

*The Poverty of Language in Education:  
A Social Class Perspective on an Unequal  
Institution*



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*Spring 2003*

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*To my mother*  
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*The Poverty of Language in Education:*  
*A Social Class Perspective on an Unequal Institution*

*The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility.*

**- bell hooks**

## *Introduction*

What is the poverty of language? In researching this topic, many researchers who study linguistics and sociolinguistics have reported that social class affects language acquisition. Researchers have reported that the lower and working class struggle more frequently in the attainment of Standard or “Cash” English when compared to upper or middle-class students (Wardhaugh 147).

After reviewing several sources, I find that problems with the “poverty of language in education” include low requirements for cognitive skills in the workplace, lack of reading and writing skills attained by the working class, and the minimal funding of education in working class neighborhoods. Many assumptions and interests were encountered through the various studies, but all urged for the best education and language acquisition for every child regardless of class. Defining the social class structure can help identify the problems of language found in lower and working class communities and ultimately provide valuable solutions to this important issue.

This research will delve into the following sections defining social class, a review of social linguistic varieties, and an explanation of the working class, social behavior, and language acquisition. Concluding the study is a section entitled, “Leveling the playing field” along with “Education and social class” that will describe the ramifications of today’s education situated in a social class

structure. Lastly, “A hope for equality” are final remarks by bell hooks and myself inspiring the ideals of educational reform for language acquisition within the social class structure.

### *Defining social class*

An immediate problem in this research is that of defining social groups or a specific social class. Social position-factors such as occupation, place of residence, education, ‘new’ versus ‘old’ money, income, racial, or ethnic origin, cultural background, caste and religion, can help define each level (Wardhaugh 148). The low

income class is

considered to have

incomes at or below

the poverty line.

Pockets of this

group can be found in large urban areas, as well as rural. The working class is the most widespread population in the United States (148). The working class includes those who are employed as carpenters, factory line employees, or even cooks in a restaurant. They are the backbone to this country’s workforce, and provide all of the labor for products consumed or exported (149).

*The Global Economy and the Privileged Class*

**Table 3.1 Ethnic Representation among Elites**

	WASPs	Other Protestants	Irish Catholics	Other Catholics	Jews	Minorities
1. Overall elite	43.0	19.5	8.5	8.7	11.3	3.9
2. Men born before 1932	22.9	22.5	4.2	17.2	2.9	14.4
3. College-educated men born before 1932	31.0	19.8	6.0	15.5	8.9	5.2
4. Institutional sectors						
Business	57.3	22.1	5.3	6.1	6.9	0.0
Labor	23.9	15.2	37.0	13.0	4.3	2.2
Political parties	44.0	18.0	14.0	4.0	8.0	4.0
Voluntary organizations	32.7	13.5	1.9	7.7	17.3	19.2
Mass media	37.1	11.3	4.8	9.7	25.8	0.0
Congress	53.4	19.0	6.9	8.6	3.4	3.4
Political appointments	39.4	28.8	1.5	13.6	10.6	3.0
Civil service	35.8	22.6	9.4	9.4	15.1	3.8

Source: Alba and Moore (1982) table 1.

The middle class, on the other hand, are usually the employers of the working class, and are those who fill the ranks of supervisors and middle-management in small to large corporations (149). Their income exceeds those of the working class due to their advanced skills in their field and possibly their usage of language. The privileged few make it to the upper class. The upper class is considered to be the top-wage earners in the U.S., such as CEOs (150). In most cases, those who have reached this level have had a college education, have equally wealthy extended family, and live in certain affluent pockets of the U.S., for example in California: Beverly Hills, Pebble Beach, and Los Altos Hills.

### *Linguistic varieties*

Different social groups use diverse linguistic varieties, and as members of a specific speech community the general population has learned to classify speakers accordingly (Trudgill 24). Social stratification is a term used to refer to any hierarchical ordering of groups within a society. In the industrialized societies of the West, social stratification gives rise linguistically to social class dialects (25). The *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* created by Peter Trudgill was intended partly to uncover how speech related to social class, but speech was itself used as one of the criteria for assigning membership in a social class in Trudgill's research:

## Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada

**Type I:** Little formal education, little reading and restricted social contact. (Low income)

**Type II:** Better formal education (usually high school) and/or wider reading and social contacts. (Working class)

**Type III:** Superior education (usually college), cultured background, wide reading, and/or extensive social contacts. (Middle and Upper class)

*Each of these three types was sub-categorized as follows:*

**Type A:** Aged, and/or regarded by the field worker as old-fashioned.

**Type B:** Middle-aged or younger, and/or regarded by the field worker as more modern.

Source: Peter Trudgill

In relating this Atlas to actual groups, researchers have witnessed distinct divisions when comparing Type I to III. Reading skills are dramatically different, especially the type of reading material read by each group. Type III individuals read novels, published research from professionals in their respective employment field, and other technical literature (24). The disparities are a direct reflection of the type of education the student receives, for example Type I

individuals tend to gravitate to less text and more pictures, such as in magazine and tabloids (24). This disparity can infer that the Type III individuals are influenced with Standard English, and Type I is influenced by less formal English, such as in a casual spoken conversation (24).

Peter Cookson states, “Community is usually thought of geographically, but it can also be defined in terms of ethnicity, race, and social class” (Cookson



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32). Social class serves as a route for bringing communities into educational discourses. Cookson provides the concept of circulation mobility, which is defined as the extent to which children’s occupational success depends on their social class origins. Circulation

mobility is present in working class education in which vocational training is greatly emphasized.

Structural mobility explains the extent to which children’s occupational success is due to a change in their social class origins (Cookson 34). Between 1972-1985 there was a decline in structural mobility, whose form differed by gender. For example, the sons of high school fathers had a declining likelihood

of obtaining high-status jobs themselves, whereas the daughters of men of low-status positions had an increasing likelihood of high-status jobs (Cookson 34).

Employment is another important issue, especially within the working class. I have witnessed my working class peers prepare for their careers. Most have a lack of high aspirations for higher paying jobs, and many end up settling for a position that does not require as much language or cognitive skill as in a middle class job. This practice is a common thread throughout the working class, as well as in the lower class.

Children from the corporate and managerial classes are generally either in private schools or in suburban schools limited to members of their social class (Perrucci 184). The privileged classes that control the major corporations and universities keep moving the goalpost whenever too many of the nonprivileged class start to get access to the valued educational credential (188). Schools for the privileged usually provide students with more opportunities for creativity, autonomy, and self-directed activities, whereas schools for the nonprivileged are more concerned with discipline, obedience, and job-related skills (189).

### *The working class*

Several distinguished professors have reported their opinions on the working class and specifically their relationship with the usage of language. Dr. Jim Daniels, a Professor of English at Carnegie Mellon University states, "In fact working class (university) students tend to get lower grades partly because of the carryover from bad public schools" (Daniels 36). Parents have a direct link in their child's educational and language development. Dr. Beverly Moss reports through her research, "Many students, including students of color, look to the college as their ticket to a better life financially than the ones their parents have. Their parents look to academic institutions in the same way" (Daniels 36).

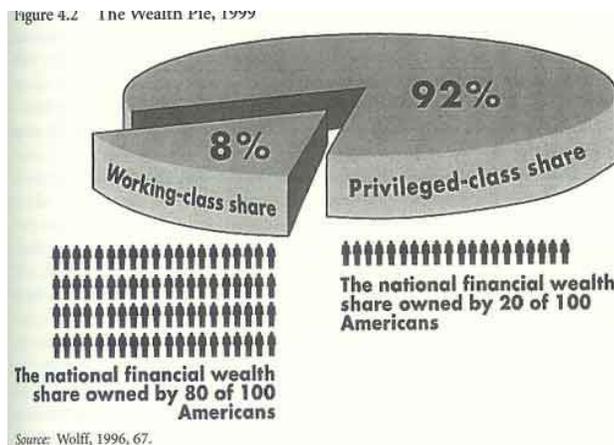
Working class students look to professors to prepare them to become part of the American middle or upper class. For example, when I entered college, I acted as a sponge; trying to learn as many language skills as possible to improve my chances for a better job out of college. The public working class high school I attended was not the best preparation for the middle class jobs I sought after, such as a stockbroker or Realtor, where usage of Standard English is a requirement.

Dr. Lawrence MacKenzie, a Professor of English at the Community College of Philadelphia reviews his research, "Working class identity is rarely viewed as an aspect of cultural pluralism and is left out of the student head counts that give institutions their diversity scores, "Non-middle-class identity is

supposed to be invisible; it is viewed not as a cross-cultural asset but as a condition to be repaired” (MacKenzie 89). MacKenzie, from a middle-class background while in elementary school recalls, “Mr. Engman, my algebra teacher, seemed more real to me because he also drove my school bus” (89). There is an emphasis in his research that there is a necessity of respect in working class education between the educators and the students.

MacKenzie, believes that disrespect is found within the poor and working class population, particularly with regard to their intelligence (89-90). Respect should be provided to everyone

equally, but the truth of the matter is that there is poverty amongst many students, and some middle-class teachers do not want to associate with their



problems, such as language acquisition and usage. This incurs disrespect, which can be seen more often in urban public schools with dense populations of working or lower class students (91).

Dr. Olivia Frey, an Associate Professor of English at St. Olaf College argues that students from the working class are, while position-orientated both at home and at work, and have clearly defined roles determined by their status.

“Lines of authority are firmly established and are rarely subject to rearrangement by negotiation” (Frey 4). The lines of authority are also part of the social mobility argument, which Frey believes is a cause for the lack of Standard or “Cash” English attainment for working class students (5).

### *Social behavior*

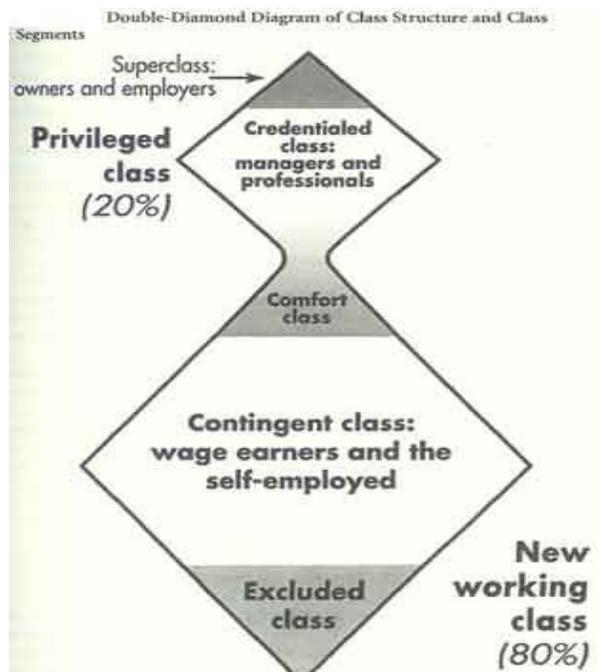
Eliezer Ben-Rafeal confirms that, “social class factors do not exist independently of social behavior generated by language” (Ben-Rafeal 56). As a social relation, Ben-Rafeal believes language produces social life and creates society (56). Many social cliques are formed in elementary school throughout high school, in which the middle class “popular” students are grouped, and the lower class becomes massed together, can be further based by gender or racial background as well as the degree of language acquisition.

Language is made of words and sentences that share different meaning, not necessarily common to all participants in diverse contexts and a regression to these meanings is described as ‘transituational’ of deep significance (56-57).

Transituational in this setting is defined as a passage between the social class groups. Ben-Rafeal’s assumptions were formed by studying various urban and suburban schools in the Chicago area. The same social class grouping can be observed at local Monterey County schools such as Seaside and Monterey High

Schools near Monterey, California, which have clearly distinct social class cliques. Both high schools have a combination of lower, working, and middle class students.

In “Freshman Composition as a Middle Class Enterprise”, Lynn Bloom demonstrates that middle class standards may operate for the worse, particularly



Source: Michael Grimes

when middle class teachers punish lower class students for not being “more” middle class (Frey 314). The “poverty of language” occurs when those students strive to be like those in other classes, often causing segregation from their family background in most cases. If a

person were to leave their social dialect for a better dialect, they also leave their identity behind (314).

Peers pressure each other to be like someone above them in class or social status. To strive to move to the top, language then must meet the standards set by the upper class, which some working class students do not have resources to complete. An example is in public working class elementary schools with out-

dated materials, when compared to middle class elementary schools with a larger budget for new materials (314).

Patrick Courts, an education reform researcher, believes that there may be an element of truth in the commonsense assertion that some communities, most typically middle and upper class communities, place a high premium on print

literacy than do poorer, more

segregated communities (Courts

34). By conceptualizing books as

priceless to those of privileged

status, and those same books may

collect dust by those of less

privileged status. For students to

appreciate middle class standards,

the students would have to either move to an area that they can attend middle

class schools or do much reading and exploration on their own. Both are rarely

achieved due to the lack of family or personal financial support (34).

Fionna Devine states that in all industrial societies, there exists a drive towards efficiency, “proclaimed through the decline of ascribed status (family social background) and the rise of achieved status (educational attainment) for occupational success” (Devine 78). Strong parental aspirations and a college



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education were especially important for African-American students' mobility, yet these resources were not automatically translated into occupational success in a study performed in Oakland, California (78). Locally, on the Monterey Peninsula, students from a working class background are seen at a very young age working in tourist-related businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and in retail stores.

In most cases these same students, later as adults, will more than likely stay in the area and continue to work in the jobs they began their work experience in, such as the hotels or restaurants (78). Even though colleges are abundant on the Monterey Peninsula, and there are occasional influences and encouragements from parents and other individuals, the individual student must be able to step ahead of their "ascribed status" by moving upwards to earn a college education and later a more financially rewarding job. Along their way they will gain the language skills for their career aspirations, and not become "trapped" in the service-related businesses of the Monterey Peninsula earning minimal salaries.

### *Language Acquisition*

Sociolinguistics researchers have looked at variations in children's speech and often, as a result, assign each child to a social class. In doing so, they have

almost always used measures pertaining to the father rather than to the mother, which include his occupation, income, and education (Marks 2). Corresponding characteristics of the mother may be used for classification only if they produce a demonstrably 'higher' rating for the child than those of the father (2). An assumption made by John Marks, a sociolinguistics researcher, is that the decline in the dependence of education on social background among women together with the increase in the dependence of occupational status on education among men provides some support for the claim that American society is becoming more unrealistic in its criteria for allocation (3).

The National Center for Policy Analysis, reports that social class is not the direct effect to lagging language acquisition in low income or working classes. In discussions with students, teachers, and parents they have revealed a multitude of theories, which explain the disparity between the social classes in the United States (NCPA 1). Their explanations range from lingering racial inferiority complexes, to peer pressure, low teacher expectations, curriculum, parental involvement access to information and remnants of racism in schools (1).

The center was puzzled by data that show that middle and upper income black students perform below levels achieved by white students of comparable background in the Los Angeles area (1). Several black students report that peer

pressure keeps them from speaking correct English or outperforming their peers in the classroom (2).

In Salinas, California, and other communities in Monterey County with a high population of minorities, the same situation is also prevalent as in Los Angeles and the rest of the country. Students, in general, need to fit into a group, and in most cases language improvement is held back because that it is not their usage of Standard English is not the “norm” within the group (2). This “norm” of a social class, fits into the NCPA’s theories that state that peer pressure is a cause for language to suffer.

### *Leveling the playing field*

Middle class language can be considered as “Cash” English or Standard English. The working class uses their own version of Cash English, which mainly provides steady job employment and “food on the table” (128). When compared to the middle class, which uses their versions of English to achieve more financial wealth and increase their sphere of influence.

The Northwestern Regional Educational Laboratory reports that students come from cultures that use different, though valid, communication and language systems from what is considered “normal” in the classroom (NREL 1). Sociolinguistics researchers from the laboratory have sought out several schools

in California in which a variety of students that attend are on all levels of the social class ladder. For a variety of reasons, including negative public attitudes and inadequate teaching models, nonstandard working class English speakers often do not effectively learn Standard English in schools (Adams 2). Without competence in Standard English, students will fail academically and face a diminished career, social and life options (2).

An assumption is made by the laboratory that states that many working class students who do learn Standard English do so at a great price of devaluation or rejection of their home or community dialect (3). The rejection of one's dialect can be an adverse situation to one's culture upbringing as well. I personally rejected my working class dialect when I entered junior high. I feel rejection was the best for my situation, since I gained a lot of experiences that my working class language would never have brought, such as employment opportunities in real estate and in business. I do not feel regret from the actions I took, since I have now been influenced who have greatly improved my life, who I would have never met at the working class level. Looking back on the separation from my working class background has provided me a unique experiences and language skills which I now implement entering the working class. The rejection of ones' family background can be positive but very difficult to overcome the obstacles in place by the social class structure.

As a conclusion to the working class discussion, I quote Kevin Rialey an Associate Professor of English at Buffalo State College, who states:

While teaching at a very expensive private college, I often encountered (middle class) students who resisted writing in a personal mode. They named this mode as silly, babyish, and below them, and they couldn't understand why it was part of a college course. They had been astutely trained in the abstract reasoning skills necessary for entrance and acceptance into the middle class. They wanted grades and qualifications, and their middle-class definitions of teaching and learning addicted the way in which I was perceived. My very status as a professor was questioned, because I was not abiding by the illusion maintained in the basic bargain of middle-class school culture (Rialey 127).

Rialey's experience mirrors the working class educational struggles in a middle class environment, which is not equivalent in terms of standards of language acquisition.

### *Education and social class*

Some methods of education for low-income students include holistic education, which uses a movement rooted in the traditions of progressive and humanistic education. Another method of education to capture the best out of economically disadvantaged students is through teacher empowerment (Shapiro 86). Teachers have the opportunity to use the ideals of the middle-class and

blend them into the working class English education; one of the barriers is standardized testing (86). Preparation for the battery of tests consumes much of the time of the teachers, which minimizes the amount of attention provided to each individual student. Many students desire attention, especially when they are in the K-8 grades, and language acquisition is at the most crucial point throughout these years (86). Without proper attention, language suffers, and home or community dialects are placed back into action.

A solution to the division between working and middle class education models is the concept of the “common school,” which would educate both financially disadvantaged and advantaged children under one roof with the same language courses (Kahlenberg 4). This concept supersedes the current “separate” schools for low-income and working class children and the middle class and wealthy children in the other, which are considerably unequal when language is taught at these two levels (4). The idea behind the system is that the educational experience should be designed to meet the “needs of the child.” The system is called tracking and streaming. Tracking seems to be a very progressive idea. The question arises, does it make sense to identify students, which are headed to college, white-collar employment, or mechanical trades (Perrucci 183)? Tracking can be class-blind in most cases, but rather it secludes students that have achieved high academic excellence. This type of seclusion can be seen as a

separation of social classes, in reality is provided for students that have been handpicked for their intelligence rather than social class standing.

Vouchers and charter schools are attractive ideas because they appear to empower parents who have become frustrated with the public school system's failure to educate their children. Many parents in low-income cities have come to view these new ideas as the only way to provide their children with a better education (Perrucci 201).

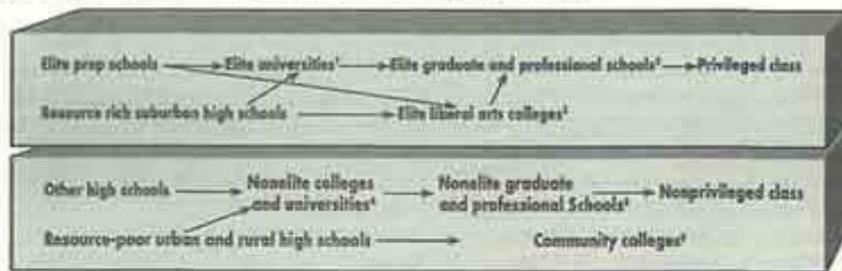
Within urban school districts, schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students receive fewer instructional resources than others attending integrated schools, such as a "common school" (Hammond 256).

UCLA Professor Jeannie Oakes and Harvard Professor Gary Orfield's research has recently confirmed that most minority students are segregated in lower-track classes with larger class sizes, less qualified teachers, and lower-quality curriculum (256). According to Joshua Shenk, a researcher of public schools in the United States and an education reform activist, when principals and teachers are given sufficient authority, urban low income schools can shine as reported through (Shenk 7). Shenk reports, "Recruiting, training, and encouraging good teachers will go a long way toward improving public schools, but not far enough" (8). His interests have brought him to meet with several working class students and witness the disparity between the classes in terms of language

attainment in urban school districts such as in Detroit and Chicago. Another education reform argument is that language acquisition in urban schools has a direct link to the amount of financing the schools have.

There is an assumption made that if a school district is poorly funded, the students who attend will suffer in their academic studies, especially linguistically

Figure 6.2 Two-Tiered System of Schooling for Privilege



- Note: <sup>1</sup> Elite universities: Approximately 20, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Chicago, Stanford, Northwestern, California-Berkeley, Michigan, Wisconsin, UCLA, North Carolina, Columbia, Duke, Pennsylvania.  
<sup>2</sup> Elite graduate and professional schools: Approximately 15, including Harvard, California-Berkeley, Yale, Chicago, Wisconsin-Madison, Michigan, Columbia, Stanford, Princeton, Cornell, Illinois-Urbana, Pennsylvania.  
<sup>3</sup> Elite liberal arts colleges: Approximately 30, including Amherst, Bates, Bowdoin, Brown, Bryn Mawr, Reed, Swarthmore, Tufts, Colgate, Smith, Wellesley, Williams, Oberlin, Hamilton, Franklin and Marshall, Wesleyan of Connecticut, Barnard, Brandeis, Mount Holyoke, Haverford, Hobart, Skidmore, Union.  
<sup>4</sup> Nonelite colleges and universities: there are approximately 2,100 schools in this group.  
<sup>5</sup> Nonelite graduate and professional schools: there are approximately 200 schools in this group.  
<sup>6</sup> Community colleges: there are 1,388 schools in this group.

Source: Michael Grimes

(Hammond 9). On the other hand, schools, which are mostly in suburbs with a large population of middle class families, have the facilities and teachers to provide adequate English language education (9).

The concept of mobility is developed from the experience of poorly funded schools, in which the students are nearly incapable to achieve middle class status, and the end result is immobility (9). Evidence from recent research

on the effects of school expenditures indicates that higher per pupil expenditures for instruction is associated with higher levels of student achievement (Perrucci 192).

Another assumption is that schools engage in a number of practices that favor status quos (Nettels 232). A status quo is defined as the existing state of affairs. Middle and upper class English-speaking students have access to a curriculum that ultimately allows them to progress through the educational pipeline. Low income ethnic minority students are less likely to participate in a college preparatory curriculum and more likely to drop out in significant numbers (232). This is true especially in predominantly working class schools, where the motivation for students is “just to get a job” after high school (232).

An education model of how individuals gain values and respect of their own experience and know their own voices is based on Monolingual education (Macedo 122). This type of education is part of the way that schools produce a weakening sense of the present and future for minority low income students. The education model denies students the basic capacity to express and produce significant meaning, in insisting on particular, and often unknown, language forms for these students (Macedo 122). Another problem related to this is that teachers delegitimize the language experiences that students bring with them

into the classroom and school, negate rather than make meaningful, the cultural experiences of subordinate linguistic groups.

In a survey of 3,000 employers in Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles, Jean Anyon found that only five to ten percent of the jobs in central-city areas for non-college graduates require very few work credentials or cognitive skills (Anyon 4). This means that the job prospects for workers who lack skills in reading, writing, performing arithmetic calculations, and operating a computer are slim. Almost all of the students interviewed by Anyon seemed to be in an oppositional stance to their teachers; most were aware that they are in an environment, which is hostile, and aggressively rejecting of them (4). The type of environment can compare to the social cliques formed within the middle class, and working class to fit in the "norm: and not oppose higher authority such as teachers can create lower expectations of language acquisition.

### *In terms of education*

Current research on education reform centers on power and institutions. Within this parameter are the examination of social institutions categories that include racism, sexism, classism, and the purpose of a model for changing the institution to embody partnership principles.

The predominant critic of education reform is bell hooks, a Professor of English at the City University of New York. hooks critiques social class in terms of education in her book, "where we stand: class matters." Hooks embraces her cultural heritage and reflects back that one should not reject one's working class background. She begins her discussion, "As a nation we are afraid to have a dialogue about class even though the ever-widening gap between rich and poor has already set the stage for ongoing and sustained class warfare" (hooks i).

hooks attended Stanford University where class was spoken of behind-the-scenes. The sons and daughters from the rich, famous, or notorious families were identified while she was attending Stanford (32). Leland Stanford's foundational beliefs uncovered that he had imagined different classes meeting on common ground at Stanford University. Hooks, on the other hand, learned how deeply individuals with class privilege feared and hated the working classes at Stanford. Hearing classmates express contempt and hatred toward people who did not come from the "right" backgrounds shocked her (35).

At Stanford, hooks encountered for the first time black diaspora in which the differences of the working class culture clashes with the middle class and upper income environment: "Of the few black professors present, the vast majority were from African or Caribbean backgrounds. Elites themselves, they were only interested in teaching other elites. Poor folks like myself, with no

background to speak of, were invisible" (35). Hooks continues her narrative of her educational experience describing how ambition affects the social behavior of working class individuals.

The pursuit of wealth may breed greed and envy but it may also breed ambition (85). And while young students are fueled with the ambition to get ahead and make as much money as possible, all attention can be deflected away from emotional lack that may affect working class children (85). hooks demonstrates this by reflecting on her educational background:

When I chose to attend a "fancy" college rather than a state school close to home, I was compelled to confront class differences in new and different ways. Like many working-class parents, my folks were often wary of the new ideas I brought into their lives from ideas learned at school or from books...I did not understand that they were also afraid of me becoming a different person - someone who did not speak their language, hold on to their beliefs and their ways (143).

As many other working class students, hooks did not take long to find that crossing class boundaries was not easy. Working class values were not the same as her college peers from a more privileged class. hooks as many other "non-privileged" students resented their assumptions about the poor and

working class (hooks 144). Hooks continues her discussion of working class issues in education in many of her other published works.

From her film “cultural criticism and transformation,” hooks describes the structure of popular culture theoretical paradigms, transgression in a diasporic culture, as well as her need to remain bonded with the working class. The issues that surround the unfavorable working class education is a differing sense of agency and that the sense of entitlement is not culture. hooks affirms that students are brilliant in any setting, which relates to the degree of language acquisition the students receive in the same note.

Above all there is a need for transformation through critical teaching and literacy in working class schools. As an objectification, hooks boldly states that it is a myth that dollars matter in schools, rather the belief is that teachers and pedagogy are in need of improvement. The improvement can be sought through a higher degree teacher development in credential programs and the development within the school department in which faculty are open to discuss their views and difficulties of language acquisition pedagogies that are in use.

### *A hope for equality*

Many factors can affect the education aspirations of students negatively affected the social class structure. Sometimes low income students’ educational

aspirations are reduced because they receive little encouragement from peers and parents in their social clique. Although researchers have noted that good grades may at least sometimes lead to good outcomes, it is also true that even the poorest students from the Ivy League share in the general prosperity, and do better than the best students from other schools (hooks 195). Earning power rises steadily with each increase in wealth and prestige of the school, which relates to the discussion of the comparison between funding of working class schools and the degree of language acquisition (199). bell hooks concludes her discussion of working class and social inequality by affirming her relationship with the working class:

My class allegiance and solidarity will always be with working people, folk of all classes, who see money as useful inasmuch as it enhances our well-being. The time will come when wealth will be redistributed, when the workers of the world will once again unite – standing for economic justice – for a world where we can all have enough to live full and well (164).

Can there ever be an educational equality for all students that is class-blind? The poverty of language is overlooked in its affect on language and the relationship of social class. In review of the several authors, professors, and research groups, problems with the “poverty of language in education” include

low requirements for cognitive skills in the workplace the minimal funding of education in working class neighborhoods, and the lack of reading and writing skills attained by the working class. These problems are in the process of lengthy reform and throughout the various studies reviewed, all urge for the best education and language acquisition for every child regardless of class.

*Carpe Diem.*

# *Appendix*

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# *Capstone Research Prospectus*

## **SECTION 1**

### **Working Title and Description**

The working title of my capstone project is “The Poverty of Language in Education”. What is the poverty of language? In researching this topic, many researchers who study sociolinguistics have reported that language is affected by social class. Researchers have reported that the lower and working-class struggle more frequently in the attainment of standard or “cash” English when compared to middle- or upper-class students.

After reviewing several sources, problems with the “poverty of language in education” include low requirements for cognitive skills in the workplace, lack of reading and writing skills attained by the working-class, and the minimal funding of education in working-class neighborhoods. The capstone research will focus on K-12 schools in California between the early-1990s to 2000.

The prospective audience is educators and students that are interested in the social class dynamics of the K-12 educational system in California. The contribution will include a clarification of the pending and on-going issues that are negatively affecting students of working-class backgrounds. The research contained will be including previous studies from college and university

professors about sociolinguistics, and will be compiled into a format easily read by students planning to teach or that are interested in the subject.

The goal is for the audience to come away with a dialogue of education and social class issues that are relevant to nearly every K-12 school in California, as well as knowledge of the social structure of educational institutions. The research is also important to further revise the current pedagogy of the classroom, especially in locations that are socioeconomically distressed. I learned in much research about education reform that the only way to make a change is by knowing more about it and applying the steps to create it.

## **SECTION 2**

### **Learning Outcomes**

*MLO 1 Critical Communication Skills:* Ability to communicate critically and empathically in both oral and written contexts, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Through the research I will apply all four principals of the MLO 1 in the process of gathering the information and presenting it to my specific audience as well as the general public at the HCOM Capstone Festival.

*MLO 2 Research Skills:* Acquire, evaluate, interpret, synthesize, apply, document, and present knowledge gained through diverse and appropriate methods of inquiry in the context of an analysis of an issue, questions, or problem. I will use

several primary sources which will be analyzed in a contextualized format that I will produce for my capstone research on the poverty of language.

*MLO 7 Historical Analysis:* Ability to actively engage complex multicultural pasts is integrating historical understanding with historical thinking skills. I will use primary and secondary sources to gather information on the history of socioeconomic issues in education and will combine the information with the skills I gained through my education at HCOM to compile a thorough explanation of the effects of socioeconomic status on language attainment.

### **SECTION 3**

#### **Research Questions**

- 1) How does language produce social life and create society according to researchers?
- 2) How do the various social groups use different linguistic varieties?
- 3) What types of schools are negatively affected by sociolinguistics?
- 4) How are schools implementing programs to “level the field” in language acquisition?
- 5) How are students of color affected by the social structure of educational institutions?
- 6) What defines the social class structure?
- 7) How is social behavior generated by language?
- 8) What are middle-class standards of communication and language systems?
- 9) Who are the “silent” in the discussion of sociolinguistics?
- 10) What is “cash” English?

## SECTION 4

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## SECTION 5

### Research Strategy

I have completed partial research of sociolinguistics in Social History of the English Language (HCOM 321) course. Research included a broad overview of social class issues in education, which is developed with the integration of sociolinguistics.

I will compile the primary and secondary book sources through the CSUMB Voyager Library Catalog into my research. Due to the scarcity of research on sociolinguistics, I will and have requested books from other libraries via the CSUMB Document Delivery system.

The journal databases I will also use are the Expanded Academic ASAP and Ebsco Academic Search. I also have used ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) for a more comprehensive search on socioeconomics and its effects on education. The internet will also be used for current data of California schools. The internet and journals will provide primary and secondary sources, and will be validated for scholarship.

## **SECTION 6**

### **Form of Capstone**

The presentation platform for my research will be in the form of an in-depth research paper with visuals. The research paper will split up in sections for easier referencing and absorption of information. The visuals will be graphs and pictures of various schools and students, which will assist the reader to better understand the various concepts of social class structures and sociolinguistics. I have not yet decided to present through a PowerPoint presentation or a table display at the HCOM Festival.

## **SECTION 7**

### **Challenges and Questions**

I believe the topic is narrowly defined at its conception and will probably need revision due to the scarcity of research of sociolinguistics in California K-12 schools. I will need assistance framing my topic analytically into proposed sections that will take shape of the research paper. Another concern is if I should perform personal interviews with students that are affected by sociolinguistics due to the restrictive timeframe in place for completion of the HCOM Capstone process. Another obstacle for conducting personal interview is the newly formed Committee for the Protection for Human Subjects that must approve all research

on human subjects, which may delay completion of the interviews in a timely manner.

## **SECTION 8**

### **CSUMB Library Archive**

I have decided to archive my Capstone with the CSUMB Library. The research will hopefully be able to assist other students in their research in sociolinguistics, social class issues, and education reform.

## *Capstone Reflection*

The process of completing the Senior HCOM Capstone was rapidly paced and exciting. Witnessing one-third of my proposed capstone project being scrubbed out due to the lengthy and bureaucratic Human Subjects Review was the downside to my Capstone experience. My proposed section included personal research I have completed over a year ago. The research included interviews with local high school students who responded to questions on how the social class structure relates to their education.

In the desertion of this section and a rigid deadline of drafts due, I decided to add a review of the controversial cultural critic, bell hooks, as well as research that is based on education and the social class structure. The addition of these sections effected my outcome of connecting current and local research into my Capstone project to provide a much more valid and understandable conclusion.

Meeting with my Capstone Advisor, Dr. Qun Wang helped me define my Capstone goals and stay on track with my original intention of bringing together a definition of the social class structures and the struggles of language acquisition in education. Another motivation and assistance was from my group members. Even though nearly all of our topics were unrelated, most were based on education pedagogies in one way or another.

Above all I enjoyed the experience of writing and researching a topic that interests me and that I will continue work on throughout graduate school and probably my intended career in the education field. The Human Communication major has provided me a solid foundation to continue my research with. With the support and guidance of the faculty this Capstone project could probably have never been as useful as it currently stands.