

**James Hile**  
**EDLTC. 220-221**  
**Prof. Hwang**  
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## **FINAL REFLECTION**

It has been a very interesting semester this year in Ed. Psych. I have learned a number of important things and valuable information. All of the research, all the time in field placement, and all of the classroom learning has taught me a lot. My research group focused on ethnic differences and I specifically concentrated on dialect and socio-linguistic conventions. My research focused on the use of dialect in the classroom and whether or not various manners of speech were dialects, languages, or inferior forms of another language. Then I compared the different viewpoints that I researched and applied them to what I had learned in the classroom as well as during my time at field placement. It was very intriguing to see how everything tied in to form various classroom implications that I can transfer to my teaching style.

I researched two articles; the first was a short book titled Spreading the Word: Language and Dialect in America. Written by John McWhorter, this book argues that it is entirely wrong to regulate the language of all Americans into Standard (or formal) English. He claims that speech differences heard in different geographical areas and among various ethnic groups are no different than differences in dialect found throughout the world where one is not considered to be superior to the others. He addresses important classroom issues such as Black English and code switching between English and Spanish or Black English and Standard English. McWhorter claims that there should

be no such thing as Standard English, or a formal language that will allow all Americans to communicate. I find his logic flawed but we will return to that later.

The second article that I read was titled Shame on Whom? This article, written by Gary Young in 1994, was a discussion about how important it is to learn Standard English. He tells the story of former students who returned to him after high school who had been fired from their jobs because they could not speak the form of English necessary in the workplace. These were the same students who had chosen to ignore all of his advice about the importance of learning Standard English for the workplace. He told them that not everyone could understand their way of speaking as easily as their friends and family and that, although they didn't have to lose an ounce of their local dialect, they would need to learn formal English to succeed in the world. Young claims that since Standard English is more respected and accepted, students who speak other dialects must learn to read and write in Standard English as well as their local dialect.

It was fascinating to read two completely conflicting viewpoints about the same subject. There were many other articles that I came across that argued one way or the other about this issue. Some felt that it was politically incorrect to teach one form of a language over another and claimed that it is the nation's responsibility to learn how to understand those who speak other dialects. Most of the articles I found however, took a more rational approach to this topic. Dialects are a helpful means of communicating among people in your own ethnic group or geographical area; however, they are particularly flawed when attempting to speak to others who do not share your dialect. The expansion of society to the point where it became a national society, and will soon be a global society, ensures the importance of a standard form of the language so that you can

communicate with people from all over the globe. It is very difficult to communicate if the people attempting to talk cannot understand each other.

This research doesn't tie in directly to any of the learning theories directly, but you can certainly learn more about it in the context of our theories. One, for instance, is Vygotsky's theory about social interaction. Students are able to learn best when they can interact with their peers as well as their instructors. Social interaction is such a crucial part of teaming and development, but it is significantly hampered when those interacting cannot communicate with each other. It is vitally important for students to be able to converse with everyone around them. Because of this, it is imperative that students learn how to communicate in Standard English at school or in the work place, even if it is not used at the home or socially. If they do not do this, they will have incredible difficulties learning through social interaction.

Another theory that can be applied to dialect in the classroom is the theory of behaviorism. Students develop responses to certain behaviors and actions. If their local dialect is all they know, then that is the only way in which they can respond. However, if students are taught Standard English so that they know that in addition to their own way of speaking, then they can develop the correct response to various situations. Students can learn to respond with Standard English in certain situations, such as a job or an academic setting, and respond with their dialect in situations where that is more appropriate. This is where the idea of code switching comes in, students learn to respond to different situations with either their dialect or the Standard English that they have been taught in schools.

During my field placement, I saw many signs of code switching and other

differences in dialect. A large number of students in my classes spoke Black English or Ebonics, including many students who were not black. This new trend is becoming vastly popular with the rise of hip-hop in music, fashion, and our speech. It was very prevalent at my high school and is even more widespread among the kids of today. This can make it difficult for teachers who are not accustomed to it to understand students who speak in this fashion. Luckily, in my field placement, most of the students were adept at code switching. They would be speaking in one style to their classmate, and an entirely different one to the teacher. It was also very interesting to note the different responses by students when I spoke in their manner as well. Some looked puzzled, and some began to address me in this fashion, while others did not feel comfortable speaking in any way other than Standard English to an instructor.

I have noticed this in my life as well; I speak quite differently at home in Ann Arbor compared to how I do here. People in West Michigan enunciate better and speak more clearly whereas in the East side of the state, people tend to speak quicker and slur their words together, and the influence of Black English is especially prevalent. I can switch back and forth between how I speak at home and how I speak when I'm at home or at school very easily.

In terms of my applications to my classroom, I feel that it is very important to instruct students to learn Standard English for the appropriate situations, and yet allow them to continue with their own form of speech in social situations or wherever else it is appropriate. Students can become proficient at code switching and learn the proper response to each situation. In the classroom, teachers should teach students to learn and use Standard English in a number of academic exercises because that is how they must

prepare for the real world. At the same time, the teacher should not discount the students' local dialect and the benefits of that manner of speech. He or she can assign writing assignments that encourage students to write in the manner in which they feel most comfortable.

In closing, I must say that this type of classroom application is the most important thing that I have learned in this class. I have taken all of the theories and experiences, applied them to my preconceived notions, and thought critically about what would work best in actual classroom management. Reading these two articles with varying view points, comparing them to what we learned in class, and comparing them to my own experience and common sense represents something that we will be doing continually throughout our lives, and it is important to start now.