DO YOU FEEL ME?:
ENGAGING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES
IN AN ENGLISH COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

THESIS: WHAT CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES ARE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES LEARNING IN AN ENGLISH COMPOSITION COURSE?

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This study examined curriculum and instructional strategies that would address the educational needs of African American males in a college composition course. Traditional roles of didactic teacher expecting students to absorb facts are unbeneﬁcial for African American males. As I began teaching a composition course, with a predominant population of African American male students, I understood the modern curriculum model was ineffective in engaging students and developing academic and personal potential. I searched for another curriculum, which accommodated Afrocentric ideals of the African American community and the learning styles of the men. Central to Afrocentric values are cooperation, a spirit of collectivity, relationships, and respect; these values can be incorporated into
a post-modern approach to curriculum development for a college composition course. The question, ‘What is College Level Writing’ posed by Sullivan and Tinberg, provided four principles that college writing possess. These principles were used to evaluate whether components of Afrocentric and Doll’s curriculum supported college writing skills. Hip hop is one literary life experience to utilize in the classroom. The learner is asked to reflect, interact and question cultural and academic concepts through discussions and student based learning. Incorporation of Afrocentric ideals through dialogue, alternative viewpoints and information strengthen instruction and learning. Doll encourages thinking and self-identity growth. By utilizing Doll post-modern curriculum, Sullivan’s four principles of college composition and Afrocentricism for my African American male students, I am able to design a culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Thesis Statement:** To develop, implement, and evaluate a culturally appropriate yet academically challenging English composition course for incarcerated African American offenders who have successfully completed requirements for the G.E.D.
Introduction

Not every child can say they were kicked out of preschool at the age of four. But Kevin can. He collapsed the legs on cots during naptime. He poked other students while they were working. Kevin was into everyone and everything. Finally, Kevin’s mother was told to take Kevin and not return. The women at daycare said they could not handle Kevin. He was too much action. This was just the first time Kevin left school.¹

The issues African American males experience in the American society are well documented. The Kaiser Family Foundation presents grim statistics on African American male’s position in America. For example, 20% of African American males between the ages of 15 and 29 live in poverty. African American men are 14 % of the young male population but 40% of the incarcerated population. They are more likely to die a violent death than graduate from college (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006, p. 1-2). Moving from the societal level to the institution of public schools, we see general failure of academic success. More African American high school males are in lower track classes (Oakes in Ornstein, Behan-Horenstein, & Pajak, 2003, p. 369) and expelled at higher rates than other high school students (Royster, 2007, p. 157). Many African American male students are not expected to perform

¹ Kevin’s story is a composite of the men in my composition course. The fictional story is to represent the real world, and humanize the research and statistics of the academic world.
well by their teachers. The classroom often may become an uncaring extension of society’s negative view of young African American men.

The students in my English composition classes are the living embodiment of the proceeding statistics. The experiences of most African American males in the educational and dominant cultures were negative. Many students dropped out before high school graduation. Teachers were not interested in the men’s culture and demonstrated a lack of concern for the men as people. A majority of the African American male students grew up in poverty. Shut out of well paying employment, they chose illegal means to earn money. Now incarcerated with an opportunity to earn a college degree, the students entered the college composition classroom with a wide range of skills, needs, and attitudes. They recognize the composition class as a promise for the offer of a second chance. The students view the education they receive in prison is vital to breaking the cycle of the poor choices made in their lives.

As I began my teaching assignment for the small, liberal arts university, I looked at the course description and realized I faced a fundamental question. “Should I continue to use the curriculum and instructional tools (worksheets, didactic instruction and literature outside their life experiences) that failed the men earlier in their education? Or should I search for something different?” The research I read described a
lack of success when modern curriculum methods were used in schools. The teacher as knowledge dispenser, read a little, do a worksheet or a report, working alone, appeared unable to provide the learning opportunities the African American male student’s required. Courses in a graduate secondary education program exposed me to new information. Discussions with my professors, fellow students, and the men in my previous composition course affirmed my intuition: strategies and theories were needed to transform the learning for my offender/students. Once I made the decision to change the curriculum, I needed to search for curriculum materials and instructional strategies to support the needs, interests, and life experiences of my students.

The following questions drove my academic exploration:

a.) What elements of curriculum and instruction are most effective for African American males?

b.) How can instructors effectively engage the African American male in a college English composition course?

c.) What, if any, role does African American masculinity play in the classroom?

d.) What instructional strategies should a teacher enact to effectively provide literacy instruction for African American males in his/her classroom?
I will begin with a discussion of the issues hindering African American male’s learning. The development of African American masculinity as a member of a non-dominant culture is examined. I move to an exploration of attitudes of the educational system and previous curriculum implemented. This research has shown some elements of the educational environment to be harmful to an African American males educational growth. To address these issues, several principles appear to attend to the requirements of an African American male in a classroom setting. The post-modern curriculum designed by William Doll, Jr. is examined and the benefits for African American males presented. This pedagogy is the theoretical foundation for my curriculum. I conclude by introducing the Afrocentric principles and show how to incorporate them into curriculum and instructional methods.

Instructional strategies were selected by the elements of the post-modern curriculum. The paper then goes on to examine implementation of the selected curriculum and instructional methods in a college composition course. Writing Workshop, Afrocentric principles, and hip hop were the instructional strategies forwarded by this investigation. By applying the selected instructional strategies in a college composition classroom, African American men appear to engage in writing in a more effective meaningful manner.
Chapter 1

College Composition

Kevin loved his mom. No question about that. But he missed having a dad. The American culture says you are scary. The streets say you must be tough. How do you be an African American male? What do you do with your feelings of anger? Or the confusion from the different messages received? Kevin felt the pain in his mother’s struggle to feed and clothe her children. She was giving Kevin and his siblings everything she could. It is hard for a young man like Kevin to figure out what to do.

In order to develop a curriculum and recommend instructional strategies to support the learning of African American males in an introductory composition course at the college level, I analyzed textbooks that were used in the introductory composition course at my home institution and the textbook used by colleagues in the prison system. Sullivan’s question (2006) “What is college-level writing?” received responses from scholars and teachers of high school and college level composition. The responses generated by Sullivan’s question framed my study. The question has “confounded, eluded, and divided teachers of English at almost every level of our profession for many years (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, xiii). Moreover, “it is a questions that is much more layered and multidimensional than first appears” (xiii). Sullivan’s collection of articles honors the differences that are
evident in the field yet reveals commonalities. Several issues that bear directly on this study are brought into sharp focus:

- Strong writers develop only over a long period of time and with considerable support from their teachers and learning communities
- There needs to be attention paid to the development of student voice
- Meaning develops in the shared context of reader and writer
- The quality of the writing assignments plays a role in the quality of the product.

The contradictions and fissures in the profession center on differences in program goals and on the impact of socioeconomic differences on student achievement. Again, these two issues lie at the heart of my study.

Sullivan answers the question, “what is college-level writing?” with the following statement:

A student should write in response to an article, essay, or reading selection that contains at least some abstract content [, which] should demonstrate [...a] willingness to evaluate the ideas and issues carefully[, s]ome skill at analysis and higher-level thinking[, t]he ability to shape and organize material effectively[, and t]he ability to follow the standard rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, p. 16-17).

The definition by Sullivan identifies four important abilities a composition student should master: responding to literature, evaluating ideas, analyzing
ideas and issues, and organizing ideas into an articulate paper with proper conventions of grammar and spelling. His definition of college writing guides inquiry to three areas:

a.) What are the writing requirements for introductory college composition courses?

b.) What conditions support African American male student’s learning, and?

c.) What instructional strategies are most effective to support African American male learning?

These three questions assisted the instructor in designing a curriculum for introductory college level composition course. The four writing requirements—response, evaluation, analysis, and organization—define the skills the students need on completion of the college composition course.

Once the particular skills are identified, the instructor must consider the learning styles of the students in order to design appropriate learning experiences to ensure that student master the identified skills.

One vital objective of first year composition appears to be the development of thinking processes, such as analysis and critique.

Good writing can only be the result of good reading and thinking, and this, to me, is one of the foundational principles of college-level work. Furthermore, the ability to discuss and evaluate abstract ideals is, for me, the single most important variable in considering whether a student is capable of doing

In other words, college composition courses must include:

Evidence of the writer’s critical thinking; grappling with multiple, perhaps contradictory, sources and ideas; questioning both authority and one’s own convictions; experimentation with genre, language, and other attributes of form, style, persona, and voice (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, p. 83).

Textbooks used in composition courses typically ask students to analyze literature. Students are expected to isolate themes and concepts and then write essays to explain their thinking. For example, one book selected by a different college composition department for introductory courses lacks the rich variety of literature to base writing. In the textbook *Everything is an Argument* (Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz and Walters, 2004), the authors focus on writing persuasive essays, specifically framing and developing the argument. The components of an argument are presented, defined, and discussed. Within the informational text, paragraphs are imbedded in the text to serve as examples. At the end of the informational text are questions to create exercises for the skills introduced in the chapter. Additionally, some chapters provide directions and concepts to be included in the design of a particular argument.

The authors provide a formulaic process to write an argument, suggesting that writing is a decontextualized and technical skill. Terms and
elements are supplied for the student to understand and incorporate into the argument. There are systematic directions on how to formulate the argument with the proper tools for each genre of argumentation. The writer’s creativity and voice are stifled to ensure the proper elements are used in the student’s arguments. Lacking in the design of the book is the opportunity for the readers and writers to be a part of the design of the learning processes.

The instructor and the textbook control knowledge. The students must work to learn the proscribed information instead of creating knowledge mutually with the readings and the teacher. The goal of this textbook does not appear to be critical thinking, but rather, the memorization of the components for each genre of argumentation.

At my college, the instructor of the other composition 102 courses chose the *Literature and the Writing Process* (McMahan, Day and Funk, 2007). The text is presumed to answer the question, what is college composition. The editors selected representative texts, selected from the traditional literary canon, to prompt the writing process, which stresses prewriting, writing, revising and editing. To assist students with the writing process, the editors chose the outline format as the conceptual framework to assist students to write analytical papers on literary criticism. For example, a section on short story discusses how to read a short story. The editors provide a definition of specific literary devices. These include, but are not limited to, imagery,
symbolism, structure, point of view and other literary components. After the students memorize the definition, they are to read the short story. The editors identify the literary device within the selected short story example. The authors present a question about the literary device used in the short story. The final step asks students to write about the application of the literary device in the short story chosen by the authors. A comprehensive explanation by the editors provide the steps the learner must follow to learn the literary device. The thinking is composed and directed by the editors. Such a tightly controlled response to literature results in formulaic writing with no place for the writing student’s voice.

Literature is a key element in the textbook for college composition courses. As Sullivan was previously quoted, “a student should write in response to an article, essay, or reading selection that contains at least some abstract content....” (Sullivan in Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006, p. 16). Thus, the selection of the literature for the text is critical. In addition to the short stories selected by the editors, poetry, and drama are also included. The editors selected works from well-respected authors such as Hawthorne, Zora Neale Hurston, Hemmingway, and Updike. In the section of poetry, the editors chose works by such poets as Keats, Wordsworth, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sandberg, and Dickinson. Drama by Socrates, Ibsen, Luis Valdez, and August Wilson is selected. Writers of color and women are
included, but are not major figures in the textbook. The genre missing from this textbook is any nonfiction writing, such as essays.

The willingness of the student to examine main beliefs and be open to scrutinize those beliefs is part of composition metacognition (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006). Instructors design assignments and activities to help develop critical thinking skills. This educational focus requires challenging reading materials that relate to the student’s life experiences.

The development of an appropriate and relevant curriculum centers on the selection of the articles, essays, books, and other literary texts since there is a symbiotic relationship between reading and writing (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006). Writers must read text that contains abstract hypotheses with which to interact (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006). They must also engage in discussion, an important step in the pre-writing phase of writing. By talking with others in class, students hear alternative points of view. Class dialogue provides an opportunity to form and defend, reflect and modify the abstract ideas and principles in texts. The instructor utilizes Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to scaffold the writing growth of the students. By focusing on the ZPD, a teacher scaffolds instruction by beginning with a skill the student mastered on his or her own. Then the student is supported as they work on a new concept built upon the foundation of the mastered skill. Scaffolding the thinking process from reading to
dialogue to writing prepares a composition student to take up the blank page and write.

Professionally written texts introduce the important academic writing and thinking skills expected of college composition students. Instructors choose anthologies to provide examples of how the professional writers presented their views, analyzed others, interpreted various concepts and forward a logical, well-organized composition. Students are helped to recognize the writing techniques of the authors and apply them to their own writing. If students are unable to relate to the various texts selected by the editors, the selection of the text is inappropriate for responding to literature, evaluating ideas, and analyzing ideas. Many first year students are unfamiliar with the academic reading and writing they will encounter in college courses. I question whether most students, especially students in the prison system, possess the life experiences to comprehend texts included in most anthologies. Composition texts designed for an introductory composition course may not be able to be accessible for all students. Not only could students’ life experiences hinder access to the concepts Sullivan selected, but also the structure of the text inhibits the critical thinking of the student. Presenting information in a manner to be memorized or inserted into a formulaic paper does not contribute to the development of the critical thinking skills of evaluating, analyzing and responding to literature.
Furthermore, the student’s voice is also stifled in this prescribed method of compositional writing.

Chapter 2

Writing Workshop

Kevin entered school hopeful, but that preschool exit was in the back of his head. School seems okay, but reading is hard. So is following all the rules of sitting still, raising your hand to speak, and understanding the expectations of the teacher. Kevin feels a little confused. But nothing too big that Kevin is too worried. Until he reaches middle school. Suddenly Kevin is placed in the lowest track classes. Teachers don’t expect too much from him. In fact, they expect trouble from Kevin.

In the following section, I will present how components of the Writing Workshop (Freedman, 1994, Graves, 2003, National Writing Project (NWP), & Nagin, 2006), incorporate Sullivan’s four objectives — development over time, student voice, shared meaning, and the relationship between the quality of the assignment and the quality of the writing produced—for college level composition courses. I begin by exploring the theories that ground the Writing Workshop before demonstrating how each of Sullivan’s four ideals for writing is present in the Writing Workshop. I also discuss how the Writing
Workshop accommodates Afrocentric learning elements found to be valuable for the learning culture of African American students. This section of the thesis nests the writing fundamentals of Sullivan within the well-researched and implemented pedagogy of the Writing Workshop to provide an instructional strategy for college level writers.

Writing Workshop Concept

The Writing Workshop concept of writing entered the educational environment through writing research. The research was based, in part, on L. S. Vygotsky’s theory that “human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (Vygotsky, 1978, in Freedman, 1994, p. 2). Vygotsky studied children’s ability to learn language. He developed the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to explain how students are often able to complete complex tasks with assistance suggesting that designing tasks in the ZPD might propel student learning.

The implication of Vygotsky’s theory is that in order to learn to write, students need to be engaged in social interactions that center around aspects of the task of writing that they cannot accomplish alone but that they accomplish with assistance. Vygotsky’s theory, explaining the intimate relationship between social interaction and learning, guide our studies of the socially interactive nature of the learning process and helped us begin to tie our findings to the learner’s intellectual processes (Freedman, 1994, p. 2).
The Writing Workshop concept was the result of studying the process of writing. (Freedman, 1994). Educators interested in the Vygotsky ideals studied what writers do when they write. Donald Graves (2003) studied young children as they learned to write; Lucy Calkins (1994) investigated published writers. Mem Fox described the results of their work as follows:

Research on how writer’s write has been illuminating. We choose our own topics, decide our own purposes, target our own audiences, take our time, draft and redraft, talk over writing with trusted friends and colleagues, and publish our pieces if we’re lucky (Fox, 1993, p. 1).

Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, Nancy Atwell, Reggie Routman, Ralph Fletcher, and others applied the findings on what writers do and created the Writing Workshop concept. Donald Graves’ work is the foundation for the Writing Workshop in the classroom.

Graves (2003) recommended several components that supported the development of writing capability: conferences between teacher and student and between student and student, revision for meaning, development of a point of view, and student selection of writing-to-writing instruction. Each element in the writing process was to assist the writer in the intellectual process of thinking and writing. An examination of each element of the writing process demonstrates Vygotsky’s theory of social learning through interaction with the writing community. In what follows, I explain the components of writing workshop.
Conferences

Conferences, a relatively new feature in the teaching of writing, are the core instructional method for the Writing Workshop.

Conferences stimulate children. They stimulate because the child does the work. Children teach, solve problems, answer impossible questions, or discover now information hidden in the recesses of experience. The children can do this when their teachers know it is the child’s action that produces the learning (Graves, 2003, p. 199).

The conferences are where the Vygotsky theory is utilized. Through the social interaction of the conference, the writer works on the components of writing conference and “also helps to overcome much of the artificiality of classroom writing where topics are remote and irrelevant, and writing quickly becomes a lonely burden” (Everson, 1991, p. 10). Writers learn about writing as they read their writing and conferences with the teacher and other learning community members. Conferences accomplish several objectives:

- The thinking aloud prepares a student to think about their writing.
- The writer is asked to form a knowledge base on the writing and each member’s feedback.
- Thinking is verbalized. In talking about ideas and opinions, additional thoughts developed to improve the piece of the writer.
- Students can verbally form opinions, and receive feedback about the writing. The student must then further strive to achieve mastery the writing element.

- Writing elements are couched at the beginning of the conference. At the end, the element has been taught through the writer’s personal work (Graves, Calkins, Atwell, Fletcher, Routman).

The objective of the introductory college composition course is to develop thinking and writing skills through discussion and writing (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006).

**Cooperative Learning**

Writing Workshop incorporates a cooperative learning component to its instructional strategies. Cooperative learning is very important to students, as they become middle school, high school and college writers. Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels express the necessity to write and discuss writing:

> Writing comes closer to these kids’ urgent personal concerns than any other school subject. After all, in learning to write, students are invited—compelled, really—to make sense of the world, to weigh ideas, to explore values, to find their own conventions, to invent voices, styles, personae on a page—and then to test everything out be communicating with others, sharing writing, and exchanging responses (Zemelman and Daniels in Calkins, 1994. p. 158).
The spaces for the kind of communication described by Zemelman and Daniels occur during conferencing, peer editing, and developing a learning community.

Writers are able to risk, make mistakes and grow in a supportive Writing Workshop environment. “We cannot write well if we are afraid to put ourselves on the page. We cannot write well if we are afraid to let our individual voice stand out from other voices” (Calkins, 1994, p. 143). To accomplish this task, “I strongly believe one of our primary roles as educators is to ensure that shared learning experiences (shared writing, reading, and scaffolded conversations) are a major component of everything we teach” (Routman, 2005, p. 75). The inclusion of conferencing, peer writing groups and other writer interaction contribute to creating a cooperative learning environment.

One of the benefits of the cooperative nature of the writing workshop is the ability to incorporate the Afrocentric principles into the instructional setting. A more in-depth examination of Afrocentric principles in relation to a post-modern curriculum is forwarded in that section of this paper. Yet, a brief application of the Afrocentric principles to the Writing Workshop elements highlights the value of the Writing Workshop and Afrocentric concepts to the African American student. Cooperation is one of the Afrocentric principles in the African American culture. The principles of
collaboration, and interdependency are two specific values where cooperation is necessary. These Afrocentric principles can be applied to instructional strategies. When Carter (2005) wished to encourage higher achievement in her African American male students, she selected cooperative activities to improve learning. “I included more opportunities for small-group learning activities, literature circles, and projects. The young men reported that they liked working in groups” (Carter, 2005, p. 199). Using cooperative activities in the Writing Workshop supports the Afrocentric learning styles of African American male writers.

Revising

Revising is challenging work for an inexperienced writer. The term revision is defined differently in a Writing Workshop context. The traditional view of revising is to change errors in spelling, eliminate grammar and punctuation mistakes and any from issues. Revision polishes the paper for publication by focusing on the conventions of grammar and punctuation. Revision in the Writing Workshop involves the student strengthening meaning, selecting stronger words, or moving sentences and paragraphs in the work to improve the text. The traditionally concept of revision held by students and teachers, Graves refers to as, “Put[ting] a good manicure on the corpse” (Graves, 2003, p. 4). That concept of revision may hinder writing growth as it only focuses on conventions. In contrast, the Writing Workshop
conference encourages the writer and teacher focus on the craft of a piece of writing. Fox defines craft as,

_Craft_ means understanding the nature and importance of leads and endings; of showing, not telling; of sharpening and tightening; of structure and focus; of purpose and audience; and of the conventions. _Craft_ means being able to put those understandings into practice. _Craft_ means struggling in that battlefield between the brain and the hand until the best possible draft is achieved (Fox, 1993, p. 20).

The writer has an opportunity to talk about craft and identify strengths and weakness in the revision process of Writing Workshop (Graves, 2003).

**Point of view**

Developing a student’s point of view is a lengthy process. Graves states:

Understanding point of view is a lifetime journey both of reading and writing. Under the best circumstances, the learner develops her own point of view in the midst of recognizing other ways of thinking (Graves, 2003, p. x).

Conferences are the place where the writer’s point of view is nurtured.

Sharing writing with peers in conferencing groups, or with an older, more experienced writing mentor, supports the development of point of view. “In other words, classroom writing instruction should provide an environment where students are able to externalize their thoughts grandly, freely, and completely” (Everson, 1991, p. 10). The exposure to point of view from professional texts provides examples for the developing writer. By writing in a workshop setting, the writer is afforded time to write, try new ideas, and
receive feedback and support as they work through their ZPD to acquire a point of view.

**Topic choice**

A writer creates with understanding and passion when the writer selects their own writing topic. To allow students to select their own writing topic empowers writers

When students have an authentic purpose for their writing—...they pay attention differently to instruction. Our students know best which topics and purposes for writing matter most to each of them. Letting them choose their own topics and set their own purposes makes it a lot more likely they’ll be engaged and receptive (Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001, p. 10).

The selection of the writing topic provides the student with the ability to write from meaningful experiences or held opinions. In turn, the student is engaged in the learning and supported to work in their ZDP.

Writing instruction, applying concepts from language acquisition theory of Vygotsky, placed the process of writing at the center of the Writing Workshop. The Writing Workshop provides the support, modeling, cooperative work and environment for a writer to work in their ZDP. Barbara Everson summarizes the Writing Workshop ideals and Vygotsky’s theory when she states:

Writing is a synthesis or pulling together of ideas, images, disarrayed facts, and fragments of experiences. It should be taught naturally. It should be necessary for something. And it should allow the time and space and cooperation necessary for
the composition to develop into worthwhile product (Everson, 1991, p. 11).

Writing Workshop and Sullivan’s Writing Principles

The first component of Sullivan’s essentials is “strong writers develop only over a long period of time and with considerable support from their teachers and learning communities” (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, p. xiv). The cooperative learning component of a writing workshop provides the time and support Sullivan requires. “Students . . . feel a greater sense of control and competence when they are actively working collaboratively. And they feel greater motivation if they believe that they are being challenged at an appropriate level “ (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, p. 214). The encouragement from the teacher and peers create a positive writing environment for the writer.

A study by Jocson (2006) documented the benefits of a supportive environment within the Writing Workshop for African American urban youth. The high school poets were placed into groups with one adult leader for each group. In describing the cooperative work of the groups, Jocson states, “[T]he engagement of the poems did not end on submission of the draft, but continued through inquiry-based discussions, group writing workshops, and a public reading event....” (Jocson, 2006, p. 253). The groups provided the liberty to cooperatively process the poems each student composed. Cooperative learning is an important element for the growth of
writers and African American males can benefit from the cooperative atmosphere.

Sullivan and Tinberg (2006) agree with the importance of cooperative activities through the conference and peer writing groups in college level composition courses. “[T]he ability to discuss and evaluate abstract ideas is, for me, the single most important variable in considering whether a student is capable of doing college level work” (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, p. 16).

The ability to talk in peer writing groups about a text assists thinking and writing. Each member of the peer–writing group brings their point of view of the text to the writer. Members examine, comment, evaluate and analyze the interpretation of the text for the writer. The writer is supported through the cooperative learning of the conferences and peer writing groups. John-Steiner talks about the writing community that takes place in peer conferences.

“When creative young people form a community—however temporary it may be—they become aware of themselves, and they profit from the criticism of their peers and they learn new ways to claim their experiences” (John-Steiner in Everson, 1991, p. 10).

If teachers theorize the very material ways in which genuine learning occurs for different types of students in different contexts—and if they give students opportunity to enact these theories in a collaborative, epistemic classroom—they can enable many more students to become actively engaged and productive learners (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, p. 206-207).
Sullivan’s requirement of a community of writers who assist each other is a component of a Writing Workshop. A writer can extend and mature, as Sullivan recommends for a college writer, in a Writing Workshop.

Secondly, “there needs to be attention paid to the development of student voice” (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006). Growth of a writer’s unique voice requires time and space. The traditional writing instruction does not value the voice of a writer. “The school experience can cut down egos or remove voice from the writing, and the person from the print....” (Graves, 2003, p. 244). The traditional writing instruction does not value the voice of a writer.

The author’s individual, human voice is generally not welcome, particularly in papers written by teams of authors, as in the hard sciences, where conventional dictates anonymity.... This suppression of the self, that might otherwise be manifested in the individual writer’s voice and distinctive features of syntax and vocabulary, has the effect of making a given piece of academic writing sound like every other piece in the same field. For a single writer’s voice to speak out would speak out of turn, and thus be regarded as immodest—calling attention to the speaker rather than where it properly belongs, on the subject (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, p. 80).

Voice is a difficult trait to develop. A writer’s voice but may be cultivated through writer choice. “Choice leads to voice,” literacy consultant John Poeton says when talking about writing” (Poeton in Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001, p. 23). When students select the topic, genre, style and audience for the paper, their voices resonate through their work.
The third point of Sullivan’s writing component is “meaning develops in the shared context of reader and writer” (Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006). Reading and writing are interdependent language learning processes. Studies support the connection of reading to writing. “Research has clearly shown that reading and writing are interactive, closely connected processes that support each other and that participation in strong writing programs benefits both reading and writing development” (Routman, 2005, p. 119). A summative report states:

One review of fifty years of correlational and experimental studies investigating reading and writing relationships concluded that:

- Better writers tend to be better readers (of their own writing as well as of other reading material).
- Better writers tend to read more than poorer writers.
- Better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing that poorer readers (NWP and Nagin, 2006, p. 31).

Educators must explore the potential of the reading/writing relationship. It cultivates better readers and writers.

Donald Graves (2003), Lucy Calkins (1994), Mem Fox (1993), Ralph Fletcher and Joann Portalupi (2001) all advocate teachers immerse their students in literature. Independent reading is important to the writer. Reading exposes writers to different genres and styles of writing. Calkins, a protégée of Graves, places great influence in well-written literature for writers.
If we are going to design writing workshops in which there are places not only for editing conferences and response groups but also for miracles, we need to bring powerful literature into those classrooms and to do everything possible to invite children to live and write inside that literature (1994, p. 252).

Routman agrees with Calkins on the relationship between quality literature and writing. Quality literature is the basis for writing growth in students. Routman declares, ”Being an avid reader is the best preparation for becoming a writer. You can study the writer’s craft and practice it, but there’s no substitute for being immersed in literature” (2005, p. 123). The gothic author Bill Breedlove spoke to my college composition courses. He told the students repeatedly if they wished to be writers, they must read (B. Breedlove, personal communication, April 3rd, 2009). Finally, Fletcher and Portalupi (2005) express the significance of independent reading for students in a Writing Workshop process. A writer can direct their inquiry into writing if teachers allow them to select the book and provide independent reading time. “Through independent reading, students discover a genre or author they love. They selectively return to favorites and, through rereading, deepen their knowledge in individual texts” (p.78). Professional authors profess the importance of the reading/writing connection as well.

Researchers, teachers and authors in the field know writing is not as full and rich without quality literature. Well-written books model writing skills for inexperienced writers and expose writers to vocabulary, genres, and
the beauty of words. Oral readings of quality literature helps teachers create the social environments Vygotsky discovered assist students in language growth. Social spaces provide areas for reading and writing so necessary for the growth of writers.

The last feature that Sullivan (2006) has identified for college level writing is the quality for writing assignments. I define Sullivan’s idea of quality writing assignments as authentic writing, writing that emerges from the interests and concerns of the writer. This means the student selects the writing topics, genres and purposes. Student choice can lead to authentic, meaningful, quality writing.

The struggle to engage students in meaningful learning is not new. It is a debate in education since the concept of a public education rose out of the industrial revolution. John Dewey wrote:

From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside of school in any complete and free way; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply to daily life what he is learning at school (Dewey in Atwell, 1998, p. 85).

The disconnect between school experiences and life experiences continues to be a concern for educators.

The gap between school and life learning exhibits itself in reluctant writers who do not comprehend writing’s power and joy. Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) describe their experiences with writing in school: “When we
were in school, most of our teachers randomly assigned writing assignments: “Okay boys and girls. We’re going to write today” (p. 8). When a teacher selects a topic or experience for the writers, it does more than stifle writing. “By supplying a topic from my experience and giving it to my students, I indirectly taught them that their lives aren’t worth writing about.... “ (Calkins, 1994, p. 12). Fox witnessed the results of the traditional approach to writing. She observed:

Many of my teacher education students, after twelve years at school, come to me helpless and fearful as writers, detesting it in the main, believing that they can’t write because they have nothing to say because they haven’t cared about saying anything because it hasn’t matters because there is not real investment for so long (Fox, 1993, p. 21).

When life experiences are denied, students disengage from the writing activities of the classroom. However, when students have issues that compel them to write, their writing can be powerful. Mahiri and Sablo noted African American students were writing prolifically and with strong writing skills outside of the classroom (1996). The students wrote about the issues they faced living in an urban setting. “In their own distinctive way, they engage in literacy practices to help them come to terms with these conditions and with their experiences. In effect, they are writing for their lives” (Mahiri and Sablo, 1996, p. 168).

In Writing Workshop, a writer has the freedom to select what to write, just as the professional writer. Sullivan connects the quality of assignments
to the writer’s quality of final text. Writer choice can provide authentic writing activities a student writer needs to engage in quality writing. Sullivan’s principle of quality assignments and writing product can be met in a Writing Workshop setting.

This element of the Writing Workshop and Sullivan’s fourth principle set them apart from the traditional writing instruction. “[S]tudent choice is the crucial fuel that drives a healthy workshop. And choice isn’t limited to deciding what to write about. We invite students to have choice in length, audience, and the pace with which they write” (Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001, p. 23). Mahiri and Sablo confirm the importance and value in student choice. “Teachers need to be shown how the behaviors and skills students demonstrate in the construction of their voluntary texts correspond to some of the behaviors and skills they need to develop and display in school” (1996, p. 178).

Teaching writing is a challenge. The four elements Sullivan selected as vital to writing are addressed in the Writing Workshop. Sullivan’s four principles and the Writing Workshop aim to develop writers over time, support the writer’s voice, incorporate reading and writing to strengthen writing, and provide quality assignments through authentic writing. Both theories agree on the four principles and a Writing Workshop provides the
instructional framework to enact the principles. James Moffett summarizes the Writing Workshop section of the paper when he says:

Writing has to be learned in school very much the same way that it is practiced out of school. This means that the writer has a reason to write, an intended audience, and control of subject and form. It also means that composing is staged across various phases of rumination, investigation, consultation with others, drafting, feedback, revision, and perfecting (N.W.P. and Nagin, 2006, p. 10).

Chapter 3

African American Masculinity

Once, Kevin would like to do something besides read a text then fill in worksheets. Worksheets and tests are all he does in middle school. The teacher demonstrates a few problems on the board and then sits at his desk. Too bad if you do not understand how to perform the math function. Just sit in your seat and work on it. Quietly. He does not see the need to do homework. Kevin sees guys on the street don’t do homework. They hustle. They are making money, getting girls, and having fun. What does Kevin get from school? Learning is neither clear nor fun. Kevin is bored. School does not seem to provide what Kevin needs for now or his future.

African American masculinity is a key component into the investigation of the education of African American males. Statistics and
studies highlight the poor performance now common for African American males in the classroom:

...most often, boys from the majority of the bottom of the class....From elementary grades through high school, boys receive lower grades than girls. Eighth-grade boys are held back 50 percent more often than girls. By high school, boys account for two thirds of the students in special education classes. Fewer boys than girls now attend and graduate from college (Pollack, 1999, p. 15).

A study of the group African American Men of Arizona in 2004 highlighted the issues facing college success for this group of students.

“...The university noted that Black males experience a high level of underachievement in the higher education arena, over involvement in the criminal system, and higher rates of unemployment, poverty, and dying via homicide” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 128). From elementary school through to high school, college and graduate degrees, African American males are failing to learn and achieve within the system. “Therefore, service to Black men in the field of education must consider and include factors confronting Black men outside of the classroom-in their homes, communities, and minds” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 129).

My examination of masculinity issues of African American males involved three questions on the needs of the young men in a classroom:
1. How has the changing image of masculinity influenced the development of young African American male’s masculinity today?

2. How does the urban masculinity, which is violent, aggressive, and hard, affect the learning of African American males?

3. What concepts of African American masculinity should an instructor be aware of as they instruct African American male students?

The development of a positive African American male identity by families has remained a concern for the African American community for over a hundred years. “Psychological freedom, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery” (King in Jenkins, 2006, p. 138). Booker T. Washington wrote about the rupture of the African American family contributing to low masculine identity. “The lack of strong ancestral influence and knowledge among African Americans further deprives the Black child of a strong sense of self-efficacy” (Washington, in Jenkins, 2006, p. 133).

According to Majors and Billson, African American males have historically defined their masculinity in a traditional male ideal. “African-American men have defined manhood in terms familiar to white men: breadwinner, provider, procreator, protector. Unlike white men, however,
blacks have not had consistent access to the same means to fulfill their dreams of masculinity and success” (Majors and Billson, 1992, p. 1). In the last forty years, the identity of African American masculinity has changed to an urban masculinity defined as a violent, ‘gansta’, muscularly strong, aggressive masculinity. Hooks noted this change when she wrote:

Even in the most violent years of Jim Crow and facing a known enemy and constant threat, the level of parental abandonment and absenteeism was not as prevalent. The American experience for many young African Americans in the post-Civil Rights era, thought racially different, is not necessarily less hostile. As laws were passed desegregating society and providing equal access to African Americans, new and more psychologically damaging strategies of oppression were enacted (hooks in Jenkins, 2006, p. 135).

A comparison of two different generations of African American males and their ideals of masculinity illustrates the societal factors that led to the African American masculine urban image prevalent in society today.

Duneier, in *Slim’s Table* (1992), studied Slim, an auto mechanic, and other African American working class men. Over several years, Duneier observed and interacted with the men in a diner just outside a large metropolitan ghetto. The study provided new information on masculinity from the African American men who grew up in a working class African American community before segregation. Duneier learned how the men created a community and supported each other. The study addressed the care and moral views held by Slim’s community, their membership in the
larger society, and African American masculinity through race, class, and media. The mid twentieth century masculinity helps us understand the shift to urban masculinity in the last few decades.

When the men of Duneier’s study matured, many appeared to have developed a positive masculinity.

Many of these men grew up in homes where the father was at least as absent as in today’s white middle-class families.... [Yet the men] are constituted inner-directed and firm, and they act with resolve; their images of self-worth are not derived from material possessions or the approval of others; they are disciplined ascetics with respect for wisdom and experience; usually humble, they can be quiet, sincere, and discreet, and they look for those qualities in friends. They are sensitive, but not “soft” in any sense.... They know how to put their foot down, and how to “show their swords” (Duneier, 1992, p. 163).

The men of Slim’s era “produced at least some variants of a ghetto-specific masculinity with positive characteristics that might serve as a model to men in the wider society” (Duneier, 1992, p. 164). Within their community, they received the support necessary to establish and maintain a positive masculine identity juxtaposed against challenges from the dominant culture. Recent generations appear to lack the solid foundations Slim and his colleagues possessed in their segregated community.

The explosion of urban flight and drugs, which heightened in the 1970’s and 1980’s, continues the assault on African American families and masculinity. In the last thirty years, increasing numbers of women have become heads of households. Young boys of the 1980’s, who are becoming
today’s adults, were three times more likely than others to be poor and live in households led by women. Current statistics demonstrate the continued effects of the societal issues of the 1970’s and 1980’s in which these African American men acquired their ideals of masculinity. First, single parent, mother lead households may have had an impact on the difficulty of positive masculinity development in African American families:

(a) 50% of all Black households with children under the age of 18 are headed by Black women,
(b) Black women are held responsible in some academic literature and in the popular press for Black males’ maladaptive characteristics and behaviors, and
(c) Catastrophic conditions exist that cause some observers to view Black men as an endangered species (Jenkins, 2006, p. 135).

Secondly, more African American men were incarcerated. Between 1980 and 2000, the population behind bars rose from 2 million to 6 million. A majority of the increase was African American males sentenced for selling drugs (Trei, 2005). Finally, the African American male’s masculinity in society, generally, has been devalued. The issue of identity formation for young black men is complicated by the lack of strong role models in some homes and communities to emulate. Monroe’s analysis of the conditions of African American masculinity in the last forty years indicates that:

Boys growing up in the ghetto were made aware daily of how little value the larger society placed on the lives and, in a postindustrial age, the labor of poor black men. Their own fathers, too often, were casualties, those who stayed home and
those who disappeared. The defeat of one generation begat defeatism in the next (Monroe in Jenkins, 2006, p. 135).

Without constant, loving encouragement from the adults around an African American boy, he may be unable to establish a positive masculine identity.

Rearing an African American boy in the American society then presents unique challenges for their families. Bush describes the delicate balancing act of raising an African American boy in the American culture by stating African American boys must learn about the racist nature of White society and yet, be protected from it at the same time (2004).

Media, in the forms of magazines, television, music, and movies, permeate the society, sending messages harmful to positive masculinity models for African American males. To combat the negative African American masculine images in society, African American mothers used dialogue, narratives, and teachable moments to assist in developing a positive masculinity identity. Bush, in his study of African American mothers, discovered that mothers use dialogue and narrative to instruct their children. Mothers kept family narratives alive by telling stories about their fathers, grandfathers, and other males in the family history to their son(s). These stories connected the son(s) role and masculinity to the males in his family (Bush, 2004).

Researchers Jenkins and Bush have different views on how successful African American families are at augmenting detrimental masculinity
messages of African American masculinity by society. The two views draw
attention to the complicated nature of African American male’s masculinity
and the African American family’s role in nurturing that masculinity under a
dominant society. While Bush documented positive examples of African
American mothering for constructive masculinity, Jenkins highlights the
struggles faced by the African American mothers/families.

    The dominant White culture, by portraying African American males in
stereotypic masculinity roles and negative views of African American males,
may hinder growth of a positive African American masculinity. The African
American man constantly sees, hears and experiences the results of
subculture membership.

    Thus, the identity and self-concept of Black males is one that
has been developed and grown under a constant burden of
negativity and otherness. This strained development has often
resulted in low-self esteem, a negative self-concept, and the
internalization of the role of villain (Jenkins, 2006, p. 138).

The development of a positive African American masculinity is a challenge
under these conditions.

    Researchers of African American masculinity refer to the lack of access
to the economy for African American men as an contributing factor to the
growth of an urban masculinity. When these young men find economic access
continues to be illusive, their anger and disappointment run deep. This may
manifest itself in various manners.
And so with regard to violence and crime, there are two primary issues: rage that leads to acts of violence against other Black men; White men; and, in many cases, Black women and crime motivated by an inability to penetrate economic opportunity in society (Jenkins, 2006, p. 141).

Majors explains this issue when he writes, “Indeed, recent research has shown that young black males are experiencing unprecedented setbacks in their struggles for economic and educational equality in the United States” (p. 210).

An economic element in masculine identity is the workspace. Edley and Weatherall, (2001) explain how masculinity growth is involved in work. “Contradictions and tensions in the way paid work is organized will condition what Tolson (1977) calls the ‘deep structure’ of masculinity-self-esteem, sense of creativity, camaraderie, bodies in space and the smaller details of self-presentation” (99). African American men face complications in their relation to work and masculinity. As African American men strove to be wage earners, access was limited or difficult for some to obtain. The frustration appeared to grow as the post-Civil Rights generation of men where told of equal opportunity, but in reality, economic opportunities may have become more limited. This was a component in the development of an urban masculinity. Urban masculinity projects a masculinity of the man to his community and protects the African American male from lack of access to hegemonic masculinity. “It is a way of acting out conventional masculine
expectations for emotional control and independence while developing strategies for coping with racist violence and the police” (Edley and Weatherall, 2001, p.112). The space of work becomes the streets they live on, the community. This urban masculinity is distinct in how many African American males operate and control experiences on the street.

Urban masculinity, or posturing, can be as a mask, covering African American men’s emotions. African American males may utilize posturing to project a façade of emotionlessness, fearlessness, and aloofness to counter the inner pain caused by the damage of pride, poor self-confidence, and fragile social competence that results from their existence as a member of a subjugated group (Osborne, 1999).

The posturing or mask worn by an African American male is not a new phenomenon. Poets Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes described African American men’s outward unaffected façade in poetry. In the poem, “We Wear The Mask”, Dunbar writes:

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, -
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mount with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be otherwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask. (Lehman, 2006, p. 483)
African American boys learn to protect their feelings from the racism of America when they are still young boys. Majors and Billson (1992) describe cool pose as “a ritualized approach to masculinity that allows them to cope and survive in an environment of oppression and racism, including that found within U.S. schools” (Majors and Billson in Osborne, 1999, p. 558). This mask transforms to protect African American’s masculinity as their identities change in society.

I play it cool,  
And dig all jive,  
That’s the reason  
I stay alive.  
My motto as I live and learn  
is: dig and be dug in return.  


The cool pose employed by African American males may well serve various needs. In the classroom, it may protect a young man from low self-esteem and the risk of appearing stupid (Osborne, 1999). Cool pose, employed in the classroom, can hinder the academic achievement of African American boys. “Cool pose often leads to flamboyant and nonconformist behaviors that frequently elicit punishment in school setting[s]” (Osborne, 1999, p. 559). These behaviors are not appreciated by the traditional school culture. Boys implementing a cool pose in school can be seen negatively by the school culture, but the boy may gain acceptance in his cultural group.
Cool pose may perhaps not only be a negative coping mechanism. The cool pose can communicate to the young man’s peers he is a member of his African American community. African Americans “employed their “black” cultural capital to cultivate their African American peers’ acceptance of them as authentically “black”” (Carter, 2003, p. 140). The cultural capital defined here is “certain speech codes, dress, style, music preferences, and other attributes framed as “black”” (Carter, 2003, p. 139). Cool pose can be one of the attributes of the black cultural capital. In this context, cool pose provides acceptance for some members of the African American community.

African American males might use the cool pose to express their frustration with the lack of academic, social, and economic opportunities open to them (Carter, 2003). This form of cool pose masculinity is influenced by the new urban culture, constructing an urban masculinity. “A particular type of Black masculinity-one defined mainly by an urban aesthetic, and an aggressive posturing-has made its way into the cultural mainstream in the last two decades” (Henry, 2004, p. 119). The aggression appears to be rooted in the disassociation of African American males in dominant society and the disappearance of a number of community supports for positive masculinity development.

The tough, emotionless, aggressive young African American urban masculinity is becoming the norm for many African American youth.
Athletes, rappers, and entertainers are held up as the role models for African American boys in today’s society. This form of masculinity, however, is exclusive and does not transfer to most African American men in the society.

Marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group. Thus, in the United States, particular black athletes may be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity. But the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men in general (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001, p.42).

This leads African American males to create a model of masculinity to defend their self-identity and self-concept. Media portrayals of African American men in conjunction with the adoption of urban masculinity perhaps inhibit positive self-concept and positive masculinity growth for African American youth. These portrayals hinder a more adaptive masculinity needed in the complex world of the twenty-first century.

A large group of African American males appear to accept the urban masculinity role of males as powerful, wage earners who subjugate women. The baggy pants, use of the word ‘nigga’, adopting a stride, and other behaviors are elements of the cool pose of African American men today. “In that sense, then, cool pose is an attempt to carve out an alternative path to achieve the goals of dominant masculinity” (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001, p. 211).
From Dunbar to Slim’s working class masculinity to the urban masculinity utilized today, African American men are strive to define and defend their masculinity in what can be an oppressive, dominant culture.

Historically, racism and discrimination have inflicted a variety of harsh injustices on African-Americans in the United States, especially on males. Being male and black has meant being psychologically castrated-rendered impotent in the economic, political, and social areas that whites have historically dominated. Black men learned long ago that the classical American values of thrift, perseverance, and long hard work did not give them the same tangible rewards accrued to whites (Majors and Billson, 1992, p. 1).

The masculine roles African American men were allowed to fill in the larger society were stereotyped ideals, such as athlete, singer, criminal, or a sexual being to be feared. These historical factors continue to shape African American masculinity.

Slim’s generation was grounded in the support of an African American community, which provided some positive masculinity growth. The deterioration of the community appeared to undermine this asset. “Most black thinkers acknowledge that internalized self-hatred is more pronounced now than it was when the economic circumstances of black people were far worse, when there was no social integration” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 136). In one generation, the degradation of African American masculinity appears to have accelerated.
Two interpretations of the movie *Shaft*, separated by a time span of thirty years, demonstrate the transformation of the traditional pre Civil Rights masculinity to the urban masculinity of today. The masculinity depicted in the first production of Shaft centers on sexual prowess. Shaft is shown in various sexual interactions, including an exchange with an openly gay bartender. His power rests in his sexuality and a street toughness supported by the rise of the Black Power Movement. Shaft moves through his world with these ideals forming his masculinity. Shaft’s 1971 masculinity is strong, sexual and based in African American communal brotherhood (Henry, 2004).

The masculinity in the 2000 version of *Shaft* is markedly different; it is the ‘hard body image’. The hard body image supports the ‘cool pose’ “defined within popular culture by urban life, rampant materialism, fatalistic attitudes, physical strength, and the acquisition of respect through violence or the implicit threat of violence” (Henry, 2004, p. 121).

The 2000 Shaft uses violence, not sex, to support his masculinity. Shaft’s urban masculinity, lacking the Black Power unity of the earlier version of the film, threatens the people with whom he interacts. Shaft commits black on black violence, only caring about his individualistic motives and status (Henry, 2004).
African American masculinity has evolved since the Civil Rights movement and the changing conditions of society. An increase in single-parent families drug use, violence, disenfranchisement with school, and higher incarceration rates has led to diminished opportunities for identification with positive role models for African American men. The cool pose or urban masculinity, adopted by many young men in response to changing contexts, can perpetuate the spiraling loss of community cohesiveness and increasing violence.

Chapter 4

Curriculum

Kevin is further and further behind in classes. He does not want to lose credibility with his group, so Kevin starts acting ‘cool’. The clothes, the shoes, the hair, and the music Kevin listens to all communicate to Kevin’s peers he is not about school, or learning. Kevin is more interested in looking good and retaining his status among his friends. The negative interactions Kevin has with school are contrasted with the respect and social standing he is creating on the streets. Money also becomes increasingly an issue.

To begin the discussion on curriculum development, I will introduce differences between modern and post-modern approaches to the organization of knowledge. Each theory is founded a particular ideal of the role of
education in society. Their stances on education influence how each defines knowledge and how to impart that knowledge. Next, William Doll, Jr.’s post-modern curriculum concept based on the Four R’s, richness, recursion, relations, and rigor. The individual R’s roles in Doll’s curriculum are described. Afrocentric principles, which have been alluded to in previous chapters of this paper, presented and applied to the Doll curriculum model. Finally, the four composition principles of Sullivan, writer development over time, writer voice, connection between reading and writing, and quality writing assignments, are applied to components of the post-modern curriculum.

*Modernism*

Modern theories of curriculum are influenced by the rise of the industrial revolution and scientific thinking. Modernism refers to

The hallmark of modernism is a society in which emphasis is placed on the rational, the impersonal or objective, and the fragmentation of thought and action. It is a society of prizing and accepting certainty, a society privileging a mechanical view of the world. It is a society that employs the rational, the scientific, in addressing the problems of human life and society (Hunkins and Hammill, 1994, p. 5).

This view of human existence and how to structure a society influenced the way education was designed. In a modern society, the application of industrial modes of producing goods influenced education. In this modern view, “education, looked at as a mechanical system, could be qualified and
managed. In being modern, one could bring efficiency and effectiveness to the schools and their curricula” (Hunkins and Hammill, 1994, p. 6). In the modern view, learning is a product to be manufactured to be a product to be manufactured in the factory/school.

This view resulted in a concept of curriculum as defining knowledge and creating ways to teach the identified knowledge. It was set, defined and static. Thus,

It was the responsibility of the curriculum decision maker to outline what knowledge was important for each subject, and to identify the objectives that would be appropriate for those subjects. Once done, one then had to develop those activities that would enable the learner to master the content (Hunkins & Hammill, 1994, p. 6).

Knowledge for the classroom was generated by external sources; teachers and students were to use that knowledge to create meaning.

School leaders could establish clear goals and objectives that were to be addressed by teachers. If teachers were not obtaining those goals, someone from outside the school, who was an expert in that area, was called upon (Hunkins and Hammill, 1994). “In a sense, all we had to do was connect the dots and the outline of the program would become evident. Then our task was just to color within the lines and the curriculum would be covered,” (Hunkins and Hammill, 1994, p. 8). The college composition textbooks examined in the first chapter of the paper are examples of a modern curriculum. The editors or authors of the textbook select the knowledge. The
job of the text, and thus the instructor, is to present the knowledge and ask the students to memorize and apply the information in a predetermined manner.

*Post-Modernism*

Post-modernism stands in contrast to modernism; it focuses on the fluid nature of systems interacting with each other and the changes that occur as a result. “Post-modernism asserts that there is indeed no structure or master narrative in which we can wrap ourselves for comfort. There is no master curriculum plan that we can generate for all times. Master plans are illusions,” (Hunkins and Hammill, 1994, p. 11). The dynamics of the constant change in ideas, opinions and knowledge around the learner are the spaces were thinking as learning take place.

The post-modernist is behaving in ways similar to those people delving into the science of complexity. These individuals are convinced that through creative questioning and inventing paradigms, they can come to understand more fully the spontaneous self-organizing dynamics of the world in ways never before imagined (Hunkins and Hammill, 1994, p. 11).

A post-modern view of society influences how knowledge is defined in curriculum. Instead of a linear, scientific, mechanical approach to knowledge, post-modern knowledge requires adaptability and flexibility.

In a dynamic world, we need approaches to curriculum development and to curriculum itself that are adaptive under conditions of constant change and unpredictability. We need for these and anticipated times curricular systems that enable us to process perpetual novelty, that privilege the notion of
emergence. We want emergence of forms, emergence of actions, emergence of systems, and emergence of results (Hunkins and Hammill, 1994, p. 13).

In the post-modern view, there is space for teachers and learners to explore knowledge, to create, define and reinvent knowledge. The teacher, in this view, learns as well as facilitates, guiding students through various levels of inquiry, reflection, and providing opportunities to apply learning.

Curriculum development in the post-modern vein would stress play rather than certain purpose; chance over certain design; process and performance over a static, finished work; participation of players over distance of players from the process; a dispersal of ideas over a narrow selection; action driven by desire rather than symptom; and a system characterized by indeterminacy rather than determinacy (Hunkins and Hammill, 1994, p. 14).

Learning facts is no longer the only knowledge; rather, relationships and self-discovery are just as valuable in the search for meaning and understanding. “I believe that in our explorations of and for knowledge, we are dealing not with a reality already “out there” for us to discover but with multiple ways of interpreting the echo of God’s laughter,” (Doll, 1993, p. 155). The post-modern curriculum structures curriculum in a manner that can address the needs of African American males by including Afrocentric values.

Afrocentricism

My reading of a postmodern stance toward curriculum supported my interest to incorporate Afrocentric values into the curriculum and instructional strategies when teaching African American students.
“Curricula should incorporate more Afrocentric ideals through the teaching of values such as cooperation, mutual respect, commitment, and love of family, race, community, and nation from the perspective of Black self-interest” (Osborne, 1999, p. 562). These values, introduced earlier in the paper, are possible to enact in a post-modern approach to curriculum development and implementation.

Afrocentrism is based on the beliefs of many different peoples in Africa. These values seemed to be carried with the diaspora of the African people to the New World. The Afrocentric beliefs are:

1. The highest value of life lies in the interpersonal relationships between men;
2. One gains knowledge through symbolic imagery and rhythm;
3. One should live in harmony with nature;
4. There is a oneness between humans and nature;
5. The survival of the group holds the utmost importance;
6. Men should appropriately utilize the materials around them;
7. One's self is complementary to others;
8. Change occurs in a natural, evolutionary cycle;
9. Spirituality and inner divinities hold the most significance;
10. There are a plethora of deities to worship;
11. Cooperation, collective responsibility, and interdependence are the key values to which all should strive to achieve;
12. All men are considered to: be equal, share a common bond, and be a part of the group;
13. The Afrocentric worldview is a circular one, in which all events are tied together with one another. (http://www.africaspeaks.com/reasoning).

A comparison of Afrocentric values and post-modern curriculum accentuates the parallel nature of the two concepts.

*Post-Modern Curriculum and Afrocentrism*
A post–modern curriculum that incorporates Afrocentric values would focus on the use of narration, metaphors, and dialogue to create knowledge and support learning. The use of narrative oral story telling, specifically the narration of hero epics, is important in African American culture and serves as a powerful tool for learning.

The narratives on which most of the spirituals are based are from Old Testament accounts depicting Israel and Judah’s enslavement. These narratives fired the imaginations of the slave-song creators to such an extent they came to firmly believe that as God delivered the Israelites from bondage... so would He deliver them from slavery (Hill, 1998, p. 14-15).

The epic stories enabled African Americans to apply a shared experience and create a new knowledge based on the interaction of their experiences and the narrations. Bruner stressed the importance of the narrative mode by juxtaposing it with the paradigmatic mode:

There is another, complimentary, mode of thought to the logical, analytic, scientific–this is the metaphorical, narrative, hermeneutical. The key difference between these two modes of thought is that analytic is explanatory while the narrative is interpretive (Bruner in Doll, 1993, p. 169).

Moreover, “the narrative mode requires interpretation. A good story, as great story, endures, encourages, and challenges the reader to interpret, to inter into dialogue with the text” (Doll, 1993, p. 169). The narrative mode, employing dialogue and relationships through shared learning experiences, promotes a level of communication critical to learning. The narration of experiences, ideas and histories creates the foundation for knowledge.
Both an Afrocentric culture and post-modern curriculum place great significance on metaphors as instructional strategies. Metaphors involve an interaction between the known and the unknown. African Americans used metaphors to explain their life experiences here in America. In doing so, the metaphors became instructional tools.

Approximately half of the slaves’ proverbs reflected a surreptitious African critique of the plantation experience. For instance, they created proverbs that served as a form of instruction on appropriate labor to render in a slave state (“Don’t fling your all our power into a small job”), as a warning that masters reacted with a cruel whip when slaves used straightforward verbal resistance to protest their enslavement (“Don’t say more with your mouth than your back can stand”), (Hill, 1998, p. 12).

Folktales often rely on metaphors. Animal trickster tales from Africa, where a smaller, smarter animal outwits a bigger, more physically strong animal, became “traditional folk wisdom to teach their children how to survive the oppression of slavery” (Hill, 1998, p. 18). Metaphors are creative and playful, yet based on wisdom and reason. The metaphor encourages understanding as the learning community seeks knowledge. Through metaphors, a dialogue of logic is redefined, re-imagined, and applied in novel ways. “It is through the interplay of metaphor and logic that life is lived, experienced, developed” (Doll, 1993, p. 169). From a post-modern perspective, “metaphors are open, heuristic, dialogue-engendering “ (Doll, 1993, p. 169)
None of the previous, post-modern curriculum traits or the principles of an Afrocentric culture could be applied if dialogue were missing. In dialogue,

Meaning is created by personal and public dialogic transactions: with ourselves, confreres, texts, histories.... By dialoguing with texts, their creators, and ourselves, we come to a deeper, fuller understanding not only of issues but of ourselves, as personal and cultural beings (Dewey in Doll, 1993, p. 136).

To put it more forcefully, “Dialogue is the sine qua non of the whole process. Without dialogue there is no transformation; the eclecticism of post-modernism remains a pastiche” (Doll, 1993, p. 169).

Teachers working to improve at risk African American writers used dialogue through conferences in the Writing Workshop model. “One-on-one student-teacher interaction in formal and informal setting proves highly successful” (Cason, et. al., 1991, p. 17). Dialogue is a central component of the Afrocentric values. In a study by Bush to determine how African American boys form their masculine identity without a male head of household, dialogue was used to foster a positive form of masculinity. “Black mothers used divers methods to teach their sons. Most salient of these is the utilization of timely words coupled with ongoing dialogue” (2004, p. 384). Dialogue was also vital to the development of poets in Joscon’s study. “Modeling and dialogue between actors [students and adult tutors] became the crucial part of the learning process” (2006, p. 248). Teachers who desired to
improve at risk African American writers used dialogue through conferences in the Writing Workshop model. Dialogue is the basis for the post-modern curriculum and Afrocentric values. The dynamic, interactive nature of both of these concepts demand dialogue.

Post-modern curriculum theory emerged out of an ideal learning could be more inquiry based. However, the curriculum is also supportive of Afrocentric community values employed by the African American culture. The movement away from set facts to experiential knowledge is similar to the learning environment created in the Afrocentric culture. Selecting a post-modern curriculum is well suited to incorporate the traditional learning components of the African American culture.

*Doll’s Four R Post-Modern Curriculum*

Doll’s post-modern curriculum model consists of four elements: richness, recursion, relational and rigor. These elements can be used to frame the development of a college composition course that follows the structure of the Writing Workshop, respects Afrocentric values, and includes Sullivan’s four ideals. In Doll’s model, richness refers to the depth of a curriculum. Richness is pushing students a little past their comfort zone and supporting them as they work to experience the new ideas or concepts Doll explains how richness of curriculum might be enacted in a composition classroom when he states:
Language—including reading, writing, literature, and oral communication—develops its richness by focusing heavily (but not exclusively) on the interpretation of metaphors, myths, narratives. Saying this places language within a hermeneutic framework; it is to see language as integrated with culture, as one of the determinants of culture (Doll, 1993, p. 176).

The second element in Doll’s model, recursion, involves ‘looping’. Learners apply a new concept to previous information. Through discussion, reflection or application, the learner reanalyzes both the new and old information.

In recursion, it is a necessity to have others—peers, teachers—look at critique, respond to what one has done. Dialogue becomes the *sine qua non* of recursion: Without reflection—engendered by dialogue—recursion becomes shallow not transformative; it is not reflective recursion, it is only repetition (Doll, 1993, p. 178).

The teacher, learner and community provide the feedback and opportunities where connections are made, broken, or adapted as the learner contemplates. Doll pointedly differentiates between recursion and repetition.

Recursion and repetition differ in that neither one, in any way, reflects the other. Repetition, a strong element in the modernist mode, is designed to improve set performance. It is a closed frame. Recursion, aims at developing competence—the ability to organize, combine, inquire, use something heuristically. Its frame is open (Doll, 1993, p. 178).

Understanding and meaning are created through recursion.

Doll’s third element, the relational element, contains two components—pedagogical relations and cultural relations.
The concept of relations is important to a post-modern, transformative curriculum in two ways: in a pedagogical way and in a cultural way. The former might, naturally, be called pedagogical relations, referring to those within the curriculum—the matrix or network which gives it richness. The later might, just as naturally, be called cultural relations, referring to those cultural or cosmological relations which lie outside the curriculum but form a large matrix within which the curriculum is embedded (Doll, 1993, p. 179).

Pedagogical relation examines the interconnections of various educational subjects. By examining the relations between subjects or concepts, thought and understanding are deepened. “In focusing on the pedagogical relations, one focuses on the connections within a curriculum’s structure which give the curriculum its depth as this is developed by recursion” (Doll, 1993, p. 179).

Pedagogical relation aids intellectual capacity as connections are made between one subject to another through recursion.

Cultural relations use narration and dialogue to communicate wisdom. Narration brings forward the concept of history [through story], language [through oral telling], and place [through a story’s locality]. Dialogue interrelates these three to provide us with a sense of culture that is local in origin but global in interconnections (Doll, 1993, p. 180).

The epic stories teach history through the heroic exploits of individuals and offers opportunities for students to consider heroic values in a contemporary scene, moving students from the past to the present, and helping them envision the future. Finally, rigor, the fourth component in Doll’s model, involves “purposely looking for different alternatives, relations,
connections” (Doll, 1993, p. 180). It means getting beneath the surface of appearances—challenging claims.

Rigor here means the conscious attempt to ferret out these assumptions, one we or others hold dear, as well as negotiating passages between these assumptions, so the dialogue may be meaningful and transformative (Doll, 1993, p. 182).

In a rigorous curriculum, learners are challenged to confront their ideals, beliefs, and assumptions in relation to new information.

*Post-Modern Curriculum, Afrocentricism, and Sullivan’s Composition Elements*

In this final section of the curriculum chapter of my thesis, the post-modern curriculum and Afrocentric concepts presented thus far are applied to Sullivan’s (2006) four writing points guiding the examination of college composition. Those points, again, are:

- Strong writers develop only over a long period of time and with considerable support from their teachers and learning communities
- There needs to be attention paid to the development of student voice
- Meaning develops in the shared context of reader and writer
- The quality of the writing assignments plays a role in the quality of the product.
Doll’s curriculum model recommends that teaching and learning move from static, universal and bureaucratic structures to a more open system, characterized by flexibility, richness, recursion, reflection, and rigor and based in the experiential knowledge of teachers and students. In the next section, I link Doll’s elements of a post-modern curriculum to Sullivan’s four ideas for college composition courses, and to Afrocentric values of cooperation, collective responsibility, and interdependence, the cyclical nature.

Sullivan’s first concept, strong writers develop only over a long period and with considerable support from their teachers and learning communities, are captured through the cooperative, collective nature of the learning environment in Doll’s post-modern curriculum and the Afrocentric values.

The attention paid to the development of a student writing voice, Sullivan’s second notion, figures in Doll’s model for curriculum that promotes the development of individual knowledge by welcoming student ideas, views and experiences. A writing voice can also be cultivated by listening and working with student’s ideas. “Nurturing anomalies, even mistakes, means taking time…to dialogue seriously with the students about their ideas as their ideas “ (Doll, 1993, p. 166).

Afrocentric principles, however, are more communal than individual. The focus on collective work and collaboration may not specifically address the development of individual voices. Moreover, historically, African-
American voices in the US have been silenced. Mahiri and Sablo (1996) note that the school’s inability to provide space for student’s life experiences “works to “silence” student’s authentic voices” (1996, p. 176. While the Afrocentric principles do not specifically address the development of voice, it is now a goal of a culturally responsive curriculum.

Doll’s Four R’s and Afrocentricism strongly support the principle that meaning is created by reading and writing. Post-modern curriculum places the connections between reading and writing at its core. Narrative stories, texts and metaphors are seen as critical instructional tools. Doll uses reading and writing to engage the learner in the post-modern learning objectives (1993). Many of the citations previously noted in this work draw attention to the value Doll places on reading and writing for the post-modern curriculum.

The importance of reading and writing for the African American culture began with the slave narrative. “The theme of black self-determination, at the very core of the slave narrative, would not only become the genesis of the nineteenth-century black novel, but, subsequently much of the focus of African American literature as a whole” (Hill, 1998, p. 4).

Arguably, the most important of Sullivan’s four college compositional principles is the quality of the writing assignment. In her article addressing what is good writing, Lynn Z. Bloom comes to the conclusion when teachers use, “creative assignments and latitudinarian pedagogy, we can set that
creative vision before them [writers], point them in the right direction, coach them for the climb, and expect the best” (Bloom in Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006, p. 87). A quality assignment contains the framework for the students to build on writing. The assignment also includes the teacher guiding the writer as they ‘climb’ the idea of placing their thoughts on paper. Doll also forwards the notion of student direction in their educational activities. He applies the student control more broadly to design of curriculum and selection of instructional activities. This ideal does provide quality assignments for the student. For example, Doll provides a way of providing quality writing assignments in a junior high setting. “I build time-orientated relationships by asking students to reframe the material presented, to choose from or reframe chapter questions, and to deal with the textual material on both a “what-if’ basis and a “relate-it-to-yourself” basis” (Doll, 1993, p. 180). Whenever you ask student to be involved in how they learn, you make available a quality assignment.

Sullivan’s quality of assignment is essential in the research of engaging African American males in learning. Mahiri and Sablo (1996), Jenkins (2006) and Jocson (2006) come to the conclusion that hip-hop is an outside the classroom literary form important to African American males to be welcomed into the classroom. Cason, et. al., (1991), Carter (2005) and Jocson (2006) support the use of the Writing Workshop as an instructional
model to provide meaningful assignments. In this manner, the Afrocentric principles of cooperation, collaboration and support are employed to provide assignments of quality Sullivan desires to see in a composition course.

Chapter 5

School Culture

They never do anything cool in class. Kevin loves rap. He can rhythm and rhyme, verbalize with his own tight attitude. He can express his opinion about the lack of job opportunities in his neighborhood. Or show some love to that new girl. Impress her. A rap can display his power with words and thoughts to get more respect. All at a quick, spontaneous artist pace. In school, Kevin writes papers. Not papers about issues that relate to Kevin’s life experiences, dreams or concerns. Its all some other stuff, like history that took place long ago, or report on a book or topic Kevin didn’t like or select.

Schools are one of the first dominant cultural institutions African American boys encounter. By not responding to the needs of African American male learners and working to meet those needs, schools can appear unresponsive to the young men.

African American youth are discouraged or prevented from incorporating schooling and education into their self-view due to:

(a) Psychological mechanisms that protect them from anxiety, evaluation apprehension, and adverse outcomes;
(b) Having to give up their identification with their minority group in order to identify with "White" pursuits and values such as education;
(c) Peer group resistance to valuing education and rejection of those who do; or
(d) Psychological reactance that manifests as heightened or ritualized masculinity which also prevents the individual from succeeding in academics (Osborne, 1999, p. 559).

Schools failed to understand how traditionally designed school environments, curricula, and instruction might impede African American males' academic success. Osborne (1999) claims, “When students begin school, there appears to be no achievement gap. “The gap between White and minority U.S. students...has been shown to widen by as much as two grade levels by sixth grade” p. 556). Ornstein, Behan-Horstien and Pajak, 2003 report that opportunities to take higher level, or higher track classes are restricted. “Schools far more often judge African-American and Latino students to have learning deficits and limited potential...schools place these students disproportionately in low-track, remedial programs” (, p. 395). Carter (2003) suggests that the nature of an institution in power to strive to maintain cultural capital [behaviors valued by the main institution] may place all others outside the benefits of that institution. “Schools help reproduce a stratified class system by bolstering the dominant social group’s cultural capital” (Carter, 2003, p. 137). Osborne (1999) concludes, “There is convincing evidence that students from disadvantaged minority groups
achieve poorer outcomes at every level, even given equal preparation [for school], than do their White and Asian American peers” (p. 555).

When public schools integrated African American students after the Brown vs. Board of Education, few accommodations, either in curriculum content or instructional strategies were introduced.

The racial integration of schools provided black students with access to the educational resources provided in white schools. However, even in these institutions, the prejudiced and stereotypical beliefs of white teachers negatively impacted the learning and development of black students, particularly black males (Jenkins, 2006, p. 145).

For African American boys to receive a culturally responsive school experience, some adaptation of the existing structures would be necessary. A culturally responsive education could include the Afrocentric principles in instruction. Another element to include would be to understand the components, which create a positive African American masculinity for the young men in their schools. Some teachers, schools, and districts learned the unstated friction between African American males and the educational system. These school and teachers made changes to their instruction and added culturally responsive elements to their schools. Other schools observed the falling statistics of educational success for African American males and responded in ways that continue to under serve this population of students.

Positive identity is difficult to sustain when a community is missing or improperly portrayed by the majority society. “Schools cannot easily offer
ethnic minorities something meaningful, because that would require those
who govern the schools to acknowledge the marginality of minority
communities as well as the political and economic reasons for that
marginality” (Mahiri and Sablo, 1996, p. 176). In other words, ”the dominant
ideology surrounding schools acts to ignore or dismiss them (minority

African Americans may perhaps not view the educational system with
a positive attitude. The long shadows of oppression and mistrust can at
times taint the classroom. “African American students tend to view
education as a system controlled by the group that subjugated and oppressed
them and their ancestors. School, for them, is seen as an inappropriate
aspect of what they deem “proper” African American identity” (Osborne,
1999, p. 558). In addition, African American males are caught between
White culture, which does not support African American male’s development,
and a culture of African American pride. Thus,

members of involuntary minority groups might consciously or
unconsciously interpret school learning as a displacement
process detrimental to their social identity, sense of security,
and self-worth. Furthermore, these minority groups many have
observed that even those among them who succeed in school are
not fully accepted or rewarded in the same way that White
students are accepted or rewarded (Osborne, 1999, p. 558).

When school learning is viewed as a displacement process, there is little
chance for academic success.
Carter, an English teacher at an urban high school and mother of an African American boy, describes her struggle to get more African American males into her AP class. The young men had fought stereotypes and low expectations from some teachers, a rigid educational system that does not cater to the needs or learning styles of young men, and gatekeepers who would exclude them from opportunities to learn (2005, p. 190).

She continues:

I believe that there are teachers who are not culturally sensitive to African American males. These teachers often lack experience with males from this culture and base their beliefs on images from books and the media. There are teachers who misinterpret the language or body language of Black boys, who misread their facial expressions (2005, p. 197).

Teachers who accept the usual media portrayals of African American males unknowingly may contribute to inappropriate learning environments and the marginalization of students. Teachers should try to uncover their tacit beliefs and assumptions about African American males in order to foster productive learning environments that promote success.

Because of an internalized belief in racial stereotypes and the influence of the social label of Black man as villain, many teachers, Black and White, hesitate to engage and interact in a close nurturing way with Black boys and often fail to provide them with superior educational services (Jenkins, 2006, p.144).

African American male students themselves perceive they are not expected to perform well by some teachers because of these stereotypes. Carter’s study of African American students speaks directly to this issue. “A significant number of those in the study shared their perceptions of
problematic relationships with teachers, who they felt expected little of them and their classmates” (Carter, 2003, p. 148). Pollack (1999) describes the damage stereotypical beliefs can cause:

Regrettably, instead of working with boys to convince them it is desirable and even “cool” to perform well at school, teachers, too, are often fooled by the [cool pose] mask and believe the stereotype: and this helps to make the lack of achievement self-fulfilling (Pollack, 1999, p. 17).

Teachers working with African American males must design instruction and curriculum to combat the issues of low expectations, lack of nurturing in the classroom, and misunderstanding of African American male behavior.

Several researchers recommend African American cultural values be interwoven in the curriculum (Jenkins 2006, Carter 2003, Carter 2005, Osborne 1999, Jobson 2006). These Afrocentric principles can be the instructional strategies incorporated in the classroom.

Chapter 6

Literacy Through Hip Hop

Kevin is not going to school more often now. Why go? He doesn’t know what is going on in classes. Teachers don’t seem to care if Kevin is in class or not. Besides, it gets in the way of his business. Kevin needs money for a car, or threads, or drugs and women. Plus Kevin can slip a little to his mom every now and then to cover a bill or
something. School doesn’t have what Kevin needs. No one in his family tells him education will pay off later. He wants pay off now. Kevin drops out of school...

An English teacher is wise to include many forms of literature in to a rigorous and rich composition course. As mentioned previously in this paper, different genres support a strong writer. But an English teacher who is also culturally responsive and wishes to engage more African American males in a classroom would be wise to incorporate hip hop. The selection to use hip hop in a composition curriculum can serve several purposes. First, it can engage some African American males to write in the classroom, (Jocson, 2006, Jenkins, 2006, Mahiri and Sablo, 1996). By its inclusion in a writing course, hip hop could support the writer/performer in the growth of their writing abilities.

In the process of producing meaning in these text, Troy’s raps evidenced a number of literacy skills and literate behaviors that reveal how literacy is actually constructed and used in the context of urban African American youths’ everyday lives (Mahiri and Sablo, 1996, p. 172).

Hip hop can incorporate Sullivan’s ideals for composition classes, notions of the post-modern curriculum, and Afrocentric principles. But hip hop has a controversial reputation. Those in the African American community do not agree on the value of hip hop (Dyson, 2007). The educational community also is resistant to incorporate hip hop in writing programs. An investigation of hip hop, its relation to literacy in the African American community, and
significance to young African American males may debunk hip hop’s reputation.

The hip hop genre is rooted in the African American oral tradition. “Carrying legacies of African oral traditions and storytelling...oral poetry as a Black art form served to disseminate the politics of the Civil Rights movements and other forms of activism” (Jocson, 2006, p. 235). Hip hop is a musical form that began on the streets of New York in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. Jay-Z, a prominent rapper, defines hip hop as “a vital arts movement created by young working-class men and women of color” (Jay-Z in Dyson, 2007, p. x). Hip hop’s core elements are the rhyming, topic and word selection of the performer. The rhyme and flow of the words are what demonstrates a rapper’s talent.

Hip hop provides the creativity and voice often glaringly absent from the writing assigned in schools. African American males are not perceived as participants in the school's writing assignments in school but were prolific outside the classroom as creators of text (Mahiri and Sablo, 1996). Camitta (1993) states

writing is actually an important and valued activity for a number of these youths” [African Americans], whose vernacular writing consists of “a range of significant and meaningful literate skills and resources that are artificially disconnected from the process of literacy education as it is officially conducted [in schools]” (Camitta in Mahiri & Sablo, 1996, p. 165).

The literacy skills of hip-hop are useful tools for African American males.
Hip hop’s artistic foundations are “unmistakably rooted in African American tradition” (Hill, 1998, p. 1363) and go back to call and response of the 18th century. “Rap[hip hop]...is “a dynamic hybrid of oral traditions, postliterate orality, and advanced technology” (Hill, 1998, p. 1362). More importantly, hip hop is a masculine African American music form. “The music is an offshoot of black masculine toasts, the revolutionary poetry of the late sixties and early seventies from people like Gil-Scott Heron, the Last Poets, and American Soul-Funk” (Hill, 1998, p. 1363). The development of hip hop in the 1980’s to today is an African American literary tradition for males to speak in society (Hill, 1998).

Hip hop becomes significant to African American males in search of voice.

Within the cultural structure of hip hop exists many of the factors that seem to be absent in the educational arena for Black males: freedom of thought, inclusion, competiveness, encouragement, and immediate reward, all taking place in a nontraditional yet intellectually stimulating environment (Jenkins, 2006, p. 147).

Cason, et al, (1991) while not mentioning hip hop specifically, discuss the need to “value ethnic diversity. All dialects are treated with respect. Lessons are designed to explore, understand, and enjoy our differences” (Cason, et al, 1991, p. 29). Hip hop is the outside literacy in which many African American males participate. “Hip hop has become the present day cultural environment that encourages Black men to write, think, and speak” (Jenkins,
This modern poetry allows males to express the frustration, anger, loss, pain, and longing African American males experience in their lives. Dyson defends the importance of hip hop, “precisely because it sheds light on contemporary politics, history, and race. At its best, hip hop gives voice to marginal black youth we are not used to hearing from on such topics” (Dyson, 2007, p. xvi).

Writing instructors should draw on the cultural traditions in the African American community specifically and incorporate the modern African American male’s voice used in outside literacy into the classroom. Cultural traditions are demonstrated in a rap written by one of the focus students in Mahiri & Sablo’s study. Troy was a self identified 11-grade writer/rapper. The work Troy produced represents how an African American rapper creates literacy. “In the process of producing meaning in these texts, Troy’s raps evidenced a number of literacy skills and literate behaviors that reveal how literacy is actually constructed and used in the context of urban African American youth’s everyday lives” (Mahiri & Sablo, 1996, p. 172). For example, one of Troy’s raps, ““Family Fam” demonstrates Troy’s prolific use of highly figurative African American language styles such as call and response and signifying“ (Mahiri & Sablo, 1996, p. 173). Troy also used rhetorical devices, slang, and preaching components, such as repetition, common to an African American literary tradition (Mahiri & Sablo, 1996). To
the traditional African American language skills, Troy added “dialogicality, or multivoicedness, ... an essential part of African American youth discourse” (Mahiri & Sablo, 1996, p. 173).

The strongest call for hip hop’s value for African American males is from the article by Mahiri & Sablo, (1996). Both authors compare the lack of support for African American youth voices in writing to the drugs on the streets, poisoning their lives. They state a teacher must develop curriculum to facilitate the development of a student voice. A voice is vital to an African American male struggling to forge an identity.

While reading and writing were denied to a large majority of the first African Americans, proverbs, folk cries, folktales, work songs, hollers, shouts and spirituals served as the literacy of the people. Oral Traditions integrate to skills of writing and reading in a unique manner. William Robinson put forward the idea that

“The fact that whites were generally deaf to the subtle complexity of black oral expression permitted African American culture to maintain a resilience, integrity, and subversive thrust that played an important role in the spiritual survival of the slaves.” Since its beginnings, the black oral tradition has been constantly evolving and functioning as a mode of black resistance to total cultural assimilation or even annihilation. (Robison in Hill, 1998, p. 10).

A unique verbal expression continues with the hip hop of today. The performer of hip hop must be able to not only write well on the page, but in a flow or on the fly, free styling (rapping with out writing down the rhymes).
This translates into dynamic writing/language practice. The poetry slam is a verbal reading of the writer’s work. Again, because of the oral tradition of the African American, reading should not only be defined as the interaction between a written text and its audience. Reading has the potential to be performance art, with the entire community participating in the reading of the ‘text’. In a style distinctive of the African American culture, reading and writing rely heavily on oral work and presentation.

Hip hop, as a genre, is not universally acclaimed. Wynton Marsalis, the well renowned jazz musician, describes it as “ghetto minstrelsy”. Social critic Stanley Crouch asserts that hip hop’s “elevation of pimps and pimp attitudes creates a sadomasochistic relationship with female fans.” Dyson repudiates this when he writes,

> It’s true that those who fail to wrestle with hip hop’s cultural complexity, and approach it in a facile manner, may be misled into unhealthy forms of behavior. *But that can be said for all art, including the incest-laden, murder-prone characters sketched in Shakespeare’s Macbeth and King Lear* (emphasis added) (Dyson, 2007, p. xv).

The value of hip hop to the African American community continues to be discussed in and out of the society. This may be one reason hip hop has not been viewed as another literary genre.

Hip hop as a literary genre is one curriculum change, which may be beneficial to African American men’s voice, writing, reading, and meaningful writing assignments. Mahrir and Sablo address the social changes needed to
allow schools to use issues within African American male's world in classes for writing and as learning experiences.

If the education of urban African American students receive is to be a liberatory one, the specific kinds of materials to which their literacy skills are applied is also significant. Further, these students' writing must name and link the issues that schools have difficulty addressing, including racism, poverty, gang violence, and drugs (Mahrir & Sablo, 1996, p. 178).

The courage to recognize hip hop as a literary genre of African American males validates them as a member of the school culture. Hip hop expresses their life experiences and is a literary genre that could assist educational instruction, in class reading and writing skills.

Kevin's Conclusion

Kevin has been out of school for several years now. His business is expanding nicely. A tight ride is parked outside. When Kevin’s baby momma gets on his nerves, he leaves. All Kevin has to do is drive in his zone and everyone knows its Kevin. Costumers know; all the fine ladies who’ve gone for a ride, they know. His home boys know. So does Kevin’s competition... and the police....

Kevin was sentenced and is incarcerated 10 n 20 for narcotics. Kevin looks back. Was being on the street what Kevin wants to do when he is out? No. He is determined not to come back to prison. Kevin decides he needs an education to have a chance at a good life. A college in the facility offers an associate’s degree, or a bachelor. With that, Kevin could open a legit business. Or work for someone else. Not flash and fast, but it beats being in prison. Or worse. Kevin decides it is time to man up.
Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to discover an effective curriculum and instructional pedagogy for African American males in an English composition classroom. The following questions drove my academic exploration:

a.) What elements of curriculum and instruction are most effective for African American males?

The research completed suggests William Doll’s Four R’ post-modern curriculum can be the framework upon which to build an English composition course. The post-modern curriculum is capable of incorporating the Afrocentric principles, such as collaboration, cooperation, and a circular nature of learning of the African American culture. The Four R’s also fulfill the requirements for college level writing as defined by Sullivan and Tinberg.

To incorporate Doll’s curriculum, Sullivan and Tinberg’s composition principles, and Afrocentricism, the selection of the instructional theory of the Writing Workshop is appropriate. All these components collaborate to provide an African American learner a rich, supportive, theoretically sound curriculum for learning.

b.) How can instructors effectively engage the African American male in a college English composition course?

The use of Doll’s post-modern curriculum pedagogy with Afrocentricism is supportive of the learning identified in this thesis as
successful with African American males. The post-modern curriculum of Doll’s Four R’s, rigor, recursion, relational and richness, opens learning to other experiences, text, and ideals. Afrocentric principles of cooperation, collaboration, relationships with others, and other ideals can be included in a post-modern curriculum. The research in the paper support the inclusion of a post-modern curriculum and Afrocentric principles to facilitate African American male learning. The ability of Doll’s curriculum to employ the Afrocentric principles is important to any teacher who desires to combat the loss of African American males in the educational setting. I would go so far as to say teachers, schools and districts should be required to examine how a Doll/Afrocentric curriculum model could be implemented for their African American students. The young African American males are too significant members of our communities and society as a whole, to continue to loose their intellectual potential.

c.) What, if any, role does African American masculinity play in the classroom?

Young African American male’s development of masculinity is a factor to consider in selection of curriculum. The historical components, which influenced masculinity development, such as the cool pose, are present in the culture today. Masculinity has become urbanized or hard. A post-modern curriculum with the Afrocentric ideals may provide the African American
male the liberty to scrutinize masculinity thus supporting a young man’s quest for educational advancement and economic success. While the use of hip hop as literature may be controversial, it needs to viewed as any other genre. There are books unsuitable for all students. The objective in using hip hop is the validation of African American male’s lived experiences. Hip hop gives African American males a voice, a way to express their emotions.

d.) What instructional strategies should a teacher enact to effectively provide literacy instruction for African American males in his/her classroom?

An examination of college level writing led to the application of Sullivan and Tinberg’s four principles of college level writing. Sullivan and Tinberg stated a writer requires time and support to grow as a writer. Reading and writing are skills that are intertwined. Reading improves writing, and writing improves reading. A writer’s voice is an element that is challenging to develop, but important to make writing personal. Finally, each writer needs meaningful writing assignments. Student choices of topic, genre, and approach to writing are part of the process to effectively engage writers. These four principles are crucial to the students, as they become writers. Any composition course that strives to produce a person who must function as a writer for life must utilize Sullivan and the four principles effective college compositional writing. As the men in my class would say, “Do you feel me?” The educational system must ‘feel’, understand, the
learning requirements of the African American males in our classrooms. By focusing on the principles Sullivan identifies for college writing, an instructor can work with their students to give them the power of writing.

Works Cited


