Centennial Honors College

Western Illinois University

Undergraduate Research Day 2012

Podium Presentation

Speaking Our Language: *Positive Steps for a Positive Future*

Elizabeth Etta

Faculty Mentor: Audrey Watkins
African American Studies

The education gap in today's African American youth is a highly discussed topic. While there are many factors that attribute to the issue, there is an apparent language barrier between young African American students and their teachers in many schools. The common language ascribed to African Americans has the potential to create both comprehension and oral participation issues in the Standard American English (SAE) speaking classroom. Deviating from Standard American English in the classroom, much like foreign language immersion courses will not only speak volumes to the children about the subject at hand but also encourage acceptance, foster higher moral, and create a comfortable learning environment.

This presentation will focus on the sociological and psychological implications of teaching youth in the language that they understand. In my research, I will analyze both past and present scholarly studies, essays from both the African diaspora and realm of social science, and articles pertaining to current events to further the notion of language. My sources include primarily the Public Broadcast Station, the Coalition on Language Diversity in Education, and studies from prestigious universities such as University of Michigan and Stanford University. It is crucial to all African Americans that our children will not only advance in school but advance in today's society as future career professionals. This multilevel advancement will be achieved by welcoming the common language of the student and assist in another step forward in the upward progression of the black community.