

## What is a *verve-acious* classroom?

In an upcoming book, *Urban Literacy Education: Helping City Kids in Regular and Special Education Classrooms* (K. Cooter & R. Cooter, in process), **verve** is described as having to do with a student's *receptiveness to variability* in the classroom.

Past research has shown that African American learners, in particular, are highly receptive to variability (Boykin, 1978, 1982; Tuck & Boykin, 1989). In fact, it has been discovered that African American students in particular *benefit from tasks* that are

- highly varied,
- visually and physically stimulating, and
- socially-oriented.

This is not a surprising finding. We are aware that family interactions in many African American households demonstrate a high degree of *verve*, and that children in these homes establish an early preference for **high *verve* environments** (Boykin & Bailey, 2000).

So, what happens in classrooms full of *verve* as opposed to classroom without *verve* (such as those where students must always stay in their seats, listen and stay quiet)? Again, research informs us that African American children have significantly better academic task performance and motivation **when tasks were presented with greater *variability*** in the classroom (Bailey, Caryn, and Boykin, 2001).

Research also reveals that children from home environments rich in African American culture and *verve* often have

- greater factual knowledge, and
- better problem-solving skills.

This finding held true, by the way, even when researchers took family income into account (i.e., whether the children were from poor socio-economic or affluent circumstances the result was the same). Also, racial pride was associated with fewer behavior problems.

Therefore, **verve-acious classrooms** are those having

1. action
2. choice
3. voice
4. and change.

*Verve-acious classrooms match the cultural needs of many Memphis students.*

**QUESTION:** *Can you think about something you have done in your classroom where **verve** was present and seemed to help students learn?* Please share this with your colleagues in our *community of scholars*.