What is the ideal English curriculum for an African American student in the Summer Enrichment Program?

Barbara Ann Barnes

Iowa State University

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What is the Ideal English Curriculum for an African American Student in the Summer Enrichment Program?

by

Barbara Ann Barnes

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfllment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
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Approved:

In Charge of Major Work

For the Major Department

For the Graduate College

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1994
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to some very special people in my life. Without the support of my parents I never would have had the strength to continue working. They never let me forget that whatever I wanted was within my reach. My grandmother, who I lost over a year ago, always told me I was special. Ever since I could walk she boosted my confidence with her loving attitude. I must thank my husband for his patience and understanding. He stood by me and encouraged me through all of the stress and fatigue. Most of all, I thank God for giving me a topic I cared about and the resources to pursue it.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

There is little research for writing teachers on how to instruct African American students. Therefore, none of the literature I used directly applies to this specific topic. The literature may relate to African American college students, writing classes, or African American students at predominantly white colleges, but few of the resources connect all three issues. Because of this limitation I must rely on assumptions based on my own experiences. I must assume that by combining the solutions and practices in these sources that I will have similar results because I have taken the relevant information from each. Most of the articles are current, although some pertaining to writing are more than ten years old. None of the resources are dated before 1982; therefore, the information should still be applicable.

Objectives

My research objectives are as follows:
1. To analyze research on African American college students for information about their behaviors, learning styles, attitudes, and cultures. This analysis might offer insights about teaching African American students.
2. To understand what aspects of composition classes will suit the needs of African Americans. The following questions will be addressed: How should classes be structured? What kinds of course materials should be used? What types of writing assignments will help students become better writers? What activities, workshops, and programs will best suit the needs of black students? What should be the grading criteria? How should teachers analyze students' performances? What should teachers know about African Americans to help them become better writers?
3. To observe what kind of adjustments teachers should make regarding their teaching styles, methods, personalities, and communication styles.

4. To offer a curriculum educators can use to instruct African American college students in English classes; to make suggestions about interacting with students, communicating with them, and selecting course materials.

Limitations

As I began my research I was limited in several areas:

1. There is little research on African Americans in college composition classes; the investigations and studies that do exist are dated.

2. There are very few programs similar to SEP at colleges and universities. Other factors such as geographical region and student populations will influence how African Americans adjust and perform on predominantly white campuses.

3. The curriculum that will be developed has actually never been used before, so it is difficult to assess whether or not it will work for composition teachers with predominantly African American students.

Background

The Summer Enrichment Program is a recruitment/retention program for minority students. Its main purpose is to familiarize students with Iowa State University and to prepare them for the challenges of a full course load at a predominantly white institution. The set-up of the program is not remedial; SEP participants take courses with the same design and teachers offered during the regular school year. In fact, according to an SEP counselor, most students have average ACT scores of 24 and 25. The program has been offered for ten years and usually brings in about fifty to seventy-five students. Although SEP recruits
minorities, most of the students are African Americans from urban areas such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York. Therefore, the Summer Enrichment Program is not a normal teaching situation. Students attend English classes for three hours five days a week.

**Hypotheses**

African American students do have special needs that can be addressed through an English curriculum designed for them. A customized curriculum will help, but teachers and teaching styles are what I hypothesized to make a difference for black students. An English curriculum designed for African Americans would be similar to any other curriculum. The curriculum would probably use more diverse course materials, more creative lesson plans and activities, and more cooperative learning methods based on students' preferences. However, all other aspects would probably remain the same. The suggestions for teachers on interaction, classroom management, and teaching styles in predominantly black classroom settings would probably be just as valuable as the actual curriculum.
CHAPTER TWO
SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

Educators must learn about African Americans as people, and as students. Learning about them is the first step in developing an English curriculum to complement their needs. Barbara Cox and Manuel Ramirez suggest identifying differences between minority and majority students to develop awareness about African American learning styles. "This awareness may be one of the first steps toward improving instruction for individual students" (Cox and Ramirez 60).

College instructors are generally aware of the plight of African Americans at institutions of higher learning. Thompson and Fretz explore what factors make academic achievement more difficult for African American students. For example, African Americans tend to be from lower socioeconomic levels, are less likely to attend college preparatory high schools, achieve lower college entrance scores, and are less likely to have parents who have completed post-secondary degrees (438). These problems affect how students learn and how professors teach in English classes. It is equally important to remember African Americans come from diverse backgrounds and many, particularly SEP students, will not have the problems Thompson and Fretz describe. I would also argue that black students bring a wealth of information educators can use to help them become better writers.

Understanding African Americans' characteristics, culture, attitudes, learning styles, and survival techniques is a modest beginning to making sure students get the most out of introductory English classes in the Summer Enrichment Program.

No insight about writing can be gained through this article by Thompson and Fretz on blacks' adjustments at predominantly white universities. However, educators can learn about African American students' experiences in and outside of
the classrooms at white institutions. Through these types of discussions, teachers can become familiar with students' feelings of satisfaction and isolation. More importantly, writing teachers can empathize with feelings that may affect students' academic performances.

Chalmer Thompson and Bruce Fretz make some solid predictions about students' adjustments. This information will help educators develop various curricula to suit the needs of African American students. In highlighting blacks' adaptive strategies, Thompson and Fretz help readers to understand adaptive strategies, such as group bonding and informal class meetings, that can be used in English classes as well.

**Group Characteristics**

Several African American personality traits distinguish these students from other ethnic groups. If teachers can become familiar with these traits, they can provide more comfort for themselves and students when interacting in the classroom. It is important to understand why some behaviors occur as well as how they affect students' writing performances.

**Group Bonding**

African American students, especially on predominantly white campuses, look to groups as sources of strength. It is unfortunate some of their peers interpret their behavior as avoiding contact with other ethnic groups. The truth is African Americans are not trying to send a message or intimidate their peers; they are simply trying to survive. The explanation for actions of any race can be traced to its history "... as a result of a history of oppression and continual discrimination, black people have adopted strategies for coping with the dominant culture and its
institutions” (Thompson and Fretz 438). Group bonding is a strategy African Americans view as a means to survive in a challenging environment. As young adults, most Blacks have already learned the code “we must stick together.” It is quite natural, almost instinctive, for them to look for some more brothers and sisters even when entering the classroom. Cox and Ramirez express a similar view that Blacks and most other minority students tend to be more group oriented (61). Group interaction, especially for minority students, helps promote self-esteem and learning (Stikes 149). Although group relations are often viewed as detrimental to the success of African American students, it is because of these relations that students don’t feel so alone while attending a predominantly white university such as Iowa State University. In a study by Thompson and Fretz more communal Blacks were found to be more resourceful and assertive in coping with predominantly white environments (439). Being part of a group gives these students more confidence to face the challenges in the classroom. In fact, the less communal students may be particularly disadvantaged if they are unwilling to utilize this adoptive strategy (Thompson and Fretz 439).

Self-identities

Black college students may find strength in groups and still face stumbling blocks as individuals. It is imperative for all first year students to develop their identities. This growth is an even greater success factor for African Americans. The majority of the cases demonstrate that the process to achieve a strong self-identity needs to be accelerated for African Americans. Furthermore, today the issues for black students are more diffuse, and personal issues sometimes outweigh the social convictions of young adults (Stikes 67). Blacks may find support and acceptance in groups, but they also constantly struggle with remembering who they are, where
they came from, and what they want. Far too often the direction they are trying to find is not clear (Stikes 67). Their achievements are clouded by feelings of rejection and confusion. Even students who show high levels of academic satisfaction may feel socially and culturally alienated, particularly at predominantly white institutions (Loo and Rolison 61). For instance, students who start off doing well in English classes could experience these emotional pitfalls that can inevitably affect their performance.

C. Scully Stikes argues that African American students could handle these feelings if they were prepared for them. A student's preparation for college is what determines his or her contentment. Unfortunately, black students' preparation is sometimes in conflict with the college environment. In the case Stikes describes, African American students rely on skills they learned in their communities, such as group bonding. Problems surface when these skills conflict with those that are necessary for achievement in the college environment (52). Students become puzzled about their identities; they begin to ask themselves, "Why must I abandon a trait that is part of me?" It is likely that most first year students do experience some of the emotional trauma described. According to Loo and Rolison what African Americans suffer is different from other first year students because it is intensified. They claim that minority students reported greater social isolation (65). Researchers attribute these attitudes to Blacks' ongoing struggle within themselves. Students are pressured to reject their own values for white, middle-class, values. Others feel inferior because they make up such a small proportion of the student body (Loo and Rolison 65).
Impact of Culture

Black Versus White

African Americans share group characteristics because their culture has such a strong impact on how they act, speak, and learn. There are many behavioral and learning differences that are influenced by culture. Professors can reach their African American students more easily by becoming aware of certain cultural differences. Often, traits that distinguish Blacks from other students hinder them from learning; teachers can have the opportunity to use these differences as assets in the classroom. Baker attests that if we, as United States citizens, are to take advantage of cultural differences and use these differences to build a stronger nation, it is necessary for schools to become involved in the process ("Education: Two Preservice Training Approaches" 32). Building a stronger nation is not the sole responsibility of educators, but as Gwendolyn Calvert Baker suggests, education as an institution can influence how students feel about themselves and their cultures ("Education: Two Preservice Training Approaches" 33).

Historically, Blacks have often viewed themselves as fighting against Whites. This idea is one they hold in most aspects of their lives, including education. One cannot deny Blacks and Whites have different cultures, but teachers can focus on similarities as well. Usually African American college students are confused; the values and practices they grew up with are different from the ones they are presented with on a predominantly white campus. “Black culture and social experiences have clashed with white culture and social experiences, and Blacks and black culture have lost in the conflict” (Stikes 121). Therefore, the university’s emphasis on conformity and assimilation is in direct conflict with what most African Americans have been taught. African American students want to learn, but
sometimes that learning makes them feel as if they are giving up their heritage, or worse, giving in to what Whites want them to do.

Black students perceive greater racial tension and hostility in their environment, express lower levels of satisfaction, and greater levels of isolation, and feel less identified with the institution than do white students. (Thompson and Fretz 437)

Higher education cannot control our world or the people in it, but there are ways for teachers, especially writing teachers, to help overcome racial prejudices. Racism can force both Blacks and Whites to feel helpless, but educators must deal with it directly because often racism places African American college students at a disadvantage. We are aware of how culture affects our world, but how does it affect classrooms? How should it affect teaching methods? Most importantly, don’t teachers need to learn about African American culture if they are going to help students?

How Culture Affects Learning

John Ogbu suggests minorities experience more difficulties in the classroom partly because of the relationship between students’ cultures and mainstream cultures (9). For example, instructors can alleviate this problem by using what they know (or should know) about African Americans to stimulate motivation about an assignment or activity. Teachers can understand African American students without sacrificing their own cultures and styles. They should develop ways to focus on learning and cultural differences. English teachers can read books, attend African American cultural events, and interact with minority students to enhance their own cultural experiences. We cannot force students to assimilate, so sometimes we have to “meet them halfway.” Teaching African Americans simply requires instructors to
be optimistic, open-minded, and creative. Teaching minority students may also require us to change; what may have worked for white students may not be effective with students of color. Instructors have to be prepared to make adjustments in curriculum, activities, and communication styles. Black students who have learned stimuli relevant to black people, may be frustrated in the predominantly white institution "which tends to omit or distort issues and foci that may adequately relate to an increasingly diverse college population" (Thompson and Fretz 440). In essence, teachers and students can literally have the best of both worlds. Afrocentric and Eurocentric cultures can be working partners in our classrooms. Placing equal values on both ethnicities will ease tension and eventually create a cooperative, stimulating, learning environment.

Black students who strike a balance between Anglocentric and Afrocentric learning may possess negotional skills that allow them to adapt to the environment with the realization that both perspectives may be necessary to understand the dominant culture and to maintain necessary ties to black culture (Thompson and Fretz 440).

It would be difficult for teachers to listen to students and accept their differences without any knowledge about their particular culture. Educators have to learn about African American culture because it affects group characteristics, attitudes, and academic performances. Culture is already in the classroom; it is just a matter of whether or not teachers will acknowledge it.

Our choice to leave students' experiences unexplored and unaddressed may cause these (minority) students to feel lost and abandoned. They may feel that their experiences are illegitimate, that they are at fault, wrong, immature, or inadequate because of their differences and difficulties. (Wu and Morimoto 52)
African American culture is often ignored or misconstrued in the media. For students to have the same misrepresentations in the classroom is dangerous. We cannot begin to communicate with them, relate to their learning styles, or teach them to be better writers if we know nothing about their culture. Ultimately, we cannot educate them about writing if we don’t educate ourselves about them. There are many practices educators can use to operate in the realms of a diverse classroom, but learning about students’ culture is easy and practical. For example, teachers can buy African American magazines such as *Ebony, Jet, Black Enterprise, Essence*, *YSB, Black Beat, Class*, and *Ebony Man* to find out about current issues affecting Blacks. Teachers can also read articles in *Black Issues in Higher Education, Journal of Negro Education*, and *Black Students in Higher Education* to get a more academic perspective on the needs of African Americans.

One solution is for teachers and interventionists to learn about the students’ cultural background and use this knowledge to organize their classrooms and programs, to help students learn what they teach, and to help students get along with one another. (Ogbu 12)

Learning about African American culture can have unlimited results in our classrooms, the most important one being that students will learn so much more through their teachers.

**African American Attitudes**

Educators need to understand how black college students think and feel. Studies have shown that background, interests, and attitudinal motivational variables are important to all students. Those same factors become particularly relevant and unique to the success of minority students (Sedlacek 40). For example, it is an English teacher’s responsibility to be aware of how students feel about such
topics as writing, Standard English, and Black Vernacular English, to name a few issues. Culture and attitudes are closely connected; how students feel about themselves as writers may be influenced by how teachers include their culture in readings and lessons. Recognizing culture specific adjustment strategies may assist students not only in a predominantly white collegiate environment, but in other dominant institutions as well (Thompson and Fretz 448). This recognition may also enhance the self-images of African American students. As Thompson and Fretz suggest, recognizing our differences can benefit students as learners, workers, and as people.

Social and Academic Pressures

As an earlier section discussed, people of color fight an emotional battle within themselves when they attend predominantly white universities. Their problems are not just academic; they can be social as well. More importantly, both factors impact each other. A student who feels socially isolated may not perform to the levels of his or her abilities in the classroom, "... the energy required to adapt to a different class and cultural situation takes time away from academic pursuits" (Loo and Rolison 65). Blacks and Whites have different attitudes about academic success. Most white students drop out due to academic variables, but most Blacks drop out because of social and academic variables (Loo and Rolison 60). Students' social problems can affect their motivation. Stikes suggests that minority students often look for concrete observable rewards for motivation (52). Unfortunately, these rewards cannot frequently be found in the higher education environment. As a result, some of the students experience a change in attitudes; they do not attempt to achieve in classes that they define as irrelevant, or with instructors and course materials they do not like. The result is students who are dissatisfied with their
education (Stikes 52). It is evident that no one person can change these attitudes, but we can make an effort to understand how these students feel and what kind of impact those feelings have on students' writing and comprehension.

African Americans feel pressure to fit in with peers and perform well academically to benefit their family and race. Those pressures can become even greater when those same students attend a predominantly white institution.

Although their internal experiences differ widely, minority students may feel that their visibility requires them to become spokespersons for their ethnicity. They may feel burdened with erroneous stereotypes of what it means to belong to a particular race or ethnicity. (Wu and Morimoto 54)

It is as part of a group that these students feel pressures to conform to standards of majority behaviors. During midterms and finals, all students feel the most pressure to succeed; however those pressures are different for minorities because they are more constant.

In addition to wanting to fulfill their own aspirations, they may feel that they are at school to live out a particular mission of success, bringing pride and validation to their family and community, whose dreams and hopes for upward mobility and security may be invested in their education. (Wu and Morimoto 54)

**Learning Styles**

Clearly minority students have distinguishable attitudes regarding higher education. Those attitudes also affect students' learning styles. Are minority students' styles of learning different from mainstream students? How different are the styles of minority and majority students? If these differences exist, how were they developed? What can educators do in response to these differences? (Cox and Ramirez 61). Cox and Ramirez address how African American learning styles may
differ from majority students. Educators can assume differences in learning styles, but they must move beyond awareness into establishing a plan. The concept of minority learning styles is one that is easily oversimplified and misunderstood (Cox and Ramirez 61). "Unfortunately, oversimplification has been used to stereotype minority students or to further label them rather than identify individual differences that are educationally meaningful" (Cox and Ramirez 61). A plan should include ways to identify specific learning styles and classroom activities that will include black students. Cox and Ramirez remind teachers about the importance of treating students as individuals by not stereotyping or labeling them, "Styles of thinking and learning which differ widely among and within individuals, are as important as levels of ability and institutions should reward all styles equally through their organizational and delivery systems" (Matthews 254). It is part of a teacher's responsibility to address all students' needs no matter what their style is. Before those styles can be addressed, instructors must find out what they are.

What Works for African Americans

Black students perform better in courses they like taught by teachers they like. For early academic success, the relationship between course content and instructors is critical (Stikes 147). From Stikes' standpoint African Americans are no different from anyone else: they will learn more in a class they enjoy with a teacher they like. It may be impossible for all students to like their teacher. However, they will respect teachers who understand their attitudes and their culture. Because group dynamics are so important to black students, they tend to benefit from cooperative classroom settings. Traditional evaluation measures may limit black students' performances, but cooperative learning and teaching methods are valuable to black students' motivation and success (Thompson and Fretz 440). Students will be more
comfortable in classes where they are not only allowed to work together, but encouraged to do so. Teachers can awaken students' interests and potential when they work within a framework that is familiar to them. An informal learning atmosphere is preferred for facilitating the development of black students (Stikes 149).

Relaxed Learning Environments

An informal classroom has many advantages for African Americans: (1) it minimizes feelings of isolation and frustration; (2) it makes the students feel teachers trust them and have confidence in them; and (3) it opens the door for students to feel free to express themselves. Both black and white instructors viewed as informal, intelligent, friendly, personable, and concerned about minority issues have the most success with African American students (Stikes 147).

Matthews found that first year students of all races tend to prefer a social style of learning (259). This style includes opportunities to interact with other students using highly organized questions and discussion materials. Instruction would also include a variety of lectures, discussion, and teamwork assignments (Matthews 257). First year college students listed an independent learning style as one they enjoyed the least. A class directed under this style would have students work alone in labs. Students would work at their own pace using instructional techniques, such as analyses (Matthews 257). This same research indicated a social/applied learning style as the one most black students preferred (Matthews 264). The differences in styles represent levels of motivation, judgments, values, and emotions; how students feel about college and their English classes is strongly connected to their learning styles. Therefore, teachers should be flexible in designing courses to fit the learning styles of their students. Another easy way to
teach through students' learning styles is to capture students' attention by making class activities and discussions relevant to them. Cox and Ramirez list learning styles and relevance as major components to teaching various ethnic groups. The two major goals of a multiethnic education framework are:

1. to utilize and extend the strengths of learning characteristics that each student has developed through previous experience by providing learning situations that reinforce the individual's preferred or familiar ways of learning;

2. To help the student become more comfortable and successful functioning in situations and ways that he or she has not previously experienced (64).

Relevance

African American students can perform better on writing assignments when they understand how those assignments can be used in their everyday lives. If they make connections between English, their majors, and their careers, then they will be motivated and excited. Minorities relate more positively to courses and instructors when the learning process promotes personal/social awareness, assertiveness, and social criticism; any developmental skill perceived as being useful to minority people should be attempted (Stikes 147). Professors know why specific paper assignments are useful, but how can they help students understand that usefulness? Students need to know how they can apply classroom writing and activities to the real world. William Sedlacek's research supports this view of practical application. He attests that students who find something or someone to identify with are more likely to be successful (39).

Survival Techniques

Educators can look to the history of any ethnic group to understand more about them. There are many behaviors and actions African Americans have used to
adapt to predominantly white institutions. It is important that we be aware of some of these behaviors before we establish a teaching style conducive to their learning. Thompson and Fretz propose several bicultural adaptation variables:

- higher levels of communalism
- positive attitudes toward cooperative learning situations
- negative attitudes toward individualistic learning situations (446)

If instructors can find ways to add what works to their curriculum and delete what doesn’t, then African American composition students will definitely benefit.

If teachers are willing to learn African American culture (its history, social pastimes, food, childhood games, music, slang, etc.), then minority students should prepare themselves to learn what actions, behaviors, and attitudes will benefit them most on a predominantly white campus. "An adaptive strategy that some Blacks may employ to cope with demands of life in a predominantly white university is to have a willingness to learn Anglocentric stimuli while maintaining their own" (Thompson and Fretz 440). Learning about other ethnic groups never hurt anyone. In fact, it is only through this learning on the parts of teachers and students that America will continue to have a number of talented writers in America. The open-mindedness Thompson and Fretz are requiring goes beyond being willing to learn; it also includes interaction and discussion: In the classroom, black students who have positive attitudes toward working with, rather than against or away from their peer group may desire the opportunity for others to learn about them as individuals (440). Some of these students may believe members of a community can break down racial barriers by sharing thoughts and ideas (Thompson and Fretz 440). A lot of minority students desire a chance to have a dialogue about racism and racial issues.
I would argue that they should be encouraged to write about some of these subjects as well.
CHAPTER THREE
THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

It can be challenging for teachers to have African American students in their classes. The challenge can be met with the proper attitudes, knowledge, and tools. The teaching process should include assisting students to develop skills and competencies that affect their existence as human beings (McDermott and Goldman 147).

Because (minority) students may enter college with low self-esteem and handicaps in problem-solving skills, and may encounter significant and additional stress in their efforts to cope effectively in what they perceive to be a hostile environment, the teaching/learning process necessarily requires that teachers and students work together to create facilitative conditions. (McDermott and Goldman 147)

Teachers have the capabilities to work with African American students. The difficulties arise when they are unwilling to be cooperative and creative. Instructors can approach minorities with a level of ease if they remember to treat people of color just like anyone else. In any class, teachers would assess students' backgrounds, needs, personalities, and learning styles. That assessment would be followed by a plan the teacher creates to develop a suitable curriculum for black students. R.P. McDermott and Shelley Goldman would recommend yet another step before curriculum choices are made:

The teacher in the classroom must communicate with the students across tremendous differences in assumptions, values, perceptions, and even the very stuff that make communication possible, namely language, gestures, and turn taking procedures. (150)
McDermott and Goldman raise an interesting point; evaluating students and developing curriculum to fit them can be made easier by simply discovering more ways to communicate with students.

**How Should Teachers Communicate with Students?**

*Evaluation*

Essentially students and teachers need to keep an open line of communication between them. Teachers should explain assignments, guidelines, and expectations. Successful communication would mean students, in turn, understand what tasks they must complete, how they should act, and why they receive the grades they do. Stikes believes frequent evaluation and immediate feedback are particularly important for the educational development of minority students. Frequent evaluation helps both teachers and students. Students can be made aware of areas of weakness by receiving suggestions for improvement. Teachers can find out if students need to clarify specific skills, rearrange assignments, or develop different class activities and discussions. After studying minority students' learning styles, researchers suggest students appreciate and benefit from open, honest, dialogue with their instructors.

*Listening*

A discussion on listening may seem pointless for an audience of educators. However, emphasizing the importance of listening to African American students seems crucial. Listening can help teachers understand how students feel and why they behave in certain ways. More importantly, teachers who listen and listen well, will be trusted by their students. Listening can be a simple, but powerful gesture for teachers and students to build awareness and to find commonalities that will bond
them. In an earlier chapter I pointed out that African American students want teachers to understand them and relate to them; listening can be the first step in reaching that goal. When instructors challenge students to extend or examine their understanding, they are asking them to take a risk—a risk which includes an appropriate response from a teacher who is listening carefully (Wu and Morimoto 56).

Our effectiveness in listening can be profoundly affected by our ability to respond to the personal feeling related to learning. When we are able to listen to, empathize with, and respond to those (personal) experiences, our effectiveness as teachers is broadened, and the learning of students is enhanced. (Wu and Morimoto 56)

In later discussions I will try to analyze what resources teachers can use for African American students, but Jean Wu and Kiyo Morimoto claim educators already have a solution, "Indeed our most important resource involves the way in which we listen and respond" (56).

**Flexibility**

Most professors view their courses and assignments as learning experiences. This idea holds true for classes in which the majority of the students are African Americans. One difference may lie in the fact that the learning will be done by students and teachers. The first lesson for teachers should involve change.

Education models and actual programs convey the impression that educating minority students is a process whereby teachers and schools must change for the benefit of the students. This education generally emphasizes changing teacher attitudes and practices. (Ogbu 6)

Instructors must be flexible about course materials, teaching styles, and assignments. They must be willing to modify past curriculum in order to suit the needs of
students. Educators should make an effort to reevaluate past performances in light of their responses to diversity. Instructors should build on their strengths, reevaluating and planning, to implement cultural diversity into their classrooms. Gwendolyn Baker makes an excellent point that applies to university instructors: educators should be responsible for reevaluating and ultimately changing curriculum for the more diverse student populations ("Cultural Diversity" 260).

Accepting Cultural Differences

Teachers have to accept the many cultural differences, such as aggressiveness, vocalness, and backgrounds, students bring into the classroom, and it is not always easy. To make it even harder I am suggesting that teachers not only tell students they accept them, but show them too. Cox and Ramirez strongly encourage teachers to respond to diversity with respect for individual differences and learning preferences (62). In an earlier section I pointed out that students want their teachers to consider individual needs and personalities. Being sincere about accepting students' differences is one way to be sensitive and constructive when addressing their needs. "The degree to which faculty impart to a student the feeling of acceptance, support, and encouragement will determine, to some extent, that student's feeling of belonging" (Loo and Rolison 61). Faculty-student relations may be even more significant for minority students because most faculty are white and come from very different backgrounds (Loo and Rolison 61). Clearly, faculty can help ease minority students' adjustments on a predominately white campus. If students understand a teacher truly accepts them, then they will find a class more stimulating and inviting.
Developing New Teaching Styles

An earlier section discusses researchers' suggestions to make adjustments according to students' needs. Striking mismatches in learning styles occur between students and instructors (Matthews 253). Although black college students have a responsibility to learn, educators are responsible for assuring them that learning is within their reach. Matthews claims it is healthy for students to use a style different from their own. I would argue that teachers should work with what is familiar to students before experimenting with other styles. If students master the basics and gain our trust, I would then suggest moving away (slowly and carefully) from their "comfort zones." No matter what teachers' learning styles, researchers continue to recommend cooperative learning for African American students. Often, when minority students experience powerlessness and sacrifice in their entire lives, cooperative learning will lessen their anxiety in the classroom. Cooperative learning will let them know they do have control over their education and that working with their peers is acceptable and encouraged.

I have highlighted how students' learning styles should be addressed but Matthews' research highlights teacher guidelines for instructing minority students. The first suggestion from his research is that instructors should know about their students, care about them, and then teach them. Those teaching methods should always consist of helping students understand their own strengths and weaknesses. Ironically, the goals for teaching African Americans are similar to teaching any student: educators' objectives are to show students how to learn and how to use various learning styles and strategies (Matthews 265). "Therefore counselors and faculty have a responsibility to help students develop primary and secondary styles
of learning, as well as adjusting instructional delivery and assignments to strengths of students" (Matthews 265).

Matthews' second suggestion is for teachers to use a variety of teaching techniques. This idea follows the simple premise that African American students need variety and that more students will be reached through a variety of class activities and lessons. The traditional lecture and independent project fit the learning style of only some learners. It may be advisable for instructors to give a variety of work assignments and to have several bases for assigning grades (Matthews 265). Many of Matthews' ideas have been highlighted earlier in the chapter, but his findings have a strong research foundation and seem quite relevant in this section as well.

**Combating Racism in the Classroom**

Combating racism is not easy in the media, business, and government and higher education faces the same challenges, but committed teachers can make a difference in the lives of African American students.

The goal for the teacher committed to change is to teach from a perspective which is not based on an ideology of cultural superiority. The immediate concern of the teacher committed to the development of education for a democracy should be the elimination of the ideology of racism from the structures and procedures of education itself. In this regard the individual teacher has a responsibility both inside and outside the classroom. (Davis 10)

It is never easy for instructors to be objective, so a safer method would be for them to simply be fair. This equality in the classroom includes recognizing differences while avoiding promoting some cultural ideas or practices over others. Teachers should be comfortable confronting racism in textbooks, newspaper articles, pictures, or any other classroom materials. Gerry Davis is naive and unrealistic about making courses "race-free" environments because the classroom certainly represents society
and the world is not that way. However, the previous quote could replace elimination with confrontation. Teachers cannot eliminate racism and they should not be expected to, but it is their responsibility to confront it.

**Interactions**

Combating racism does not have to be a strenuous battle between teachers and students. The combat can be relaxed, simple, and even subtle. For example, a solid beginning can come through teachers' interactions with students. Students can become socially integrated through contacts with faculty (Loo and Rolison 60). Teachers can use assignments and activities that maximize students' opportunities to interact with faculty and their peers. Black college students are forced to rely on their own ethnicity for social support. This dependence is a result of distrust between Whites and Blacks (Loo and Rolison 60). According to Loo and Rolison, students can feel alienated from the larger campus community, but be well integrated into their own ethnic subcultures in the classrooms. The same researchers cite several institutional factors that counter academic and sociocultural alienation of minority students and one of them is an accessible faculty who impart a sense of academic and personal worth to students (72). Therefore, even if African Americans encounter blatant racism on their predominantly white campuses, the may feel quite comfortable in their courses through interactions with instructors.

**Being Realistic**

Instructors fighting against racism in their classrooms must remember to be realistic about their feelings. Teachers can address specific African American issues only after they are honest about their own preconceptions and biases. Teachers must be realistic and honest about their own feelings because those ideas affect how they
feel about students and how they treat them. For instance, a teacher who has very negative feelings about Black English Vernacular might not tolerate it in any written or oral form in their classrooms. This same instructor should be realistic about his or her own biases when developing paper assignments and facilitating discussions.

It is just as important for instructors to be realistic about what kinds of changes they can really make.

The individual classroom teachers wishing to change the white ethnocentric perspective should not presume that their work in the classroom will directly eliminate racism and racial inequality from society at large. Education cannot, indeed compensate for society. (Davis 12)

It would be unrealistic for teachers to think they could change the world; it would also fuel feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness in the most committed teachers (Davis 12). Teachers can be proud of small signs of progress in their classrooms. No one, black or white, expects them to completely change the world or even all of their students. Instructors have to be realistic about what changes they can make and how quickly those changes will come.

Handling Uncomfortable Situations

Instructors who are realistic will know that whenever issues of race are involved tension and even hostility may result. Tension cannot be avoided because we have no control over it. On the other hand, Phillips suggests teachers can control how we handle particularly uncomfortable situations when they arise. "All real learning emerges out of tension. Educational institutions should not be about running away from tensions. I don't mind tension so long as we have civility and conversations, and we do not try to censor each other" (Phillips 14). Phillips makes a strong assessment that students cannot learn about racism unless they discuss it. If
they are thinking, feeling, socially aware human beings, then they will never agree. Teachers should expect tensions and tempers to rise; it is natural in a healthy learning environment. Instructors, especially in English classes, have the opportunities to encourage students to raise questions, express their feelings, and include their opinions in class discussions.

Davis recommends specific guidelines for teachers who must handle uncomfortable situations with African American and minority students. The first is that instructors not compromise with any incident of overt racism. Silence usually indicates agreement and tolerance (Davis 12). I must adjust this idea slightly: if teachers encourage their students to speak freely, then they leave themselves open to racist and offensive comments. Teachers can tell students: "racial slurs will not be tolerated," and "we should have respect for ethnic minorities and their cultures", and "evidence and examples must be provided when making a claim about a particular issue". Another of Davis' suggestions addresses facilitating class discussions. Students should be included in the decision-making process regarding discussion practices and their content (12). Because African American college students prefer informal classroom settings and cooperative learning, these suggestions seem quite workable.

Selecting Course Materials
Instructors who understand African American learning styles and culture will have fewer difficulties choosing course materials. Teachers should use that knowledge along with caution and good judgment to select books, essays, and worksheets for minority students. In planning classes it is important that course materials be suitable for the students.
Ethnic and cultural content should be included and incorporated into instruction at every level and in all subject areas when and where appropriate. The extent to which a group or groups are included in an area of study will depend not only on the participation of a group but also on the teacher's awareness of the participation and involvement of specific ethnic and cultural groups. (Baker Cultural Diversity 260)

Baker implies two key points for this discussion: (1) teachers can use subject matter that covers a variety of ethnic groups, especially ones that are represented in the classroom, and (2) teachers must have some knowledge about different ethnicities and cultures in order to choose course materials for minority students. English instructors should be specific about tasks and set objectives. When instructors have set goals for black students, these teachers need to select books and essays that will help them achieve those goals. They should ask themselves, "What do I need to make sure my African American students become better writers? How can I best serve their needs considering all of the circumstances?" An analysis of personal and professional goals will give teachers some guidelines and criteria when selecting course materials.

Selecting Books and Readings

Teachers who are truly interested in getting course materials for their African American students should be dedicated and prepared to find those materials on their own. What has been offered for minority students is very limited so teachers will have to do some searching and networking to find materials they will be satisfied and comfortable with. "It is unlikely teachers' demands would increase fast enough for resource producers to recognize the commercial viability. Thus the teachers themselves need to develop their own classrooms materials – as many do already" (Duncan 19).
Instructors must remain informed about issues that affect minority students as well as about textbooks and articles that might be helpful in their classes. Gillian Klein offers suggestions for what teachers should not do when they choose resources. Because resources are limited, he suggests choosing materials with a world view. Teachers should avoid books that:

- equate the "white" man with civilization
- contain patriarchal or white philanthropical approaches to other peoples
- reduce all non-Western societies to the exotic, primitive, or quaint. (Klein 154)

Teachers should also discuss with their students what is said as well as what is not said in textbooks; omissions can be equally damaging to students' perceptions about themselves and other minority groups. If instructors cannot find exactly what they want, they still should not give up. Teachers should remember that essentially, it is not what book that is used; it is how it is used.

Teachers need to be aware that they automatically endorse the books they use with their own authority and approval — unless they say otherwise. Challenging prejudice and stereotyping as they arise in a book has been found effective in encouraging children to question and explore the issues in a controlled situation. (Klein 157)

A poor book will not change a great teacher; teachers who are sensitive to African American and the messages in some books can be confident about their effectiveness in the classroom. If the perfect composition and rhetoric text existed for minority students, it would not help teachers who have failed to do their homework regarding minority students and their cultures.

With an understanding of the issues involved in education, and the ability to select materials appropriate to an anti-racist approach to education, all that
remains for teachers to do in terms of resources is to keep informed about new publications and developments. (Klein 157)

Using Creativity

Teachers should understand African Americans and their cultures, but they must also try to reach a new generation of black people. Dianne Williams-Hayes describes blacks between the ages of 14 and 21 as the "hip hop" generation. They are the young adults who have been trained to scrutinize for credibility and they don't always agree with what is politically correct (Williams-Hayes 31). Teachers do not have to agree with students' lifestyles or behaviors, but they must accept what students think, feel, and do. "Educational messages must be created which will respect the clothes and style of this generation, without denouncing it. The bottom line is respect" (Williams Hayes 31). Powell suggests educators use materials that are culturally relevant to students which includes using rap music in the classroom. Rap can be considered a form of informal education for adolescents, one that extends beyond the confines of the classroom and into their peer group circles (Powell 245). "Whether rap is denigrated or applauded as an artistic product, it cannot be ignored as a dominant means of expression within contemporary African American adolescent culture" (Powell 245). Whether instructors like it or not, rap music is a powerful force for identity, solidarity, and emotional reinforcement for the black youth. With so few resources to teach African Americans it would seem unwise not to use one such as rap. Rap can be a motivational tool in English classes because it can capture students' interests and it is relevant to most of them. "As educationalists we cannot afford not to tap into some of rap's vitality and bring it into the educational setting where it can inspire and motivate our youth to stay in school and receive relevant education" (Powell 257). Rap can be used effectively in college
courses, but I am not suggesting that all instructors use it. What can be learned from Powell is that educators and composition teachers need to find current relevant resources to teach their African American students. Those resources can include music, magazine articles, films, poetry, and guest speakers.
CHAPTER FOUR
AFRICAN AMERICANS IN WRITING CLASSES

Traditionally, English teachers have been able to more easily develop classroom settings for a multicultural audience than their peers. As Tomlinson describes, composition instructors probably are the largest group of subject specialists developing multicultural curriculum approaches (96). Not only do English teachers have flexibility over classroom activities and discussions, but also they can choose from a wide variety of diverse course materials as well as design paper assignments to suit students' specific needs. It may be true that not enough value has been placed on bidialectal programs for African Americans on university campuses because few instructors have this background and training (Taylor 43). This fact should not stop instructors from addressing language issues in their classes. African American students often present teachers with unique styles and difficulties, but classroom teachers with unique abilities can help these students.

Flexibility

The unique abilities teachers need are actually very common. One of the first steps, which has been mentioned before, is for the instructor to be flexible. We have discussed the idea of teachers being flexible, but this practice is even more crucial for writing teachers with African American students. Instructors cannot just state they will be more flexible; they must really be willing to give more control to students. Moll explains that relinquishing a substantial amount of control to students can be difficult (McLane 316). The results of such flexibility are well worth the effort: students are given the opportunity to feel empowered, where in so many areas they simply cannot or do not.
It is equally important that teachers be flexible and realistic about students’ progress. Rarely will we discover many overnight success stories. Writing instructors should set goals for students, goals that can be modified if necessary. Craig attests that often teachers and school authorities expect courses to achieve results that are impossible (73). In developing a composition curriculum for African Americans, instructors should continue practicing flexibility by determining how specific factors affect students’ learning such as the period of time over which teaching takes place and the intensity of the teaching.

**Making Lessons Relevant and Practical**

Most African American speak at least two dialects. English instruction must continue to emphasize the importance of Standard English, while allowing students to maintain their own dialect. Nembhard proposes teachers will be less successful when they attempt to destroy the first-learned language. Flexible teachers will find there is room for more than one dialect in their classrooms.

The aim of teaching composition to black speakers should be to provide them with effective communication skills and to help them recognize that the individual who harbors any hope of ever being in a position to help influence change or correct social injustices must be able to make himself or herself understood to the educated people in the society. (Nembhard 78)

If instructors can help students see that expanding language skills will enhance their possibilities as students and as future employees, then they can provide students with tools they really need. Both Standard English and Black English Vernacular are equally important on different levels, and writing instructors should be prepared to teach according to these standards.
It is difficult but not impossible for writing teachers to be flexible in their interactions with African American students. Specific teaching methods can make the goals of a multicultural classroom attainable (Nembhard 75). The ends, for black students to write well, should remain the same. It is only the means that needs changing.

Craig suggests that students would be more likely to learn the fundamentals of Standard English if they understand its relevance to them. More support for this idea can be found in the Spikes and Spikes survey. Students were more successful when presented with well defined, focused, practical criteria (117). Craig admits that one of the reasons why African American students fail to learn Standard English is because of the negative attitudes they have toward it (67). However, he also cites two more reasons for failure in teaching:

(1) the speakers do not perceive Standard English as relevant to their socials needs;

(2) the simulated social situations that might be used in some teaching programs in school are not real situations and cannot be expected to have the same effect on learners that real situations might have, given the fact that language is best learned in real social situations (67).

Black students must perceive that Standard English is applicable to them and how they live before they will write it and speak it well. If students view lessons and activities as relevant, teachers can more easily generate their interest (Craig 72). Far too many times, teachers are faced with students who say. “But, how can I use this? When will I ever need this?” The natural speech events in the life of nonstandard speakers are in nonstandard language, and, therefore, Standard English is an artificial imposition on the experiences of such speakers (Craig 73). Writing teachers have to show students the connections between curriculum, the real world, and
students' lives, if such a connection exists. Teachers who are more familiar with African American culture, characteristics, and learning styles will depend on that knowledge to prepare relevant curricula.

**Developing Curricula**

Curtis and Lerah Spikes observe an experimental program to help African American students pass a Regents' Test in English. Although this does not directly apply to our work, the articles does identify variables that have a positive effect on writing competency. The students' ultimate goal is to pass the test, but they must write better to pass. The program is different than a class because the students have very specific tasks they must master. For teachers who provide specific tasks for students, the design of the study shows what phases of activities can help student writers the most.

Similar to Iowa State University, the program places strong emphasis on student paper revisions. Program facilitators and students work very closely to improve writing skills. The program was a success; students were able to pass the Regents' Test with this preparatory course. Therefore, we must ask: was it the class design or just the fact that there was a class that made a difference?

We cannot measure the motivation of the students or the timing of the course, but there are a few implications from this study that apply to this thesis' topic:

- teachers must analyze students' writing abilities before they can help students by giving them usable feedback
- teachers must make assignments clear by providing strict guidelines and specific tasks
- teachers should find ways to help students feel good about their writing
In Dennis Craig's article the students studied are people of color from the Caribbean, Jamaica, Guyana, and Belize. They are not African American, but we can draw some similarities because the speakers who make up this study use the Black English Vernacular similar to that of African Americans. The students in this study are bidialectal, speaking both Standard English and some form of it. Their BEV is influenced by their cultures and ethnicities. Therefore, Craig is again assuming that those speakers will experience difficulties using Standard English. Craig's assessment is not necessarily true. I believe bidialectal speakers usually can speak both languages; they can use either language depending on the situation. In fact, BEV is a form of Standard English, so that speakers must have some working knowledge of Standard English to speak BEV.

Craig does offer sound advice to teachers trying to help students learn Standard English. Craig is able to offer his suggestions because he remains objective – never criticizing or condemning the dialect of the speakers. The foundation for his expertise was taken from methods known to help international students in foreign language programs. The foreign language basis for his study does not pose as much of a problem as his using children and not adults. Can we assume what he learns about bidialectal children will apply to young adults attending college?

Most of all, Craig's advice concerning approaches to teaching Standard English to nonstandard speakers corresponds with other related research. Other studies about teaching minorities and writing classes promote the idea of making lessons useful and practical. Because Craig's suggestions follow this line of thinking because what he provides for writing teachers is very practical.
Judith Nembhard's article is actually one of the most helpful resources for teachers used in this thesis. What she has to offer actually applies to teaching African Americans in composition classes. On the other hand, her remarks are based solely on black students attending predominantly black universities. The advice she gives is still applicable because the Summer Enrichment Program has all minority students. The major differences are: (1) most of the students in the SEP program are African American although some are Hispanic and Asian and (2) the majority of classes are taught by white professors and white teaching assistants, not African Americans.

Nembhard's approach is helpful because she discusses teachers' attitudes without revealing what the racial backgrounds of these teachers are. Her suggestions pertain to how teachers feel about accepting BEV, how they should confront their own prejudices, and how they can provide flexibility in the classroom. Nembhard gives writing teachers issues to think about before they instruct African American students such as making lessons practical and allowing students to include BEV in their writing. She stresses the importance of black students learning Standard English by discussing some guidelines taken from a successful writing program at Howard University.

The suggestions in this article are based on the work done with students at historically black colleges. Nembhard observes that students enjoyed working in groups and responded well to individual help from instructors. In this section, her advice is very practical covering teacher-student interactions, writing assignments, in-class writing assignments, student conferences, and grading policies.

Taylor's study addresses the question: How well will students respond to bidialectal programs in which they can use their dialect and Standard English? This
question has some bearing on African Americans' writing issues because black college students may not only speak BEV, but write in it as well. The study is concerned with language arts so the scope may be too vague for our purposes.

The article's conclusions are somewhat helpful, but lack relevance for African Americans at predominantly white universities. Taylor et. al. do explain what should be done in organizing bidialectal programs, but the suggestions do not pertain to teaching. Instead their findings will enlighten readers about the general organization of successful bidialectal programs.

The survey was sent to only fifteen people, which seems like a small number to answer such a profound question. Many of the survey items did not pertain to writing or even classroom interactions. The majority of the items were quite political – questions regarding funding, program hierarchy, location, and facilities. The survey items relevant to our purpose were vague. There is so much variation among bidialectal programs that students could never be sure what is meant by simply, "reading or writing activities." The questions, and ultimately the answers regarding the location of the facilities and the amount of money used in them, will give no real sense of what was actually done in the workshops and programs.

I maintain that Black English Vernacular should not be the focus for African Americans in writing classes. However, BEV must be addressed because cultural difference between teachers and students do contribute to learning difficulties (McDermott and Goldman 150). Earlier discussions implied that both dialects be incorporated into paper assignments and classroom activities. "... despite the strongly acknowledged need for the teaching of Standard English, there is nothing to indicate that nonstandard dialect speakers are learning Standard English any more efficiently now than they were doing a decade ago" (Craig 67). According to Craig,
black students have not mastered Standard English and the fundamentals of writing. This situation calls for change in the aims of language education and for a consequent reform of the curricula and organization of writing classrooms. Stikes claims many black students speak a different language from their teachers. As a result, it is difficult for African American students to gain knowledge in areas that require learning unfamiliar vocabularies (Stikes 52). Language is the basis for learning, and teachers and students who cannot communicate effectively will be unable to build a solid foundation in writing courses.

Writing teachers in multicultural classrooms must be presented with theories and tools which will enable them to work with students who speak Black English Vernacular. Often, minorities consciously or unconsciously interpret school learning as a displacement process detrimental to their social identity, sense of security, and self worth (Ogbu 10). Students of color fear learning the white cultural frame of reference because they might cease to speak like minorities and eventually lose their identities as minorities. Most African Americans are reluctant to learn Standard English so teachers must be creative when instructing them.

Instructors should remember that BEV is not just a language; it is part of students’ experiences as African Americans. Written language is a social construct highly related to people, their patterns of communication, and their use of written language to mediate activities in day-to-day life (Moll 288). Moll describes how written and spoken language, including BEV, embodies the ties people have with one another, their culture, and their own thinking. Smitherman agrees that when black people use the language in which their experience is embodied, a register is tripped that serves as a reminder of the Black Experience (19). Students who are not encouraged to speak BEV do not consider the language as being silenced. On the
contrary, students will view the attempt to silence BEV as an attempt to deny them their feelings and experiences. If Black English is an important part of black students' lives, then it should be not only tolerated, but included in writing courses' curricula.

Allowing Black English a place in composition classes should not be at the sacrifice of Standard English. Dianne Williams Hayes suggests writing teachers have responsibility to understand students' language; teachers should be willing to let students educate them (31). Williams Hayes is simply promoting an instructional setting that will help students understand what is appropriate language for informal settings, classroom settings, and the workplace. Bidialectal instruction's ultimate goal is to promote mastering the elements of Standard English while acknowledging the role of students' native dialect. The result of this goal is a student who is competent in two dialects (Taylor et al 36). This bidialectal approach can be implemented more smoothly through teachers who are informed, creative, and flexible.

**Keeping the Focus on Writing**

The goal of writing instructors teaching black students should continue to be that students master the basic fundamentals of composition. From that aspect, minorities should receive the same treatment majority students are given. Teachers should periodically assess students' strengths and weaknesses, develop lessons to help them, and analyze the progress they have made. Composition research maintains that English teachers should not concentrate on dialect differences, or attempt to stamp out language behaviors when treating writing problems (grammar, punctuation, etc.) of majority students (79). Therefore, African American students should be no different. “Teaching black students to write necessitates the same
methods and attitudes employed in teaching non-blacks” (Nembhard 79). Writing teachers must focus less on dialect difference and more on the students’ need to be linguistically competent to fill their roles in society. “If teachers first recognize the dignity and value of the students, the linguistic differences will then be placed in proper perspective, and the job of teaching them to write will proceed unimpeded” (83).

African American students benefit greatly when teachers develop a community of writers in the classroom. Time should be devoted to teaching students the art of writing, which includes developing qualities shared by good writers: clarity, convincingness, and originality (Nembhard 78). Students should incorporate the mindset that they are writing with, to, and for a group of peers who have similar goals. Moll also states an important ingredient of the writing process is for students to belong to a community of writers. Teachers can develop activities and assignments in which students are encouraged to work in groups, to peer edit, and to actively share their written work, as well as their thoughts and ideas.

What Else Can Teachers Do?

Before they develop new curricula and research sources to help them instruct African Americans, teachers must really believe they can help them. Writing instructors must have a sincere desire to help black students become better writers. There is not a vast amount of information available regarding African American students who are the majority in a writing course at a predominantly white institution. However, teachers should be informed by the limited degree of research and information in this area. Howard University’s writing program for black students was successful and its coordinators used the research findings on black dialect, such as showing the relevance of learning Standard English and allowing
students to use both Standard English and BEV in class (Nembhard 80). It is also important for instructors to try new teaching methods, to push aside fears and prejudices, and to use the little information that exists.

Minority students will benefit from a variety of classroom activities. It is not my claim that writing teachers have mundane, routine, lesson plans. In fact, English teachers probably incorporate very exciting, stimulating, activities into their courses. On the other hand, I suggest that it is crucial for black students to experience a variety of activities, assignments, and discussions. It makes little significant difference exactly what the activities are as long as they share the common goal of helping students become better writers. The goal of any instructional phase is to move the student to a level of confidence in his or her writing ability by developing the students’ awareness of skills assessment and basic structural procedures in essay writing (Spikes and Spikes 114). Any activity that will model the steps students should take to write papers will work in a classroom with minorities. Nembhard recommends a variety of lesson plans that will embody cooperative learning, process-oriented activities, and pre-writing, editing, and revision (79).

Also, writing instructors should consider an element of their responsibility to build students’ confidence. Moll demonstrates in his research that beginning writers will continue to need support from teachers (317). How much support they will need and how long they will need it will depend on the individual student, but teachers should still be prepared to provide it. In an previous chapter, motivation was shown to be a factor in the writing success of African American students. Teachers can be sources for this motivation in their enthusiasm, attitudes, and general rapport with students. Powell believes that basic classroom tools, such as comments on papers, can be influential methods that shape students’ attitudes (121).
“In other words, teachers should learn to specialize in finding positive comments about all writing passed for scrutiny. There is no better way to build confidence than to let students know that they have something worthwhile to say” (Powell 121). For Powell, it is simply a matter of building morale and creating an atmosphere of acceptance and encouragement. Then, he states, the relevant question becomes whether or not teachers possess the inward resources to show acceptance to all students (Powell 121). Composition teachers instructing African Americans should have the skills to make students feel good about themselves. Spikes and Spikes would suggest that confidence is almost as important as one’s writing abilities (114). In observing students who had failing papers, they cited student-instructor interaction as one of three factors that affect success ratios. Students need the kinds of writing activities and feedback that will not only help them feel more positive about their writing, but increase their ability to write. Powell summarizes the point well, “Confidence is at its highest when success is achieved” (122).

Through her survey, Bertie Powell Jeffries is trying to find out what factors help make student successful writers. Her purpose is to expose educators to the factors that may contribute to students’ success or lack of success in writing courses.

Of the 350 questionnaires completed, ninety percent were completed by black students. Therefore, the scope of this study is very similar to my purpose. What makes Jeffries’ participants different from the students I’m trying to help is their classifications. The students in this study are first and second semester freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The survey student population is more experienced and well adjusted to a predominantly white campus than the first year African American students in the Summer Enrichment Program.
It is difficult to measure students' success and improvements in writing. Jefferies used students' final grades to assess student success. However, I would argue that grades do not necessarily represent success. Grades cannot measure improvement, attitude, and confidence levels. Also, the researchers cannot measure participants' honesty in self-reported surveys.

The question still remains: Is there a correlation between students' attitudes and writing success? Generally speaking, I would say the answer is yes. The study does identify a relationship between apprehension and writing performance, and grade point average and writing performance. The first factor, which can be more controlled, is relevant to this document's purpose. Teachers can be exposed to factors and behaviors that affect students' confidence; teachers will be aware of tools that can help African American students to become better writers. Powell implies that teachers can help shape students' attitudes about writing and the composing process through classroom interactions, comments on paper assignments, and grading policies.
CHAPTER FIVE
SOLUTIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

Up until now I have addressed what teachers should do and how they should conduct themselves in classrooms with African American students. However, the practical procedures for teachers have not yet been covered. A portion of this document has been devoted to developing suggestions for majority teachers instructing African American students. Historically, English teachers have made excellent contributions to multicultural education (Tomlinson 95). “English teachers have pioneered, documented, and evaluated successful multicultural innovations in the area of literature, language, and media studies” (Tomlinson 95). English instructors, like many other liberal arts professors, have the freedom and versatility their subjects allow to implement multicultural classroom discussions and activities.

Teacher Sensitivity

All of the African American books and articles will not equip the most determined instructor to address the needs of African American students. Teachers who are sincere about helping minority students will make modifications, not only in their attitudes, but in almost every other aspect of their teaching. Teachers need to be sensitive to African Americans when displaying visual material, communicating verbally and non-verbally, setting classroom management policies, and placing students in groups (Davis 20-23). By recognizing certain facts about black students, instructors are creating awareness that will help them teach. Ogbu cites three areas teachers need to recognize about the plight of minority students. The first suggestion is for teachers to recognize different kinds of cultural/language differences that arise for different circumstances. Secondly, instructors should realize minority groups are often associated with different types of
cultural/language differences. Finally, one of the greatest things a teacher could do for his or her African American students is recognize that minority students face a degree of social adjustment because of cultural/language differences is (Ogbu 12).

Similar to Ogbu, Sedlacek and Brooks proposed noncognitive variables that were related to academic success, particularly for minorities:

1. positive self-concept
2. realistic self-appraisal
3. understanding of and ability to deal with racism
4. availability of a strong support person. (171)

Writing teachers who have the initiative and skills could focus on some or all of these variables in a given semester. For example, writing the positive comments on a paper before the negative ones may boost a student’s self-concept. Teachers can use journal articles and videos to motivate students to understand, discuss, and deal with racism in the United States. An English instructor can be a strong support person to the student who is insecure about his or her writing or academic performance. Based on the variables there is almost an unlimited array of ideas that could be developed for teachers with majority African American students.

Williams Hayes advises teachers and faculty about reaching out to the African American “hip hop” generation. Hip hoppers are youth, mostly from urban areas, between the ages of 12-19. This fast growing group have been taught to question and even criticize society and its institutions. They seemingly understand racism and are quite verbal, and sometimes hostile about it. Hip hoppers have embraced rap, hip hop music, and their cultures. English instructors will have more members of the “hip hop” generation in the 1990’s and they should be exposed to methods for helping them. Williams Hayes has some insight in this area. She
suggests raising the level of expectations for students, utilizing peer groups to reinforce academic achievement, and showing students that "it's not as smart to be cool as it is cool to be smart" (33). It is also very important for teachers to refrain from judging students by their appearances, styles, or tastes. "But most importantly, teachers must be willing to reach out and put aside preconceived notions about their students' music and dress" (Williams Hayes 33). Williams Hayes' guidelines do not apply to every single teacher at every single university. Teachers should continue to trust what they know about African Americans and minority students to use their best judgment as to what is appropriate for their courses. Instructors should recognize there are limited sources and be willing to make a persistent search for suitable course materials.

**Teacher - Faculty Relations**

*Reporting Problems*

It is challenging to instruct African Americans. Each class will not always run smoothly, just as with any other class. Writing classes require teachers who are prepared to deal with unpredictable situations. Teachers need to take under advisement what they can do when problems of a political nature arise. For example, if the instructor has selected books by authors of color and the bookstore staff is not taking immediate action to order the materials then faculty need to know how to proceed. Teachers should report any problems to the appropriate person responsible in administration. Davis suggests any correspondence should outline the nature of the problem and its effect inside and outside of the classroom. Instructors may also find it necessary to make suggestions for ways in which the problem factor could be reduced or removed. This type of report should also
request a time scale in which a reply from the administration, orally or verbally, can be made (13).

**Building Faculty Awareness**

Teachers can bring their knowledge out of the classroom and into their staff meetings, the faculty lounge, and the rest of the English Department. Instructors should share ideas, lesson plans, and activities that have worked well to teach African American students. Stikes reiterates that faculty members need to be taught to understand various teaching processes, with an appropriate understanding of black culture, its importance to black student development, and its impact on teaching (129). Faculty should also be aware of the importance of interacting with students. Interactions sustain students in a college environment (Stikes 129). Finally, Stikes recommends that strong language development be a priority when promoting black student development. African Americans, as I discussed earlier, must understand their own ability to speak both Black English Vernacular and Standard English. Faculty should encourage these students to acquire proficiency in reading, writing, and oral expression (Stikes 129).

**Course Material Selection**

Selecting course materials has been an issue of previous discussion in this document. However, this section provides more specific procedural guidelines for selecting books and other classroom materials. The races, backgrounds, and cultures of students are subordinate to the need that all books be accurate and up-to-date. The books used in a multicultural setting should present people with a variety of attributes, none of which could be viewed as stereotypical. Information about different cultures, races, and societies should be focus areas in textbooks (Klein 155).
Essentially, any book that could be used equally well in a majority black classroom, and a majority white classroom is suitable (Klein 155). Stikes insists that instructors should be able to answer some basic questions when selecting course materials.

1. What does the course material have to say about women and minorities?
2. Are women and minorities presented in leadership roles?
3. Are social relationships and lifestyles authentically presented?
4. Are women and minorities given equal representation and importance in course material?

(Course Packets)

Teachers can use a variety of materials to coordinate readings and essays for their African American students. Often it is difficult to find a textbook that incorporates all or most of the authors teachers would like to discuss during the semester. My first suggestion would be to put essays, articles, and other reading materials in a course packet. The course packet gives instructors the flexibility to choose stories and articles from several books, textbooks, and journals. The English 104 syllabus includes, as an option, the use of a course packet that I could easily change from semester to semester. A packet can be economical and the possibilities for its content are almost unlimited. Instructors can choose from such writers as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Kazou Ishiguro, Joy Kogawa, James Weldon Johnson, and Terri Macmillan as resources for their course packets. Student essays from previous classes (with the permission of the writers) also make excellent reading materials for a packet.
Textbooks

The implementation of a course packet does not necessarily require the elimination of textbooks. I have found that textbooks offer a wide array of diversity in the authors and essays they use. Sometimes such a wealth of information is offered in textbooks that teachers find it difficult or impossible to use all of their contents. However, textbooks are resources students can use to discover their own personal interests and tastes. For example, even if I cover only a few ethnic groups during the semester, students will still have more information about other cultural groups available to them. For English 104 I would recommend the following textbooks which are being offered for the 1994-95 school year:

- *Across Cultures*, Gillespie and Singleton, Allyn and Bacon, 2nd ed.
- *Connections: A Multicultural Reader for Writers*, Stanford, Mayfield
- *Being in the World*, Scott and Slovic, Eds., Macmillan
- *Cultures: Diversity in Reading and Writing*, Thiroux, Prentice-Hall
- *Our Times 3*, Atwan, Bedford/St. Martin’s

For English 105 I would recommend the following textbooks which are currently being offered for the 1994-95 school year:

- *Strategies of Argument*, Hirschberg, Macmillan
- *A World of Ideas*, Jacobus, Bedford, 4th ed.

• *Issues and Images*, Rivers, Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich

• *One World, Many Cultures*, Hirschberg, Macmillan

• *Ourselves Among Others*, Verberg, St. Martin's Press, 3rd ed.

I would urge writing teachers to remember that almost any text can be used with a majority of African American students. What element remains important is how teachers use the textbooks they have. Black students should be able to read from authors that are similar to them. However, black students and students of all races should be exposed to many different cultural and ethnic groups. Often as readers and writers, students can make connections with other minority groups that have similar histories of mistreatment and oppression.

Many of the textbooks' essays fit the tradition of English 104 and 105's assignment structure; many essays are narrative, persuasive, analytical, evaluative, and research based. They address current issues and current situations for the groups they discuss. Most of all, the essays and articles in these textbooks will give students issues to think and write about.

*Movies*

Another teaching tool that I have used is film. As I pointed out before, there is often excessive class time in the Summer Enrichment Programs. The right movie will motivate students to discuss specific issues, such as racism, sexism, political correctness, interracial relationships, civil disobedience, minority crime rates, drugs, or gang violence. Black students can write about how these topics affect them and make them feel as individuals, African Americans, and human beings. So many movies would suit assignment criteria, teaching styles, and students' needs it is difficult for me to suggest only a few:
- *Jungle Fever*
- *The Five Heartbeats*
- *Malcolm X*
- *Menace to Society*
- *Posse*
- *Sparkle*
- *Do the Right Thing*
- *Blood In, Blood Out*
- *Glory*

Many of these films and others that will serve an instructor’s purpose have very mature contents. The nature of such sexually explicit or violent scenes can be discussed with students before the movie is viewed. Students should understand they are adults and adult behavior will be expected of them.

**Practical Guidelines for Writing Classes**

**Grading**

Professionals who have been charged with developing a curriculum for black dialect speakers must understand that these students can be taught to write well. This goal will only be achieved when students and their teachers are freed from anxiety over black dialect concerns (Nembhard 79). Nembhard highlights some essential components to ensure students’ success. The most practical of these includes grading writing assignments fairly and thoroughly – pointing out strengths and weaknesses with positive feedback (Nembhard 80-83). Grading should assign value and spell out the criteria which students must meet in each category of writing. English teachers should also set aside time for conferences with students. Conferencing provides invaluable strategy for guiding students’ writing progress.
During conferences students should be given their current standing so suggestions for improvement can be discussed and evaluated. Cox and Ramirez also place value on how instructors assess their students' performances. Teachers should evaluate the learning experiences in terms of attainment of goals as well as in terms of observed student behaviors and involvement (Cox and Ramirez 65).

Revision is another useful tool for grading students based on their performance and improvement. Revision enables students to view their writing as a process by determining how their work can be improved. Many writing instructors offer students the opportunity to revise a graded paper. I have tried revision several times and as a group, students would make minor changes in only few areas. They would make changes based on my suggestions solely. Students seemed to view revision as a way to improve their grades, but not their writing. I realized if I made revision one of their assignments they could have more easily met the revision criteria. Dr. Carol David uses a revision assignment in her English 104 classes and I would recommend it for writing instructors interested in this realm (See Appendix A).

Writing Assignments

The nature of the assignments can have a strong impact on students' attitudes and performances. Writing paper assignments can be quite challenging. It often takes years for writing teachers to develop assignments they truly feel comfortable with. Even when suitable assignments have been created, instructors may feel the need to modify them each semester depending on their students. Teachers should take extra precautions when developing assignments for African Americans. Teachers might make assignments which relate to the knowledge and experience of
students, ones that will encourage them to write about situations that matter to them (Powell 123). Students should also be required to do some of their writing assignments in class. Inexperienced writers need the opportunity to write in class where the teacher can provide help during the actual writing (Nembhard 80-83). Essentially, instructors can even use students' assignments to assist their teaching. Essays and papers that have been done well can be used to give writing demonstrations to the entire class (Cox and Ramirez 65). This practice will help students know that what has been requested of them is attainable.

These are the assignments I use for English 104 and 105. Of course, they suit my teaching style and personal preferences, but they can be easily changed to fit the needs of any writing teacher. They can also work as a model for students teaching a majority African American class.

**English 104**

**Assignment 1: Significant Event**

In thinking about significant events in your life, recall an incident that really made you angry. You should be able to relate your situation to your race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Ask yourself how these variables contributed to the situation. You should also be able to describe the event and then explain why it made you upset.

The purpose of this assignment is to describe a situation so that your reader will understand your anger or frustration. Tell your reader what happened in as interesting a way as possible. Explain what made the event important to you. Remember your reader is not only interested in what happened, but how you responded.

Keep in mind what the reader discovers about your feelings because your response is more important than the event itself. Therefore, focus on your response and the significance of the event. What was the incident's effect on you? Were you justifiable in your anger? Does this issue (or related ones) affect other people? How? You can use any of these questions to help you find focus and organize your thoughts.
English 104
Assignment 2: Observation

For this assignment you and a partner should choose an organization, place or activity on campus where you can observe a specific cultural or ethnic group. Pay special attention to the different kinds of language people use (slang, acronyms, phrases, academic jargon, politeness terms, informal or casual uses of words, etc.) Gather information through observations or interviewing and write a report that summarizes your findings. Do not talk to each other or share any ideas while you are forming thoughts for your paper.

Your audience will consist of students new to the university who might be interested in the organization, place, or activity. Therefore, your job is to collect data during your observation and then interpret this information for readers. Don't simply make a factual listing of your observations, like a grocery list. Organize the information and make it clear and interesting reading for the audience.

You can observe characteristics, attitudes, and styles of the ethnic group. You can also observe practices or speech patterns that may be similar or different from your own. You should not be condescending or insulting to the people or activity you observe. This assignment is an opportunity to show appreciation and acknowledgment of others' differences. In fact, you should feel free to point out observations that you have never seen before or ever heard about before. It is okay to voice your opinion or make some guesses about what you see or hear – as long as you can explain them.

You should take careful notes during your observation so that you will have plenty of material for your paper. As you organize information, try to classify it into areas or topics. Make lists of different aspects of your subjects, and then you can begin drafting separate sections on each one.

In addition to reporting the facts in your paper, you should also include inferences and judgments about your subject. For example, you can refute many of the stereotypes our society has about Native Americans after attending a meeting to plan one of the group's activities. Your ultimate goal is to paint a picture for the reader that describes your experience with the person(s), place, or event. Make the reader understand how it felt and what it was like to observe what you did.
English 105
Assignment 1: Rhetorical Analysis

The purpose of this assignment is to identify rhetorical aspects of an argument and also to evaluate the success of the argument. Find an article or essay that pertains to people of color and/or issues that affect them. Evaluate how the author adopts the material, as well as how it is organized. Determine the article's purpose and audience. Formulate some ideas about the author's goals: What are the objectives? Is the author successful? What kinds of ideas does he or she try to imply about this particular group of people? What ideas seem to be emphasized or even ignored? Remember your purpose is to analyze an essay dissecting the rhetorical qualities of the argument.

Consider
  . audience: who are the readers of this argument? What beliefs may they have about the argument? What does the writer do to persuade this particular audience?
  . message: What message or thesis is the writing trying to send about this cultural group? What evidence is used to support that message? Is the argument logical? Is it believable? How does the message try to persuade the audience?
  . Who is the source? Is he or she credible? How do you know you can trust or rely on the words of this writer?

This assignment is unique because you will write a paper and do a five minute presentation. For your presentation you should explain your evaluation of the text. Use the author's words only to support your claims. The goal of your presentation is to share your analysis with your peers. When you present remember that everyone hasn't read the article, so make sure you are clear about your explanations.

Learning to analyze will allow you to become adept at noticing how a writer accomplishes his or her purpose. My hope is that this skill will help you gain experience for your own writing. Try to make yourself familiar with the essay by reading it more than once. Take notes on your ideas and make some evaluations about what is happening in the article.

English 104
Assignment 3: Position Paper

Your goal for this assignment is to identify an issue pertaining to minorities and present your beliefs by stating your position and why you hold it. You can choose a topic that affects particularly students of various ethnic background and cultures.

English 105
Assignment 2: Position Paper
Your audience for this essay will be the academic community here at ISU – students, professors, and administrators.

Your readers could agree with you, be uncommitted, or actually hostile to your ideas. Because all of your readers may not agree with your views, you will want to consider the opposition's position and address their views as well. You can look for areas of common ground, acknowledge the counterarguments, refute the counterarguments, and/or concede a point. In other words, you need to show that you are well informed on the issues.

Approach this paper with a rational tone. Identify the issue, explain it, and tell the readers where you stand and why. You can choose any issue affecting minorities in our society. Just make sure you have some understanding of the subject so that you may argue effectively.

Possible topics
- advertising that targets minorities
- minority scholarships to college
- the value of historically black colleges
- black fraternities and sororities
- interracial dating
- cross-racial adoption
- Malcolm X
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- black women in the 1990's
- exclusion of minorities in educational materials

English 105
Assignment 3: Counter Argument Paper

For this assignment you will be given the task of writing a counter argument to your original position paper. Granted, this opposing issue is not one that you really believe in. However, you will have to familiarize yourself with the reasons why someone would believe in the opposing side.

Use your first paper to help you develop some support for this assignment. For the main ideas in that paper, develop some refutations to those arguments. You may also want to implement some of the stronger arguments of the opposing side you used in the first paper. Because this counter position will be less familiar to you, feel free to use a combination of evidence: personal experience, facts and statistics, and rhetorical support such as definitions, examples, and analogies.
You should make a serious attempt to develop a strong argument even though you disagree with the subject matter. Your tone should be rational and you should present some serious, solid, arguments. You should appeal to and respect the audience. Your appraisals of this counter position should be fair and logical.

English 104
Assignment 4: Documented Essay

English 105
Assignment 4: Documented Essay

For this assignment you will need to find sources to support your views in your original position paper. You will be expected to use clear, concrete evidence to support your explanations and viewpoints. Also, address the arguments offered by the opposition to show that you are well informed on the issue. You should present yourself as a reasonable person who understands the opposing views. Your readers should be able to see how you arrived at your position through the use of supporting evidence.

Your sources should be used to support your position. Choose sources that are relevant and ones that help clarify your position. Use your previous position paper as a springboard for this assignment.

Because you are writing a position paper, you'll need a strong clearly defined thesis that indicates where you stand on the issue. Because this paper will be longer than previous papers, you'll need to be especially careful to organize your ideas for your readers.

A major part of your task will be to decide which types of sources to use. Both primary and secondary sources will be acceptable. Try to find a variety of books, newspaper articles, magazine articles, essays, and journal articles to implement into the paper. Include all of the evidence you will need for support, but you must use a minimum of five sources.

English 104
Assignment 5: Evaluation

English 105
Assignment 5: Evaluation

Choose a movie with an all or mostly minority cast and write a review of it. You may select one or several areas to evaluate. You can recommend the movie or warn movie goers based on characters, plot, appropriate viewers, and/or setting. The movie's relevance to statements about minorities can also be a subject of your review. Areas such as realism, stereotypes, sexism, action, and special effects would also make interesting topics of discussion.
Take care that the criteria and evidence are both reliable and appropriate to readers' interests and attitudes, as well as the purpose of your evaluation – to persuade. You should essentially be trying to persuade the audience to see the movie, wait for the video, or skip it. If the criteria you select are unfamiliar to the audience, you may have to justify or define the criteria and establish your authority to set these criteria. For example, if you choose to evaluate the realism of the hip hop music and clothes in a film about urban environments, you may want to offer some explanations.

When you have gathered sufficient information, organize your ideas into sections based on the criteria. One or two criteria are probably enough if you are to analyze sufficiently. You will want to think about what the film attempts to do and evaluate its success in accomplishing its purpose.

Write a tentative thesis that states the evaluation you wish to make. Follow the thesis with a paragraph that explains the criteria you use for your judgment. Then support each of the criteria with examples from the film. Please avoid summarizing the movie and explaining what happened from beginning to end.

Assignments Rationale

The assignments were designed to encourage students to write about their experiences as African Americans and minorities. Black students should write by exploring themselves and exploring the world around them. Students should be given the opportunity to evaluate themselves, their peers, and their communities through assignments such as the significant event and observation papers. Maybe through these types of explorations students will understand their writing does matter and there are actually audiences they can address. These assignments require students to think before they write. With the aid of readings and discussions, students can be motivated to really think about what they’re writing.

The proposed assignments like the position paper give students issues such as interracial dating, cross racial adoption, and affirmative action, to discuss and write about. Students should be able to express their feelings by exchanging their ideas about different subjects. Hopefully, students will find a connection between how
they feel, what they read, and what they write and why in assignments designed like the film evaluation paper.

Not only do I want African American students to make some interpretations about their lives and how they feel, but also I want to give them the chance to feel empowered. Researchers suggest that students should have a certain degree of power over their writing assignments. Therefore, they are able to choose their own topics, especially topics they may want to explore over an extended period of time. Writing teachers can tell students to pick subjects that make statements about who they are and how they feel. Students of all races can experience writing as an activity they can enjoy. The paper assignments give students freedom, but they also set specific guidelines; this system provides the balance and flexibility students need.

*Participation*

Class participation exists in two extremes – it is usually very lively, or it doesn't exist at all. Most English teachers understand the importance of student participation, "this element of teaching becomes even more crucial when teaching minority students. Teachers should plan and implement student participation in learning experiences that require behaviors that students have previously avoided" (Cox and Ramirez 65). Through interactions and discussions with teachers and peers students can build the foundation for a "community of writers." Instructors can continue building trust in their classes by having students work in groups. Placing students on editing teams will give them the chance to enjoy reading and discussing what they and their peers write (Powell 123). This type of cooperative learning will present students with the benefit of support and feedback from peers.

Students can be given every opportunity to participate in their English classes. Instructors can let students know at the beginning of the course that they
will be expected to participate in many informal discussions and they should feel comfortable speaking freely and honestly. Teachers can maintain open communication with their students by being honest and direct about their feelings. There are many activities and tools teachers can use to encourage students to discuss how they feel about their writing, as well as how they feel about issues that affect them as African Americans. I found that it is quite easy to initiate discussions with SEP students; the difficult part lies in facilitating discussions into constructive learning experiences about writing.

Peer Editing

Some materials are little work for the teacher, and yet conducive to students participating in class. The first recommendation is peer editing, which has been very popular. I strongly encourage instructors to continue to implement this type of group editing into Summer Enrichment Program classes. In pairs or in groups students can proofread and edit each other’s papers before they are due. They can exchange ideas about the writers’ words and what those words mean to them as readers. A longer peer review checklist can be used to address specific aspects of a paper assignment, while shorter, more general, peer editing checklist can also be used (See Appendix B and C). This peer editing interaction gives students the chance to reread and reevaluate their writing before handing work in for a grade.

Collaborative Writing and Presentations

Instructors can also motivate students to cooperate with and learn from each other by having them participate in group presentations. Students can be divided into smaller group of three or four to write collaboratively and then present their ideas. I have used group presentations before by making a list of essays I wanted on
the syllabus but had no time or room for. Students would write a rhetorical analysis on an essay or article from the list. Collaborative writing assignments and presentations would probably work just as well if students were allowed to choose their own topics. The main idea is for them to work together in building a "community of writers" as I discussed earlier.

**Group Quizzes**

Group quizzes are another form of collaborative work tools that can be used in writing classes. I have used quizzes in the past to ensure students are keeping current with the syllabus and the reading assignments. However, as a student, it always seemed quizzes were given on the one or two days I wasn't prepared. The group quiz requires a group of three to four students to answer discussion questions together. All group members will be given the same grade for their answers. Students should discuss their thoughts about the questions and present answers as a group. This tool lessens the work for writing instructors because the whole class gets a quiz with only a third of the papers to grade.

**Activities Rationale**

I recommend these few activities based on the research that minority students will benefit from informal class environments, cooperative learning, and more control in their writing classes. Students should feel comfortable in a classroom focused on open lines of communication. African Americans, in particular, should be able to freely discuss races issues with their instructors and their peers. I have tried to put my students into groups at least once or twice a week. My hope is that they will build on each other's strengths and weaknesses. Collaborative assignments enable them to learn with peers that they have already bonded with because of the
nature of the Summer Enrichment Program. Class activities, no matter what they are, should enable students to work toward the common goal of mastering writing assignments and other writing tasks.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS

The increasingly diverse college student population calls for major changes in curricula. The Summer Enrichment Program was designed to address the needs of minorities. Therefore, English instructors should be able to design writing class curricula to suit the needs of African Americans and minority students. In the past, it seems as though instructors have had to do a lot of guessing and experimenting as to what should be covered in SEP classes. Instead instructors should be given the benefit of paper assignments and syllabi that have been recommended for the students they serve. These materials have been designed to help teachers develop courses without restricting teachers from making changes to correspond with their own styles.

Recommendations

For Further Research

Through my work and observations on the subject of an English curriculum for African American students, I propose the following recommendations:

- There should be further research about African Americans and their success in writing classes.
- A survey of at least four SEP groups should be conducted to receive feedback from actual participants who have taken English courses.
- Interviews with SEP instructors should be conducted to verify what assignments, activities, readings, and discussions they considered to most helpful with this group of students.
• The proposed curricula should be redesigned to better correspond with findings from SEP students, instructors, and recent research on related subjects.

For English 104 and 105 Syllabi

I have developed the following syllabi for English 104 and 105 classes. Generally, I attempted to give students time between writing assignments to work on several drafts. Students should be able to make connections between paper assignments through sequence. For example, the summary is followed by the rhetorical analysis so that students will first learn to summarize articles then analyze them. Each paper should be seen as an opportunity to continue thoughts and ideas previously started in earlier papers or class activities and discussions.

The reading assignments have been designed with a similar context so that students can find connections between what they read and their upcoming writing assignments. Students should be able to gather ideas about what they can do with their paper assignments through some of the readings. I admit that not all of the essays directly reflect criteria for the upcoming assignments; however students can evaluate similarities and differences as alternate class activities. I also tried to choose authors from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. The authors I chose have many different experiences and they address some controversial issues. African American students should be exposed to people, situations, and places that are different from themselves. I want them to have some reactions and opinions to the assigned readings. Several of the essays are short and easy to read. They make statements about society and race issues students can explore. They are engaging and entertaining, but seriously thought provoking as well.
Throughout the semester students will respond in writing to assigned essays through reader responses and discussion questions. I usually assign reader responses for the more difficult essays. The activities should help to guide readers into the essays' main themes. The journal entries require students to reflect on their writing process and their writing progress. The entries are on the syllabi mostly at transitional times (when there is a change in the nature of paper assignments). For computer intensive courses, questions, journal entries, and group activities can be completed online. Students can also discuss readings through the Aldus Daedalus program.

English 104 Syllabus

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Conferences
Conferences

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-journal entry due
Mini-Conferences (in-class)

Writing to explain something (Motives, 303-309)
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Writing to evaluate something (Motives, 355-360)
Goodman, "The "Tapestry of Friendships" (packet)
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Sante, "Unlike a Virgin" (Motives, 371-378)

Malcolm X, "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" (packet)

Preparation for final
Preparation for final
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Introduction to the computer

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Brownmiller, "Let's Put Pornography Back in the Closet" (Conversations, 580-583)
Jacoby, "I am a First Amendment Junkie" (Conversations, 583-583)

Baldwin, "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me What is?" (Strategies, 357-360)
Simon, "Tennis Without a Net" (Strategies, 362-367)
Rodriguez, "Aria: A Memoir of Bilingual Childhood" (Strategies, 229-241)
- do a reader response

Strategies of argument: support (Strategies, 55-72)

Presentations

Presentations

* Assignment 1 is due: rhetorical analysis

Strategies for writing arguments: pre-writing (Strategies, 227-234)
Choices in organizing your essay (Strategies, 241-250)
- do a journal entry
Gates, "2 Live Crew, Decoded" (Conversations, 530-532)
Williams, "Making Heroes of Hate Mongers" (Conversations, 539-542)
Evaluate student position papers

Conferences
Conferences

The role of logic in argument: methods of reasoning (Strategies, 138-148)
- do a journal entry
Logical fallacies (Strategies, 148-162)
Slimp, "South Africa" (Strategies, 546-548)
Lewis, "Enough is Enough" (Strategies, 550-552)
* Assignment 2 is due: position
Writing a resource paper: choosing a topic (Strategies, 287-293)
Conducting research (Reference, 207-213)
Writing the paper (Reference, 213-220)
Syfers, "Why I Want a Wife" (Conversations, 312-314)
Fernsler, "Why I Want a Husband" (Conversations, 314-316)
- do a reader response

The role of language in argument: definition (Strategies, 172-188)
The role of language in argument: tone (Strategies, 188-205)
- do a journal entry
Assignment 3 due: counter position
Library day
Spickard, "Why I Believe in Affirmative Action" (Conversations, 717-719)
Chinae-Varela, "My Life as a Twofer" (Conversations, 741-743)
Stimpson, "It's Time to Rethink Affirmative Action" (Conversations, 727-731)
Mini-conferences (in-class)
* Assignment 4 rough drafts are due: documented essay

Dean, "Let's Legalize Gay Marriage" (Conversations, 744-745)
Elshtain, "Accepting Limits" (Conversations, 746-749)
* Assignment 4 is due: documented essay

Drexler, "Don't Touch That Dial" (Conversations, 453-455)
Quindlen, "TV or Not TV" (Conversations, 459-460)
Groening (Conversations, 452)

Singer, "Is Animal Experimentation Harming Society?" (Strategies, 524-532)
Visscher, "The Ethics of the Use of Lower Animals in Scientific Study" (Strategies, 535-542)
* do a reader response
Hearne, "What's Wrong with Animal Rights" (Conversations, 984-993)

Preparation for the final
Preparation for the final
Preparation for the final
Assignment 5 due: evaluation

For 104 and 105 policies

The policy sheets summarize the guidelines and expectations under which the classes will operate. To surprise students about such information as grading and attendance policies is unfair. Students trust and respect instructors who are consistent by letting them know from the very beginning what they can do to perform well. If students read my policy sheets carefully they will know they are expected to participate; discussing opinions and personal experiences is encouraged as well. My style and the style of this class may be new for some African American students. At the first class meeting students should be exposed to the instructor's style and the nature of the course.
English 104 Policy Sheet

Purpose
English 104 is designed to help you improve your writing skills. The class also requires you to express yourself clearly and intelligently on a wide range of issues about race and cultural groups. In this class we will treat writing as a form of self-discovery, of learning about yourself by thinking critically about a subject.

Texts
*Motives for Writing*, Miller and Webb, Mayfield, 1992
course packet

Attendance
Because the class is formatted around discussions and group activities you will be expected to attend regularly. If you have more than three absences it will affect your grade. However, you should feel free to contact me in case of any emergencies.

Participation
You should come to class prepared. You should read all of the assignments and be ready to participate in discussions. A good way to help improve your writing is to actively participate in class because it gives you the opportunity to exchange ideas and receive feedback from me and your fellow classmates.

Conferences
Each of you will have at least one scheduled conference during the semester. During this conference we will discuss ways to improve your writing. Writing requires patience and perseverance and oftentimes the advice and encouragement of a reader. You may, however, schedule as many additional conferences as you like. If you have any questions about the assignments or need additional help during the writing process, please see me before or after class, or drop by my office.

Assignments
You will be required to complete five writing assignments including your final exam. These writing assignments will range in length from two to five pages (typed, double spaced). Papers that are late will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late (B to B-). On the days papers are due you will have until 4 p.m. to hand them in.

You will also be required to respond on loose leaf paper (1) your reader response to essays (2) answers to discussion questions and (3) journal entries to provide
samples of your writing progress. In addition to these tasks I will give at least three pop quizzes during the semester. No partial credit will be given if you fail to participate in these activities.

Mechanics
Correct Standard English will be required in all of your written assignments. Your references for mechanics (punctuation and grammar) will be the *A Writer's Reference*. To be eligible for a C grade papers must meet the departmental requirement of not more than one major error per 100 words. For more details about the major errors and the departmental guidelines please refer to *Student's Guide to English 104-105*.

Grading
Your grade in the course will be based primarily on your performance on the writing assignments. Papers will be graded on the basis of material, organization, expression, and mechanics as well as on how well you adapt your papers to your purpose and audience. Your participation in class discussions and workshops will also strongly influence your final grade.

- **Paper Assignments**
  - papers 1, 2, 3 at 100 points each (300)
  - paper 4 at 150 points (150)
- **Revisions**
  - two revisions at 100 points each
- **Participation tasks are 10 points each**
  - four reader responses (40)
  - four journal entries (40)
  - four discussion questions (40)
  - three pop quizzes (30)
- **Final Exam**
  - 100

**Total points**
- 900

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**English 105 Policy Sheet**

**Purpose**
English 105 was designed to develop students' writing and reading skills. My personal goal is for you to be able to express yourself clearly and intelligently on a wide range of subjects dealing with race issues. In this class I will encourage you to treat writing as a form of self-discovery; learning about yourself, as an individual and a person of color, by thinking critically about various issues.
This particular class will use the computer to help you (1) analyze (2) evaluate and (3) gather information on current issues. There are many exciting and controversial events happening in our world. I would like to focus on how you feel about yourself, others, and your community.

Texts
Strategies of Argument, Hirschberg, Macmillan, 1992
Conversations, Selzer, Macmillan, 1994

Attendance
Because the class is formatted around discussions and group activities, you will be expected to attend regularly. Computer conferences and on-line responses work most effectively when everyone comes to class. Therefore, if you have more than four absences it will affect your grade. However, you can feel free to contact me in case of sickness or emergencies.

Participation
You should come to class prepared. You should read all of the assignments and be ready to participate in discussions and group work on the computers. A good way to help improve your writing is to actively participate in class because it gives you the opportunity to exchange ideas and receive feedback from me and your fellow classmates.

Conferences
Each of you will have at least one scheduled conference in the semester. During these conferences we will discuss ways to improve your writing. Writing requires patience, perseverance, and oftentimes the advice and encouragement of a reader. You may schedule as many additional conferences as you like. If you have any questions about the assignments or need additional help please see me before or after class, or drop by my office.

Assignments
You will be required to complete five writing assignments including your final exam. These writing assignments will range in length from two to five pages (typed, double spaced). Papers should always include a title page with your name, section, and title. Late papers will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late (B to B-). On the days papers are due you will have until 4 p.m. to put them in my mailbox in Ross 206.

You will be required to complete online (1) reader responses to essays (2) answers to discussion questions and (3) journal entries to provide samples of your writing progress. These assignments should be at least 75 words (one hand written page).
In addition to these tasks I will give at least three pop quizzes during the semester. Similar to quizzes discussion questions will not be announced. If you miss class on the day these materials are due no partial credit will be given. I will drop your lowest 10 point assignment grade at the completion of the course.

Mechanics
Correct Standard English will be required in all of your written assignments. Your references for mechanics (punctuation and grammar) will be *A Writer’s Reference*. To be eligible for a C, your papers must meet the departmental requirement of not more than one major error per 100 words. For more details about the major errors and the departmental guidelines please refer to the *Student’s Guide to English* 104-105.

Grading
Your grade in the course will be based primarily on your performance on the writing assignments. Papers will be graded on the basis of material, organization, expression, and mechanics as well as how you adapt your papers to your purpose and audience. Your participation in class discussions and workshops will also strongly influence your final grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Assignments</th>
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<td>papers 1, 2, 3 at 100 points each (300)</td>
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<td>paper 4 at 150 points (150)</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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<td>Total points</td>
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Suggestions for Instructors

This list of suggestions for instructors teaching African Americans is based on the research I have discussed and my personal experiences as a teaching assistant. These recommendations can also be used as guidelines or reference for writing instructors teaching any first year students.
Select diverse course materials by various authors of color. If you have trouble finding resources, seek the advice of minority faculty or acquaintances you may come in contact with.

Evaluate your own biases and prejudices about African Americans and minorities. Admit that you are human and you do have certain feelings, then explore why you feel as you do.

Use leisure time to acquaint yourself with African American culture. Read African American magazines and books. Catch a black TV show or movie when you have time. Remember to be wary of stereotyping, as the media has exploited and denigrated the image of blacks in the past. In fact, take these opportunities to see how many stereotypical behaviors you can pick out and then, explore what statements those images could be making.

Don’t be afraid to try new teaching tools, like rap music or jazz, TV shows, and films as part of your course. Use these tools to give students the opportunity to discuss and explore race issues.

Give students more control over the class. Set aside class meetings in which students can choose topics for discussion. After getting their input, search for reading and writing materials that would be appropriate for the topics they suggest.

Ask other Summer Enrichment Program teachers, TESOL instructors, writing center staff, and/or other staff members what types of paper assignments, activities, and reading materials are most effective with minority students, specifically African Americans.

Don’t make guesses about what will or will not offend students. The best way to avoid miscommunications is to simply ask them what offends
them. For example, you can have a group activity in which students discuss what story characters they find stereotypical or what storylines they may find unrealistic or exaggerated in works about African Americans or other minorities.

Conclusions

Teachers with the proper training and backgrounds can instruct a class of African Americans with ease. Building awareness and developing plans for writing teachers will set the foundation for issues of race and culture becoming less significant in university classrooms. With college student populations becoming more and more diverse it will be necessary for teachers to take action on a much larger scale. Hopefully, the diverse college populations will result in more cultural diversity in English departments’ staff and faculty. More research and discussion will be required in order for instructors to continue making better writers out of African Americans and other ethnic minorities.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A
REVISION ASSIGNMENT

Choose a paper from a previous assignment you would like to expand and produce as a finished work. Revise by rethinking the entire paper; don’t just patch up pieces of the paper.

Begin by thinking through the paper’s topic. Can you make one statement that captures its main ideas? How well is your paper focused? Can you write a working thesis? It is okay to change your thesis as you write. The main idea is that you be able to summarize your paper in one or two sentences.

Ask yourself the following questions about your revision:

Material
Does the narrative contain specific details of people, places, and actions?
Does the narrative focus the reader on the topic?
Does the analysis answer questions of who, what, when, where, how, and why?
Have you included specific support for your assertions? (examples, definitions, comparisons, and classifications)
Have you shown your readers some insights into the topic?

Organization
Will the beginning attract the reader’s attention?
Do you include transitions the reader can use to follow your thoughts and ideas?
Do the paragraphs contain topic sentences or focus on single ideas?

Expression
Do you have a variety of sentence types? Do all of your sentence begin with the subject?
Have you used words accurately?
Have you clarified the meanings of slang words, unfamiliar phrases, and acronyms?

Mechanics and Format
Have you chosen a catchy title that suggests the topic?
Have you chosen an appropriate typeface?
Does the whitespace indicate the organization of the paper?
Have you removed all errors in correctness?

Remember, revising is a process. You should read your draft and make changes several times before you complete a final draft.
APPENDIX B
PEER REVIEW LONG FORM
(based on a handout by Dr. Bonnie Irwin)

Content
How convincing is the writer’s argument? What suggestions would you make for changes?

Are there other points that the writer should have included?

Have all the possible views been addressed? What points have been left out?

Do any of the points need further support? (library sources, interviews, personal examples)

Has the writer balanced the factual evidence with personal opinions? Is the factual evidence lacking, and if so where?

Organization
Is the organization of the argument logical? Do the main ideas follow each other in a logical order? What areas may need work?

Is the organization effective? Does the order of the points make the argument convincing? Should they be rearranged? Where?

Expression
Are there good transitions between paragraphs? Which ones can be improved?

Is there variety in sentence length and structure? Where can it be improved?

Are the introduction and conclusion interesting and well connected? Do they get your attention? Would other techniques be more effective?
APPENDIX C
PEER EDITING SHORT FORMS

Proofreading your paper's structure
Does the introduction set up the whole paper?

Would any paragraphs make more sense or follow better if arranged in a different order?

Does your topic make itself clear early in the paper, or must the reader plow through much distracting material to come to it? Later in the draft, is there any passage that would make a better beginning?

Is your thesis clear? Is it given a position of emphasis? Are all the ideas relevant to the thesis?

Does everything flow clearly? Does one point lead to the next?

Does the conclusion follow from what has gone before? Or does it seem arbitrarily tacked on?

Do you suspect that your paper is somewhat confused?

General proofreading checklist
Have you omitted any words? and letters? and -s at the end of words? and -ed on verbs? any necessary marks of punctuation?

Have you transposed any letters? Have you misplaced any punctuation marks?

Have you added any unnecessary letters or punctuation?

Have you checked your grammar? (verb tense, subject-verb agreement, pronoun agreement, pronoun case, and pronoun reference)

Have you checked the spelling of the words you're unsure of? Of words you habitually miss?

Have you in haste, used the wrong word? (its for it’s, their for they’re, her’s for hers).