

VOICES IN AN EDUCATION TRAP:  
Linguistic Deficit Theory in Nova Scotia Assessments

by

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## Dedication

To my ‘Scotian Talented Tenth and the African Nova Scotian Community whom we wish to encourage and uplift: [switch] *I see you! I ain’t forgot ‘bout you!* [switch] Never give up even at the darkest hour; know how intelligent and extraordinary you are. Read “Mother to Son” by Langston Hughes and continue on. I will always support you. Education is freedom and strength. Think, act, and lead!

I decided to do this project because I never want linguistic discrimination and racist ideologies to prevent you from succeeding in school and elsewhere. [switch] *Don’t be ‘shame of yourself. Love ‘r culture.* [switch] Learn to code-switch in English [switch] *et en Français* [switch] without prejudice or shame of your mother tongue. Code-switch as a skill to help you succeed in Canadian society, but never forget who you are and where you come from. Our speech is socially important, beautifully different, linguistically complex, and undoubtedly equal to all. You are our voice, our exceptional African Nova Scotian voice, which needs to be heard. Don’t let oppression silence you. Speak on and say it LOUD...

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## **Abstract**

Research in the area of sociolinguistics, African Nova Scotian Ebonics, and literacy achievement never truly developed in Nova Scotia. Unlike previous literacy outcome research, this research study employs a qualitative content analysis and Critical Pedagogy to examine the process of assessment and the Linguistic Deficit Theory embedded within the education system. The sociolinguistic hierarchy of Standard English has caused numerous misconceptions, which impacts the Ebonics speech community across the African diaspora. Yet, previous research found that the promotion of code-switching between Standard English and Ebonics in an anti-racist empowering environment promotes higher literacy achievement among Ebonics speakers. My research findings suggest that the Nova Scotia education system has implemented cultural and linguistic diverse curriculum policies. However, the Linguistic Deficit Theory resurfaces in several sections of the assessment process. These findings suggest that future research should focus on in-classroom participation or observing the assessment practices for more detailed and generalizable findings.

## **List of Abbreviations Used**

**ANSE-** African Nova Scotian Ebonics

**AYR-**Active Young Readers: Teaching Assessment Resource

**EAL-**English as an Additional Language

**LACP-**(English) Language Arts Curriculum Policy

**LDT-**Linguistic Deficit Theory

**SE-** Standard English

**TIA-**Active Young Readers: Teaching in Action

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We will never forget Burnley Allan “Rocky” Jones or Trayvon Martin and their impact on our world. Rest Peacefully. \*Hoodie Up\*



## Chapter One: Introduction

*“I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not...”* (DuBois, 1903, p. 108)

In this classic quote DuBois (1903) uses this literary allusion to highlight and challenge the myth that African North Americans are intellectually inferior to Caucasian Americans who continuously are falsely perceived as physically, intellectually and socially superior. People of African descent, whose present social conditions are a reflection of the aggressive and brutal conditions of their American beginnings, are perceived and treated as less than humans with low cognitive ability. More than a century later, the perceived intellectual inferiority or intellectual capacity of African North Americans is continuously misrepresented through assessment outcomes that deem African North American children as underachieving and inevitably unequal to Caucasian North Americans intellectually. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are numerous examples of research on African North American intelligence emphasizing the perceived academic gap based on various factors (Bodovski, 2010; Caldas & Bankston III, 1999; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Morgan & Mehta, 2004; St.C.Oates, 2009).

The fixation with comparing intelligence and achievement between African and Caucasian North Americans is not a new area of research. Wilcox (2005) demonstrates that the earliest perspective on African North American intelligence and bodies seeks to confirm an alleged superiority of the elite class to further oppress and control newly freed African North Americans naming them dangerous and illogical (p.523). There continues to be a profound area of research focusing on the academic achievement of African North Americans and Caucasian North Americans (Codjoe, 2001; Smith, Schneider, & Ruck, 2005). The well-researched White-Black achievement gap is a major interest in the

behavioural and social sciences. Social scientists, such as Thiessen (2009), dedicate years researching the discontinuity between African North American students' and Caucasian North American students' test scores across various age groups, grade levels, and geographical locations. Although, researchers altruistically aim to understand the social factors that prevent African North Americans from performing as well as Caucasian students, the end result further reinforces African North American achievement issues (Bodovski, 2010). Explicitly and implicitly this research contributes to the perceived superiority of Caucasian intelligence based solely on the academic assessment outcomes.

Academic achievement research focusing on literacy assessment final scores is one method dominating the research field and causing a skewed understanding of the phenomenon. Put simply, the focus on understanding the "what is achievement" question, while only considering final scores, ignores the process of assessment and the factors influencing test outcomes. For example, Thiessen (2009) uses Nova Scotian student literacy and numeracy assessment final scores to determine the academic achievement among various ethnic groups. The assessment outcomes only tell part of the story of this perceived achievement gap. An important aspect of understanding literacy achievement is the process of assessment, as this has a direct impact on the phenomenon that deems African North Americans as underachieving. Giroux (1988) and Henry & Tator (2006) demonstrate that the school's role in influencing the academic outcome of students is often neglected. Without investigating the testing instruments and assessment tools embedded in the public school system, the school's responsibility is further ignored. Therefore, academic achievement research must move toward exploring the process of assessment and its effects on academic achievement.

This research project focuses on academic achievement of the largest visible minority population (African Nova Scotians) in Nova Scotia. In comparison to other Canadian provinces with minority populations, literary outcomes are similar with minor differences (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994; Smith et al., 2005).

Achievement gap research in Nova Scotia focuses on the final literacy achievement score identifying African Nova Scotians' failure to meet educational standards. The Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) and Thiessen (2009) find alarming results indicating that the literacy achievements of African Nova Scotia students, between the ages of five through 15, is significantly lower than Caucasian Nova Scotians. These results showcase that literacy achievements are consistent over the last two decades. Furthermore, research on literacy achievement has a large quantitative focus while researching the assessment outcomes (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994; Thiessen, 2009). It is important to note, however, that quantitative research focusing solely on the outcomes does not give an in-depth description of what is happening in literacy achievement (Thiessen, 2009). Quantitative data helps to show that a phenomenon exist, but most of the research data is not released publicly, which leaves gaps in the literature surrounding literacy achievement and understanding how to improve decades of low outcomes.

Additionally, the study of sociolinguistics in the education system is largely neglected in Nova Scotia. More specifically, understanding African Nova Scotian Ebonics (ANSE) and its sociolinguistic influence on education is limited in social science (Fauset, 1931; Clarke, 2002), yet is a very developed area of research in United States (Fogel & Ehri, 2006; Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006; Seymour, Abdulkarim, & Johnson, 1999; Smitherman, 1997; Whitney, 2005). Within

this study, “African Nova Scotian Ebonics” refers to the historical rule-governed linguistic system which is the first linguistic code spoken by the African Nova Scotian community deriving from Niger-Congo African Ancestry (adapted from Williams, 1975, as cited by Smith & Crozier, 1998, p. 112). African Nova Scotian Ebonics is a sociolinguistic continuum where the speech community speaks between the basilect (farthest from the standard) and the acrolect (closest to the standard) (Bailey, 1969; Clarke, 2002). The earliest documentation of ANSE (referred to as Black English at the time) takes place in Halifax throughout 1750 where approximately 16 enslaved people are identified (Clarke, 2002). This demonstrates ANSE’s long history within the province and its continuity among a speech community. For instance, Clarke (2002) details a Caucasian author who is attempting to make a comedy out of the ANSE-speaking woman, however through this dialogue shows distinct linguistic features and social hardships:

Why, I never had no such work to do at home as I have to do here, grubbin’ up old stumps and stones; dem isn’t women’s work. When I was home, I only had to wait on misses, and work was light and easy [...] de difference is, dat when I work here, I work for myself. (p.93).

As the Preston woman details the social class differences in Nova Scotia compared to her experience in the United States, she demonstrates ANSE is more than its complex linguistic system filled with lexicon and grammar. African Nova Scotian Ebonics carries a sociolinguistic representation of a deep history and experience lived by the African Nova Scotian community. African Nova Scotian Ebonics, like Ebonics across the African diaspora, is more than words and grammar; it embodies an entire culture (Fanon, 1967, p.2).

Sociolinguistics emphasizes that all linguistic codes are equal and are fundamentally used as a communication tool and therefore functional (Hymes, 1980, p.51). However, Ebonics across the African diaspora and other non-standard dialects are consistently under scrutiny within the sociolinguistic discipline as well as the public. Ebonics must continuously legitimize its linguistic and sociolinguistic value unlike the rule-governed linguistic system which is an official language in most countries around the world, politically referred to as Standard English (SE) (Ronkin & Karn, 1999). Myths and misconceptions about Ebonics falsify its function in society and further discriminate the speech community. The most common myths pertaining to Ebonics are as follows: 1) there is no African sociolinguistic heritage; 2) it is illogical, lazy, broken English; and therefore, 3) it is a language acquisition deficiency (Thompson, 2000, p.419). These myths are challenged and falsified by Ebonics researchers who have spent over five decades of linguistic and sociolinguistic research legitimizing the existence of Ebonics across the African diaspora (Gibbs, 1997; Green, 2002; Smitherman, 1997; Thompson, 2000; Yancy, 2011). The perceived social-political value emphasis on SE forces these myths outside the sociolinguistic discipline. For example, researchers argue that these misconceptions and prejudice towards Ebonics have invaded the education system, affecting academic achievement and assessment (Palacas, 2001; Seymour & Seymour, 1979a). Above all, there is a lack of in-depth, descriptive research on the sociolinguistic impact ANSE has within the education system that would help in fully understanding literacy achievement and in this thesis I aim to accomplish that.

## **Hypothesis**

As noted previously, the state of African Nova Scotian academic achievement is steadily an overwhelming underachievement. Regardless of the long history of African

Nova Scotians, the educational barriers and challenges are often represented through one methodology of research (Thiessen, 2009). Contrary to previous literacy research in Nova Scotia focusing on the assessment outcomes, I strive in this thesis to understand the process of assessment. The process of literary assessment is important research for broadening the scope of the well-researched academic achievements “gaps”. Thus, guided theoretically by Critical Pedagogy, I hypothesize that the Linguistic Deficit Theory (LDT) is consistently utilized in the Nova Scotia education literacy assessments.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework**

### **Linguistic Deficit Theory**

There is a historic preoccupation with the African American speech community in sociolinguistics since its infancy (Yancy, 2011). Furthermore, the public historically emphasizes the ability of African Americans to acquire SE:

In 1734, the Philadelphia American Weekly Mercury carried the following notice: “Run away...he's Pennsylvanian born and speaks good English”...An ad in 1760 edition of the North Carolina Gazette stated: “Run away from Subscriber, African born, speaks bad English.” (Wright, 1998, p.7).

Distinguishing SE in “good” or “bad” categories illustrates the emphasis on speech and the social power placed on the knowledge of SE. It also demonstrates that there is a consistent hierarchy of which language is superior and the use of other linguistic codes is seen as “bad English”. Standard English is the dominant reference point for sociolinguistics where languages or dialects which seem similar to the uncritical ear are cast into a dichotomy of “good” versus “bad” in society and early sociolinguistics. During a time of political and social change in United States, sociolinguistics in the beginning stages starts to gain popularity (Yancy, 2011). During this time, scientists’ interests move beyond hard-core linguistics to the application of language in social interaction and its significance for cultural groups (Hymes, 1980). Although, cultural groups, especially African Americans, who challenge racist ideologies governing the country, sociolinguists did not embrace the progressive movement during the 1960s. Sociolinguists continue to practice and theorize racist ideologies regarding African Americans and their speech

community similar to the slaveholder's perception of language in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Bereiter, & Englemann, 1966).

Since the 1960s and 1970s era, there are many theories in sociolinguistics that perpetuate racist ideologies. These theories are the foundation and practice for the new wave of scholars convincing the world that language influences society and vice versa. Yancy (2011) argues that these new wave sociolinguists guided their work in the Linguistic Deficit Theory (LDT), which they coined as characteristic of the African American speech patterns and the African American community (p.43). The "LDT" refers to Ebonics adults and children not having a language resulting from cultural disadvantage (Seymour & Seymour, 1979a, p. 399). Put simply, Seymour & Seymour (1979a) argue that the LDT assumes that the Ebonics speech community does not acquire language (SE in particular) and that Ebonics speakers do not have language skills based on cultural disadvantage. As one of the most well-known Ebonics researcher, Ernie Smith, recalls firsthand the experience as a child going into a school applying the LDT:

In 1948 my family moved to south central Los Angeles, where I attended a predominately Black grade school. At this particular elementary school, I was confronted with the fact that my language was different and that this difference was perceived as a 'deficiency' that needed to be corrected [...] they suggested that our language differences were deficiencies that were related to physical and/or mental abnormalities. (Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2002, p. 17).

Ernie Smith's experience is not unique; his experience represents the experiences of Ebonics-speaking children entering the classroom. The LDT, and those who practice it, assume that children from this speech community enter school with underdeveloped scattered language and literacy skills (Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2002, p.17). The LDT,



therefore, ignores the linguistic and sociolinguistic significance of Ebonics by reinforcing the fundamental ideologies based in the socio-political hierarchy of SE.

Sociolinguistic theories are arguably based in the ideology that African Americans are intellectually inferior since the beginning of the American slave era (Seymour & Seymour, 1979a; Speircher & McMahon, 1992; Thompson, 2000; Yancy, 2011). Seymour & Seymour (1979a) and Williams (1997) demonstrate that sociolinguists use government support and funding for research programs to confirm that African Americans are intellectually inferior early in sociolinguistics history to sustain white supremacy and the linguistic hierarchy of SE within society. Furthermore, this sociolinguistic theory characterizes African American Ebonics-speaking children having illogical behaviours along with an underdeveloped intellect: "[T]he language of culturally deprived children is not merely an underdeveloped version of Standard English, but it is a basically non-logical mode of behavior" (Bereiter & Englemann, 1966, as cited in Writght, 1998, p. 7). The "non-logical behaviors" linked to the "bad English" Ebonics speakers are clear indicators that sociolinguists ignore the possibility of a linguistic difference outside of SE. It also marginalizes a cultural group and demonizes their linguistic behaviors as "bad". This theory does not offer any explanation for logical linguistics or levels of social acceptance of Ebonics. This theory is dependent on SE being the only logical language of North America to read, write, and speak. Ultimately, this theory ignores the history of African North Americans and deems their speech community as inferior due to the perceived inability to speak "good" SE.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

In an effort to challenge the LDT and the damaging affect it has on growth and acceptance in the academic and public sphere, I apply a liberating theory to understand

literacy and ANSE in Nova Scotia. My thesis project is guided by an alternative teaching philosophy known as Critical Pedagogy. Critical Pedagogy critiques the current Canadian education system which marginalizes and forces students to submit to narrowly-defined learning materials and methods (Freire, 1970; Henry & Tator, 2006). The current teaching methods force ideologies of dominant culture to be the only view of reality for students (Henry & Tator, 2006, p.204). Critical Pedagogy criticizes educational methods for its oppressive teaching and learning methods that condition students to submit to the dominant cultural rules and norms of society (Freire, 1970; Giroux, & McLaren, 1989; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007).

Like many other provinces across Canada, the Nova Scotia education system has not escaped what Freire (1970) coins “suffering for narration sickness” (p.71). Freire (1970) and other Critical Pedagogy scholars refer to narration as a one-way teacher-student relationship fundamentally based on the banking method (Baral, 2006; Giroux, 1988). The “banking method” refers to the ways in which the teacher becomes the complete knowledge authority over their students whereas students become passive receptors of knowledge (Freire, 1970, p.72). In this student-teacher relationship, students simply receive knowledge, accept this knowledge as truth, and store the information which the ultimate authority gives to them (Freire, 1970, p.72; Giroux, 1988). The banking method relies on student obedience without question or room for critical analysis of the information given. By creating this type of teacher-student relationship, students do not develop the creativity and critical thinking necessary to assess their social situation (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007, p. 190). Furthermore, the lack of critique continues established social biases and hierarchies that reinforce inequalities and exclusion (Giroux, 1988; Henry & Tator, 2006). The banking method leaves students with an empty view of

learning and more importantly, an inequitable success rate for already marginalized groups to meet their highest potential.

To challenge the exclusive oppressive theories such as the LDT and the banking method, Critical Pedagogy encourages students to challenge social norms and ideologies which bind them and their communities. Critical Pedagogy's main goals are empowerment, liberation and transformation (Freire, 1970). Cook (2000) encourages teachers and students to critically examine the social behaviours and inequalities which are taken for granted on a daily basis and start a transformation which will empower all students. Students and teachers need to challenge their daily interactions and their cognitive processes that they take as "natural" or "normal". Critical Pedagogy, therefore, seeks to break through this oppressive learning technique and instead encourage a means of inclusion. Not only does Critical Pedagogy liberate oppressive reproduction, it empowers students to transform the social organization in which they live (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007, p.191).

In theory and in practice, Critical Pedagogy involves in-depth critical analysis through reflection and dialogue, but also calls for transformation through action. Put simply, it is not enough for students and teachers to think and talk about liberating change; they must act on them (Freire, 1970, p. 125). Through thinking and engaging in Critical Pedagogy, the teacher-student relationship starts to become an equal academic and social partnership in a quest for freedom and socio-political change (Giroux, 1988). Although liberation and empowerment is the most rewarding goal to achieve, it is argued that the process of achieving this goal is the most difficult for students and teachers (Freire, 1970, p.49). In light of Critical Pedagogy, my study strongly encourages teachers and African Nova Scotian students to immerse into Critical Pedagogy to shed the

sociolinguistic barriers which limit their transformation and academic growth. African Nova Scotian students and their teachers must empower each other to achieve their literacy potential while transforming the social and political barriers they face.

Critical Pedagogy is an expressive, creative, and critical form of learning. It is argued that there is no distinct method to practice Critical Pedagogy as this would reproduce the constraining blueprint of the banking method (Cook, 2000, p. 16). Through dialogue, teachers and students share their knowledge and begin to challenge the traditional models of life. Without dialogue, Freire (1970) argues that education would “reduce men to the status of ‘things’- and this is a job for oppressors, not for revolutionaries” (p.128). Freire (1970) is illuminating the dehumanizing effects of the lack of questioning and passively accepting all knowledge as truth. The banking method frequently ignores continuous learning where the teacher and the student share knowledge within a teacher-student relationship (Baral, 2006; Giroux, 1988).

The teacher who practices Critical Pedagogy must be a leader and a learner. Canadian and American literature details the challenges facing students of African descent are caused by the attitudes and pedagogy of the teachers (Apple, 1999; Codjoe, 2001, Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Henry & Tator, 2006). In Critical Pedagogy, the teacher must take the role of guiding students to consciousness and not resort back to methods that impede critical awareness and analysis (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007). Through encouraging an alternative means of thinking, the teacher must become a learner by being involved in dialogue as they lead. It is imperative that the teacher does not confuse being a leader with being an absolute authority and dictator; they must not strive to win the opinions of the students and follow learners as this would reproduce the banking method (Freire, 1970, p. 80). Teachers must find alternative means of leading, teaching , and

learning through testimony, poems, songs, oral history, article analysis (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007) It is the teacher's role to create empowering and liberating teaching blue prints that fosters academic and social consciousness for the purpose of freedom for all (Freire,1970; Stewart, 2009).

In addition, the role of the student must not be undermined by the teacher, as both are working alongside each other to grow into a new liberation. Students in an oppressed society must strive to challenge the social ideologies which dehumanize and neglect them. Freire (1970) argues that students must not be fearful of this critical analysis or the consciousness that Critical Pedagogy requires, this process of consciousness will liberate them and prepare them for action; it is through this process that students become leaders (p. 81). The benefits of acting against the oppressive position they hold in society are plentiful. Through Critical Pedagogy students are not only made stronger through thinking about inequalities, they are liberated in ways that the traditional method taught them could and should never be. For example, students are free to use their creativity and engage in discussion which is silenced in the banking method. Students are encouraged to explore their cognitive-behavioural talents and skills which are not concerned with racist streaming processes that deem students inadequate or illogical (Henry & Tator, 2006). Certain scholars explain that the traditional method of learning does not provide minority students with an adequate learning environment and that minority students are much better at using critical thinking and analysing (Cook, 2000; Hill, 2009).

A safe and empowering environment is also critical to help students and teachers to develop their relationship while achieving consciousness. Traditional schools can be extremely damaging for minority students who learn that school is only a place of instruction (Henry & Tator, 2006). This misconception neglects to understand the social

influence educational institutions have on social and political inequalities which exist (Giroux, 1988, p. xxx). The site where Critical Pedagogy is taught must be a site where students can express themselves freely without prejudice and/or a restricting authority holding absolute knowledge. To move into a liberated environment, teachers must ensure an openness of the environment so that transformation can develop.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

### Historical Foundations

Ebonics evolved through various names and descriptions throughout American history. In sociolinguistics, Ebonics theories are debated, examined, and critiqued. Ebonics, a sociolinguistic system, is consistently in open debate surrounding its legitimacy and influence on the African diaspora, specifically African North Americans (Myhill, 1995; Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001; Williams, 1991). The most reoccurring theories are about the origin of Ebonics (Baugh, 1999; Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1997; Smith & Crozier, 1998; Thompson, 2000). This fundamental debate continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and adds to the depth of the complexity of Ebonics sociolinguistic significance (Labov, 2010; Thompson, 2000; Wolfram, Thomas, & Green, 2000). Labov (1998) best describes the diversity of theories about its origin by stating: “any attempt to state a general consensus can only be momentarily successful” (as cited in Wolfram et al., 2000, p. 315). There are diverse opinions related to the origin of Ebonics, but many underlying factors continue to be the foundation of a historically oppressed speech community.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are three main theories which are tested (Thompson, 2000; Williams, 1997). These three theories are all based on the extremely important factor that African people were enslaved through violent colonization in the America. Green (2002) shows that during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, African people (mainly West Africans) were forced into enslavement and brought to the Americas where they became the less than human population dominated by people of European descent (p.8). One extremely enforced method of control and oppression is the laws

against the enslaved population learning to read and write (Means Colemean & Daniel, 2000, p. 77).

American enslaved populations and their descendants are not entitled to formal lessons in SE during the American slave trade therefore, the acquisition of SE is not readily available to this population during the beginning of American history. Holm (2000) and Williams (1997) describe the enslaved people as captured throughout a very linguistically diverse West Africa and brought together speaking very diverse languages and through time create a common language, known as a pidgin, or continued previous pidgins from trading posts while in Africa to communicate to each other. This pidgin is passed to the descendants of the enslaved population and creates what is known as a creole of all West African languages (Mufwene, Rickford, Bailey, & Baugh, 1998; Thompson, 2000; Williams, 1997). Researchers refer to this linguistic variety as the “Pidgin / Creole Dialect Theory” (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 199, p.302; Williams, 1997, p.210).

The Creole/Pidgin Dialect Theory is the commonly accepted theory on the origin of Ebonics during the 1960s to 1980s. This theory is also debated to have Caribbean influence on Ebonics (Mufwene et al., 1998, p. 161; Myhill, 1995). It is argued that the transportation of West Africans into countries such as Jamaica, where their distinct creole Patwa was forming continued into the United States where enslaved Africans applied this to SE lexicon; this argument is supported through the analysis of ex-slave recordings from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Myhill, 1995, p.166). Researchers use these recordings to analyze and compare Ebonics speech communities that are living distinct lives across the African diaspora in Dominican Republic and Nova Scotia (Myhill, 1995; Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1991; Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). This is a formal distinction from another linguistic



origin theories which are based on no African base and speculation that the enslaved population acquired SE through the slave master's baby-talk, known as the "Transformational Theory" (Thompson, 2000, p.427). Although, the creolized theories add to the growth in research on the legitimacy of Ebonics, it still is based on simple words mixed together and not deep rooted in historic linguistic systems (Thompson, 2000; Williams, 1997).

The final theory related to the origin of Ebonics further establishes its history, Africentric linguistic structure, and the sociolinguistic importance of the speech community. The "Ethnolinguistic Theory" refers to Ebonics' heavily based linguistic foundation in West African syntax and overlapping Standard English lexicon (Thompson, 2000, p. 427). The linguistic features such as morphology that create the language/dialect and make it a distinct form of communication is established in Africa and variations of SE lexicon were added. To emphasize the importance of the conditions which shape the formation of Ebonics, this theory captures Ebonics as the totality of African North American experience and history presently used for communicating. Hymes (1980) further emphasizes this in his argument that the evolution of a language or dialect is based on the speech community's socio-historic influences (p. 9). That said, the social and historic conditions which shape the formation of this speech community must be accounted for and the previous sociolinguistic background they bring to their new oppressed world must be considered. Overall, this origin captures the most recent and relevant origin of Ebonics establishing it separately and equally among all languages and dialects.

## **Sociolinguistic Inequality and Standards**

The sociolinguistics discipline benefits from ground-breaking methods used on Ebonics' origin to analyze and theorize inequalities of other languages studied within the discipline (Rickford, 1997). However, there continues to be a historical hierarchy given to certain languages over others which influences the discipline and how various linguistic codes are viewed publicly. Hymes (1980) and Rickford (1997) emphasize that sociolinguistics establishes itself on the linguistic equality and the equal use of languages for their cultural-social speech communities. For example, a pioneering researcher in sociolinguistics states that linguistic equality is the goal of this discipline, but in society languages are given up are deemed inadequate "because of their suitability for certain purposes" (Hymes, 1980, p.51). The definition of "suitability" is defined by those in powerful positions who neglect to recognize their position in the inequalities reproduced through defining linguistic codes.

Linguistic inequalities as experienced by Ebonics speakers are as old as the American slave trade. During the American slave trade, the slave masters and those of the ruling class reinforce their social status and racial superiority through their use of SE (Holms, 2000; Thompson, 2000). Means Coleman & Daniel (2000) explain that the enslaved population who speak in African languages or pidgins are made to believe that their languages are not human and shunned from speaking in their mother tongues because SE is the only logical form of communication (p.77). As Means Coleman & Daniel (2000) assert, the linguistic inequalities which were placed within the enslaved society were a form of control:

Because they were also concerned with facts such as the slaves' ability to communicate among themselves for purposes of solidarity and rebellion, slave masters also employed divisive tactics such as (a) mixing slaves from different linguistic-cultural regions of Africa to impede communication; (b) forbidding Africans from speaking their indigenous languages or passing it along to others; (c) at birth, separating children from their mothers; and (d) making it illegal for slaves to be taught to read or write the English language. (p.77)

It becomes much easier for the slave masters and the ruling class to emphasize the superiority of their linguistic code and further degrade the enslaved speech community through these methods of control. The ways in which SE is viewed as a priority and a superior language over other languages has an effect on the development in sociolinguistics and the struggle for Ebonics to gain its respectful right as equal.

### **Theories and Schools of Thought**

Theory is necessary for guidance and understanding throughout the research processes. Theories guide research methodology and thus, define and influence research findings. Sociolinguistics suffers from racist theories dictating social norms and misrepresenting the African North American Ebonics speech community (Krapp, 1925, as cited in Thompson, 2000, p.424). Baugh (1999) argues that other theories similar to the LDT misinterpret and ignore evidence because a theory is narrowly-based on exclusion (p. 9). An example of a narrowly defined theory is the so-called “Traditional View Theory” which has often been applied to pidgin/creole speakers (Beckford Wassink, 1999, p. 58). The “Traditional View Theory” refers to the standard language as “good” and other linguistic codes as “bad” (Beckford Wassink, 1999, p. 58). For example, SE is

believed to be good and Jamaican Creole (or Ebonics) as “bad” which is a political moral judgement of language. This theory utilizes the social position of SE and its predominately upper class speech community to reinforce the subordination of Ebonics in North America and Jamaican Creole in Jamaica (Devonish & Carpenter, 2007; Seymour & Seymour, 1979a). The morality of goodness within society is defined to reflect those in power. The so-called Traditional View Theory within sociolinguistics contradicts the idea that all languages are equal and is a lingering ideology that hinders the growth of equality.

Theories like all good research must be critically assessed and challenged, especially as information and new scholars use different theoretical lenses. One of the main critiques that scholars advocate in Ebonics research within sociolinguistics is the lack of representation of the speech community conducting research (Rickford, 1997, p. 169). Scholars note the lack of Ebonics-speaking researchers within the field, which causes theoretical issues misinterpreting the true richness of Ebonics (Yancy, 2011, p.43). Ebonics-speaking researchers are necessary to redefine the sociolinguistic theories applied to Ebonics and the speech community. Through self-determination and solidarity, Ebonics-speaking researchers challenge the previous theoretical frameworks and create a sociolinguistic theory based on inclusiveness and equality (Yancy, 2011, p. 45). The “Linguistic Difference Theory” refers to the idea that all languages are simply different and equal (Seymour & Seymour, 1979a, p. 399). This theory reflects the mandate of sociolinguistics itself (Hymes, 1980). When the Linguistic Difference Theory is applied to research, sociolinguists examine linguistic codes by their complexities and not a comparative analysis emphasizing hierarchy.

## **Myths and Stereotypes**

Scholars and the public alike use methods that devalue Ebonics, in the face of SE, to create myths and stereotypes. Sociolinguistics must recognize the myths it influences and supports that contribute to society's viewpoint of Ebonics. As noted earlier, the origin of Ebonics is one of the main misconceptions turned into myth. Ebonics researchers recognize the myth stating that Ebonics is not linked to Africa causes confusion related to the sociolinguistic function and the separation from SE (Green, 2002; Palacas, 2001; Thompson, 2000). As argued by the Ethnolinguistic Theory, the origin of Ebonics is fundamentally based in West African linguistics; however, the myth that there is no connection causes scholars and the public to believe that Ebonics is an underdeveloped SE. Ebonics-speaking linguists and sociolinguists continue to argue that the study of Ebonics when in comparison to SE ignores these two linguistic systems as existing independently (Green, 2002; Yancy, 2011). For example, in earlier studies sociolinguists study Ebonics to reaffirm that it is not its own linguistic system and thus, falsely highlight that Ebonics is a sub-version to the alleged superior SE (Labov, 1972, as cited in Palacas, 2001, p. 328). Palacas (2001) argues further that the idea of SE and Ebonics having the same underlying linguistic structure contradicts evidence of language acquisition amongst the Ebonics speech community: "if the two varieties are so similar in their underlying structures and origins, then why do so many Ebonics-speaking students have difficulty consistently producing fully acceptable Standard English?" (p. 328). Ignoring the heavily African foundation of Ebonics which separates it from SE also ignores the extreme circumstances that Ebonics came to be formed and the sociolinguistic importance of Ebonics to its speech community.

In addition to the misinterpretation of the African connection, an argument, which is still relevant and often used to destroy Ebonics' existence, is the myth that Ebonics is illogical, lazy, or broken SE. Again, this myth ignores the deep structural linguistics elements of Ebonics proven to be independent of SE (Green, 2002; Palacas, 2001). Thompson (2000) notes earlier research deemed Ebonics to be simply lexical items from the SE put together illogically (p. 427). Not only does this myth ignore the linguistic structure, this myth influences society's view of Ebonics-speech community being less intelligent that they cannot acquire SE (Seymour & Seymour, 1979b). For example, Labov (1972) argues that Ebonics and SE are one system: "the relations between [Ebonics] and [Standard English] in the competence of black speakers shows that [Ebonics and Standard English] do indeed form a single system" (as cited in Palacas, 2001, p.328). Labov (1972) and other scholars guided by the LDT have limited Ebonics repeatedly to words and phrases because the theory they employ is too narrowly defined to account for linguistic structures outside of SE. However, Ebonics is a sociolinguistic system which has its own fundamental linguistic structure and more importantly, Ebonics is a sociolinguistic system that represents the past, present, and future of the African diaspora.

These myths also encourage Ebonics to be the victim of endless jokes and mockery (Ronkin & Karn, 2002; Gaudio, 2011). These tactics are especially used by non-linguists as a defense to argue for the illegitimacy of Ebonics. More often than not in literature and media, non-linguistics use a non-standard dialect or language to create their version of a comic masterpiece, demonizing Ebonics as child-like or just silly words (Ronkin & Karn, 2002). These biased comedy pieces further illustrate that society, namely the media, portrays the speech community and this linguistic code as not serious or the idea of

Ebonics is laughable. The underlying message of these literary documents, internet sites, and media articles comedy skits is that Ebonics is not its own linguistic form and continues racist ideologies about the speech community (Gaudio, 2011). The heavily biased idea that Ebonics is illogical and therefore laughable neglects the fundamental linguistic structure of the system.

### **Fundamental Linguistics**

To abolish the myths that haunt the Ebonics speech community and sociolinguistics, fundamental linguistics must be demonstrated and confirmed. Ebonics scholars have dedicated decades of research to the linguistic structure of Ebonics, demonstrating its separate system and significance for the African American population (Williams, 1975). Scholars research Ebonics' most simplistic lexicon and phonemes to complex morphology and syntax such as copula, verb tense, negation, and semantics (Green, 2002; Palacas, 2001; Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1991; Seymour et al., 1999; Williams, 1975). All of these features prove the logical independent existence of Ebonics and rely on its own syntax to communicate. For example, the famous and most critiqued linguistic feature of Ebonics is the "habitual be" which is not synonymous to English verb "to be" present tense (Green, 2002, p. 45; Seymour et al., 1999, p. 67; Smitherman, 1998, p. 141). This is the case where Ebonics and SE have the same lexical item, but the syntax and semantics differ completely (Green, 2002; Palacas, 2001). Also, important evidence that linguistic structures exist is that Ebonics is not geographically confined: "Ebonics can be traced back to Africa, and it's all over the diaspora rather than just in a particular region." (Yancy, 2011, p. 44). Research in Nova Scotia, Dominican Republic, across the United States, and Africa demonstrate the underlying structures which rule Ebonics

(Poplack & Tagliamonte, 2001). The majority of in-depth linguistic research focuses on isolated communities of African descent, such as African Nova Scotian communities, whose speech communities show longevity because of the isolation.

In addition, the fundamental linguistics of Ebonics is constantly debated and scrutinized over its label. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ebonics is referred to as “Black English” or “Negro English” meaning an alternative name for slang or illogical linguistics (Smitherman, 1997, p. 31). Contrary to earlier labels, which proclaimed that Ebonics as irrational in a linguistic sense, the term Ebonics is coined in 1970 (Smith & Crozier, 1998; Williams, 1975; Yancy, 2011). Dr. Williams among other linguists, psycholinguists, and sociolinguists attend a conference to discuss the title and linguistics defined by the African American community where they coin the term “Ebonics” meaning “black sounds” (ebony and phonics) (Williams, 1997, p. 210; Yancy, 2011, p.44). Preceding the conference, Dr. Williams discusses in his book the evidence and examples teaching the linguistic structures of Ebonics (Williams, 1975). Presently, there is a continuing series of books researching the linguistics of Ebonics and articles addressing linguistics across the African diaspora (Baugh, 1999; Gibbs, 1997; Godley et al., 2006; Green, 2002; Makoni, Smitherman, Ball, & Spears, 2003).

Labeling Ebonics does not stop after the conference in 1970, conversely, there continues to be attempts to label it differently. After 1970, many labels describe the Ebonics speech community such as African American English or African American Vernacular English or in the case of Nova Scotia, African Nova Scotian English. A major labeling issue that troubles many Ebonics-speaking researchers and the speech community is the label still containing the word English. Speircher & McMahon (1992)



study members of the Ebonics speech community exploring attitudes towards Ebonics and they argue that the Ebonics-speech community feels confined by the label “Black English” (p. 389). The speech community states that naming it Black English intended that all people of African descent speak the same way, when there is a linguistic continuum which is spoken across age, class, and gender (Speircher & McMahon, 1992, p. 389). The homogeneity of labeling the distinct linguistics of Ebonics as English only degrades and further excuses the public and scholars to continue to shame or ignore the independent complex structure which is static over time in North America and abroad.

The morphology, syntax, or grammar of a given linguistic system is static; however linguistic systems are also innovative and productive. Ebonics has a static morphology which cannot be discredited and it also has lexicon which grows and evolves over time (Green, 2002; Singler, 1998). For example, researchers have located and analyzed ex-slave recordings which they argue show similarities in their speech to contemporary Ebonics across the diaspora (Myhill, 1995; Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1991; Poplack & Tagliamonte, 2001). The ex-slave recordings show the early existence of Ebonics however, the words in the ex-slave recordings are different over time and over geographical space (Singler, 1998). For example, ANSE does not have the same full lexicon as New York or Georgia however, they follow the same syntax. Moreover, the production of new lexicon challenges the homogeneity which mistakenly dictates that all Ebonics-speakers use the same variation of Ebonics.

### **Speech Community and Sociolinguistics**

The Ebonics speech community and sociolinguistics suffer from an unequal partnership where sociolinguistics is gaining more from the community than vice versa (Rickford, 1997). Sociolinguists and their discipline must recognize that they do not

simply understand words and suffix endings, but they are researching and partnering with a community who have been historically marginalized:

Fundamental to the concept of discourse is the recognition that a language is neither a camera lens nor a mirror. That is, language does not capture nor does it reflect a reality that exists "out there" independent of the speaker, but instead shapes and is shaped by its users' overarching ideology. (Wright, 1998, p. 6)

Sociolinguistics never adequately recognizes the Ebonics-speech community for the amount of time and investment they put into research (Rickford, 1997, p.168). The sociolinguistics discipline focuses on class, race, power, and gender inequalities which were largely derived from researching Ebonics (Rickford, 1997; Yancy, 2011). While Ebonics research helps to open critique and discussion on the subject and how it is misinterpreted, sociolinguistics has not fully eliminated power inequalities towards the sociolinguistic system (Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2002).

As alluded to above, the misrepresentations of the Ebonics speech community in media and in sociolinguistics have been overtly damaging to the growth as a speech community and people. Ebonics across the African diaspora is a form of spoken cultural identity and home language of the majority of African North Americans (Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2002; Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1991; Seymour & Seymour, 1979a). However, there is a racist narrowly defined representation of the Ebonics speech community which leads to misleading findings. For example, Labov (2010), after four decades of research, uses an example of a child talking about jail. This continued negative representation of the Ebonics speech community allows for the colossal amount of findings which are not representative of the complexity and richness of Ebonics speech community. These representations only show a very small percentage of the Ebonics

speech community giving a false truth that Ebonics is based in street talk ignoring the use throughout all parts of African North American life.

### **Education and Ebonics-Speaking Students**

Caused by myths and false theories, Ebonics-speaking students are the target of misdiagnosis within the education system. Findings show that when the education system is challenged for its failed ability to teach Ebonics-speaking children, the school will implement programs to simply improve deficiencies that are not realistically present (Devonish & Carpenter, 2007, p. 280; Henry & Tator, 2006, p. 309, Seymour & Seymour, 1979a, p. 400). Moreover, LDT ignores the linguistic diversity and silences any non-standard languages or dialects deemed unacceptable by political Eurocentric standards in Canada and United States (Mackey, 1997). The scholars who apply the LDT in practice influence the placement of Ebonics-speaking children's inappropriate cognitive classes (Seymour & Seymour, 1979b). Researchers find that the LDT is so heavily based within the school system that Ebonics-speaking children are falsely assigned to speech pathology classes further influencing their potential of academic achievement and upward mobility (Seymour & Seymour 1979b; Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2002). For example, in Nova Scotia, findings show that there is a consistent overrepresentation of ANSE-speaking students who are enrolled into the individual program plan (BLAC, 1994; Thiessen, 2009). Moreover, Fogel & Ehri (2006) argue that there is an overrepresentation of African American Ebonics speakers incorrectly assigned to special education classes (p.466). The misdiagnosis of Ebonics-speaking children has been seen in two distinct court cases against the school board.

For example, in 1972, a California court examines one of the first Ebonics misdiagnosis case. Larry P. versus Riles is an American law suit based on the inaccuracy

of IQ tests and labeling Ebonics-speaking children as cognitively delayed (Seymour & Seymour, 1979a). The standard intelligence testing measurements are matched to the standards of mainstream Eurocentric ideals to sustain the upper-middle class Caucasian American SE-speaking population, and therefore misdiagnosing children of African descent as unintelligent. Grant, Oka, & Baker (2009) detail that the absence of cultural relevance in testing causes the standard testing measurement to favor one cultural group over the other and thus, the findings are biased and invalid. As evidence that the students are not incompetent or unintelligent, sociolinguists are brought into the case to demonstrate the separation of SE from Ebonics (Seymour & Seymour, 1979a). The sociolinguists show that the misinterpretation of Ebonics as broken or illogical SE is incorrect which leads to the negative consequence of innocent children being mislabelled (Means Coleman & Daniel, 2000; Seymour & Seymour, 1979b). Ramirez, Wiley, De Klerk, Lee, & Wright (2005) further demonstrate that the racist ideologies creates a narrow view towards different speech patterns and deems Ebonics-speaking children as intellectually inferior in comparison with Caucasian American SE-speaking children (p.101).

Several years later, similar misdiagnoses and maltreatment of Ebonics-speaking children are challenged. In 1979, 11 African American students sue their elementary school for linguistic discrimination and inadequate instruction (Ramirez et al., 2005, p. 155). Martin Luther King Junior Elementary school children versus Ann Arbor School District Board strive in this court case to encourage linguistic difference recognition and improve student proficiency in SE (Ramirez et al., 2005, p. 155). The court's decision encourages teachers to implement a strategic plan which accepts and acknowledges sociolinguistic diversity to help non-standard speaker's acquire SE (Ramirez et al., 2005,

p. 158). The main instruction remains in SE, but the overarching goal is for teachers to eliminate their prejudices and embrace students and their sociolinguistics experience while guiding them to reach their full potential (Seymour & Seymour, 1979a, p. 404).

Legal cases are not the only steps taken towards acknowledging the need for non-standard speakers to acquire the SE. The Oakland California School District Ebonics resolution is one of the largest national debates within United States in Ebonics' long history (Taylor, 1998). The original Oakland California School District proposes a policy in December 1996, which sends United States into sociolinguistic media confusion. The original goal of the policy is to address the failed attempt of educating African American students within the school system with high drop- out rates and low proficiencies in SE (Ramirez et al, 2005; Smitherman, 1997; Smitherman & Cunningham, 1997). By addressing the underachievement and school's responsibility to the African American community, the Oakland California School District proposed that they use Ebonics to help students advance their skills in SE:

WHEREAS, the federal Bilingual Education Act (20 USC 1402 et seq.) mandates that local educational agencies 'build their capacities to establish, implement and sustain programs of instruction for children and youth of limited English proficiency. WHEREAS, the interests of the Oakland Unified School District in providing equal opportunities for all of its students dictate limited English proficient educational programs recognizing the English language acquisition and improvement skills of African American students are as fundamental as is application of bilingual education principles for others whose primary languages are other than English. (Ramirez et al., 2005, p 116).

One of the major concerns and causes of overt resistance is that the education program would replace SE instruction with Ebonics. However, as seen from the direct quotation from the original policy passed, the goal is to provide the adequate SE teaching instruction and literacy achievement (Ramirez et al., 2005). Moreover, this policy demonstrates the Oakland School District's quest for equity and sociolinguistic acceptance of cultural relevant education for young African American students to excel similar to the proposed project with Jamaican Creole speakers and English (Devonish & Carpenter, 2007).

Unfortunately, the mass confusion around the subject of Ebonics and its application within the school is widely devalued and scrutinized. The response to the Ebonics policy is characterized as "nonsense" or an excuse to speak "slang" within the classroom (Gibbs, 1997; Smitherman, 1997, p. 28). "Slang" is defined as temporary lexicon items only which evolve and change over time and by definition contradicts the fully structured linguistic system of Ebonics (Jay, 2003, p. 460). McWhorter (1997), Johnson Jackson (1997), and Means Coleman & Daniel (2000) show that the ignorance shared by linguists and non-linguists of the sociolinguistic system before this resolution makes it easier to misinterpret the policy with racist LDT reproducing the white supremacist ideologies of intelligence. The overall response and use of the LDT towards this policy was discriminatory against young Ebonics-speaking learners and their alarming issues with literacy achievement (Ramirez et al., 2005; Williams, 1997).

### **Moving Forward: Critical Pedagogy and Code-switching**

The current education system in Canada and in the United States is not void of racism or racist ideologist. Instead of an environment where all students receive equitable treatment and education, students of colour are a constant target of discrimination, forced

assimilation, and “miseducation” (Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Henry & Tator, 2006; Richardson, 2000, p. 196). Richardson (2000) explains the concept of “miseducation” as “a form of training designed for the uplifting of the dominant society that inadvertently works to demise of the oppressed people in the society” (p.196). The education system continues to operate with the banking method that is directly linked to forced assimilation from the teachers’ and administrators’ views of dominant culture (Giroux, 1986). In addition, an equally important issue remains, which is the lack of representation for marginalized students within the school system (Stewart, 2009, p.42). The lack of representation in the school staff, administrators and/or curriculum sustains the systemic racist procedures in the education system.

The current school system’s lack of representation and diversity has an influence on the language use within the classroom. The vision of the Oakland School District is an example of a Critical Pedagogy approach to encourage literacy in SE while preserving the rich cultural significance of Ebonics through taught code-switching (Williams, 1997). “Code-switching” is a linguistic term which refers to moving from one linguistic code to another linguistic code, consciously or unconsciously (Jay, 2003, p. 469; Seymour & Seymour, 1979a). It is not uncommon for Ebonics speakers learning SE to practice code-switching through forced obedience at a young age as Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy (2002) example underscores:

It was not until much later, however, that I discovered there was a drastic difference between the language I had acquired and used extensively in my home environment, and the language I was expected to use away from home, especially in the classroom. (p.17).

In this quotation, scholar Ernie Smith recalls his recognition as a child in elementary with the concept of code-switching (Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2002). Seymour & Seymour (1979a) and Seymour et al., (1999) detail evidence that code-switching between Ebonics and SE is a skill that can foster great academic outcomes. Code-switching practices are an essential teaching tool that can improve the inconsistency and low literacy achievement among Ebonics-speaking children (Williams, 1997).

Code-switching is a daily skill used by all speakers. Moreover, code-switching is a skill that takes more than linguistic capabilities which are related to Critical Pedagogy principles. Code-switching requires higher levels of cognitive skills that identify social environment (socio-pragmatics), uses critical thinking, and requires an abundance of practice (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Code-switching is not used as method of forced cohesion unlike the current education system, code-switching under Critical Pedagogy serves to empower and educate students while improving their SE proficiency (Fogel & Ehri, 2006; Mourdant, 2011). Research shows that when using Ebonics and SE in partnership children recognize linguistic system differences quicker and improve their writing in Standard English by 59 percent (Wheeler, 2004, as cited in Whitney, 2005, p. 67). In addition, a program with young Ebonics-speaking students, teachers used Ebonics-SE bridging teaching techniques which increase literacy by 6.2 months in comparison to the non-bridging group who improved by 1.6 months (Simpkins, Holt, & Simpkins, 1974, as cited in Williams, 1997, p. 213). It is important for teachers to use the home languages/ dialects of students and link them to the classroom environment without creating a hierarchy which oppresses students into forced code-switching and neglecting their rightful mother tongue (Whitney, 2005; Dalmas Jonsberg, 2001).



The assessment measures and tools for testing students' linguistic and literacy ability are crucial to Critical Pedagogy and code-switching practices. The appropriateness of assessment instruments to accurately capture the social and cultural relevance helps to understand the low academic achievement of Ebonics speakers (Grant et al., 2009). Grant et al. (2009) demonstrate the challenges of culturally relevant assessments within the classroom and the methods which benefit Ebonics-speaking students. For example, the "Black English Sentence Scoring" is a tool to credit the students who responded correctly to a test through a different linguistic code (Nelson & Hyter, 1990, as cited in Grant et al., 2009, p. 120). However, this is a limited tool and the majority of literacy assessments are not appropriate for sociolinguistic differences causing issues for educating SE. In addition, the learning and assessment environment for Ebonics-speaking students can be a hostile environment. Teachers must transform their learning setting into a liberating area for healthy academic growth. By acquiring SE in an environment that welcomes diversity, students learn to master two methods of communication and learn to accept both linguistic varieties as equal (Godley et al., 2006, p.342). Teachers and administrators must recognize and celebrate the cultural and linguistic differences and reflect these differences during assessment. To ensure the validity of literacy assessment, teachers must use assessment methods which socially and linguistically reflect Ebonics-speaking student experience and eliminate the linguistically oppressive environment where students currently are educated.

## Chapter Four: Research Design

### Documents

As emphasized in the hypothesis, the focus of this thesis is the process of assessment. Therefore, the documents under analysis are primarily teachers' guides to daily literacy assessment. All documents are separated into two grade sections. The focus of the study is to understand literacy in its earliest stages in early elementary (primary to grade three) and late elementary (grade four to grade six). The elementary ages are critical for learning literacy, the use of language, and developing a broader sense of language use (Santrock, 2010, p.298). There are four documents which are under analysis: The Active Young Readers Assessment: Teacher's Resource (AYR), Active Young Readers: Teaching in Action (TIA), BLAC Reports, and English Language Arts Curriculum Policy (LACP) (full references in Appendix B).

Active Young Readers Assessment: Teacher's Resource and TIA are the primary documents under analysis due to their direct use in the process of assessment (see Appendix B). Active Young Readers Assessment: Teacher's Resource and TIA are tools which detail how teachers must assess students' daily literacy progress. These documents guide teachers on how to assess and measure intelligence. This document is not to be mistaken for the actual literacy and numeracy assessments administered by a separate division within the Department of Education, these documents are continuous guides for daily classroom assessment. These documents originated in 2000, when they were used in early elementary to promote literacy. These are actively used as a reference for teachers throughout the province with various activities and structures for their classroom. The AYR and TIA are first and foremost a resource for teachers to create an environment for

students to grow academically. As previous research shows, and as I have highlighted above, the learning environment is essential for student academic success.

The BLAC Report is a three part report published in 1994 by the Department of Education (see Appendix B). The BLAC report is a document detailing the recommendations to the Department of Education based on the quantitative and qualitative research on the academic underachievement of African Nova Scotian students. This document is a milestone for African Nova Scotian education. From this document, there are several non-profit organizations whose mandate is to advance the education of African Nova Scotians such as the Council on African Canadian Education (who were previously the Black Learners Advisory Committee who created the BLAC Reports), Africentric Learning Institute and the Black Educators Association. In addition, this report's recommendation is to implement a division within the Department of Education focusing on the educational needs and rights of African Nova Scotians. Furthermore, there are three critical responses to BLAC report published by the Department of Education in recent years (see full references in Appendix B). These documents are the advocacy of the African Nova Scotian voice and continue to be used by the Department of Education and other organizations as a reference guide for education policy and programs. Choosing to analyze the BLAC reports along with AYR, TIA, and LACP is important in understanding how the recommendations from the BLAC report were incorporated into the process of assessment.

Lastly, the LACP is an essential document for the assessment process. This policy document is complementary to AYR and TIA because it also includes sections that directly dictate how a daily assessment should be conducted. Language Arts Curriculum Policy is essential to teaching literacy because it is the policy that dictates what are

appropriate learning areas and topics that students must acquire in each grade level. Here, the LACP is useful in an effort to understand the process of assessment through its use as a guide for teachers preparing what language materials and tools students must learn and how they should learn such materials. Daily assessments would not occur if there is a lack of content which is covered through the LACP. Overall, LACP dictates the content which is deemed most adequate for all students to retrieve and learn to advance their literacy skills.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection included various steps during the months of April and May, 2013. The primary stages of data collection were direct access to documents on provincial government websites such as the Nova Scotia Department of Education, Active Young Readers, and African Nova Scotian Division. On these websites the BLAC Reports, TIA, and AYR documents are listed. In the second phase of the research, I made phone calls and emails to various divisions in the Department of Education. After weeks of a low response rate, I emailed several different provincial representatives in assessments division and English services for archival documents. The Department of Education representatives referred me to the online website for data where I previously collected data during the first stage of this research. The third phase was through a curriculum representative at the Department of Education who prepared archival research and retrieved LACP documents for the current study that could be found within the Department of Education.

### **Sampling**

Once the data collection phase was completed, I used a sampling frame known as convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involves the researcher to sample from the

AYR, TIA, LACP, and BLAC documents readily available and easily accessible to the researcher (Krippendorff, 2009, p.121). As indicated above, the data collection phase presents low response rates and low accessibility which forces the researcher to rely on the documents online from 1997 to 2013 (see Appendix B). This sampling technique is not a random sample of AYR, TIA, LACP, and BLAC documents; convenience sampling uses only documents available for analysis. Although, this sampling technique is limited in sample size, social researchers argue these documents are still important for the analysis and conclusions (Bordens & Abbott, 2008, p.162). In many social/behavioural science studies, non-random sampling, such as convenience sampling, is argued to be the most time and cost effective sampling frame (Bordens & Abbott, 2008, p.160). For the current research completion timeframe the convenience sample is beneficial and feasible to analyzing the process of assessments.

In addition, the convenience sample is made up of the most current AYR, TIA, LACP, and BLAC documents which benefit my analysis in two ways. First, the convenience sample allows the current research conclusions to be based on the documents teachers are currently using to demonstrate reliable inferences. Second, convenience sampling is a method which is ideal for a preliminary research study. In a primary study with narrower timeframes to conduct research, convenience sampling allows the researcher to gain access to information and draw primary conclusions to later test in a larger study. To emphasize, the convenience sample gives an in-depth analysis and prepares future research with preliminary findings to later test in a higher academic level and larger scale analysis.

## **Analytical Procedure**

The most unique process of my research is the sociolinguistic use of ANSE as a key tool in understanding literacy in Nova Scotia. Data analysis is conducted primarily in African Nova Scotian Ebonics. My coding scheme is created in ANSE (mesolect) to be consistent with the theoretical framework and practice using a non-standard dialect in the understanding the assessment methods and literacy (see Appendix A). Put simply, coding in SE only reproduces the exact theory and practice I aim to examine and create a cyclical phenomenon. Also, conducting research in SE further represents the perceived superiority of SE. As mentioned in the Ethnolinguistic Theory, SE lexicon and ANSE lexicon share the same names, but usually their use in syntax and semantics differ (Thompson, 2000). Moreover, a language is not only filled with words put together eloquently to make perfect grammar, a language or dialect is also the culture that it reflects (Fanon, 1967, p.2). So, using ANSE to question and code develops a new perspective that certain phases or feelings that cannot be translated in any other code.

My research analysis is twofold, whereby I triangulate between qualitative and quantitative content analysis methods. I begin with a fixed coding scheme which includes my quantitative and qualitative coding categories (see Appendix A). Although, I start my research with a structured coding scheme, I am open to allowing codes to present themselves throughout the analysis process. In the first phase I analyze the quantitative portion of my content analysis. This phase uses a preliminary analysis which serves to analyze the frequency of words in each document (Appendix A). Put simply, I use the PDF search tab (CTRL + F) and enter the lexicon items “Ebonics”, “African Nova Scotian”, “English”, “Standard English”, “Dialect”, “Home Language”, “Home Dialect” and record the number of items that appeared in each document. For the hard copy

documents I physically count the number of lexicon items. I also note the location where the lexicon appears for phase two analysis. Moreover, phase one analyses whether these words are present in the documents and if present, when and how do these languages arise in documents. The quantitative content analysis is the preliminary analysis to prepare for a deeper descriptive content analysis.

The secondary phase is the most relevant and significant to the innovation of my research. In the second phase of research I use a qualitative content analysis where I code through the fixed coding scheme (Appendix A). During this phase, I start by reading the entire document once and then, I start the analysis following the directed coding template. The purpose of reading the document over once is to familiarize myself with format and structure of these documents. Krippendorff (2009) argues that the qualitative approach is very important in analysing the process of assessment because it broadens the scope of interpretation which can be missed through quantitative methods such as simple word counts or word location counts (p. 88). After conducting the structured codes, I use the open codes which appeared during in qualitative and quantitative content analysis. An open code is useful to gather more in-depth information on the process of assessment.

### **Limitations**

As in all research, either dealing with human participants or documents, there is a possibility of low response rate or unavailability. The current data collection is incomplete and causes gaps in this research. The current documents under analysis are public policies and resources which are readily available for the public which it serves; however, this is not the case in my data collection. An issue which is not resolved in data collection are the historical policies missing from the Department of Education and the Nova Scotia archives. The missing years 2000 to 2013 of AYR and TIA documents are

the target documents which could not be retrieved through archival research at the Nova Scotia Archives and the English Service representatives referred to the websites' current documents only. Although, these are public documents, the Department of Education representatives ask for identification and that the only documents they have are "online". In several cases, documents such as AYR and TIA are carried over for years; however, there have been a lot of changes to these documents that are beneficial and crucial to the current research. The lack of documents and low response rates inevitably affect other processes in the research design.

The sampling frame for the proposed project was aimed at systematic sampling, whereby every year from 1993 to 2013 documents assessment aid documents would be collected. This is the best method of collecting data for a qualitative content analysis (Krippendorf, 2009, p.116). Systematic sampling covers two decades of literacy documents providing an in-depth analysis. However, as seen above in data collection, the documents are limited to the accessible documents. The major limitation of convenience sampling is missed data which is not recovered causing the analysis to then be illogically scattered across the two decades. The misrepresentation of data caused by the missed data makes findings a non-generalizable sample for the population (Bordens & Abbott, 2008). Although limitations exist and perceived biases are controlled to an extent, the current research effort and findings should not be dismissed. The research findings which indicate the sociolinguistic challenges faced in assessing literacy should be re-examined and followed up in a larger scale research project to identify where these processes can be ameliorated.



## Chapter Five: Research Findings

### *What They Be Doin' For Us in Elementary?*

The education system historically and continuously fails African Nova Scotians. The Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) is a collection of province wide research that documents these systemic failures in a report with recommendations for better education. The aim of the Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) is to challenge systemic racism in policies which prohibit the academic and social growth of African Nova Scotian learners:

In the near future, we see a system where every child is challenged to achieve personal excellence; where race, class, age, financial resources and gender are recognized every day as Nova Scotian educators prepare all learners for full participation in society and in their communities. Social and economic inequalities are not allowed to deny equal opportunity for access to education. (p. 15)

Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) also explains its hopes for equitable education system within a seven year plan:

By the year 2001, Nova Scotia's education system has become a model for other countries to consider as they struggle with racism, classism and religious intolerance within their systems and societies. Nova Scotia's strides were made through changes in policy and practices. (p.16)

In 2013, the documents under analysis show the education system attempts in several ways to abolish systemic racist policies and give voice to African Nova Scotian culture and identity.

**Recommendations and systemic change.** Following recommendations from the Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994), the Department of Education is currently held accountable for the application of anti-racist policies and practices. The Nova Scotia Department of Education (2003b) details a committee who critically examines the recommendations and the current education system's execution to strongly support these recommendations within the system. Out of these recommendations, the Department of Education quickly developed the African Canadian Services Division in September 1995. Along with this office, there is a recommendation that anti-racist policies reflect the educational institution and in response the Department of Education develops new policies:

The Department accepts these recommendations and will complete a draft multicultural and anti-racism policy and distribute it for input by 1996. The policy will clearly identify responsibility for implementation and outline the process for accountability. The new African Canadian Services Division will play a lead role in developing the policy and CACE will have a role in monitoring its implementation. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003b, p. 9)

As a result of this policy, there is also a mandatory degree requirement that teachers must undergo in race-relation and cross-cultural training:

The teacher certification requirements are such that the professional studies must include, among other things, a knowledge of racial, cultural, and linguistic composition of public school classrooms; a knowledge of gender and sexuality, anti-racism, and multicultural issues; and the ability to apply the knowledge to the resolution of conflict among individuals and between individuals and institutions... In 1997 the Department formed an internal advisory committee to

develop a departmental racial equity policy. The policy has been completed. The policy clearly identifies responsibility for implementation and outlines the process of accountability. Implementation of the policy will begin during the 2002–03 school year. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003b, p.10).

Lastly, a recommendation states that the education system must change its assessment policies to match the diversity and equity policies which provide a fair chance for academic growth and for all children to reach their potential:

In the construction of provincial assessment instruments, item writers, item reviewers, and the Assessment Advisory Committee are responsible to ensure that all items (questions) on the final form of the assessment meet certain standards of presentation. The standards address racial and ethnic bias as well as general and sex-role bias. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003b, p. 13).

These culturally relevant assessment policies are a step towards understanding sociolinguistic differences that challenge the LDT throughout the assessment process.

The culturally sensitive assessments help to support and encourage non-standard speakers to acquire SE through their school environment.

***Learnin' environment.*** The learning environment, which is important for literacy achievement and assessment, is aligned with recommendations that support African Nova Scotian students. The learning environment is not only based on physical surroundings; this environment is also a social environment of learning and growth. The social environment described in Nova Scotia Department of Education (2007) and Nova Scotia Department of Education (1998) encourages teachers to create a sense of community amongst students and promote openness for students to ask questions, explore, and support each other. For example, teachers are told to create an environment which creates

and builds peer community relationships to achieve literacy and social well-being: “[i]f a climate sensitive and responsive to needs of all students is to be created, the students must come to know one another. This builds the base for peer partnerships, for tutoring, sharing, and various other collaborative efforts.” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1998, p. 10). The teacher’s role, emphasized in Nova Scotia Department of Education (2007), demonstrates that they must monitor this environment to be a consistent social learning site: “a safe, supportive environment, in which all contributions and questions are valued and all learners respected, is paramount.” (p.7). Teachers must regularly sustain the openness of their social environment, as well as the upkeep, of their physical environment which is going to have an impact on student success.

The physical environment described in Nova Scotia Department of Education (2007) and Nova Scotia Department of Education (2006) includes various displays of books and their mini-library to access literacy materials. Students are encouraged to seek out the class mini-library when it is time to read or a formal time for assessment. Moreover, the physical environment must reflect the same openness that is fundamental to the social environment that encourages students to enjoy their literacy achievement. Physical environments are kept tidy and organized, but not always by grade or literacy level. The organization allows visual organization to easily identify literacy materials for teachers to use when making connections with students for instruction and/or assessment.

**Linguistic difference in education.** Throughout all documents, there is heavy emphasis on making connections and providing support. The disconnection in school from the students’ experience and lack of support is arguably one of the many issues that African Nova Scotian students face while in school, thus it is significant that the education system attempts to make connections for a diverse school experience (Black

Learners Advisory Committee, 1994). There is an emphasis on connections between prior knowledge, the student, and what they are currently learning as an essential method to literacy achievement and assessment. The students' prior knowledge or what the student brings to the text is an important aspect of LACP. For example, Nova Scotia Department of Education (2003a) demonstrates its understanding of the students' life and their views in connection to the text and society at large:

The reader is able to recognize relationships that exist between the text and other experiences. These connections support the reading by linking the reader's prior knowledge and experience to the reading situation. Connections include/text-to-self: connections between the text and the reader's own life/text-to-text:

connections between the text and other texts that have been previously read or viewed/ text-to-world: connections between the text and larger world issues.

(Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a, p.12).

This emphasis on connections in the classroom helps students to understand the semantics and pragmatics of their reading. Also, it is emphasized in the earlier grades as well: "They are able to make personal connections and are beginning to question and comment on text." (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012a, p.13). These connections acknowledge the student's experiences with texts and linguistics absent in the LDT. Students understand reading is a purposeful practice through these connections and improve their literacy achievement (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012a). Assessing the connections helps the teachers understand the student better and they can subsequently provide better instruction.

Secondly, there is an emphasis on support from teachers to promote literacy achievement. Along with teaching, assessing, and evaluating, teachers and other school

staff are the student's primary support system when learning literacy skills and must be supportive during the evaluation/feedback. For example, feedback must be in a "positive and constructive tone" to further develop student literacy (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2007, p. 69). Detailed feedback is one of the ways in which teachers create a positive and supportive atmosphere after assessment to teach students what they have done: "To facilitate learning feedback must be specific and non-threatening, and encourage more risk-taking" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1997, p. 12). To further advance all students, LACP focuses on the well-being and confidence of students during the early stages of literacy assessment and instruction:

A supportive environment is crucial for students who lack confidence in themselves as learners. If a true community of learners is to be created, teachers need to demonstrate a valuing of all learners, emphasizing that diversity enhances everyone's experience of learning. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1998, p.10).

Support systems demonstrate that students will attempt more through confidence building and directly become engaged into lessons that translate into their assessment process (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2006). The supportive nature that teachers build also helps the teacher understand and accept all students regardless of learning level or developing skills.

To combat the LDT in daily assessment process, there is an acceptance of English as an additional language (EAL) and a sense of code-switching through sociolinguistics in the LACP. The EAL policy section accepts and values various "dialects of the English language", which may be a students' first language (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p. 95). Continuing the supportive environment, LACP

highlights that the students' home language or first language is essential to learning:

“Students from language backgrounds other than English add valuable language resources and experiences to the classroom” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p. 95).

In a classroom with students whose first language is not SE, LACP details that students are in need of continued support while teachers are training them to “transition from their first language to English” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p. 95). These transitioning practices, also referred to as code-switching, are an important step to link home and school environments and continuous growth from the student's previous language skills.

To accompany EAL learning is the practice of sociolinguistic awareness and code-switching. Often in the LACP documents code-switching is referred to as “transitioning” or “formal-informal” talk or conversation (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p. 58). Code-switching and sociolinguistic awareness is written in the LACP outcomes for grades primary to six. It is the role of the teacher to help promote sociolinguistic awareness primarily in SE. For example, general LACP outcomes express that students understand when, where, and how to use SE; how to use respectful SE; audience code-switching: “Students will be able to interact with sensitivity and respect, considering the situation, audience, and purpose.” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012b, p. 27). Further in the LACP, it describes in detail sociolinguistic awareness and code-switching techniques for early elementary:

Demonstrate a growing awareness of social conventions such as turn-taking and politeness in conversation and co-operate play/ recognize some examples of unfair and hurtful vocabulary, and begin to make vocabulary choices that affirm rather

than hurt people/ recognize that volume of voice needs to be adjusted according to situation (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012b, p. 27).

In later elementary levels, teachers must instruct and assess students in further detail on their code-switching abilities and their sociolinguistics awareness:

Listen attentively and demonstrate awareness of needs, rights, and feelings of others/detect examples of prejudice, stereotyping, or bias in oral language; recognize their negative effect on individuals and cultures; and attempt to use bias-free language/ make a conscious attempt to consider the needs and expectations of their audience. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p. 155).

Teachers assess sociolinguistic awareness through behaviours such as “facial expressions” and “gestures” for the specific audiences (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1998, p. 24). This awareness of sociolinguistic difference in the LACP shows progress away from devaluing other sociolinguistic varieties.

Overall, the sociolinguistic difference, support, and valuing implied in curriculum shows progress towards starting a discussion and acceptance of African Nova Scotian sociolinguistic importance in acquiring SE. The code-switching text within LACP clearly shows that there is a sociolinguistic appreciation to nurture a system toward a Linguistic Difference Theory approach. Although, so-called multi-cultural anti-racist policies have been implemented into certain sections of the Department of Education’s LACP, there is a gap between the content in LACP and the actual assessment process conducted primarily by teacher. There is also ambiguous language which leaves undefined terms and policies open for LDT to arise. LACP (socio)linguistic difference outcomes are not explicitly written in the assessment policies, thus the presence of this



ambiguous policy gap is likely to encourage teachers towards using the LDT of assessment.

***What They Mean by “Linguistic Deficit Theory” in Elementary?***

In the grade primary to six education assessment documents there are several places of vague instruction that encourage a place for teacher’s socially constructed view of linguistic diversity to be narrowed. Although, the recommendations from Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) lead to various policy implications and changes systemically to racist bias policies in LACP, the LDT still appears within the assessment process in particular. In LACP documents, it outlines the rationale of assessment and the standard of assessment:

The quality of assessment and evaluation in the educational process has a profound and well-established link to student performance...what is assessed and evaluated, how it is assessed and evaluated, and how results are communicated [...] send clear messages to students and others about what is really valued. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1998, p. 243).

By this standard, the assessment and evaluation process emphasizes what is important and what is not seen as valuable by the educational institution and teachers. Language Arts Curriculum Policy documents include anti-racist approaches and include linguistic diversity as recommended by Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) as seen above however, it is unclear if there is a strong connection between LACP guides and the daily assessment process. In fact, Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) notes that policy and practices suffered from misinterpreting assessment:

During the BLAC research, we encountered widespread condemnation of the education system as biased, insensitive and racist. Systemic racism was seen as manifested in student assessment and placement; in labeling of large numbers of Black students as slow learners or having behaviour problems; in streaming; in low teacher expectations; in denigration by and exclusion of Blacks from the curriculum; and in the total lack of responsiveness to the needs of Black learners and concerns of the Black community. (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 35).

The vagueness in the assessment document language likely leaves teachers and administrators space for the LDT to resurface. Thus, findings suggest that the assessment sections within LACP, AYR and TIA demonstrate the LDT are indeed applied in various ways.

**Sociolinguistic absence/presence.** In the preliminary phases of the current research project, the aim is to isolate lexical items and their location. This process indicates whether or not the discussions of non-standard languages, creoles, or dialects are present and recognized by the Nova Scotia education system. Indeed, a presence of “English” is present in all documents in many various ways, majority in titles and references. As it is the main focus to understand SE focused assessment and curriculum, the use of “English” is repeatedly noted. An unexpected sociolinguistic code “Gaelic” is noted which opens more discussion on sociolinguistics and non-standard languages in the education system (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012b). Gaelic language education is outlined as a grade three to nine education option. As a general LACP outcome, there is a large emphasis on *Aire air Cultur* (Cultural Awareness): “students will be expected to demonstrate an appreciation for and understanding of, and make connections to, Gaelic

culture through various contexts and expressions of Gaelic language” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012b, p.75). The Gaelic education outcomes emphasize sociolinguistic approach to teaching and assessing Gaelic comprehension as well as SE. Unfortunately, Gaelic was the only distinguished and operationalized non-standard sociolinguistic system throughout the documents.

African Nova Scotian Ebonics or simply the word “Ebonics” is not noted in any document under analysis. In volume two, Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) use the term “vernacular” in an example to refer inexplicitly to ANSE (p. 45). Later in volume three, Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) argue that African Nova Scotian students are “dialect” speakers who are stigmatized in standardized testing and thus, more likely to perform worse on verbal tests in SE (p. 28). ANSE- speaking students are alienated in the education system because of the constant discrimination towards their speech community, especially students who speak in the basilect of ANSE (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994). Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) notes an issue in curriculum where African Nova Scotian students are not treated as bilingual learners (p. 51). This issue relates to the sociolinguistic hierarchy that continues to neglect ANSE’s fundamental linguistics and as a separate system. Although, the sociolinguistic significance of ANSE speech community is noted, this small section on language and literacy is not translated explicitly into recommendations for the education system. African Nova Scotian Ebonics is not prioritized or operationalized in any of the documents causing a gap between Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) and assessment policy implementation.

Moreover, an absence of ANSE explicitly in all AYR, TIA, and LACP documents indicates that the LDT exists in an effort to silence African Nova Scotian

sociolinguistic culture and linguistic system. The lack of policy implementation from Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) findings silences ANSE and leaves the education system unaware of the profound linguistic structure and its sociolinguistic importance in helping African Nova Scotian students' acquire SE. For example, when LACP documents encourage cultural studies, there is an exclusion of sociolinguistics from culture: "Students will be expected to[...]recognize and acknowledge cultural diversity in the broader nova scotia community ( e.g., Acadian, Mi'Kmaq, Gaelic, African Nova Scotian, Ukrainian, Irish)" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012b, p. 78). The disconnection between culture and linguistics allows the teachers to assume ANSE is simply not its own system and avert to the LDT. This absence of Ebonics/ANSE presents a gap for teachers understanding of community or what is known as a student's "home language".

The term "home language" was located within the LACP (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1998, p.3). Acknowledging the student's home language is an important aspect to abolishing LDT, but the vagueness of home language provides a method for teachers to continue LDT in testing: "language learning develops out of students' home language and their social and cultural experiences" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p.14). Home language is not exclusively defined as a term within the document and is inferred as a student's spoken language at home. However, lack of definition allows the teacher to identify what they consider a home language based on social norms. As seen in previous literature, the legitimizing of Ebonics across the African diaspora is consisting under scrutiny and debate (Ramirez et al., 2005). The lack of an operationalized definition likely leads teachers who do not understand

sociolinguistics to use their SE sociolinguistic bias to identify Ebonics as perceived underdeveloped English and not a home language.

***Representin' and modelin'***. Representation within the school system is a historical barrier for the African Nova Scotian community across the province. There is a lack of representation of African Nova Scotians in all levels of the education system which has costly effects on the academic achievement of African Nova Scotian learners. For example, students' are put in a position where they do not understand their cultural value because of the lack of representation:

We have been made vividly aware of how Black students feel that their race and culture simply does not appear in the conventional school program and that they are left without models, symbols, and achievements with which to identify themselves. The implementation of our recommendation would result in putting Blacks in the school program; in ending forever the ignorance and general lack of awareness of their presence, of their contributions and of their legitimate expectations; an end to discrimination and prejudice against them in schools (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p.41).

This lack of representation is found in 1994 and a decade later, committee members recognize there is a continued lack of representation in the education system: "The Committee recognized that there continues to be a need in the area of equity representation at all levels within the public school system." (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003b, p.7). In 2010, an advisory committee recommends that there is a need to improve equity recruitment practices and early year LACP that reflects African Nova Scotian heritage because the low representation rate continued across the education system two decades later (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2010, p.11).

Representation is important for young literacy learners because they are constantly encouraged to involve themselves into the text (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a, p.10). Student participation and involvement in the text cannot be applied when representation of African Nova Scotians role models are limited.

The idea of self-representation and the student's influence on their assessment is heavily emphasized during the assessment process. Nova Scotia Department of Education (2012a) and LACP assessment sections perceive that the students' self-representation is equal to the sociolinguistic system of SE; this is an inaccurate assessment. For example, as an assessment measure, there is a separate section for teachers to watch for disconnection with text: "if you notice...a student does not make connections or relate the text to his or her prior knowledge and experience." (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2006,p. 32; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012a, p. 67). When the teacher assesses this, the recommendation is to model a connection to the text again (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012a, p. 67). This type of modeling follows the LDT and assumes the experience of an ANSE-speaking student experiences life primarily in the sociolinguistic code of SE. Furthermore, it is assumed in the "underlying meaning of English Language Arts" that SE is how thought is created and expressed: "Language is the primary instrument of thought and the most powerful tool students have for developing ideas and insights, for giving significance to their experiences, and for making sense of their world and their possibilities in it." (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1998, p. 3). Although, it states "language", a teacher/non-sociolinguist whom is unfamiliar to sociolinguistics' mandate will mistakenly make an assumption that "language" is synonymous to SE because of the hierarchy within society which uses English as the reference point for language (Hymes, 1980).

Also, assessing students' self-representation only by SE sociolinguistic standards reproduces the LDT. A SE sociolinguistic standard denies ANSE and its impact on the students' personal experience. For example, Nova Scotia Department of Education (1998) discusses the connection to self-representation and the read text under assessment:

Did the discussion reveal anything about the text, about other readers/ viewers, or about you? These questions ask students to evaluate their own interactions with the text and with other readers/viewers, rather than focusing only on the details of the text. (p.192)

In this section, SE is assumed to be the cultural experience of all students, even when the topics or experiences in the SE literacy material may differ from the sociolinguistic experience of an ANSE speaker. Standard English cultural identity is an outcome students must acquire during their beginning stages of literacy to help “understand why language and literacy are so central to their lives...language expresses cultural identity” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p.14). Although, this uses the term “language” it is paired with English Language Arts and contradicts the sociolinguistic differences emphasized in EAL section which acknowledge various cultural identities. This is a section where racial inequalities can be reproduced through LDT and conformity to dominant culture. The implication that SE sociolinguistic identity is the only identity students should experience and learn from is misguided and could weaken the sociolinguistic differences that exist in Nova Scotia and affect literacy outcomes.

The minimum representation in photographs of African Nova Scotians or people of colour in AYR and TIA is a contradiction to the recommendations from the Black Learners Advisory Committee (1994) for LACP. Moreover, (socio)linguistic and cultural diversity which is emphasized clearly in LACP contradicts the narrowly defined SE

learner in assessment process visuals. In all documents, there are only four photographs depicting African Nova Scotian female students reading or under assessment; there is an absolute absence of African Nova Scotian males. Furthermore, there was a lack of African Nova Scotian adults (teachers or support workers) within these photographs to represent the recommendations on diversity and the experience of African Nova Scotians. The majority of the photographs display a clear focus on male Caucasian Nova Scotian students reading or under assessment which Mackey (1997) argues to be the Canadian standard view of national identity. The photographs further support that SE is a sociolinguistic code and identity exclusively for Caucasian Nova Scotians: “When you examine the Nova Scotia curriculum’ the commissioners further noted, ‘the Black community hardly seems to exist at all.’”(Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 41). The LDT perceives that African Nova Scotians or people of African descent do not develop language and these photographs do not emphasize African Nova Scotians in learning language and literacy in a standard class room. The visuals in the AYR and TIA are not representations which model what is valued in the education system; the visuals model African Nova Scotian perceived “deficiencies” in literacy.

Modeling practices in the assessment and instruction in LACP reinforce LDT by perceived representation. In the texts, “modeling” refers to the instructor teaching linguistic or sociolinguistic practices, so the student learns how to speak, read, and/or write: “Modeling of good reading through read-aloud and choral reading...guided practice” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2006, p. 26). Although, imitation may help students learn language, especially young learners, the lack of representation in the photos which detail the instructor exclusively and always Caucasian Nova Scotian, reproduces the ideology that SE is spoken only by this model. Moreover, Black Learners



Advisory Committee (1994) explains that modeling and lack of representation affects the African Nova Scotian student:

The current generation of Black students [...] facing similar conditions- systemic racism and cultural barriers. Hence, whether their thoughts are consciously articulated or left simmering, Black students want to know why all or most people in charge of their school do not look, talk or walk like they do. They want to know why the teachers do not come from their communities, and why the curriculum provides them little clue about themselves and their history. (p. 45)

The ANSE speaker who is trying to learn SE are visualizing their teacher, who is not a representation of their sociolinguistic experience, through modeling and the consequence is that the student perceives the way he/she speaks is not valued in a SE hierarchy. There is no explanation in these assessment documents that demonstrate that teachers will explain there are sociolinguistic differences in SE and other linguistic codes outside of LACP. The mere modeling exercise or exposure teaches African Nova Scotian students that the image of middle-class adult Caucasian identity speak SE only creates exclusion and degrading practices.

Another method that reproduces LDT throughout the assessment process is modeling through the banking method. The banking method in the education system demonstrates the teacher as the absolute authority with he/she having the only knowledge that is correct. Modeling is simply the banking method under a new name whereby the teacher gives information, the students then receive, store, and imitate (Freire, 1970, p. 72). For example, in the photos which involve teachers, the teachers are the only instructor. This is contrary to the emphasis in curriculum encouraging student involvement and experience in assessment and instruction. If curriculum diversity policy is not conscious at the

moment of assessment and instruction the teacher will slip into banking method and reproduce inequalities to discourage ANSE speakers. In addition, if the teacher is not cognisant of the linguistic variations and explicitly announces them, the ANSE students are likely to not connect with the teacher's model and as a result, the teacher is likely to identify these behaviors as incorrect language use. Modeling and representation need to be used interchangeably to represent and model sociolinguistic diversity to aid students in acquiring SE through visuals and content.

*Correctin' how I be talkin', that ain't teachin' English.* During the daily assessment process, teachers have an opportunity to note where a student needs improvement in literacy and have mini-lessons directly after the informal assessment. The majority of daily assessment falls on the teacher and their understandings, however if the teacher is unaware of linguistics and sociolinguistics that his/her students use, it is more likely that the teacher will misdirect students into the binary of good versus bad assessment leading to problems of streaming and misdiagnoses aligned with the LDT. The findings suggest that teachers are firmly grounded in the fundamental linguistics of SE (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p. 104). This refers to the education system recognizing fundamental linguistic structures and their use especially at a young age when language development is essential, but only required in SE (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013, p.17). Phonological awareness is an essential curriculum outcome that teachers must be aware of and understand the linguistic structures of SE to assess such outcomes. However, several structures within SE phonological awareness could be misinterpreted as "incorrect" when it is "correct" in another linguistic system. For example, phonological awareness concept of "deleting" in SE refers to "deleting beginning or ending sounds in words", however in Ebonics, most suffixes are deleted and

the phonological awareness is different (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1997, p.3; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1998, p.3).

In addition, during the assessment process there are many ways in which the dichotomy of correct SE versus “incorrect” SE mimics the historic view of Ebonics as illogical misplacement of lexicon. The LDT is apparent when assessing reading which focuses on miscues during running records procedures:

The student is asked to read the text orally while the teacher tapes and/ or records everything the student says and does. Correctly read words are recorded with a check mark, and variations from the text are recorded with conventions such as those that follow. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1997, p.250).

There is an emphasis on “correctness”; variations are not indicated as other linguistic systems rather, they are marked simply incorrect. This is an issue for teachers who are only required to understand SE linguistics and cannot quickly help an EAL student such as ANSE students. Also, certain types of feedback encourage the teacher to focus on deficiencies. For example, the use of evaluative feedback demonstrates the student as doing well or not:

Evaluative feedback tells the student how he or she has performed and often uses letters, numbers, check marks, or other symbols. While it may tell students that they need to improve, it does not let the student know what they must do to improve. Evaluative feedback sometimes involves stickers, or comments such as “good” or “keep trying”. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2007, p.76)

There is an absence of home language and linguistic difference when teachers record perceived mistakes during reading and this simplistic feedback does not recognize whether a student needs help in code-switching to SE. Moreover, this neglect could lead

to ignoring the student's linguistic needs or simply misplacing them into special needs classes for a perceived inability to acquire SE.

The absence of code-switching in assessment is used as strategies to ignore linguistic differences. Teachers are not expected to assess code-switching practices on the daily basis in AYR even though it is an outcome in LACP. Instead, AYR encourages the LDT by indicating that teachers must use responses to students reading and writing such as: "Did that make sense? Did that sound right? Did that look right?" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a, p. 5). Moreover, teachers are encouraged in AYR to use language and questions that infers that linguistic variations are illogical or underdeveloped during their assessment: "While reading, the student makes substitutions that are visually similar but don't make sense...prompt the student to question 'did that make sense?'"(Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2003a, p.54). These questions reproduce the LDT by modelling for the student that SE is the only logical or sensible language. It is important to learn SE grammar or lexicon, but questioning the linguistic "sense" in that manner indicates that non-standard speakers are intellectually inferior by assessing students based on SE sociolinguistic hierarchy; that would be inaccurate. This does not demand the teacher to teach code-switching practices. What it does is tell the teacher to focus on deficiencies which will affect ANSE speakers by telling them their linguistic system is wrong or incorrect.

Moreover, Nova Scotia Department of Education (2013) describes EAL section added more detail for teachers to be guided by, but the detail reproduces LDT. Nova Scotia Department of Education (1997) emphasizes that EAL students are accepted and their abilities to use their home language are celebrated in a non-hostile environment: "the learning environment and classroom organization should affirm cultural values to support

these students and provide opportunities for individual and group learning.” (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1997, p.5). However, Nova Scotia Department of Education (2013) added descriptions which lead teachers to the LDT such as “modeling *correct language structures*” (p. 95, emphasis added). The use of the word “correct” or appropriate language demonstrates a socially constructed SE superiority and contradicts the LACP that states sociolinguistic diversity should be celebrated and accepted within the literacy achievement. Nova Scotia Department of Education (2013) also added that these learners may need additional support in acquiring SE: “specialist teachers’ support for intense intervention” (p.95). By indicating in this policy document that a specialist teacher will intervene focuses on deficiencies and not on the learner as equal linguistically, where it states in the earlier version that:

While students should work toward achievement of the same curriculum outcomes as other students, they may approach the outcomes differently and may at times be working with different learning resources at different levels and in a different time frame from other students (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1997, p. 5).

The earlier document promotes clear Linguistic Difference Theory and encourages teachers to use code-switching pedagogies to help in learning SE, but the latest version moves teachers away from understanding difference and focuses on perceived deficiencies.

## Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

### Discussion

In summary, the aim of this research study is to examine the influence of sociolinguistics and ANSE on academic achievement. Guided by the theoretical framework of Critical Pedagogy, I hypothesize that the LDT is consistently embedded in the Nova Scotia education system. Although there are research design limitations, findings demonstrate that the LDT still surfaces in the assessment process regardless of the progress made to encourage sociolinguistic difference in LACP.

The results demonstrate first and foremost that there is progress in accepting sociolinguistic differences in the Nova Scotia education system. The education system identifies students who learn EAL in their LACP (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013). This progressive policy recognizes the needs of non-standard speakers and includes these students in the classroom where learning is diverse for their needs. Bringing sociolinguistic awareness to the LACP outcomes not only recognizes the linguistic structures in a language, but also the culturally specific behaviours and experiences portrayed through each language/dialect. Similarly, research on sociolinguistic awareness in the classroom details SE acquisition extends beyond learning a language; it is recognizing the cultural differences that are consistent with language (Devonish & Carpenter, 2007). In addition, LACP details methods to endorse the use of code-switching for EAL students to bring their home language knowledge into the classroom in an effort to increase literacy proficiency (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2012b). Hill (2009) argues that encouraging students to use their existing

sociolinguistic skills instead of deeming them simply incorrect or “wrong” increases the linguistic awareness and increases student appreciation of their culture (p.130).

Recommendations and reports challenge the Nova Scotia education system and gain progress in advancing many inclusive policies. To achieve sociolinguistic acceptance, the school environment is arranged where it encourages and supports students and their peer group. Critical Pedagogy urges the educational environment socially and physically to be a place where critical thinking and reflection on one’s personal experience is in place to achieve consciousness (Cook, 2000, p. 18). Similarly, LACP and TIA emphasize the need for the social environment to be as supportive for academic growth and openness for students to question and learn (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2006; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2007). Critical Pedagogy research and LACP detail that the teacher as a leader must guide students and support a community learning environment where there is a reciprocal learning experience (Baral, 2006; Giroux & McLaren, 1989). In creating an environment which is supportive, LACP emphasizes a teacher-student relationship heavily based on the support of the teacher to assure student literacy success.

Unlike the progressive anti-racist policy implementations in LACP, findings also demonstrate a continuing sociolinguistic hierarchy of SE that further marginalizes non-standard speakers. The anti-racist LACP are progressive and altruistically aim to address inequality, however addressing systemic racist policies in one section of the education system and ignoring the systemic racism which influences other areas of the education system only addresses social issues partially. Put simply, the LDT resurfaces in the policy gaps between LACP and assessment. For example, Henry & Tator (2006) argue that anti-

racist policies inadequately avoid addressing racism and focus on improving relationships:

Many of the policy documents are framed in the context of diversity with no specific identification of the issues of racism and other forms of oppression. Issues are conceptualized in terms of improving “relations” between racial and ethno-cultural groups, rather than of targeting the elimination of racial bias and systemic discrimination...The language of many of the policies suggests a preoccupation with promoting and encouraging greater tolerance, understanding, and harmony among racial-minority students and staff, rather than ensuring fairness, justice, and equity as outcomes (p.309)

Policy must work to emphasize anti-racist practices in all areas of the education system. Inadequate policies create a false security or a means to legally accomplish immediate issues that do not totally protect or benefit marginalized groups (Wendel, Shore, Feldman, & Lathrop, 2005, p.37). Specifically in the current study, there needs to be a linkage between LACP anti-racist sociolinguistic awareness applied to the assessment process to further address the LDT in the education system.

The assessment process findings in the current study emphasize correctness instead of significant emphasis on dialogue between the teacher and student. The idea of “correctness” stems from LDT that wrongly deems the ANSE speech community do not have the cognitive ability to acquire or sustain high levels of SE proficiency (Coleman, 2000, p. 75). Seymour & Seymour (1979b) argue that identifying students who are not reaching academic goals is part of assessment process, however classifying students based on the LDT and sociolinguistic hierarchy of SE falsely assesses their literacy intelligence:



What is at issue here is not whether to classify and segregate children according to individual needs, but to do so in the least restrictive manner. Educational placements based on capricious decisions, inadequate family involvement, a disregard for cultural factors, and biased assessments and evaluation tests will invariably result in an imbalanced racial enrollment in special classes, a condition that would be considered restrictive. (p.464)

Moreover, the LACP documents emphasis on the need for EAL learners to have a specialist intervene only commits to the LDT which enforces ANSE-speakers sociolinguistic behavior is a deficiency which needs to be corrected (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2013). Instead of using both sociolinguistic codes to instruct SE, the teachers' inadequate knowledge of ANSE and other non-standard linguistic varieties limits teachers to resort to LDT when assessing.

Furthermore, the ambiguous definition of home language neither acknowledges nor denies ANSE in education system policy documents (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1998). The silence around Ebonics in the education system is not new across the African diaspora (Palacas, 2001; Seymour et al., 1999). The lack of definition for home languages does not encourage the presence of ANSE to be accepted as its own functional linguistic system. The myths and misconceptions founded in sociolinguistics and society at large often misinterpreted Ebonics as illogical English lexicon use (Thompson, 2000) and thus, without appropriate definitions, home language is left to be assessed by the teacher. This leads teachers into the political debate around languages versus dialects. However, these assumptions are not based in linguistics or sociolinguistics. Therefore, incomplete knowledge about ANSE surrounding SE-speaking teachers make them participate in the correct/incorrect dichotomies which are less likely

to encourage ANSE speakers to appreciate both linguistic systems as equal. Judith Baker argues these right/wrong dichotomies force children to choose between conforming or resisting the dominant culture and thus, many students lose interest in learning to read under constant “correction” and devaluing of their culture (Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2002, p. 52). Languages and social identity must be used synonymously when learning literacy skills in an effort to create an accepting area which helps non-standard speakers in their SE proficiency instead of constant degradation.

Also, the idea of modeling as a tool to help students understand SE and improve their proficiency is misguided. Mackey (1997) and Henry & Tator (2006) argue that there is a mono-linguistic cultural identity in Canadian society which silences marginalized groups and their diverse sociolinguistics. Language Arts Curriculum Policy and assessment documents use the term modeling, but ignore the overwhelming need for African Nova Scotian representation in staff. Baldwin (1997) argues that it is not the language of the Ebonics speaker; it is their experience that is despised (p.6). Modeling creates a hierarchy which values SE experiences over ANSE-speakers experiences. For example, it is noted that African Nova Scotian children are learning lessons that they cannot connect with: “The average Black child is learning about the life lived by the White student while the White student is living the life he is learning about” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 92). These arguments are linked directly with the visual representation that does a minimum job to include African Nova Scotians. Flowers (2000) argues that Ebonics-speakers often code-switch to Ebonics more often when they are connecting to personal experiences or feelings (p.225). Therefore, in the assessment process which encourages African Nova Scotians to connect with the text and reflect through personal reactions, they are more likely to use their mother tongue and be

deemed incorrect because the SE model does not include their experiences. Overall, the findings in the current study align largely with previous research conducted in United States and Canada to highlight a need for equitable methods to instruct and assess students from diverse cultural sociolinguistic backgrounds to attain SE.

### **Future Research**

As discussed in Chapter Four, the current research study has several limitations which future studies can continue to build on. First, the sampling methods used in this study caused a convenient bias in research findings. Future studies should aim to capture a balanced sample of Department of Education policy documents through other sampling methods such as random sampling or systematic sampling. Choosing other sampling methods will increase the external validity, reliability, and provide a better representation of policy documents. The convenient sample was beneficial for the timeframe and preliminary nature of this research study, but for larger scale research projects there needs to be a thorough sampling framework to provide accurate findings.

In addition, a disadvantage in data collection is the timeframe. The choice to analyze public documents was a reasonably valid pursuit, however, data collection from government archives should have a longer collection period in future studies. A longer timeframe would increase the response rate and document retrieval. Future research that is confronted with low response rates for government policy documents can use their right to the Nova Scotia Freedom to Information Act. This policy allows researchers and the public to access government documents through a request form. The Nova Scotia Freedom to Information Act would require a larger timeframe for response and document retrieval; however document quantity would increase tremendously.

The current research project is limited to policy documents and cannot examine beyond the ambiguous language used in several sections. For example, it is identified that policies are implemented but the practices are slow to match: “Policy changes and legislation must be accompanied by an aggressive educational program. Although the laws regarding education may change, the evidence is that actual practice has been very slow to change” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 57). This being said, policies may seem to be progressive, but the actual daily practice may not be as advanced. To truly examine the LDT, future research must explore daily classroom practices and focus on daily assessment between the teacher and ANSE speaker. Future studies should continue to use a qualitative research design that would provide insight to the connections between policy and practice. A qualitative research focus on practice would highlight the teacher’s interpretation of policy and their application when assessing ANSE speakers. This approach would further the research area on literacy, code-switching practices, attitudes towards EAL learners, attitudes towards ANSE, and the frequency of using ANSE in the classroom.

Though there are several limitations within my research, I emphasize that this is only a preliminary research project in a new research area. This research study has numerous innovative findings and research designs that differ from previous research in this area that should not be ignored. Future research should build on areas such as qualitative research designs, theoretical framework, and ANSE in the education system. A qualitative research design allows more descriptive analysis and provides detailed findings which can be ignored in other methods. Future studies should continue to use an inductive-deductive coding method which allows the codes to appear and themes to emerge freely. Coding templates are beneficial to start the coding processes, but too many

codes in a template will narrow or restrict analysis (Krippendorff, 2009, p. 88). Using an inductive-deductive approach to coding provides the researcher more freedom to explore policy documents while allowing themes and categories to present themselves. It is also useful to use a theoretical framework such as Critical Pedagogy that benefits all students and empowers students and their teachers to critical assesses social issues. Further research should be done to support the sociolinguistic value and worth of ANSE in Nova Scotian society and further challenge the sociolinguistic hierarchies that exist. Overall, future research in this area should use the limitations and innovations of this project to investigate the impact of LDT in the process assessment for ANSE students.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the significance of my research study is to participate in a sociolinguistic analysis on ANSE in the education system. Nova Scotia literacy research has hardly examined the sociolinguistic influences on literacy achievement for non-standard speakers. Majority of research on literacy achievement has had a quantitative approach which solely focuses on the students' literacy outcomes to make inferences about African Nova Scotian achievement. Though quantitative research is valued for its data, my research study uses descriptive analysis approach on African Nova Scotian literacy achievement to fill literature gaps and broadens the research area on social issues. Moreover, my research study is not only an effort to increase sociolinguistic academic literature; like other studies in this field, this research study aims to encourage social and academic change affecting the Ebonics-speech community (Makoni et al., 2003).

My research study aims to emphasize and investigate the process of assessment to further provincial research on African Nova Scotian literacy achievement. Literacy

achievement research with a quantitative approach is limited and only partially captures the social issue. The disadvantage in previous quantitative research is that it capitalizes on perceived “failures” of marginalized groups in the education system instead of acknowledging the significant impact that the process of assessment, instruction, and evaluation has on literacy outcomes. It is significant for this research study to explore the assessment tools and measures which directly impact African Nova Scotian literacy outcomes. The Nova Scotia Department of Education needs to acknowledge its limited pedagogy policy which does not reflect a true anti-racist/multicultural curriculum and assessment. Above all, the ambiguity of policy language and lack of research on the connection between policy and practices reinforce harmful methods which continue to oppress marginalized groups.

It is imperative that my research goals are not misconstrued or misinterpreted. This research project is not an attempt to end SE acquisition or proficiency from the education system or to abolish SE from Canadian society. All sociolinguistic codes are important. It is imperative to learn the two official languages to successfully communicate with all Canadians; students must learn to read, write, and speak in SE and French. My research aim is to encourage the education system to use an alternative pedagogy that liberates and accepts all linguistic codes as equally complex as the standard. It is through this process of liberating and empowering students that literacy achievement rates will improve. Alternative pedagogies use methods which do not degrade or discriminate when instructing and assessing literacy because it recognizes that this has a lasting effect on literacy achievement (Hill, 2009). Policies and practices that degrade non-standard languages/dialects and thus, fail to educate non-standard speakers appropriately are unacceptable. The educational institutions that continue systemic racism will not help the

ANSE speech community achieve SE. If all students from diverse linguistic backgrounds and cultures are to acquire SE and grow academically, they must be in an educational environment which uplifts them to reach their full potential.

Lastly, I aim to analyze the LDT which African Nova Scotian children are facing when acquiring SE in Nova Scotia; and therefore: “by analyzing it we aim to destroy it” (Fanon, 1967, p.xvi). It is imperative to destroy the ideology that African Nova Scotians are less intelligent because they choose to communicate in a code which is culturally relevant and fully functional for them. The LDT forces ANSE speakers into an education trap that belittles them and damages their academic growth. I encourage my reader to reflect on the misguided theories that socially perceive “proper English” as a better suited language than [*switch*] *how I be speakin ‘cuz African Nova Scotians bin speakin’ like this* [*switch*] and recognize that all linguistic systems are socially important and linguistically equal. The education system needs to enhance their policy and practices regarding EAL students and promote a positive literacy learning environment. Also, I encourage the ‘Scotian Talented Tenth (our leaders) to critique and critically build from this research. Critical Pedagogy urges us to become leaders and learners to critically think and act towards social transformation that frees everyone (Freire, 1970). Above all, I acknowledge that I have not solved the complete issue I sought to analyze, but by writing and opening a research area on ANSE and literacy in Nova Scotia, our sociolinguistic code and the obstacles faced in the education system will be documented for future research to lead us into social transformation and liberation.

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## Appendix A: Data Analysis Coding Template

Category	Codes
<i>Words</i>	<i>Ebonics</i> <i>Black English</i> <i>English</i> <i>Home Talk</i> <i>African Nova Scotian Ebonics</i> <i>African Nova Scotian</i> <i>Dialect/s</i> <i>Gaelic</i>
<i>Sociolinguistics/Diversity</i>	<i>Standard English Culture</i> <i>Standard English/ English</i> <i>Home Language</i> <i>Bilingual</i> <i>Culture</i> <i>African Nova Scotian</i> <i>Home Speech</i> <i>Home language</i> <i>Informal talk</i> <i>Difference</i> <i>Self</i> <i>Linguistics</i> <i>Gender</i> <i>Multicultural</i>
<i>Testin'</i>	<i>Testin'</i> <i>Speakin' Skill</i> <i>Intelligence</i> <i>Actin' up</i> <i>Right/Wrong</i> <i>Behavin'</i>
<i>Teachin'</i>	<i>Connection</i> <i>Bankin'</i> <i>Support</i> <i>Environment</i> <i>Critical Pedagogy</i>



## Appendix B: Research Document List

- Black Learners Advisory Committee. (1994). *BLAC report on education: Redressing inequality-empowering Black learners*. Nova Scotia: Black Learners Advisory Committee.
- Nova Scotia Department of Education. (1997). *Atlantic Canada English language arts curriculum guide: Grades primary-3*. Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia Department of Education.
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