
Austen Morris

Individual Inquiry Project

EDUC 275

Professor Zuckerman

Implementing Linguistic Equity in Practice

Professional Development Workshop Plan

OVERVIEW

My Individual Inquiry Project is looking at how linguistic bias/discrimination against Black Language (BL) shows up in the classroom, especially in grading practices; and then how do we educate teachers to stop perpetuating Standard American English (SAE) hegemony. This Professional Development Program Workshop argues that teachers have a responsibility to preserve and uphold the right of students to their own language.

GOALS

1. Critically interrogate your involvement in perpetuating linguistic oppression, including linguistic hegemony and standard language ideology.
2. Examine the relationship between language and power.
3. Preparation to implement Anti Racist Black Language Pedagogy.

WARM-UP ACTIVITY:

The following sentences each have different features of Black Language. A teacher has already graded these sentences. As you read, note down any observations you have.

are

1. We ~~be~~ at the park.
2. I don't want ~~no~~ ^{any} ketchup.
3. We ~~gonna~~ ^{are going to} win this game.
4. I ~~ain't~~ ^{don't have a} got ~~no~~ pencil.
5. We didn't do ~~nothing~~ ^{anything} this weekend.
6. She ~~stay~~ ^{is} driving that van.
7. This song is ~~lowkey~~ ^{actually good} lit.
8. Her brows ~~are on fleek~~ ^{look good}.

Please come
see me
during
recess!

What did you notice about the sentences?

What did you notice about what was marked wrong?

How does this grading uphold Standard American English supremacy?

ADDITIONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS: From “the guide for white women who teach black boys”

- In your classroom, do you teach your students that White Mainstream English is the “standard”, “official”, “normal”, “appropriate”, and “respectful” way of communicating?
- In your classroom, do you teach your students that Black Language is “slang”, “informal”, “inappropriate”, or an “uneducated” way of communicating?
- Is your “rejection of students who do not adopt the dialect most familiar to us is based on any real merit in our dialect” or a rejection of “students themselves, rejecting them because of their racial, social, and cultural origins” (CCC, “Students’ Right to Their Own Language”)

BLACK LANGUAGE

Black Language (BL) is considered by some to be a dialect of Standard American English (SAE), and by others, an entirely separate language. BL is “systematic with regular rules and restrictions at the lexical, phonological, and grammatical level” (Baker-Bell).

Common Syntax Features Of Black Language

Habitual Be- Indicates habitual meaning or a recurring state or activity that suggests that something regularly or usually happens. The be incorporates past, present, and future activity.

Regularized Agreement- Third person singular verbs do not require third person singular subjects.

Zero Copula- Copula verbs are not required in some instances within BL. Often marked with $\emptyset$.

Multiple Negation- Multiple negators such as don't, no, and nothing can be used in a single sentence.

“BIN”- Pronounced as “been”, is used to mark the remote past.

Common Semantic Features Of Black Language

Words & Idioms- “Ashy”, “Fake it til’ you make it”, “Triflin/Trife”

Slang- “Swag”, “Vibe”, “Keep it 100”, “Mood”, “Fleek”

Common Pronunciation Features Of Black Language

Consonants- “Ask” pronounced as “Axe” or “Aks”.

Final Consonant Clusters- Some consonants in SAE don't exist/are replaced in BL. For example, “Hand” → “Han”

Sounds- Voiceless final consonant clusters. For example, “Spend” → “Spen”

Common Rhetorical Features Of Black Language

Signifyin- “The communication of multiple levels of simultaneous meaning, usually involving wordplay and misdirection”. It's a “vehicle to express Black cultural knowledge, humor, or a serious social critique.”

Semantic Inversion- “Takes words/concepts from SAE lexicon and either reverse their meanings or impose entirely different meanings.”

*Definitions and examples come from *Linguistic Justice* by April Baker-Bell

WHAT’S NEXT?

Antiracist Black Language Pedagogy is highlighted by April Baker-Bell as a mechanism to honor Black Language in the classroom. This approach is used to critically interrogate white linguistic hegemony. The goal is to eradicate students’ internalization of anti-Black linguistic racism.

This approach does not:

- seek to replace BL with SAE
- encourage code-switching
- prepare Black students to communicate in SAE so they don’t get discriminated against

This pedagogy posits:

- that BL is a language that should be validated, affirmed, and respected.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Consciously or unconsciously, not welcoming and affirming BL in the classroom sends the message that BL is inferior to SAE and perpetuates linguistic hierarchy. SAE legitimizes White, male, upper class mainstream ways of speaking and writing. It has become the “standard” because it derives from the dominant race, class, and gender in the US. Using S.A.E. is a silent and invisible norm, especially in American classrooms. It has become “proper academic English”, “the language of school”, and thus, “the language of power”. This designation of prestige is arbitrary, not innate to S.A.E. Linguists agree that no dialect of language is inherently good or bad. Language preference is based entirely on social attitudes and cultural norms. Additionally, it is critical to remember that dialect is not separate from culture; to accept a dialect is to affirm one's identity, but to reject a dialect is to reject someone's culture, heritage, and existence.

Implementing Anti Racist Black Language Pedagogy is not a suggestion, it is our responsibility as teachers to uphold the right of students to their own language. How can we, as teachers, urge creativity and critical thinking yet try to invalidate and eradicate the way people speak and write? We must share the richness of all varieties of language and encourage and validate linguistic virtuosity. If we truly want our students to learn, to express, to communicate, then shouldn’t we view a variety of dialects as an advantage? By eradicating language freedom we are encouraging learners to imitate, rather than create and think critically. We must move away from the “difference = deficit” mind trap, just because an individual communicates differently does not imply a sense of hierarchy.

VIDEO

Watch [Three Ways to Speak English](#) by Jamila Lyiscott.

IN PRACTICE

This approach does not call for educators, especially White educators to teach BL. It is important to not co-opt or appropriate BL if you do not belong to that culture. What is important, though, is to encourage and facilitate translanguaging and heteroglossia in your classroom. This means you do not mark Black Language incorrect, or teach students that S.A.E. is the “correct” way to read, write, and speak. Teaching the history of Black Language, and having students examine what language means to them can be an effective first step to dismantling linguistic bias. Classroom and school libraries should be stocked with books written in BL, such as *Stitchin' and Pullin'* by Patricia C. McKissack or *The Roots of Rap* by Carole Boston Weatherford. Students can and will thrive in a growing multiplicity of language situations, and we must encourage and validate this.

ANTI-RACIST BLACK LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY GOALS: Developed by April Baker-Bell

1. Critically interrogates white linguistic hegemony and Anti Black Linguistic Racism.
2. Names and works to dismantle the normalization of Anti Black Linguistic Racism in our research, disciplinary discourses, curriculum choices, pedagogical practices, and teacher attitudes.
3. Intentionally and unapologetically places the linguistic, cultural, racial, intellectual, and self-confidence needs of Black students at the center of their language education.
1. Is informed by the Black Language research tradition and is situated at the intersection of theory and practice.
2. Rejects the myth that the same language (White Mainstream English) and language education that have been used to oppress Black students can empower them.
3. Acknowledges that Black Language is connected to Black people's ways of knowing, interpreting, resisting, and surviving in the world (Richardson, 2004; Sanchez, 2007).
4. Involves Black Linguistic Consciousness raising that helps Black students heal and overcome internalized Anti Black Linguistic Racism, develop agency, take a critical stance, and make political choices (Kynard, 2007) that support them in employing Black Language “ for the purposes of various sorts of freedom ” (Richardson, 2004, p. 163).
5. Provides Black students with critical literacies and competencies to name, investigate, and dismantle white linguistic hegemony and Anti Black Linguistic Racism.
6. Conscientizes Black students the historical, cultural, political, and racial underpinnings of Black Language.

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7. Relies on Black Language oral and literary traditions to build Black students' linguistic flexibility and creativity skills. Provide students with opportunities to experiment, practice, and play with Black Language use, rhetoric, cadence, style, and inventiveness, which is necessary to use language effectively in a multilingual, multicultural world.

SOURCES

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