CHAPTER 3: EDUCATION (20:43-37:56)

This chapter considers the experience of speakers of non-mainstream dialects in an education system designed for speakers of Standard American English. Additionally, experts discuss how ignorance of Black Language and culture can result in misdiagnosis of speech and language issues as well as behavioral misunderstandings that lead to unfair consequences for those students.

KEY CONCEPTS

The Ebonics Controversy began when, in December of 1996, the Oakland (CA) School Board passed a resolution claiming that African American English (AAE) was a language and should be used in classrooms to help those speakers learn standard classroom English. The resolution was met with national attention, most of it negative. More information about the Ebonics program and surrounding controversy can be found in the "Extra Stuff" and "Additional Resources" sections.

Communication disorder The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) defines a communication disorder as "an impairment in the ability to receive, send, process, and comprehend concepts or verbal, nonverbal and graphic symbol systems."

The term **"school-to-prison pipeline"** originated in education circles to highlight how school discipline policies disproportionately affect students of color, often leading to their involvement in the justice system.

Culturally sensitive education, or culturally responsive teaching, values students' cultural backgrounds to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

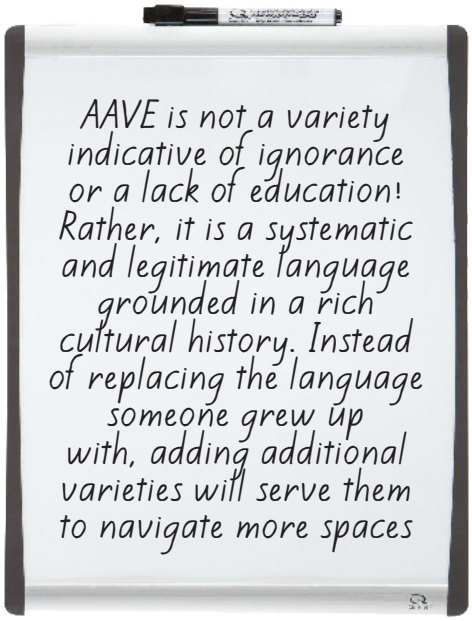
"Where American educational policy is failing is that it doesn't know enough about the relationship between culture and education and achievement, and there is this tendency to think that one-size-fits-all works in a country of 330 million people with, you know, tens and tens of millions of school-age kids."
- Prudence Carter, sociologist

"We have an overrepresentation of Black and brown youth in special education and it connects to the school-to-prison pipeline. And so once we begin to track them into the special education system when they don't belong there, we affect their intrinsic motivation to academically succeed."
- Shameka Stanford, Speech-language pathologist

COMMON MISCONCEPTION

people may think

the truth is



LINGUISTIC CONCENSUS: Black Language has a rich history and culture. Speakers can add other varieties to their repertoire without having to "lose" or replace it.

EXTRA STUFF

Early in the Education segment we see a short clip from a 1997 C-SPAN hearing about the question of "Ebonics." Professor Robert Williams is one of many who testified before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee (which oversees education funding). He shares childhood memories of how instructors and counselors made decisions, based on the way he spoke, that affected the course of his education. Although many language experts weighed in (at that hearing and on the Ebonics controversy more broadly), misunderstandings by the media and the general public persist today. The entire hearing is available to watch via C-SPAN's website.
The first film in our Talking Black in America series addresses the Ebonics controversy in more depth; here is a link to that segment of the film.

In the film, speech language pathologists (SLPs) discuss one of the ways that a lack of understanding of language continues to affect students' educational experiences today. When young children who speak African American English are referred for special services, such as speech and language therapy, that they do not require. We created a documentary short about why the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) works to educate its SLPs on making the very important distinction between language *differences* (speaking a variety that is different than standard English) and a language *disorder* that could be addressed by assistance from an SLP.
For an additional perspective from an SLP, check out this article.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. Do you feel like you speak differently at home or with friends than the way you speak in class?
2. Have you (or someone you've known) hesitated to speak up in class because of not wanting others to hear the way you speak?

POST-VIEWING

1. Recall in the video when the young girl was having her language choices tested by a speech therapist. What biases might be present in a test like this? What are the potential lasting consecuences for a student who undergoes this type of testing?
2. Are there contexts in which you code shift, or change your speaking style? Where and when?
3. Do you think that having different language styles in the classeroom is beneficial? Would it be better to have one style, used by all people? Why or why not?
4. Can you think of an instance in popular media where African American English was used? How about books you've read for school? How were the speakers of African American English portrayed?

Additional Resources

Black English and "Proper" English: The impact of language-based racism from the Reading Partners Website

African American English Articulation Differences and Language Characteristics - Tips to Increase Effectiveness for Speech Language Pathologists

From Kappan Online, a publication about K-12 education: Lessons from the media's coverage of the 1996 Ebonics controversy