Research Note

An Interprofessional Approach to Dialect-Shifting Instruction for Early Elementary School Students

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Purpose: Dialect-shifting has shown promise as an effective way to improve academic outcomes of students who speak nonmainstream dialects such as African American English (AAE); however, limited studies have examined the impacts of an interprofessional approach with multiple instructional methods. In this study, we developed a dialect-shifting curriculum for early elementary school students who speak AAE and evaluated the curriculum for feasibility and preliminary impacts.

Method: Forty-one kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade students and their teachers in one elementary school participated in a 7-week dialect-shifting instruction co-taught by the classroom teachers and a speech-language pathology graduate clinician. Students' use of dialect-shifting and dialect density was measured by calculating dialect density measures in retells presented in AAE and mainstream American English and responses to situational dialect-shifting and applied dialect-shifting tasks. Teacher surveys

and interviews about the feasibility and perceived impacts were conducted.

Results: Initial impacts of the curriculum demonstrated increased dialect awareness for all students, with grade-level differences when students were asked to explicitly dialect-shift. In particular, second- and third-grade students were more proficient at dialect-shifting AAE features included in the curriculum. Additionally, high rates of administrator, teacher, and student satisfaction, teacher generalization, and maintenance of incorporating contrastive analysis instruction into class activities were reported.

Conclusions: Literacy and play-based instruction are feasible methods to create a dialect-shifting curriculum tailored to younger students. Furthermore, the feasibility and effectiveness of the curriculum were supported by an interprofessional approach.

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For several decades, there has been a documented academic performance gap between African American students and their European American counterparts, specifically in the areas of reading and writing (Barton & Coley, 2010; Baugh, 1999; Labov & Baker, 2015; Labov et al., 1968; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Wheeler, 2016). Multiple intersecting factors such as systemic educational inequalities, cultural and linguistic variabiity, and biases have been identified as contributors to lower

literacy skills in African American students (Baugh, 1999; Brown et al., 2015; Labov, 1972; Ladson-Billings, 2006; McCardle et al., 2001; Terry et al., 2010; Wolfram, 1969; Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009). Another contributor is the linguistic mismatch or difference between African American English (AAE),[1] which is spoken by many African American students, and mainstream American English (MAE),[2] the predominant dialect of instruction (Brown et al., 2015; Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig & Washington, 2002; Edwards et al., 2014). Although AAE is a valid and rule-governed language dialect, several studies have documented that students who speak a higher dialect density or use more AAE features are more likely to struggle with literacy acquisition due to the

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[1]There are differing positions on whether AAE is a dialect of English, a dialect of West African languages, or its own language (see Hudley, 2008; Smitherman, 2006).

[2]Many sociolinguistics use the term *standardized English*, as opposed to MAE, to recognize that there is not inherent value in one dialect over another.

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linguistic mismatch (Charity et al., 2004; Craig & Washington, 2006; Craig et al., 2009; Washington et al., 2018).

Multiple efforts have focused on various instructional tools to support students who speak AAE within the classroom. The challenge has been developing tools that build on the cultural and linguistic knowledge that African American students are often immersed in at home and bring with them to school (Baugh, 1999; King, 1994; Labov, 1972; Smitherman & Smitherman-Donaldson, 1986; Swindler Boutte & Hill, 2006). Original approaches were often racist, classist, and suggested that teachers "act as if African American students had no language at all" and "re-teach language" to the student (Bereiter et al., 1966), or centered on "correctionist" models that corrected AAE utterances with MAE (Christenbury, 2000; Dresser & Asato, 2014; Hill, 2009; Kautzsch, 2002; Wheeler, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). These approaches led to lower student motivation, decreased teacher perspectives of student abilities, and failed to improve reading and writing outcomes on standardized tests (Dresser & Asato, 2014; Godley et al. 2006; Hill, 2009; Nieto, 2000; Pearson et al., 2013; Taylor, 1989; Wheeler, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2006).

More culturally responsive strategies have sought to highlight linguist diversity by examining the differences between two dialects to help student's dialect shift or deploy MAE features in an academic context (Craig, 2010, 2016; Cumming, 1997; Edwards & Rosin, 2016; Fisher & Lapp, 2013; Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Justic & Redle, 2014; Maddahian & Sandamela, 2000; Moyle, 2015; Simpkins et al., 1975; Sweetland, 2006; Taylor, 1989; Wheeler & Swords, 2006; Wolfram et al., 1999). One method that incorporates linguistic diversity and encourages students to shift between AAE and MAE is dialect-shifting with contrastive analysis (Feigenbaum, 1970; Justice & Redle, 2014; Wheeler, 2005, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Dialect-shifting is described as the act of interchanging between two dialects depending on the social or cultural context and can increase students' awareness between their native dialect, such as AAE, and academic dialects, such as MAE (Justice & Redle, 2014; Pearson et al., 2013; Rickford et al., 2004; Wheeler & Swords, 2006). This skill can be implicitly acquired by students through observations in their environment or explicitly taught in curricula that use methods such as contrastive analysis (Baugh, 1999; Cumming, 1997; Taylor 1991; Wheeler, 2005, 2008). Contrastive analysis compares specific features of different dialects to teach students to discern differences between the dialects. Dialect-shifting taught through contrastive analysis can increase awareness of linguistic features, encourage metacognitive skills, build on the linguistic knowledge students already possess, and promote linguistic flexibility, skills that are critical for dialect-shifting, reading, and writing (Conner, 2008; Craig & Washington, 2006; Edwards & Rosin, 2016; Wheeler, 2008).

Despite the benefits, explicitly teaching dialect-shifting has been criticized for its promotion of segregated use of language, the portrayal of language use as a rigid activity by restricting the use of AAE to specific locations or interlocutors, and reinforcement that MAE is superior or the more desired dialect (Gilyard, 2011; Young, 2009; Young et al., 2014). Additionally, it has been critiqued as a method that further challenges students' identities by perpetuating the idea that Eurocentric linguistic and cultural norms are valued more while putting the onus on the student to conform to those ideals within education (Canagarajah, 2006; Lee & Handsfield, 2018; Paris, 2012; Young, 2009). Critiques of explicitly teaching dialect-shifting highlight the tension around how we create and implement culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining teaching practices. An ideal approach would be to shift our educational values to models that build on students' cultural backgrounds, prior accomplishments, and intellectual capabilities to teach additional skills (Ford et al. 2000; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012; Sleeter, 2012).

Although shifting educational values to be inherently more inclusive and culturally sustaining is the ultimate goal, it has been one that has proven to be slow-moving due to political and societal disagreement and difficulty translating theories of a culturally relevant classroom into practice (Ball, 1995; Barton & Coley, 2010; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010; Sleeter, 2012; Young 2010). Thus, there is still a need for concrete tools that support linguistic and cultural individuality while increasing reading and writing outcomes, which are especially important for younger students who are impacted by linguistic mismatch as soon as they enter the classroom (Charity et al., 2004; Craig & Washington, 2004, 2006; Craig et al., 2009; Hill, 2009). Researchers have demonstrated the promise of dialect-shifting instruction to improve teacher perspectives around linguistic variation and students' academic outcomes (Bailey, 1968; Craig, 2010, 2016; Edwards & Rosin, 2016; Feigenbaum, 1970; Fisher & Lapp, 2013; Golden, 1962; Hurst, 1965; Johnson et al., 2017; Lin, 1965; Moyle, 2015; Pearson et al. 2013; Rickford et al., 2004; Smitherman, 2015; Taylor, 1989; Wolfram et al., 1999).

Dialect-shifting is a feasible tool to mitigate linguistic impact within the classroom while also validating the use of AAE as an academic dialect; however, limited studies explore play- and literacy-based methods to facilitate instruction, focus equally on reciprocal shifting between AAE and MAE, and administer instruction in brief periods of time for early elementary school students. Furthermore, there is a need to explore the use of preexisting culturally relevant text to facilitate dialect-shifting instruction and the impacts of a curriculum developed with an interprofessional team that includes administration, teachers, and speech-language pathologists. The potential benefits could expand beyond improving proficiency in speaking MAE for academic context to contributing to the multidimensional approach needed to close the academic performance discrepancy.

The purpose of this project was twofold: (a) to develop a dialect-shifting instructional curriculum for kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade students that aligns with grade-specific learning standards and (b) to explore the feasibility, acceptability, and initial impacts of a pilot implementation of the curriculum. The following research questions guided this study: (a) How does participating in a brief dialect-shifting curriculum influence kindergarten,

first-, second-, and third-grade students' dialect awareness and dialect-shifting when explicitly asked? (b) How do teachers perceive language variations and the process of explicitly teaching dialect-shifting? The remainder of this research note will address how the curriculum was developed, the materials and protocols used, the initial impacts, and feedback from teachers and administration.

Method

Curriculum Development

Curriculum Scope

The curriculum was a 7-week program that focused on four salient AAE features. The first 2 weeks focused on introducing the concept of dialect-shifting through play-based situations, with subsequent weeks targeting a specific feature. We used the Common Core State Standards to guide the selection of AAE features and activities to ensure they would be language and literacy targets that were appropriate for each grade-level (Common Core Standards, 2007). Based on those standards and knowledge of child AAE, the following features were selected genitive marking: possessive –s, zero plural, future tense of the auxiliary verb "going" (i.e., "gonna" vs. "going to"), and the phonological pattern of /ŋ/ to /n/. Dialect-shifting was explicitly taught through contrastive analysis with a t-chart, which compared specific features of different dialects, without identifying or emphasizing one dialect as superior or desired (Edwards et al., 2014, Wheeler, 2008). Similar to Wheeler and Swords (2006) and Craig (2010, 2016), one part of the t-chart was used to illustrate how an utterance or feature may appear in AAE versus MAE.

Instructional structure and method. The curriculum structure was developed with a combination of prior research knowledge and input from administration and teachers. Administrators and teachers attended a professional development session conducted by the authors, a speech-language pathology graduate student and a speech-language pathologist, that discussed the historical context and linguistic features of AAE and dialect-shifting methods. Teachers and administrators worked with the authors to provide recommendations on the length and timing of instruction to not infringe on core curricula. At the beginning of each week, the first author held one-on-one meetings with each grade-level teacher to review the week's lesson and make adjustments. These weekly meetings were integral in promoting collaborative practices and ensuring teacher and staff input into the curriculum.

Based on teacher input, weekly content was taught in two 20- to 30-min key lessons co-taught by the general education classroom teacher and the first author. Each lesson began by activating prior knowledge, introducing new material, and explicit instruction on the targeted feature/skill. The curriculum followed the practice of introducing the concept of dialect-shifting to early elementary school students by exploring situational differences with play-based activities that focused on how different types of clothing can be worn depending in the environment and how greetings

differ depending on who you are addressing. Those examples were the foundation of the curriculum, which emphasized dialect-shifting based on context. The first lessons of each week consisted of whole group read alouds that used pre-existing cultural text such as "Mirandy and Brother Wind" by Patricia McKassic, or play-based situations to support the idea of shifting dialects based on your location and your relationship with an interlocutor. Students were provided scaffolded support to define AAE and MAE and classify utterances within the story as AAE or MAE. Each week, the second lesson began with a review and focused on small group activities that involved sorting or matching activities. Similar to other dialect-shifting curricula (e.g., Craig, 2010, 2016; Wheeler & Swords, 2006), lessons focused on defining each dialect, classifying utterances in each dialect, and practicing with a matching, sorting, or fill-in-the-blank activity. Students were provided multiple opportunities for practice, self-evaluation, and feedback on the targeted dialect-shifting skill.

Each dialect was given a label to aid students in defining the dialects and connecting them to more concrete examples such as locations, conversation partners, and clothing styles. The labels given to the dialects throughout the curriculum were "informal" for AAE and "formal" for MAE. The authors acknowledge that those labels have been soundly criticized for promoting a deficit narrative around the use and classification of AAE (Gilyard, 2011; Young, 2009; Young et al., 2014). "Home" and "School" language were also thought of as potential labels; however, the authors wanted to communicate to teachers and students that AAE is not just used at home but also used in school with peers and familiar speakers. In hindsight, these labels were counteractive to our real goal, and if revisions were made to the curriculum, "Everyday English" and "School English" (Sweetland, 2006) or similar wording would be considered.

Kindergarten and first-grade lesson plans focused on teaching contrastive analysis through reading (primarily read alouds) and sorting and fill-in-the-blank activities. Second- and third-grade students used the same activities while also incorporating a grade-appropriate writing component, which usually involved rewriting short sentences. A t-chart was used to identify the dialectal differences so students could visualize the MAE and AAE patterns. To preserve the integrity of AAE and demonstrate that the use of AAE is not just used at home, there were ample opportunities for students to shift MAE into AAE. This was necessary to demonstrate that dialect-shifting is more than just deploying MAE features, but that it can occur within environments that may be considered formal and can depend on nuanced contexts like your familiarity with a speaker. An example lesson plan is presented in Supplemental Materials S1 and S2.

To balance the somewhat competing needs to provide an instructional program in brief time periods and to provide multiple learning opportunities, "minute lessons" were vital components of the curriculum. Minute lessons further reinforced the concept of dialect-shifting by providing additional opportunities to practice and receive reinforcement on the targeted concept or feature. Teachers were provided

with a key ring of quick minute lessons that could be used during class transitions. Minute lessons included short prompts that teachers could present to students to highlight salient pieces of the weekly lesson (e.g., read a sentence and ask the students to identify if it is informal or formal). Minute lessons allowed for distributed practice and reinforcement of the targeted features, while also creating an opportunity for teachers to assess students' knowledge of the week's concept informally.

Pilot Implementation Study

Participants

The pilot implementation study included the students and teachers in kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade classrooms at a small urban nonprofit private school. The sample included 41 students (kindergarten $n = 7$, first grade $n = 11$, second grade $n = 11$, third grade $n = 12$) and their classroom teachers and instructional assistants in each class (collectively referred to as teachers, $n = 6$). Thirty-nine students were African American, and two were European American; two teachers were African American, and four teachers where European American. Parents of students and teachers provided informed consent, and the students provided assent for the data collected to be used in the institutional review board–approved research project.

Measures

Measures were conducted at scheduled intervals for specific purposes: participant description, pre–post instruction, and post-instruction. The participant description measures we administered prior to dialect-shifting instruction and included the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation–Screener (Seymour et al., 2003), Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–Fourth Edition (Dunn & Dunn, 2007), and pure-tone audiometry hearing screening. The Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation–Screener is a standardized screener designed to distinguish typical dialectal variation from differences due to language delay or disorder (Seymour et al., 2003).

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–Fourth Edition is a standardized measure of receptive vocabulary skills (Dunn & Dunn, 2007). All children passed the hearing screening or received appropriate amplification. See Table 1 for participant description measures.

Pre–post instruction measures were used to monitor participants' performance on dialect awareness and dialect density. We developed a *Situational Shifting* assessment to evaluate which dialect students would deploy when given a scenario that contained a location or person that could be considered formal or informal. This measure was closely connected to the purpose of the curriculum because it heavily focused on the context in which students may want dialect shift. The beginning of the assessment gave students two open-ended questions that asked them to define what informal or formal language was, which included answers like but not limited to "informal language is how I talk every day to family and friends," "informal language is home language," or "formal language is how my teacher talks or how I talk in class." Subsequent questions asked students if they would use AAE (informal) or MAE (formal) in specific locations like on the playground or in the classroom, or with certain speakers like their sister or principal. Answers were not necessarily right or wrong but used to evaluate if they had connected dialect use to a specific context. Student responses represented if they understood that concept. The formal and informal scenarios were counterbalanced to minimize order effects. The Situational Shifting measure is included in Supplemental Material S3.

Students' dialect density measures (DDMs) were calculated as a proportion of dialect features produced to total words produced (Craig & Washington, 2000). DDMs were calculated for two measurement contexts—narrative retells presented in MAE and narrative retells presented in AAE. To collect language samples for the narrative retell, students were presented with two audio-recorded narrative stories—one in AAE and one in MAE. Students were instructed to listen carefully and after the story was finished to retell as much of the story as they could. Student

Table 1. Participant demographic information by grade level.

Grade	n	Gender	Race	Primary language	DELV-ST Language variation	PPVT M (SD), range
K	7	Male $n = 4$ Female $n = 3$	African American $n = 6$; White $n = 1$	English $n = 7$	Strong (AAE) $n = 5$ Some (AAE) $n = 1$ MAE $n = 1$	94.88 (18.77), 73–131
1	11	Male $n = 3$ Female $n = 8$	African American $n = 10$; White $n = 1$	English $n = 10$ Spanish $n = 1$	Strong (AAE) $n = 7$ Some (AAE) $n = 1$ MAE $n = 3$	95.45 (11.92), 68–106
2	11	Male $n = 6$ Female $n = 5$	African American $n = 11$	English $n = 11$	Strong (AAE) $n = 7$ Some (AAE) $n = 4$ MAE $n = 0$	93.64 (11.17), 74–109
3	12	Male $n = 2$ Female $n = 10$	African American $n = 12$	English $n = 12$	Strong (AAE) $n = 4$ Some (AAE) $n = 7$ MAE $n = 1$	91.31 (6.54), 75–101

Note. K = Kindergarten; DELV-ST = Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation–Screener; PPVT = Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–Fourth Edition; AAE = African American English; MAE = mainstream American English.

responses were recorded on an audio recorder for transcription. The MAE stories were grade-appropriate stories from the CUBED: Decoding, Language, Reading – Narrative Language Measures (Petersen & Spencer, 2016). The AAE stories were grade-appropriate stories developed by the first author, an African American woman who is a native speaker of AAE. Each story was developed with a similar structure, length, and features to the MAE stories. The presentation of AAE and MAE story retells was counterbalanced across participants to minimize order effects. Language samples were transcribed and analyzed using the Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts software (Miller & Chapman, 1984–2004). DDMs were calculated in two ways. First, Van Hofwegen and Wolfram's (2010) DDM coding protocol was used for a holistic view of dialect density. Second, a subset of the Van Hofwegen and Wolfram taxonomy representing the four-targeted AAE features in the studied curriculum was used to align with the curriculum's intended outcomes. Narratives were coded in Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts by student research assistants trained in the transcription and coding procedures. Two research assistants independently coded 31% of narrative samples (13 MAE narrative context samples and 13 AAE narrative context samples) to ensure reliability. Interrater agreement for DDM and feature-specific DDM ranged from 86.7% to 100%. Calculating DDMs from narrative retells presented in MAE and AAE provided an opportunity to determine potential differences in dialect features related to the dialect context.

We developed an applied dialect-shifting assessment that was administered to students as a post-instruction measure. The applied dialect-shifting measure was used to investigate students' ability to explicitly dialect-shift when asked, focusing on the features taught during instruction. Students were given eight sentences in two sections. In the first four questions, students were presented sentences like "I saw three cat" or "We lost Jacob's toy" and asked to identify if the sentence was formal or informal and identify the feature(s) that made it such. In the second four sentences, students were given four different questions of the same caliber and asked to shift a sentence into either MAE or AAE. The presentation of MAE and AAE sentences in both sections of the assessment were counterbalanced to minimize order effects. They were given 1 point for each correct response, with the highest possible score being 8.

Lastly, a brief teacher survey was given to each participating teacher after participating in the pilot implementation. The survey contained items adapted from the Language Knowledge and Awareness Survey (Smitherman & Villanueva, 2000). Fixed choice, rating scale, and open-response questions were presented to measure teacher's knowledge about dialects, perspectives about students using different dialects, and perspectives about the teacher's role in dialect instruction.

Results

This study aimed to explore the feasibility and initial impacts of developing a brief dialect-shifting curriculum for early-elementary African American students that used preexisting culturally rich text from children's literature. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the potential change in participants' dialect density and/or measure-specific scores pre and post curriculum implementation. The data presented are pilot data and should be interpreted with caution due to a feasibility research design and lack of a control group.

Situational Shifting

Situational Shifting responses were used to analyze student skills in defining informal and formal English and shifting dialect based on the person or place. Paired-samples t tests were used to examine aggregate differences from before and after instruction. There was a statistically significant difference between before ($M = 1.24$, $SD = 0.94$) and after ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.66$) instruction for students' dialect-shifting skills as measured by the Situational Shifting measure, $t(40) = -12.029$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.018$. Grade level analysis demonstrated that students in each grade improved in their definition of formal and informal language. Third-grade students demonstrated statistically significant differences in shifting dialect based on the person or place presented from before instruction ($M = 0.25$, $SD = 0.13$) to after instruction ($M = .59$, $SD = 0.15$), $t(11) = -2.345$, $p = .03$, $d = 2.38$.

DDMs in Narratives

In both the AAE and MAE narrative contexts, the DDMs were similar across time with neither measure yielding statistically significant differences. In addition to the holistic DDMs, a targeted feature of DDM was calculated, which only accounted for the AAE features in this instructional program. Results from the analysis of targeted feature DDMs were also statistically insignificant. See Table 2 for descriptive and inferential results of DDMs in each context across time points.

Applied Dialect-Shifting

Grade level averages on the 8-item applied dialect-shifting measure were calculated. Accuracy levels increased with each grade level—kindergarten students were 37.5% accurate, first graders were 48.8% accurate, second graders were 77.5% accurate, and third graders were 85% accurate. Younger students, kindergarteners and first graders, accurately identified if the sentence was formal or informal, but demonstrated difficulty shifting the sentence into a different dialect. Older students, second and third graders, not only correctly identified if the sentence was formal or informal at higher rates, but they applied learned language structures by shifting the sentences from MAE to AAE and AAE to MAE.

Teacher Knowledge and Perspectives

Teachers' responses in the survey generally clustered together; they all reported that they perceived the curriculum's

Table 2. DDM results from narrative retells presented in MAE and AAE.

Variable	Pre-instruction M (SD)	Post-instruction M (SD)	t	df	p	d
DDM in MAE retell	0.08 (0.07)	0.07 (0.05)	0.42	38	.67	0.08
Targeted features DDM in MAE retell	0.01 (0.08)	0.01 (0.01)	1.67	38	.10	0.10
DDM in AAE retell	0.08 (0.06)	0.08 (0.08)	0.18	36	.86	0.04
Targeted features DDM in AAE retell	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	1.45	36	.16	0.27

Note. DDM = dialect density measure; MAE = mainstream American English; AAE = African American English.

positive impacts and that it was feasible to implement in the allotted time. Additionally, they reported increased knowledge of language variations, diversified the ways they would address it within their classroom, and observed changes in how and where their students used AAE and MAE. All teachers agreed that dialect-shifting is valuable to promote the use of MAE in the classroom, which they felt was important, while also validating students' native dialect. For example, one teacher stated, "Teacher training was valuable to increase my knowledge about the validity of other dialects, and dialect-shifting allowed me to integrate the discussion of dialect into daily lessons. Every student should have this skill." Lastly, their responses indicated that support from administration and a speech-language pathologist added value to the curriculum. The instructors also praised the curriculum structure within the instructional day and stated that students should attain this skill if they do not already have it as early as possible.

Discussion

This study explored the development and pilot investigation of a brief dialect-shifting curriculum for early elementary school students. The findings add to previous work showing promise of early elementary literacy and play-based dialect-shifting curricula developed by interprofessional teams (e.g., Craig, 2010, 2016). Additionally, this study further contributed by demonstrating the possibility that dialect instruction can occur in shorter lengths of time and with lower frequency of instruction, use of preexisting cultural text for facilitation, and be constructed by an interprofessional team that included a speech-language pathologist to create a culturally responsive curriculum.

Situational Shifting

Results from the Situational Shifting assessment revealed there was a significant difference between pre and post measures in all students' performance, which potentially demonstrates an awareness of using different dialect features in different settings. Students in all grades accurately defined formal and informal language. However, students demonstrated various levels of knowledge in whether they would use MAE and AAE dialects with a specific person or place. Performance on this portion of the task improved with each increasing grade level, with second- and third-grade students scoring better than the younger students. In addition,

third-grade students demonstrated microshifting—they not only shifted their language depending on what environment they were in but further adjusted their dialect within the environment to fit the person they were speaking to.

The grade level difference in dialect-shifting demonstrated on the Situational Shifting measure highlights potential differences and areas to examine in dialect-shifting skills and instructional programs. Younger students may gain knowledge on defining dialects, potentially demonstrating an awareness of dialectal differences and usage, but, as students get older, there are general increases in language development and metalinguistic skills that may explain why the older students can expound on which dialects they may deploy when given a hypothetical situation (Justice & Redle, 2014). Additionally, older students have had more experience in academic settings, therefore increasing the exposure to MAE, which could yield faster acquisition of dialect-shifting skills (Craig & Washington, 2004; Green, 2011; Van Hofwegen & Wolfram, 2010).

Applied Dialect-Shifting

Like the Situational Shifting measure, students' dialect-shifting skills when explicitly asked to do so increased with grade level. Younger students accurately identified sentences as formal or informal but demonstrated difficulty in shifting the specific features targeted in the curriculum to MAE or AAE. Their performance was not surprising because younger students accurately defined informal or formal dialect in the Situational Shifting measure but demonstrated more variability in their answers of what dialect they may deploy in a given context. Conversely, second- and third-grade students defined and shifted targeted features to the opposite dialects. These results support the idea that, as students' knowledge of language develops, the better students may be able to dialect shift. Therefore, it may be beneficial to teach dialect-shifting sequentially by focusing on beginning concepts of what a dialect is and dialect awareness for younger students, and, as students, language and metalinguistic skills develop target frequently used features of child AAE and cognitively appropriate dialect-shifting strategies as students age and grade level increase.

Narrative Dialect Density

When students' DDMs were evaluated during the narrative retell task in both MAE and AAE, overall, there were no statistically significant differences in dialect-shifting to

match the dialect they heard within the story. There are three potential reasons why there were no differences in the task. First, retells were used to evaluate if students matched the dialect that the story was read in—mimicking an interaction with an interlocutor who may speak a different dialect. This may imply that the students had not developed the skill/sensitivity in the allotted time to shift their dialect to match the dialect a communication partner was using, or it may simply represent the natural variation in language use. Second, the curriculum primarily focused on identifying specific features, places, and people that may warrant the use of formal or informal context and not dialect-shifting within dialogue or based on a story. It is possible that students can identify different dialects and dialect-shift specific features when explicitly asked but have not generalized skills to broader conversational context. Lastly, interlocutor was described in the curriculum as a salient cue to decide what dialect students should deploy, and as evident by the older students microswitching, many students honed on to this as a cue. This may have led to students using their knowledge about their examiner's dialect to still use AAE features within the retells; however, the study was not designed to differentiate which hypotheses may be correct.

Teacher Knowledge and Perspectives

Teachers and administrators reported positive impacts of the curriculum. The teachers' feedback highlighted the importance of teaching dialect-shifting early, and that teacher training in dialect variation can contribute to future programs' success. Several teachers commented on how the brief instructional length combined with the minute lessons made integrating the lessons into their daily schedule easy and feasible to implement. One teacher commented, "I particularly enjoyed getting to collaborate on implementing the lessons. We each walked around to small groups to provide targeted instruction and feedback." In addition, teachers discussed how their views and methods to address dialect within the classroom had been diversified and how administrative support helped make the curriculum more successful. The alignment of lessons with English Language Arts standards, supporting collaborative interprofessional practice, and administrative support may be crucial aspects of this curriculum that should continue to be explored.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that are important to consider. The most significant limitations were the lack of an experimental control group, which prohibits any causal claims, and the small sample size within one school limited the statistical power of the analysis tools and the capacity to evaluate the impact of the curriculum. Therefore, all interpretations and conclusions from this study need to be made with respect to the possibility that several factors outside of the dialect-shifting instruction could have led to the changes from pre-instruction to post-instruction, with the most notable threat being maturation.

The brief nature of this program—in overall weeks implemented, frequency within each week, and the limited number of targeted features—likely impacted the findings. The amount of time allotted to teach and practice dialect-shifting was intentionally designed to mimic real-world limitations that teachers may face. Therefore, future research should continue to examine how frequent instruction should occur to determine efficient and effective amounts of time to dedicate to dialect-shifting instruction.

The selection of our features also poses a limitation. It is possible that there are other features, such as overt marked copulas that appear in both dialects, that are more predictive of reading outcomes (Craig & Washington, 2004; Maher et al., in press). These findings could mean that optional features like overt marked copulas that are available in both dialects could be easier to learn and comprehend than features that are zero marked, leading to improved reading outcomes. Future research should further investigate what features could be more generalizable and predictive of improved reading outcomes in teaching dialect-shifting curricula.

Lastly, we were limited in our ability to distinguish language variation and the developmental changes within children who speak AAE from actual dialect-shifting. Children who speak AAE demonstrate a general decrease in the use of AAE features as they progress in school, and the use of MAE features does not necessarily mean (a) the MAE feature was not already in the student's linguistic repertoire and (b) that the use of an "MAE" feature is not just the use of a feature that is optionally marked within the AAE grammar (Craig et al., 2014; Green, 2011; Maher et al., in press, Newkirk-Turner & Green, 2016; Van Hofwegen & Wolfram, 2010; Washington & Craig, 2004; Wolfram & Schilling, 2015). Thus, direct claims cannot be made that dialect-shifting curricula are the sole contributors to increasing MAE use within the classroom.

Future Research and Implications

Dialect-shifting instruction provides an opportunity to create culturally responsive classrooms that value and build on the cultural and linguistic knowledge African American students bring to the classroom. Despite the criticisms, dialect-shifting instruction serves as one of the tools that we can use as professionals to stand in the gap as we continue to address the systemic educational inequalities that contribute to the academic performance gap. Dialect-shifting curriculums have primarily been designed for late-elementary to college students and use writing as a main medium of instruction. This study supports previous research that literacy and play-based methods are feasible avenues to teach dialect-shifting and demonstrated initial impacts of shorter instructional time and implementation by an interprofessional team. Additionally, this study further emphasizes the importance of preservice and in-service professional development for teachers on dialect variations and ways to support students' language use in the classroom. The next steps include exploring what AAE features can be predictive of

improving reading outcomes and embedding them within dialect-shifting curricula, and evaluating the structure in which dialect-shifting is taught.

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