

Faculty Development Committee

Proposal for Faculty-Student Summer Collaborative Grant
(Faculty-\$3000; Student- \$3000)

Summer 2008

Submitted by: Ayanna F. Brown, Ph.D, Department of Education

Date: Monday, February 18, 2008

Part I.

Project Title: “Using Sociolinguistic Methods to Examine Discussions of ‘Race’
in Secondary Classroom Settings”

Project Description: Using data collected from two different micro-ethnographic research projects, the student research assistant and professor will use a sociolinguistic approach to examine discussions of “race” in classroom settings.

Project Summary: This project will examine discussions of “race” within the context of classroom learning events. The research process will be organized in two components. First, the project will review current methods used among sociolinguists and ethnography to code discussions of “race.” This review process will specifically examine the methodological choices made among scholars to identify issues of “race talk” in schools over the last ten years. The second component of this project will review existing data collected in four different secondary classrooms. This review process will center on developing an in-depth content analysis of discussions of “race,” extending the current analysis identified in Brown’s (2008) research.

Abstract: The purpose of this research project is to examine discussions of “race” in secondary classrooms. The major research questions guiding this project are: (1) What constitutes discussions of “race” in classroom settings? And, (2) In what contexts do these discussions occur? The research will focus on reviewing and developing a sociolinguistic methodology for contextualizing discussions of “race” in classrooms settings in an effort to raise larger questions about addressing racial equity and social

justice in our larger society. This project is framed by the College's mission toward social justice and the Department of Education's pursuit of developing knowledgeable, caring and creators of learning. To this end, addressing racial injustice requires disentangling in part, when and how do students and teachers engage in discussions of "race."

Part II. Narrative

Current Situation.

Within my tenure in graduate school, I completed two micro-ethnographic research studies as the primary investigator. Both of these projects have attempted to push the current discourse on "race" and "diversity" extending it to how students engage in discussions of "race" within the classroom setting. While I have analyzed and presented nationally on students' uses narratives in discussions of "race," I have not examined these data across several research contexts (i.e., different school districts and different classrooms with different curriculum).

Research that focuses on "race-talk" has not yet raised questions about how "race" is constructed in these discussions. These projects emphasize discussions about racism and its relationship to social justice and equality (Bolgatz, 2005) and the absence of earnest discussions of "race" as a result of coded language that has racial meanings (Pollock, 2004). However, there seems to be conceptual limitations within this research in thinking about how language is functioning within these discussions. More importantly, existing research on "race-talk" in schools does not delve into the modes used for those discussions, notwithstanding the processes used to distinguish discussions of "race" from other types of talk.

Although there is vast research across several disciplines related to "race," much of this research theorizes "race" outside of the experiences of "ordinary" people. Additionally, the research on "race" outside of education focuses on "race" as a variable against which several concepts are measured, for example poverty, education, socio-economic status. These intersecting lines are important because there is significant overlap between these domains. However, isolating "race" rather than treating as a variable centralizes the racial constructs that shape how many people interpret their

experiences. Therefore, the significance of this study is that it focuses on how African American secondary students discuss “race” and analyzes how “race” is simultaneously constructed in and by discussions of “race,” notwithstanding other ways in which “race” is social constructed in everyday life (e.g., media). The distinction for this concept lies in how the participants challenge social constructions of “race” as they also construct “race” themselves within these discussions.

The Project Plan

The purpose of this research project is to examine discussions of “race” in secondary classrooms. The research project will be organized in four phases.

Phase I: Notification of Grant Award and Student Research Orientation

Time period: Between May 19, 2008 and June 1, 2008.

The grant award is announced by the FDC. After the official announcement, I will schedule a meeting with the student research assistant to orient them to the depths of the project, responsibilities, scheduling and the resources we will use.

Phase II: Research and Review

Time period: June 9, 2008 through June 23, 2008

During this period, the student research assistant will research and review existing sociolinguistic methods used to identify “race-talk.” We will then create an organizational schema for the varying methodological approaches detailing their utility and efficiency for our purposes. After organizing these methods, we will then detail a useful method for coding the existing data using Hyper-Transcribe and Hyper-Research.

Phase III. Coding and Transcription

Time period: June 23, 2008 through July 18, 2008

During this period, the student will work independently transcribing existing classroom data collected from two research studies. The student will use Hyper-Transcribe for the digital video. After transcribing the files, the student and I will then move toward coding the data for uses of language that denote “race.” Presently, I have identified four domains for discussions of “race” (Brown, 2008). These domains are: (1) Terminological, (2) Racial Mimicry, (3) Use of Language, and (4) Content of Lesson. We will be guided by the following questions: (1) Are the four domains for discussions of

“race” represented in the larger data set? If not, what are the other domains for discussions of “race” in the newly coded data that represented? Using these questions, we will begin an in-depth analysis of other ways discussions of “race” are represented in these recorded and transcribed class events.

Phase IV. Independent Analysis

Time Period: July 21, 2008 through August 1, 2008.

This phase will focus on the student writing his or her own independent analysis of the coded the data. This is important for two reasons. First, the student is able to present a fresh-look the Brown (2008) analysis of discussions of “race” using similar but a broader set of data. Secondly, the student is able to create a research analysis the develops his or her own analytical thinking that can be either (a) used for graduate study and (b) used to create research portfolio that may lead to teacher leadership and teacher inquiry. The student will submit the analysis electronically no later than August 15, 2008. I will read, review and meet with the student research assistant at the beginning of the Fall 2008 semester to discuss the analysis and formats for sharing the data coding and analysis process.

Expertise

My on-going investigations of “race” and its role in classroom spaces have afforded me to work with some of the leading scholars within the field of education on issues of equity and excellence through the American Education Research Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. I created a research focus by tailoring my doctoral curriculum that would meet the needs that would challenge the existing framework for pedagogical research. Completing an interdisciplinary doctorate in Language, Literacy, and Sociology at Vanderbilt University reflects my engagement with rigor and excellence and my commitment for facilitating an effort to cultivate teacher leadership for social justice.

Part III. Contact Information

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Part IV. Current Grants

None

Part V. Publications and Presentations

Publications

Brown, A.F. (in press). "Just because I am a Black male doesn't mean I am a rapper!:" Sociocultural Dilemmas in Using "Rap" Music as an Educational Tool in Classrooms. *New Directions in Hip Hop Studies*.

Richards, H., Brown, A.F., & Forde, T. (2004). *Addressing Diversity in Schools: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*. National Center for Culturally Responsive Education Systems. www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity_Brief.pdf

Formal Presentations:

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| February 2008 | National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for Research
Bloomington, Indiana
Presentation Title: "Constructing 'race' Through Talk":
An ethnographic examination of discussions of "race" among
African American Secondary Students in the South |
| January 2008 | Center for Advanced Learning
Elmhurst College; Elmhurst, Illinois
Presentation Title: "How did I get that grade?": Using Rubrics to
Increase Student Accountability and Grading Equity |
| April 2007 | American Education Research Association (AERA)
Chicago, IL.
Presentation Title: "We fail because they don't listen.": Discourse
of Dissension Expressed by African American Secondary
Students" |
| January 2007 | Qualitative Research Interest Group (QUIG)
Athens, Georgia
Presentation Title: Discourse Practices in Constructing "race" as a
Social Reality: Analyzing Discussions of "race" Among Secondary
Students |
| February 2006 | National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for Research
Chicago, Illinois.
Presentation Title: Extending Halliday's Functions of Language:
Uses of Narratives in Discussions of "Race." |

