied to English Language Learners. However, I would not be surprised that many of these teachers do not purposefully plan or implement ELL strategies or instructional practices with African American students in mind. African American students who speak African American Vernacular English continue to be a linguistic minority in our educational institutions.

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Americans. A strong correlation has been found between oral language development and its impact upon reading and writing development for students in the emergent stage (e.g. Craig, Conner & Washington, 2003; Loban, 1976; Scarborough, 2001; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

The works of Craig & Conner (2006) reveal that an African American preschool student who demonstrates either a very strong or a very weak relationship to African American Vernacular English in his/her oral reading of a wordless storybook has a positive correlation to overall reading achievement versus a student who only moderately identified with African American Vernacular English. These findings suggest that overall linguistic ability is a stronger indicator of potential

English toward Mainstream Academic English does not in fact occur gradually over time but is more of a precipitous drop during two distinct periods of their educational experience. The first major shift occurs between entrance into kindergarten and the end of first grade, where the student's spoken discourse reveals a sharp decline in the morphological and syntactical (morphosyntactic) features of child African American Vernacular English. The second major shift occurs between second to third grade, where students experience another sharp decline in morphosyntactic features of child African American Vernacular English in their oral reading.

We know that these dramatic shifts occur during pivotal periods of liter-

The lack of instructional support in language development for African American students was never more explicitly stated than in the nationwide debate sparked due to the Oakland School Board's resolution for the implementation of an educational program that would focus on the nature and history of African American Vernacular English, at the time referred to as "Ebonics." The assumption was that this program would address the teacher's knowledge gap about African American Vernacular English, begin the process of changing their attitudes about the language, and help teachers figure out how to use the rich and varied linguistic abilities of African-American children to help them become fluent readers and writers (Perry & Delpit, 1998). Unfortunately, the overwhelming backlash to the resolution from both the White and African American community on this issue caused its immediate cessation and the discrepancy between the literacy achievement between White and African American students still lingers in the classroom nearly three

decades later.

Language Learning: An Even Wider Perspective

If you've ever lucky enough to interact with one, much less a room full of African American five- or six-year-olds, you will experience first-hand intelligent articulate oral and written expressions in either African American Vernacular English and/or Mainstream Academic English, depending upon the student(s)' familiarity with these two language systems. African American students are representative of any English Language Learners (ELL) or Linguistic Minority (LM), with a range of abilities in oral, reading and writing development in both their home/community and academic language abilities. They enter just like any other student in the educational school system with life experiences and measures of confidence and self-worth that can be positively or negatively affected by their interactions with teachers, administrators and school personnel.

As an educator and literacy coach on the site of a predominantly African American student body, over the past eleven years I have witnessed the transformation of a once lively communicative child in kindergarten who becomes more and more subdued and muted by the end of the school year. I believe that we, as educators, whether implicitly or explicitly, send a message

I believe that we, as educators, whether implicitly or explicitly, send a message that African American Vernacular English is considered a less than language system...

that African American Vernacular English is considered a less than language system than Mainstream Academic English. And that students must make the move towards adopting monolingual Mainstream Academic English for their own academic gains without the assistance of their teachers who are often ill-prepared to understand, much less identify and provide explicit instruction in the discourse features African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Although the move towards monolingual Mainstream Academic English (MAE) is laced with good intentions, it is detrimental to the literacy development for some of our struggling African American students who receive mixed messages during guided reading practice, writing workshop and basic communication in the classroom. Lisa Delpit warns educators that when students enter

into their classroom with an African American Vernacular English discourse pattern in oral and written speech to recognize that this linguistic form is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. She adds that "To suggest that this form is 'wrong' or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the students and his or her family. On the other hand, it is equally important to understand that students who do not have access to the politically popular dialect form in this country, that is Standard (American) English, are less likely to succeed economically than their peers who do....Teachers need to

support the language that students bring to school, provide them input from an additional code, and give them the opportunity to use the new code in a non-threatening real communicative context."

Gloria Ladson-Billings cites a teacher in her book *The Dreamkeepers* who considered it her job to make sure that they (African American students) can use both languages, that they understand that their language is valid but that the demands

placed upon them by others mean that they will constantly have to prove their worth (p. 24). And finally, from the PBS special *Can You Speak American?*, a clip highlighting the work of Noma LeMoine in Los Angeles showed explicit instruction in both AAVE and MAE with a group of third graders that caught my attention. These three literacy events were the catalyst I needed

...over the past eleven years I have witnessed the transformation of a once lively communicative child in kindergarten become more and more subdued and muted by the end of the school year.

to begin the inquiry practice on the impact that AAVE had upon the literacy development of my own first grade students.

Regardless of the fact that the linguists define AAVE as a legitimate language system, to this day there still remains a silent stigma on AAVE and very little to no formal instruction in teacher education programs in how to linguistically engage with speakers of AAVE. When we refer to bilingual students or English Language Learners we do not conjure up images of African American boys and girls whose entire life has been spent here, enrolled in the American public school system.

As an academic institution we do not make any formally recognized accommodations to support the linguistic differences that speakers of African American Vernacular English may possess and yet, we hold them accountable to the standards and assessments designed for monolingual Mainstream Academic English speakers. And we wonder why there continues to be a discrepancy between the academic achievement of African American students and their White or even bilingual non-AAVE peers. Any concept or idea that we value enough to provide formal instruction in will make an impact upon the lives of our students, including language development.

(Kané, continued on p. 18)

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Young Writers' Camps

The Imagination Bottle

Take the cork
off the imagination bottle

Pour it all
over the thirsty pages

Don't stay exact,
go wild
and free

Find your
buried treasures
of stories

—Fiana Albarran



The eyes
of nature,
a powerful
pressure point,
startling,
but always there,
the rustling leaves
are the hands
of nature,
the footprints
of dinosaurs
are lakes

—Claire Jones



The Journey

There is a journey
in every written piece.
There is a risk to be
taken, whether it is to
read or to write.
So be clever and
put something in
the world that wasn't
there before.
Invent and create
a world of description.
Be an explorer, take the risk
and travel through a world of words.

—Marissa Love

I Imagine

The sea

On another world

With as many colors

As a box of crayons

I envision an iced-over

Glimmering expanse

of frozen dreams

I see a steel blue vastness

That spits out

White foam onto

Yellow sand

—Mason Brown



Choking on Words

I can't breathe!
Can't you hear me, I can't breathe!
I am drowning in a world of endless possibilities.
If I turn on the lights in this pitch black box,
The sight will be too strong for my bare eyes.
For I am surrounded,
enclosed even,
By unknown trinkets and toys
That I have no use for.

Now.
But I want to learn to turn the hands of time,
Fitting the pieces of a puzzle
And Seeing the Awaited picture.
I want to master the art of light and darkness,
Right and wrong.
But breathing is not so simple
In this foreign land I hope to call home.
being is easier,
But living is essential,
And life takes time to find.
But once it is found
I can turn on the lights
And inhale completely,
For I will be prepared to write.

—Mikayla Stern-Ellis



*Inspired by the Kelly Norman Ellis poem
Raised by Women during Writing For Change,
SDAWP's newest summer
young writers' program*

Raised by ... Samoan Women!!

I was raised by Samoans
Who ate beefy, slimy palosami
Chicken and beef loving
“go fix you a plate!”
kind of Samoan women.

Some hard working
Problem solving, writing, producing
“Stay your butt in school!”
yelling, screaming, shouting
if I do badly
type of sister

Some proper sitting
Hands in lap, sitting up
“say your prayer before you eat”
type of aunties.

Some burnt tan,
Caramel, honey, and brown skinned
Sort of women

Samoan dancing
“Shake your big, wide hips
from side to side!”
“Put your back into it”
kind of aunties.

Samoan talking
“Oute Alofa teleianntesoe!”
Olf ituaiqa fafine

I was raised by
Samoan women

—Christiana Jimenez



6-Word Memoir—Ally Deremer

The Balloon Man

Ariel Foy—YWC Teaching Assistant, Summer 2010

Children did not fear the balloon man
like they feared the doctor or the dentist.
He kept balloons like bursting purple grapes
tied to the brim of his hat. They were filled with
analogies that smelled like mint ice cream,
and the bakers' dozens
of them kept his head floating,
his toes inches off the ground.
For fun he'd place the hat on children's heads'
just to watch them levitate in place, wide eyes,
mouths agape. In the air they could smell blue
and taste abstracts like butterscotch.

The balloon man collected small galaxies
when he went into space. He kept all that he found
like lost business cards and lovers throwing stones,
buried in his pockets, waiting for the chance to use them.
Usually, they were baked.
If children were smart
they'd take a balloon from him afterwards,
and if they were good they'd get a cookie loaded with
chocolate chips, which were at the same time,
the frantic beating of a hummingbird's wings.

Occasionally, for our amusement
he'd bend the world to a fun house reality
warped and bloated on the edges.
He'd let rocket ships become raindrops
which we could ride as easily as a carousel
into park fountains and flower petals.
He showed us absurdities that gave our teeth
a chattering giggle. Let us touch the clouds
with our fingertips and whisper to them with our finger prints
for that is the only way to speak to clouds.
He sends us around racetracks the size of pinheads
chasing metaphors like stray balloons,
only these things we caught
and when he tied them with ribbon to our wrists
they did not float away.

And when we were done we left
with a balloon on our wrist and a cookie with chocolate chips,
knowing they both might have been something else entirely.
And we knew, this was the balloon man's gift.



Frank Barone (aka The Balloon Man) works with 3rd graders during a YWC presentation.

Frank Barone uses a purple balloon to teach the concept of metaphor.



If I Ask You to Write a Poem

Frank Barone—SDAWP 1977

Ask me to write a poem
and I will show you how a hummingbird
can dance on the wind around a flower
then race off to catch a dream
or I can help you to see how a purple balloon
can change into a rocket ship or a raindrop.
Sometimes in one of my poems
you may hear autumn leaves scuttle
down the sidewalk
or hear the echo of songs
as they bounce among the stars.
And when you learn to listen with your eyes
you may even hear the trees
gossiping with their friends
or hear spiders whispering secrets to each other.
In a few poems you may smell lilac blossoms
or spaghetti sauce as it bubbles on the stove.
Once in a while you may taste a poem
about cookies filled
with chocolate chip metaphors.
You must take care when you read these poems.
Some words can bruise your skin
with their honesty
or pierce your heart with the truth.
Now if I ask you to write a poem
I know you will be able to show me
pictures that will surprise my eyes
and choose words that will thrill my ears
entertain my imagination
and move my heart to shout
"Yes, I see those same pictures,"
and "Yes, I can hear your voice in those lines"
and again "Yes, your poem speaks the truth
because you write with clear and honest words.
Welcome to my wonderful world of poetry."

Finding Our Voices

Janet Ilko—SDAWP 2009

Beginnings

Journeys are interesting things; the roads that wind and twist take us to places that we didn't intend, yet somehow we end up right where we belong. For me, that place is back in the classroom, taking my experiences as a coach and teacher leader into the world of middle school, and then to a new role of teacher researcher. Over the past two years I have rediscovered what is important, what inspired me to teach in the first place, helping students find their voice. I arrived at the doorsteps of the Summer Invitational 2008 searching for my professional soul, looking to find what brought me to education over 20 years ago. I spent the summer reading, writing, studying, and questioning all I had learned about education and my students over the past 20 years. At the time, I was out of the classroom, working as a literacy coach. I had spent the past five years in and out of the classroom and was at a point of transition. I didn't know it at the time, but that summer experience was preparing me for my next chapter, to teach in an urban middle school with all its joys and challenges. In an era of budget cuts, I awoke one rainy December morning to discover that the rumors were true: the funding for my coaching position was really gone, and that I would be returning to the classroom. It was late on a rainy Friday afternoon, right before winter break. I stood in a sixth grade classroom with a set of keys and two teachers' editions and met briefly with the principal, vice principal, and a few teachers as they all came to quickly welcome me to the site before we went on vacation. It was surreal, scary, and exhilarating all at the same time. I went home and immediately emailed my Writing Project cohort, and within minutes received words of encouragement as well as internet sources and ideas on how to make the transition. I spent the following sixth months just learning what that world of an

Dialogue, Fall 2010

urban middle school looked like. I have always worked in an urban environment, but the schedule and climate of a middle school was new to me. One nice thing about going to a site midyear is that you have a lot of freedom to learn. No one expected perfection from me; they were just thrilled I truly wanted to be there. I tried many things in my writing program and some worked and some flopped. My students challenged me every step of the way, and yes, there were days where I threw up my hands and cried. Students wrote poetry, and stories, and narratives about their lives. It was long, grueling work and we struggled together. But by the end of the year, the writing that my students created in their

Journeys are interesting things; the roads that wind and twist take us to places that we didn't intend yet, somehow we end up right where we belong.

memoir projects demonstrated their willingness to take risks and their desire to put their lives on paper. I knew that project was a turning point, and I also knew that was the type of fire and enthusiasm I wanted to generate in the fall. This past September, I was introduced to a text in our SDAWP study group written by Linda Christiansen, *Teaching for Joy and Justice*. I knew after our first meeting that this text would help define the lens from which my students would view reading and writing. My students felt a disconnect between school and their world out in the community. "We don't build communities instead of working on academics. We build communities

while we work on academics"(15), states Christiansen. That statement has defined my work this year with each of my classes. Our site faces the same challenges that most urban schools face. Our campus is truly diverse, with many languages and cultures. We are primarily low income, and our surrounding neighborhood represents the financial and social struggles faced in our society today. There are times our students have difficulties relating to adults and to each other. We strive to bring understanding and respect to our classes each day. My students recognize that we have a long way to go in learning to respect and eventually even celebrate diversity on our campus.

Through many class discussions I learned my students were also feeling they didn't have a voice, or the power to make any changes on their own. That is when I realized that our writing, our study of text, could support the idea that young students have the power to make change. I learned early on that I had to demonstrate relevance to my students, to make them feel that reading and writing weren't just tools for school, but truly tools to use to make their everyday lives better. "If we intend to create citizens of the world, as most school districts claim in their mission statements, then we need to teach students how to use their knowledge to create change.... We must construct academic ways for students to use the curriculum, to authentically tie student learning to the world" (8). It is important to note that I do not have the freedom to choose my curriculum. Like most teachers, I work under the constraints of district-adopted text, pacing guides, and assessments. I also know that within that framework, creativity still can and must thrive. It was in January of this past year that social justice and the standard curriculum collided, bringing about some of the best work of my students to date.

Civil Rights is Not about Dead People

It was January of this year when a major change occurred in our study of literature, history, and writing. Our unit became not just a review of the stories in the chapter, but also a study of civil rights and social justice. In our core text we read non-fiction

articles on Brown vs. The Board of Education, and biographies on Rosa Parks and Maya Angelo. We included the novella *The Gold Cadillac* by Mildred Taylor to better understand the struggles the characters faced when traveling from north to south to visit family in 1950. We spent time in the computer lab studying Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Children’s March, sit-ins, and various challenges faced during The Civil Rights Movement. We tied the past to the present with every poem, article, and story. My students were passionate about this time period and the struggles faced by those we studied. I knew this was an opportunity to show them the power of words over violence, peaceful protest versus riots, and most importantly, to try and empower them to speak and write about the injustice they still feel today. And so it began.

Writing For Justice

Again referring back to the work of Christiansen, I was able to have my students begin this unit of study in a whole new light. I wanted so much for them to see the struggles of the past mirror the struggles they face in their own lives. I hoped that as we reviewed the text through the lens of social justice, it would highlight how words and actions have an impact on a situation. Everything we do or don’t do contributes to an outcome. In other words, I was seeking to highlight those in the story who were powerless and those who were empowered. I wanted students to reflect and question what differentiates those who are powerless from those who become empowered. We used the chart below to create a new

| | |
|--|---|
| Target: The person who is the target of injustice (could be an individual or group) | Ally: The person who stand up for others |
| Bystander: A person who observes the act of injustice, but who does nothing to stop it | Perpetrator: Commits the act of injustice |

lens through which to approach our reading. As we viewed videos and read texts, we defined the characters into these categories taken from Christiansen’s work “Writing For Justice” (85-95).

Acting for Justice

Students read an article or story and identified who was the target, ally, bystander, or perpetrator in the piece. The most important learning came when students realized that by categorizing characters or real people in this way, they had to take into account the perspective of the person(s) doing the categorizing. Point of view took on a whole new meaning and relevance as students had to justify why they believed a character to be the target or the perpetrator. In the case of Dr. King, it all depended on perspective. In the eyes of many, he was a target of oppression, but to others he was an ally in their fight for civil rights.

It was an eye-opening experience for students to understand that a person could be a target, ally, and perpetrator all in the same situation just by looking at it from a variety of perspectives. This translated well into their own lives as we discussed classroom or school situations in which students felt they were victims of injustice. Many times, when looking at situations from others’ views, they were able to realize they may indeed have felt they were a target, but others could easily have seen them as a bystander or even a perpetrator. Our experience allowed for greater understandings of the struggles middle school students experience every day and gave us a common language in which to discuss or write about it.

Modern Expressions of Social Justice: The Power of Images and Words

As a culminating project for this unit, I wanted students to understand the power of words and to have an opportunity to relate those powerful words of the past to their own lives today. We returned to Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech as a common text. Now that students realized that this speech represented the voices of many civil rights leaders and the struggle itself, it became more meaningful and powerful to analyze

that text. Students first watched the speech itself from a video on DiscoveryEducation.com. They then read an excerpt from the speech and had to highlight five words they thought were critical to the speech. From those words they selected three to present to their table team and then each table selected one word that represented the essence of Dr. King’s speech and the ideas of that time period. They wrote justifications for their choices. Students were allowed to choose their own words if they disagreed with their table’s decision and write a rebuttal. It was a very effective lesson in word study and debate. At the end of the lesson I created a list of about twenty-five words that students could consider using

I wanted so much for them to see the struggles of the past mirror the struggles they face in their own lives.

for their final projects. The second prewriting activity again focused on words, this time quotes from his speech. We read *Martin’s Big Words* by Doreen Rappaport. From there, students selected a quote that meant something to them. They created an idea web and then wrote a response answering the following questions: *What do you think Dr. King meant when he said these words? What does it mean to you today? Give an example of how it applies to your own life? Why did you select this quote? Why did it stand out to you?* The third prewriting activity addressed vocabulary and word study. Going back to the key words students listed, each student selected one word. Using thesauruses, dictionaries, and online sources, they created a word map to include the definition for the word that applied to this speech itself, its part of speech, and synonyms and antonyms of the word. Students then had to write their own definition and use it in a sentence that demonstrated the meaning.

Options for Publication

Students responded to the speech and unit in a variety of ways. Some

students wrote diamante poems using their selected words and published them in the computer lab using both their words and one carefully selected image that highlighted their message. The poetry was so powerful that two were published in our school newspaper and others were displayed in our campus bulletin board for student discussion.

One period of students created a quote quilt. Students wrote an interpretation of their selected quote from the speech on one square. On another square they created an illustration or collage that used only images to represent their ideas. They were then glued all together in a quilt and hung on the wall in the classroom.

My third option for students was to create a Glogster page about their quote. The website <http://edu.glogster.com> allows students and teachers to create online media posters filled with video, music, sounds, text, and images. One period of students created a poster about their word they selected, including all the word study criteria, and also included images and the quote where their word is displayed. These posters were printed and displayed in a case out in the hallway, and then again they were presented at our parent night where students proudly displayed their work to family and friends. For some of my students, this was the first piece they had completed to “final edit” the entire year. Each of these culminating activities had to include how this study of civil rights and social justice applied to the world they live in today. By displaying our work publicly, students recognized the power of their words. Our poets were asked to write an editorial on race relations on our campus and were featured in our school newspaper the next month. Students saw that their voices and their writing made a difference. Linda Christiansen writes, “Students need tools to confront injustice, they need to hear our approval that intervention is not only appropriate and acceptable, but heroic. Acting in solidarity with others is a learned skill—one I hope more of us will teach” (90). I agree with Christiansen, and know that teachers themselves need to stand up and confront the curricular issues we face each day. We need to find ways to work within the constraints of standardized testing and curriculum, and always push to include relevance and voice within the real world in which we teach.

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Congratulations

SDAWP Fellows Summer 2010

Heather Bice

Coronado High
Coronado Unified

Mark Manasse

Miramar Community College
San Diego Community Colleges

Janet Chaloux-Baum

Mission Estancia Elementary
Encinitas Union

Jennifer Jo Mokiao

Sycamore Ridge Elementary
Del Mar Union

Jennifer Chance

Anza Elementary
Cajon Valley Union

Jason Parker

San Diego State University
CSU San Diego

Mark Dubé

Integrity Charter Middle
National

Casey Payte

Cardiff Elementary
Cardiff

Jamie Esposito

San Diego Global Vision Academy
San Diego Unified

Miriam Sikking

Paul Ecke Central Elementary
Encinitas Union

Judy Geraci

Albert Einstein Academy
San Diego Unified

Laura Smart

San Diego Global Vision Academy
San Diego Unified

Elizabeth Lonnecker

San Diego High-
Science & Technology
San Diego Unified

Veronica Welch

Nubia Leadership Academy
San Diego Unified

Ann Zivotsky

Del Rio Elementary
Oceanside Unified

SDAWP Spring Conference 2010

Teaching the Writer: Voices from the Summer Institute



Victoria Mossa-Mariani—SDAWP 2009

“Go by your passions,” SDAWP’s Co-Director, Christine Kané, advises when addressing attendees about the session choices available at the 3rd Annual Spring Conference hosted at UCSD’s Cross Cultural Center. As participants review their choices, I join the migration down the corridor to the conference rooms.

For the first session, I attend Valentyna (Tyna) Banner’s presentation, *Creating an Authentic Audience through Service Learning*. She begins with the “block party” protocol to focus participants in a progression from self to community and then onto the global community. Tyna recommends the organization Volunteer San Diego and addresses the benefits of service learning such as motivation, a feeling of being needed, and a nurturing of student voice. She then shows a video clip from *Playing for Change*. Some bob their heads along to the song *Stand By Me*, others smile. Tyna explains that the charity’s mission is to build music schools in war-torn countries. Next, she debriefs three types of service learning: direct (face to face), indirect (raising money) and advocacy (raising awareness.) Tyna recommends *The Complete Guide to Service Learning*, a book by Katherine Kay, and then smoothly transitions to student work. Tyna’s students at Nubia Leadership Academy studied persuasive letters as mentor text by charting words and information. Next, they chose politicians and musicians and wrote letters asking them to make a contribution to *Playing for Change*. Tyna explains how teachers can weave service learning into their curriculum wherever they desire. Tyna ends her address with the PARC model: Plan, Action, Reflection and Celebration. Then, participants are asked, “Where might you infuse service learning in your curriculum?” I linger at the edges while the group breaks into little clusters, and I strain to catch snippets as the room buzzes.

For the second session, I enjoy Aja Booker and Mindy Shacklett’s demonstration, *Constructing Thought through Writing*. Aja tackles the first half of the session and shares that her students analyze informational text at their grade level for structure, vocabulary, and content. Although Aja herself readily admits that it is a challenge to find informational texts for the primary grades, her student samples suggest the powerful results that can be had.

Mindy takes over and we each receive a card with a mathematical representation. We are tasked with finding our matches. As we begin to look for our equivalents, Mindy tells us to “think outside the box,” and I stumble into a group of percents. Next, we write definitions for the symbols on our cards and share with our group mates. “We never talk about sets; that’s why I grouped you that way,” explains Mindy. This leads most groups into interesting debates and side conversations. Then Mindy discusses how this kind of activity helps students. She contends that “lecturing and copying demand little of students cognitively. Students need more action whether it’s through think-pair-share activities or by asking them to explain or write about something in their own words.”

Mindy’s passion is evident but SDAWP time is fleeting. Before I know it, the session ends and I’m saying goodbye to colleagues and exchanging e-mail addresses with a new friend. It’s nice to know that there are more SDAWP fellows in North County. And as I cruise home on Interstate 5, sunshine smattering my path, I meditate on the power of words, the promise that our students hold, and all of the inspiring possibilities alive in the San Diego Area Writing Project.



Attendees of the SDAWP Spring 2010 Conference write to the morning prompt presented by Susan Minnicks, “Your First Kiss with Writing.”

2009 Summer Institute Fellows and SI Leadership Team members kicked off the Spring Conference 2010 with Susan Minnicks who invited everyone to participate in the institute’s hallmark activity, The Daily Writing Prompt.

“Think about the time you had your first kiss with writing,” encouraged Minnicks, giving her audience “a whopping six minutes” to complete their assignment. Silence filled the room as participants took pen in hand and began quietly writing about their first encounter with their love of writing. For SDAWP Fellows, this was old hat, but it was a new experience for visitors, friends, and uninitiated colleagues.

“Take one or two minutes to finish your thoughts,” Minnicks encouraged quietly, before inviting participants to share their writing. Inspired by the prompt, Victoria Mossa-Mariana helped conclude the session by sharing her poem with the audience. (See Writing’s Kiss below.)

Robert Gallo—SDAWP 2009

Writing’s Kiss

Victoria Mossa-Mariani

Shy at first and turned away
Crayons wrote what words can’t say
Scribbles from a child’s mind
Graduate to Valentines
But Ns in penmanship suppress
The joy that beats in writer’s chest
Over time words overcome
Authors’ themes are not undone
And from the halls of letters come
What inspiration has begun

(Pribyl, continued from p. 3)

teachers can do. Once teachers have that meaningful dialogue with their counterparts so they can see what my move forced me to see...

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does."

—Margaret Mead

"Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person." —Mother Teresa

What could my affluent students learn from a pen pal in The Hood? What could the students in The Hood learn from mine?

I am one teacher. I plan to see what can happen if I team up with a teacher at my old site. Other teachers have started pen pals between schools. What could my affluent students learn from a pen pal in The Hood? What could the students in The Hood learn from mine? What if we wrote to each other all year, and got together a few times? What if my students could donate the hundreds of extra books/clothing/toys they have? What if students from both schools could join together in service projects, like picking up trash or visiting a nursing home? What if I could get that army of college-educated parent volunteers I have to consider spending one or two days a week working in a classroom in The Hood? Would they too, lose their stereotypes and assumptions that isolation has imbued in them, and begin to see and understand what's really going on in our educational system? Would that inspire them to join the larger fight on the national level to realize the promise of Brown?

What if there was more than one teacher?

Is four miles really so far?



Dialogue, Fall 2010



MUSE BOX

Jenny Moore,
SDAWP 1999

Sometimes chance encounters are among the most meaningful in our lives. In the poem "If You Knew," by Ellen Bass, she asks her audience, "What if you knew you'd be the last/to touch someone?"

She writes, "When a man pulls his wheeled suitcase/too slowly through the airport, when/the car in front of me doesn't signal,/ when the clerk at the pharmacy/won't say Thank you, I don't remember/they're going to die."

Reflect on the people in your life who are "regulars," but about whom you know very little: the familiar grocery store clerk, postman, couple who walk their dog past your house. Write about their lives as you imagine them, and the possible significance of the crossing of your paths. "What would people look like/if we could see them as they are,/soaked in honey, stung and swollen,/reckless, pinned against time?"

SDAWP NOTES

Kudos to Becky Gemmell (SDAWP 2001). In March she was named Teacher of the Year for the Escondido Union High School District. Becky, who teaches dance, English and journalism at Escondido High, credited her success to her school district, the school, and to the San Diego Area Writing Project. Of her association with SDAWP, she stated "...it's because of that organization, that professional support, that I am the teacher I am."

Goodbye to Shannon Falkner (SDAWP 2009). Shannon moved to New York with her husband who has begun a graduate program at Columbia University. We will miss you, Shannon.

Happy retirement to Judy Leff (SDAWP 1990). Judy may have retired from the Encinitas Union School District in June, but she continues to work with the SDAWP on a variety of projects. Since retiring, Judy has provided professional development on the topic of writers' notebooks for our Young Writers' Camp teachers, and she co-coordinated SDAWP's first Fall Conference.

Well done, Divona Roy (SDAWP 1996) and PJ Jeffrey (SDAWP 2008). One of Divona's students had an essay published in *California English*, and one of PJ's students won a writing contest sponsored by Christine Kehoe (CA State Senator 39th District).

Thank you to those who participated in the 2010 The National Day on Writing, which was held on October 20. To browse or to contribute to SDAWP's gallery in the National Gallery of Writing, "Fall in Love with Writing," please visit: <http://galleryofwriting.org/writing/957930>

(Kané, continued from p. 9)

Preparing For African American Vernacular English Language Learners

To be purposeful in my literacy instruction in the classroom, I first had to become more familiar with the oral and written discourse patterns associated with African American Vernacular English. As a teacher of Hawaiian-Irish heritage, I must credit the work of those scholars and researchers who have made a critical impact upon my instruction in the classroom in regards

To be purposeful in my literacy instruction in the classroom, I first had to become more familiar with the oral and written discourse patterns associated with African American Vernacular English.

to African American Vernacular English such as Lisa Green, Gloria Ladson-Billings, bell hooks and Samy Alim. Although I did not grow up engaged in African American Vernacular English as my primary form of discourse, it did not prevent my attempts to understand the featured patterns that influenced the reading and writing development of my students.

The inquiry on African American Vernacular English patterns was a challenge in the classroom. It required us to analyze discourses that were so ingrained in everyday speech and writing and make explicit the subtle nuances of vocabulary and syntax choices in their emerging literacy development. It meant monitoring myself during guided reading practice to limit the interruptions for a student's fluency practice when they used common AAVE featured syntax that did not interfere with their ability to comprehend the story. It meant acknowledging their ideas in print could be written in two language systems and finding meaningful ways to highlight spelling patterns in both and asking them to consider who their intended audience would be and respecting their wishes in the final editing stages. It also meant finding a balance between offering mentor texts in both language systems during read-alouds to encourage linguis-

tic diversity as well as monitoring their progress in both language systems. The greatest limitation to this inquiry process resided within my own lack of experience or expertise with AAVE and lack of mentorship on the subject to confer with about my own instructional practice along the way.

I held discussions with my students' parents/guardians, grandparents and loved ones on the use of AAVE in the home and in the community. From this critical dialogue I debunked three common myths dur-

ing the inquiry process: a) African Americans do not all inherently speak AAVE but as with any language it is associated with your regional context of upbringing and the role models in your life, b) the use of AAVE, like any language system, is used as a means to identify relationships within the lives of African Americans and use of AAVE often implies trust and respect between two people rather than disrespect or lack of intellect, and finally c) socioeconomic status had no bearing upon the use of AAVE as nearly all conversations held throughout the year had some element of AAVE but rather it affected the frequency in which the AAVE features would occur in any given context.

We began the year discussing with students the purpose of language in terms of sociolinguistics and how people alter language in different contexts for different purposes. I took observation notes and recorded their speech patterns in the classroom and on the playground and looked for patterns to emerge that were characteristic of AAVE. I offered explicit models of instruction on the patterns of AAVE found most commonly in their own speaking, reading, and writing and discussed their use in context. We charted MAE sentence structures that utilized different word choices or word placement but implied the same meaning

as those found in AAVE.

We looked at print in published children's books and our mandated curriculum textbooks more purposefully than ever before. We used books as mentor texts to guide our own writing and talked about the way authors use language to express different ideas dependent upon their intended audience. We used multi-cultural literature that included African Americans beyond a mere reference point as characters but as identified speakers of AAVE as well. We held many discussions on the wide variety of AAVE speakers in regional and national contexts, the distinct possibility that many of our African American friends and family members may use features of AAVE differently in different contexts and that being bilingual in both AAVE and MAE is more advantageous to us in communication than being monolingual in either one. The greatest change to my instructional practice has been the purposeful inclusion of lessons based upon the linguistic needs of my students that were not being met by the adopted language arts curriculum or state standards.

The Gift of Paying Attention

Whether we look out and see one or thirty African American students looking back we must ask ourselves how much of their inherent linguistic abilities are being nurtured to positively or negatively affect their literacy development. How much of their linguistic aptitude are we engaging in during our instruction time in the classroom? Who, if not the teacher, is ultimately responsible for bridging the gap between what the student brings into the classroom and what they need to take away with them in order to be successful in life? And how are we to communicate these concepts and ideas if we continue to only speak from what we know and not what they understand. Consciously developing instruction with the African American Vernacular English Language Learner in mind may be the link between saying we care and showing we care that they are truly successful in life.



(Meza-Ehlert, continued from p. 7)

to describe people of non-European ancestry. For example, E. Allison Dittus of East Hartford, Connecticut, describes the phrase as, "Both graceful and euphonious...a beautiful and descriptive folk idiom" (Safire 2). Rinku Sen expresses how she "found a home in the term" and that it is "extremely useful for moving multi-ethnic alliances" (Sen 2). In many ways this phrase is an improvement on similar terms that have been used in recent decades. The term "minority" is highly inaccurate in that the demographics in a growing number of regions in the United States are such that there are fewer Whites than other groups; this reality is all the more clear when we look at the entire globe, which has such a relatively small White population. The term non-white is equally problematic because of its negative connotations. As William Safire writes, "Why should anybody want to define himself by what he is not?" (2)

With this in mind, I am not calling for the eradication of the term "people of color" from our discussions and writing, both popular and academic. I've thought hard in recent weeks and haven't been able to come up with the perfect, unproblematic phrase for when we want to discuss as a group those Americans who aren't identified as White. Instead, I am asking that we put our heads together in schools and communities throughout the country to be more creative in how we talk about the complex issues surrounding race, ethnicity, culture and language. Perhaps we can resist the urge to oversimplify, eschewing neat categories and allowing the blended messiness of our lived reality to show up more often in the phrases we use in discussion and writing.

When I ask for students' thoughts, rather than getting THE Latino view or THE Asian-American perspective, I'm going to ask for Jazmina's thoughts and Matt's ideas and then help them dig deeper to see how their own unique ethnic heritage might shape that answer. It may even be possible that a teacher or student who reads this will coin a better, more descriptive, less hindering phrase than "people of color" or any of the others that have been used over the years (I'll be watching my email fastidiously). In the meantime, as educators we bear

the responsibility of thoughtfully and inclusively helping students wrestle through the complex issues surrounding ethnicity in our country. Our students, from every conceivable background and culture, deserve nothing less.

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DIALOGUE

Call for Manuscripts

Spring 2011 Issue
Submission Deadline:
February 1, 2011

Resourcefulness

At its foundation, the National Writing Project poses "core principles" which serve as a model for writing project fellows. One of NWP's core principles states: "Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing. Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically."

What are the main sources that catalyze your own writing practice and teaching of writing in your classroom? How has your own knowledge about the teaching of writing been influenced or challenged by research, analysis of practice and/or your hands-on experience with writing? Which sources have been most effective in creating a writing community in your classroom? What resources have you culled through professional development? What source, in particular, has challenged an existing approach to writing in the classroom? Which sources do you see as most vital for students as they navigate through the writing process?

Dialogue would like to receive your work or the work of your students. Submit a story of student success, a strategy for implementation, or a personal essay on your teaching experience.

Email all manuscript submissions, suggestions, letters to the editor and/or Project Notes to
Jenny Moore at
jenny4moore@hotmail.com
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Calendar of Events

Invitational Summer Institute 2011

June 28 - July 22, 2011
8:30am - 3:30pm
UC San Diego

Applications are now available

Reading Like a Writer K-12

Utilizing Reading
Curriculum for
Writing Instruction

3 Tuesdays from
4:45pm - 7:45pm
Jan 25, Feb 8, Mar 1, 2011
UC San Diego

Study Groups

5 Saturdays from 9am - 12pm
Oct 16, Nov 13, Dec 11,
Jan 29, Feb 26
UC San Diego

NWP Annual Meeting

November 18 - 20, 2010
Orlando, Florida
Registration info available at:
<http://www.nwp.org/>

NCTE Annual Convention

November 19 - 21, 2010
Orlando, Florida
Registration info available at:
<http://www.ncte.org/annual>

NWP & UCLA Center X With Different Eyes Conference

Breaking Our Silences
Saturday, Nov 6, 2011
UC Los Angeles
Registration info available at:
[www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/
events/499](http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/events/499)

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