‘About your color, that’s personal’: A critical discourse analysis of race and resistance in an urban elementary classroom

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This paper presents a critical discourse analysis of a classroom event in which fourth and fifth grade students in a highly diverse urban school completed, discussed and, ultimately, protested a district survey intended to illuminate the social climate of the city’s schools, with a particular focus on race and racism. The story of the children’s experiences with the survey began on a Wednesday morning in April when Ruth (the classroom teacher and one of the co-authors of this paper) passed the required district survey to each of her students. She read the script she was given to introduce the survey and the children began to fill it out, sharpened number 2 pencils in hand. Almost immediately, children began to grumble and raise their hands. Questions of “why do they want to know that?” and “What do they mean?” traveled through the classroom. When they did pass them back to Ruth, many students said that they didn’t like taking the survey and that it made them uncomfortable. A few students suggested that the class let the district know how they felt about the survey and Ruth promised to give them time to discuss the survey and possible responses. The next morning, Ruth called a class meeting to debrief the survey and to follow up on students’ suggestions that the class should communicate their concerns to the district. In this discussion, children raised issues of racial categorization, racism, and the district’s right to access experiences and opinions that the children considered

private. Ultimately, the class decided, with Ruth's support, to send a videotaped statement of protest to the district along with their completed surveys. They also met with their principal to express their concerns and the principal conveyed the students' issues and her own concerns about the survey to the district leadership.

A few days after the surveys had been distributed the district announced that it was cancelling the survey due to strong protest from students, teachers and the teachers' union. Ruth announced the district's decision to her class and asked, "What do you think? Would you like me to tear them up? Would you like to tear up your own? What's your preference?" Stephanie raised her hand and said, "I'd like to tear up my own." It was a unanimous decision. As soon as the students received their surveys, the sound of ripping paper filled the room. Some students shouted, "Yay!" as they tore. A few said, "let's do it together!" and ripped in unison. Others covered the survey in dark blue, green, black marker before shredding it. Still others stomped on the pieces that had fallen on the floor. The surveys were obliterated.

The children's complex and emotional response to the questions of stigmatized behavior, race and privacy raised by the survey occurred in the context of previous experiences that had prompted the children in this class to confront and discuss race, racial categories, and the tension between self-ascribed identities and those that are imposed by others (Dutro, Kazemi, and Balf, 2005; under review). Although research continues to offer insights into the social, academic and pedagogical role of race in K-12 classrooms' (e.g., Comber & Simpson, 2001; Delpit, 1996; Enciso, 1997, 2003; Ferguson, 2001; Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Tatum, 1999), we know too little about how issues of race arise in elementary classrooms and are taken up by children and teachers, as well as the process and consequences of critically engaging race with students. There is particularly scant research on how students make sense of race in highly racially diverse

elementary classrooms. The aim of this paper is to closely examine the discussion surrounding the survey and the survey itself for what they reveal about children's understandings of race, privacy, response to authority, and the discourses about race that were supported and challenged by this classroom event.

Theoretical Framework

We draw on theoretical perspectives that view race as socially constructed, rather than representing inherent traits or fixed meanings (e.g., Hall, 1990; Malik, 1996; McCarthey & Crichlow, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994). Children are socialized early to recognize racial categories and they are central to how individuals are sorted into particular social locations in our society (Omi & Winant, 1986). As Orellana and Bowman (2003) emphasize, social categories such as those used to mark race and ethnicity are too often treated as "fixed and often essentialized categories rather than as multifaceted, situated, and socially constructed processes" (p. 26). In addition, theories and research on identity and how students' conceptions of themselves and others' perceptions of them influence learning and students' experiences in classrooms were important to our analysis of these children's experiences (e.g., Hall & DuGay, 1996; Moje, 2000; McCarthy, 2001).

Although some studies show that elementary children are very capable of discussing race in complex and thoughtful ways (e.g., Dutro, Kazemi, and Balf, 2005; Enciso, 1997, 2003), research also suggests that discussions of race in elementary classrooms are rare and, when they do occur, are most likely to emphasize racism as a historical issue that has largely been eliminated (Banks, 1997). Whereas there is no doubt that explicitly raising race as a topic of inquiry is fraught at all educational levels (e.g., Ellsworth, 1993), it is also necessary if children

are to learn to question their own and others' assumptions about race and the underlying systems of power and privilege that prevail in US society.

In addition, our paper is situated within critical approaches to discourse (e.g., Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1998; Luke, 1995) and the discursive nature of experience (e.g., Foucault, 1977; Davies & Harre, 1990). The former emphasizes the relationship between language, power and ideology and has implications for examining classroom interaction, including how learning experiences are shaped by issues such as who speaks and who is silenced, the amount and kinds of verbal and non-verbal interactions in any given classroom event, and the subtle ways that classroom talk and the surrounding sociocultural context works to empower and disempower participants and support the taking up of certain ideas at the expense of others. The latter approach assumes that individuals' experiences of self—how we define who we are in the world—can only be expressed and understood through categories and concepts available to them through language/discourse. Within discourses, particular subject positions—or ways of defining oneself in any given situation—are made available. We were interested to see how the language and form of the survey worked to position students and teachers and what subject positions were available to and taken up by children and Ruth within the discourses that arose around the survey and the classroom discussions that followed. As we discuss in a later section, we drew primarily on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework to analyze the data for this paper.

The racism that accompanies current ways of 'dividing the world' (Willinsky, 1999) in the United States has both social and material consequences for individuals and groups of people. Although scholars emphasize that engaging in discussions of race with students is always complex (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2000), explicitly engaging race in elementary classrooms

is particularly challenging in the current reform context of increasingly scripted curricula and a focus on discrete, measurable skills. This increasing lack of critically engaged content in official curricula, makes it all the more important to examine the discourses of race that circulate in and around that void as well as the efforts of teachers who strive to make space for the kinds of critical inquiry advocated by critical theorists (e.g., Apple, 1993; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shannon, 1995). As critical theorists argue, schools should be spaces where students have opportunities to understand and critique the structures and institutions that construct power and what counts as knowledge (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993). Although the ways that race and other issues raised by the district survey were taken up by these children and their teacher is very complex, the experience we describe does serve as an example of how teachers can capitalize on serendipitous events to engage students in both critical inquiry and social action.

Methods and Data Sources

Consistent with our theoretical framework, we employed critical discourse analysis to learn from the data that informs this paper. We drew on the three-dimensional critical discourse analysis methodology articulated by Fairclough (1989; 1995). Fairclough argues for the importance of conducting discourse analysis in three planes when the intent is to examine the relationship between language, power and ideology: analysis of spoken and/or written texts; analysis of the processes of production, distribution and consumption of texts; and, analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice. Accordingly, we conducted three analyses of data related to this classroom event that were mapped on to one another. First, we analyzed the production of each text (classroom discussion and district survey), examining the other texts that surrounded each of our key texts and the context through which each arose. Second, we analyzed each text—the classroom discussion and survey. This analysis included

examining turn-taking in spoken texts, identifying ideologically-contests and value-laden words and phrases, use of metaphor in both spoken and written texts, terms/phrases used to articulate race, difference, fairness, and privacy, and generic structures in the survey. This level of analysis also involved examining how the language of the survey led it to be consumed in a particular way by this group of children and Ruth. Third, we analyzed the sociocultural context surrounding this event, particularly the characteristics of this particular classroom, including the high level of diversity and the teacher's stance. Our critical discourse analysis was conducted in the context of ethnographic data collected over two years in this classroom. Our understandings of the transcripts analyzed for this paper are supported by extensive fieldnotes, interviews, audio and videotaped lessons and discussions, and collections of student work.

The event analyzed for this paper occurred in the second year of a two-year, collaborative, classroom-based study of children's experiences across literacy and mathematics in a fourth/fifth grade urban classroom (Dutro, Kazemi, & Balf, in press; 2005a; 2005b; 2002). Twenty-three children participated in the project. Their school is located in a large northwestern city and reflects the city's shifting demographics. In addition to Native American, African American, white, and Asian American families who have lived in the U.S. for two or more generations, this school includes many families who have more recently emigrated from Africa (primarily Ethiopia,Eritrea, and Somalia), Southeast Asia, Pakistan, and Mexico. Classroom data specific to this paper included fieldnotes of observations, audio and videotapes of the discussions surrounding the survey, audiotaped interviews with several students after the event, and children's written reflections following the survey events. In addition, we analyzed the survey itself, the printed directions to teachers on administering the survey, a newspaper account

of the events surrounding the survey, and several email exchanges between the school principal and district administration.

Findings

In this section, we discuss the results of our critical discourse analysis of the district survey and related written materials and the resulting talk and actions that occurred in the classroom. We begin by discussing the production of both the district survey and the classroom discussion. In other words, we discuss the contexts through which each text arose. We then turn to examples of textual analyses, discussing how particular features of each text supported certain kinds of interpretations, affording some understandings while constraining others.

Production of Analyzed Texts

District Survey

The large urban district that was the site of this research had anonymously surveyed students in 3rd through 11th grades on school climate for several years prior to the experience we describe here. In 2002, however, the district made significant revisions to the survey, including adding new questions about race and racism and deciding to identify students by name, grade level, and race/ethnicity. The district's director of research and evaluation explained that the questions were added to explore issues of bullying, safety and racial climate within and across district schools. Students' names and identification numbers were used so the district could correlate answers to demographic information (City Newspaper, May 7, 2002).

After distributing the survey, the district administration almost immediately began receiving messages of concern from principals and teachers. The students filled out the survey on May 18 and the city's teachers' union called an emergency meeting on May 22, voted to boycott the survey and filed an official protest with the district. The ACLU also sent a letter to

the district outlining their criticisms of the "intrusive" and "coercive" nature of the survey. Based on the response at Ruth's school and the responses of teachers who attended the teachers' union meeting, concerns seemed to center on the language of the survey (e.g., language that was confusing for children; implicit criticisms embedded in wording of questions; questions that produced a defensive stance) and the lack of anonymity.

The district responded by informing principals that the survey would be voluntary that year and that schools could opt to destroy the completed surveys. The principal of Ruth's school sent the district a letter confirming that her school had opted to destroy the survey and expressing her hope that the district would employ experts in survey research to construct an effective survey for the following year.

Classroom discussion and action

At Ruth's school, her $4^{th}/5^{th}$ grade class was the most vocal in their protests about the district survey. Her students began to voice their concerns almost immediately after its distribution and Ruth's own concerns about the survey grew in tandem with and response to the children's. In addition to planning a letter and video of protest to the district, the children asked to speak with their principal about their concerns. The principal subsequently used quotes from the children in Ruth's class in her own correspondence about the survey with the district administration. The children's response was impressive in both its passion and sophistication and, as might be assumed, did not arise out of nowhere. Indeed, we clearly saw its roots in an experience the children had shared two months before they encountered the survey. In a curricular experience that we have analyzed in detail elsewhere (Dutro, Kazemi, & Balf, 2005; Dutro, Kazemi & Balf, under review), Ruth's students were required to research and share an aspect of their cultural background. The children had interviewed their parents, consulted books

and the internet, written reports, gathered artifacts, created art projects, and, finally, put it all together in a poster presentation to be shared with peers from other classrooms. The project represented an attempt by Ruth to make visible the diverse backgrounds of her students and bring home knowledge and experience into the classroom. For the public presentations of their projects, Ruth's students stood beside their posters and answered questions as children visiting from other classrooms walked around the room. It seemed to have gone well—an observer would have seen Ruth's students speaking knowledgeably and comfortably about their work as the guests wound their way through the room, pausing to ask questions of individual children. It was only after the visitors left that Ruth discovered that for some of her students the afternoon had not been the positive celebration of their work that she had planned. Two of the biracial children in her class lingered after school to tell her that some children from other classrooms had questioned their claim to the backgrounds they had researched, saying things like, "He can't be from Africa. He's only half." In ways that Ruth had not anticipated, the public presentations of the project resulted in feelings of hurt and frustration for her three biracial students as other children questioned their claims to their own racial identities. Ruth offered to call a class meeting the next day if the children wanted to discuss their experiences with their classmates and they enthusiastically agreed. The following morning, the biracial children led their classmates in a lengthy discussion that raised complex issues of racial categorization, including how people are placed and misplaced into categories, the tension between the desire to identify oneself and the inevitability of being identified by others, the social construction of racial categories, and the meaning of whiteness.

The experience with that project and the resulting discussion, was relevant to the survey experience in at least two important ways. First, it illustrates Ruth's student-centered approach

to addressing critical issues and concerns expressed by children. The children were provided a forum for addressing important issues with one another. As with the class meeting called following the biracial children's experiences, the class meeting to discuss the survey occurred immediately after children expressed concerns and Ruth did not hesitate to adjust her lesson plans and daily schedule to prioritize these opportunities for discussion. For instance, this is how Ruth began the class meeting about the survey:

Ruth: Little change in plans. We're not doing math. I think you'll be ok with this. I'm going to hand you guys back these surveys, so you'll have them to look at while we're talking about them. That way you won't have to depend on your memory. [passes back papers]

Alrighty. So, yesterday we did this survey and you weren't pleased. And so we said that we'd talk about it today and let you vent, say everything that is bothering you, and then figure out how we can send a letter to the district, whoever the district is, to tell them what we think and why we think it. So, the floor's open.

Second, the questioning of racial categorization that had occurred in the discussion prompted by the biracial children's experiences appeared to set the stage for children to question and critique the issues of race and racial categorization that arose in response to the survey. At the same time, as we discuss below, the survey discussion pointed to issues of race that the children and Ruth approached less critically and, therefore, suggests ways that further issues of race and racism raised by the survey might have been productively addressed with the children.

Textual Analyses

Below, we share the results of our critical discourse analysis of the district survey and the teacher directions for administering the survey as well as the discussion that occurred in Ruth's classroom following the survey.

District Survey

The survey included a note to students at the top of the first page:

> Dear Student: We want to know how we, as your school, can better serve you. This survey asks you to tell us how you feel about your school. Please answer the questions below thoughtfully and carefully so that we can help make your school a better place for you.

The language of this note suggests that the survey is originating at the school level, rather than the district level where it actually originated. The pronoun "we" suggests that it is the adults at the school—the principal and teachers—who desire this information from students. As we will discuss later, this pronoun usage is actively resisted through the pronouns used by Ruth and the school principal regarding their relationship to the survey. At the district level, the assumption seems to be that students are more likely to respond to questions if they believe the questions come from adults they know and potentially trust. In addition, the note to students suggests an altruistic motive and implicit promise of benefit ("we" wish to "better serve you") and an authoritative directive ("answer the questions thoughtfully and carefully") upon which that promise depends. The note implies that if you (the student) don't respond thoughtfully and carefully we will not be able to make school a better place for you. Therefore, the note functions to reinforce the power and authority of those giving the survey in relationship to the children responding to the questions.

The authority of the survey is also reinforced through its form. It is very official in appearance and uses formal language. For instance, it has the district's logo in the corner of the first page and directly following the logo is a box that reads "Important Directions for Marking Answers" in bold capital letters. More than anything, it resembles a standardized assessment in its form. The survey requires children to fill in 'bubbles' to mark their responses, a form of response that the children encounter most often in formal assessments. The survey also requires "#2 pencil only" and includes a set of scripted directions that teachers are to read prior to distributing the survey, two features that are common to standardized assessment. Therefore, the

survey's form signals not only authority, but also accountability. Given the likelihood that children could associate the form of the survey to the standardized assessments with which they are familiar and that they know to have weighty consequences for them individually and for their school, it follows that children might take very seriously the implications of their responses to this survey.

The potential of the survey to be read by children as being a serious and authoritative document with potentially serious consequences is exacerbated by the information that is prominently displayed in the left corner of the first page. Each survey includes boxes, filled out by the district, that identify the following information: the name of the school the child attends, grade level, classroom number, teacher's name, student's name, date of birth, 'ethnic' code, sex, and student's ID number. This information became central to the concerns expressed by Ruth's students as well as district teachers and the ACLU. The survey is decidedly not anonymous and the identifying information, coupled with the other implications of the survey's form discussed above, could certainly indicate to children that this document is not without potential personal consequences for them as individuals.

The survey's questions addressed several areas related to school climate, including academic expectations, bullying, weapons, smoking, and racism. The following are examples of the range of items included:

Teachers in my school expect me to do my best. (always, sometimes, never)
I feel safe at my school. (always, sometimes, never)
Students at this school make fun of, bother or hurt me. (always, sometimes, never)
My teachers listen to my ideas. (very true, sometimes true, not true)
I think it's okay to cheat at school. (yes, no)
How wrong do you think it is for someone your age to: take a handgun to school. (very wrong, sometimes wrong, not at all wrong)
How wrong do you think it is for someone your age to: smoke cigarettes. (very wrong, sometimes wrong, not at all wrong)

The items specific to race and racism were at the end of the survey and included all of the following (each with response options of very true, sometimes true, not true):

31. At my school, I play with students who are a different color than me.
32. I get along with or feel comfortable with teachers who are a different color than me.
33. I feel comfortable talking to teachers who are a different color than me about my problems.
34. I can ask for help with schoolwork without my color working against me.
35. In my school, there are posters, books and magazines with pictures of people of my color.
36. I can do well in school without being called a credit to my race.
37. In school, we learn about how people of my race helped make history.

As we will discuss further in the analysis of the classroom discussion, the students in Ruth's class consistently spoke of feeling as though the survey was implicating them in the negative behaviors it included in questions. The questions are value-laden and ideologically contested in ways that children understand. For instance, at this age (3^{rd}-11^{th} grades), all children understand that bringing a gun to school is considered an ultimate offense by adults and would result in serious consequences for students. Given that their names appear on the form, it is unlikely that any student would admit to thinking it was 'not at all wrong' to bring a handgun to school (an argument that also applies to the other value-laden behaviors explored in the survey). Many of the students in Ruth's class responded to several of these questions (about guns, smoking, fighting) with discomfort and righteous indignation.

The questions about race were a particularly ideologically-contested and value-laden aspect of the survey. The children understood that the survey was trying to determine if they or their teachers were racist and it made them defensive. The grammatical structures of the survey items exploring racial relations could exacerbate children's sense that the questions might be implicating them and their teachers as racist. All of the items are written in declarative mode ("At my school, I play with students who are a different color than me."), requiring students to determine whether this statement about them has positive or negative connotations. This

structure, coupled with their identifying information, could result in students attempting to determine what the 'right' answer will be—an answer that won't make them or adults they care about appear racist. Two of the questions (34, 36) exploring race, use language that would arguably very difficult for elementary students to understand. "My color working against me" implies an understanding that sometimes a person's race might impact how a teacher or other school personnel would respond to a student asking for help with schoolwork. Likewise, understanding the phrase "being called a credit to my race" requires not only background knowledge about racial discrimination (which many of these children did have either due to personal or curricular experiences), but a particular kind of racial discrimination (i.e., individuals who are high achieving are an exception in certain racial groups) and a very specific way of speaking about that discrimination. Also, whereas those writing the survey opted to use "color" as a stand-in for "race" in each of the other questions, question 36 not only uses "race", but employs it in a complex way. Although the intent of the racial climate items must surely have been to try to locate and address racism in the city's schools, the survey's construction makes it unlikely that it could effectively serve that purpose.

It is also important to note the language used in the directions given to teachers about how they should administer the survey. The one page sheet given to Ruth along with the surveys was titled "Directions for Administering the Student Survey to Grades 3, 4 and 5." Directly under the title is a paragraph that reads:

> The purpose of this student survey is to collect data that will give schools additional information to help move school transformation forward by addressing the attributes of highly effective schools from the student perspective. How students feel about these important issues are important elements of school transformation.

The language used in this paragraph is very official in tone and refers to one of the district mandates ("school transformation") for which schools were held accountable in a number of

ways. School transformation was linked to academic goals (such as meeting adequate yearly progress goals) in addition to the climate issues addressed in the survey. The important issue for our analysis is that the use of "school transformation" and "highly effective schools" in the opening paragraph of the survey links the survey to teacher accountability and reinforces the hierarchies between district and teachers (much as the form of the survey did for the children).

The directions page also includes a script, in bold type and in quotes, that teachers should use to introduce the survey to children.

> You can introduce the survey to students with a brief opening: "The survey I am passing out asks you to tell us how you feel about your experience as a student at this school. It is important that we learn about how you are feeling about this school. Please read each item carefully and fill in the bubble that accurately explains how you feel or think about that item. Your responses will help us make the school a better place for you to learn."

For our analysis, the most striking element in this paragraph is the use of pronouns. The district directs teachers to frame the survey as if the request is coming from teachers ("tell *us* how you feel" "It is important that *we* learn" "Your responses will help *us* make the school a better place"). It is interesting that the introductory paragraph on the directions sheet uses language that reminds teachers of their less powerful status in the hierarchical relationship between district and teachers, while the scripted opening uses language that attempts to affiliate teacher and district. As we will discuss below, the use of pronouns in the district's script is very different from the pronouns Ruth uses to position herself in relation to the district in her conversations with the children.

Classroom Discussion

In this section, we discuss our analyses of two excerpts from the classroom discussion that followed the survey. We chose these excerpts because they include talk about issues that

children consistently raised about their experiences with the survey in this discussion and in the subsequent interviews and written reflections.

Children raise key concerns—issues of privacy and race converge

The excerpt below is from the beginning of the discussion. The overall goal of this discussion was for children to express their concerns and for the class to arrive at consensus about the action they wished to take. The day before, the children and Ruth had begun to talk about expressing their concerns to the district through a letter. As the discussion proceeds, the children raise the idea of making a video to send to the district administration. In this excerpt, the children begin to address the issues about the survey that concerned them.

1	Zack:	Yeah, I didn't like it because it was asking about like can you work with people who are like a different color than you. I didn't think that was right because it's like kinda personal.
	RB:	Ah, okay, so questions (writing on board). OK, other comments. Laura.
5	Laura:	I didn't like the questions either and it was all if you think a kid your age would take a cigarette or like skip school. That was really like stupid.
	RB:	OK, can you explain why you think that was really stupid.
	Laura:	Because what kids would say, like I don't think most kids would say that, I don't know, it just kinda bothered me.
10	RB:	Could you explain a little bit more what bothered you about it.
	Laura:	Well, it's just like they're asking me about, it's kind of like have you ever done it. It kinda made me feel like=
	RB:	OK, so it feels like they're asking do you do these kind of things. OK. Grace.
15	Grace:	So, like all the questions about the color. They could have just shortened it down to one question. I mean, they don't need to have like 5 questions down here. They could have just wrote, 'do you mind people who are a different color than you."
	RB:	OK. Other comments? Tavor.
20	Tavor:	You know on the question that Laura was talking about. [referring to the question about smoking] I think that's a good question because a lot of kids in our age group, I know kids who do that.
	RB:	So, you're kind of disagreeing with Laura. You think there are kids your age who do this.
25	Tavor:	Yes.
	RB:	OK. Other thoughts. Tavor.
	Tavor:	On that one, I disagree with Laura and agree with Laura. Because if they're asking you. I know some kids do that, but they don't need to ask

30		you. I don't want to be asked that, because I'm thinking that they're thinking that I did it too.
	RB:	So, you're also having this feeling [referring to board] that they're asking are you doing that and you don't like that. Jeff. Jeff, actually I did want to hear from you because one of the first things you said to me this morning was that you don't like this survey=
35	Jeff:	=I didn't like it because of what Zackney said, about your color, that's personal. They shouldn't just. . . It's your own life.
	Zack:	They shouldn't be able to just go and ask you those questions.
40	RB:	The interesting thing about this is that this survey is not anonymous, it has your name on it, doesn't it. So, they can just go and find out what Zackney thinks about these things, so it is not an anonymous survey. Messing with your privacy. Yep.
	Laura:	Well, some of these questions are a bit too personal. Like have people made fun of you and have you made fun of people. Or like have people hurt you and stuff like, it's just too personal.
45	RB:	So, we're having issues of privacy. So it's not necessarily their business to know about your personal experiences.

This excerpt introduces several issues that were salient throughout the discussion. The children attempt to articulate issues of privacy, feeling implicated in negative behaviors by the language of the survey items (what we term "guilt by association"), and race. This excerpt also illustrates how the children and Ruth position themselves in relationship to the survey and those who mandated its use. The issue of privacy is prominent in the children's and Ruth's language about "guilt by association" and race, therefore, we discuss it in the context of those other themes.

Prior to discussing our analysis of particular themes in the discussion, it important to note the shift in pronoun usage that occurs as the discussion unfolds. In line 1 Zack uses "it" to refer to the survey, but by line 11 Laura has shifted to "they", signaling a change from talking about the survey as a passive document to focusing on the Asman actors that she and others imagines behind the survey. The other children and Ruth consistently use "they" from that point in the conversation. This works to position the children and Ruth in relation to the survey in at least

two ways. The children seem to not only recognize that there are Asman actors responsible for constructing and distributing the survey, but also feel that they as students can speak back to those actors. They see agency in the construction of the survey and claim agency in taking an active response. Ruth's use of "they" instead of "we" when speaking of the survey actively resists the positioning suggested by the district in the directions to teachers (where the script consistently used "we" and "us"). Her pronoun usage aligns her with her students and, like them, as someone who can question and critique the actions of those in power.

Guilt by Association

Laura, a Vietnamese-American fourth grader, struggles to articulate a feeling that her peers then echo in other parts of the discussion (lines 8-9 and 11-12). She began her turn by referring to the smoking and skipping school items as "stupid" and as Ruth pushes her to explain what she means, she says "it's kind of like have you ever done it." Laura's struggle to articulate the source of her discomfort is an example of "overwording" (Fairclough, 1995). The use of more words than necessary to articulate a point can signal an ideologically contested topic, one in which the speaker is trying to find a position for herself that feels comfortable given the 'hot button' nature of the words she must employ. Laura, like many of the children throughout the discussion, worked to distance herself from the stigmatized topics raised in the discussion.

Tavor is the first to come to the defense of an aspect of the survey (line 20).[1] He refers to his personal experience of knowing "kids who do that [smoke or skip school]" to demonstrate the potential importance of including those questions in a survey. In lines 27-30 he backtracks a bit and qualifies his response, expressing that being asked those questions makes him think that

[1] Tavor plays this role again later in the conversation when Ruth asks the students why they think the district is giving them the survey: "Like some schools, they just say, 'you're black and I'm white, so I'm not going to play with you.' Some kids still have the racist and, uh, they just want to find out and they're asking us these questions. But some of these questions are too far."

"they're thinking that I did it too." He intervenes in the critique of the survey, but also aligns himself with two very prominent themes in the discussion—privacy and being guilty by association.

Race

In this first part of the discussion, three children raise the issue of race in the survey. Zack and Jeff are biracial and both were prominently involved in the class's previous discussion of race. Grace is white and a consistently vocal participant in classroom discussions. Zack's opening comments raise issues that are subsequently picked up by many of his classmates. He connects his dislike of the survey to a question about whether students can work with peers of other races, deeming such a question "kinda personal" (the actual item says "play" instead of work). As one of the biracial children who called and led the class's discussion of race following the project that had occurred several weeks prior, Zack had demonstrated his comfort with speaking about race. Therefore, it did not seem to be the topic of race per se that made Zack uncomfortable. The survey item he quotes is one with particularly strong connotations of personal racism on the part of the student taking the survey (they must answer if this is very, sometimes, or not true of them) and he deems this not "right" and too personal.

Following Zack's initial introduction of the topic, Grace raises race again (line 15). Her suggestion that the survey could have asked only one question on race, rather than "like 5", suggests her sense that it is quantity of items on race that lie behind student discomfort. Her words also suggest her sense that racial climate is something that can be determined quite simply and straightforwardly by asking "do you mind people who are a different color than you." Her suggested question avoids the subtleties of racism, instead addressing the less ideologically contested area of identifying only overt and explicit racism (only an overt racist would admit to

"minding" the presence of other races). As we will discuss in our implications, Grace's comment is one moment, and foreshadows others, that we now see as a teachable moment that went unheeded in this conversation.

In line 32, Ruth acknowledges Jeff and prefaces his comment, recalling that he was someone who had expressed strong feelings about the survey. Jeff was not a student who often voluntarily contributed to discussions that occurred in the context of instruction. Ruth often had to remind Jeff to focus on the task at hand. However, during and following the experience in which he and the other biracial children had drawn on their own experiences to spearhead a discussion of race, Jeff had been very vocal about his own experiences as a biracial person. Here, he raises the issue of race as a privacy issue. His comment, "about your color, that's personal," very explicitly articulates the link between race and privacy that is a prominent theme in the discussion. He suggests that your race is no one else's business. This is a particularly interesting argument coming from Jeff, who identifies as biracial Filipino/white, but looks white. For him, being identified as "of color" is in his control (he is only identified as biracial if he identifies himself) in a way that it is not for the other biracial and children of color in the classroom.

These three children's comments about race within the survey and the connections they make between privacy and race, introduce a theme that becomes more prominent as the discussion continues. The direction this theme takes is also influenced by Ruth's move to raise more complex issues related to privacy and the children's experiences of the survey. Toward the end of the above excerpt (line 38), Ruth raises the issue of anonymity that up to this point in the discussion has been only implicitly present. She validates the children's sense of the survey "messing with" their privacy by reminding them that their names are on the survey. She even more explicitly uses an example that "they" can "find out" what an individual thinks about any

of the items on the survey. Ruth's comments raise the ideological stakes in the discussion. The children's sense that the items are too "personal" is linked to the survey as a tool by which those in power can access children's personal responses.

The next excerpt we examine arises from this shift of focus to the issue of lack of anonymity and reflects the concerns about race raised in the above excerpt and the class's previous discussions of race and racial categories.

Discussing racial categories

In the excerpt below, children and Ruth delve more deeply into the issues of race raised by the survey. It is important to recall that the discussion that had occurred several weeks prior to the survey had centered on racial categorization—the tension between being identified by others and identifying oneself and the meaning and consequences of arbitrary racial categories.

1 5	Stephanie:	I agree with Laura about the privacy thing. Why does it matter if you play with kids of different color. It shouldn't really matter if you play with a person that's the same color or if you play with someone who's a different color. It makes it sound like they want to know if you're racist or not. That's what it seems like.
	RB:	[writing Stephanie's idea on the board] Grace.
	Grace:	Well, when it has your identification on here. I don't think it should have your ethnicity on here, because I don't think that should matter.
	RB:	Is your ethnicity on here? Under the=
10	Grace:	Yeah=
    15	RB:	By gosh it is. So on the front it labels what your ethnicity is. So, they can sort through this and they can go, 'ah, all the black kids who answered this or the majority, or most of the black kids who answered this said this and most of the white kids said this, so they're collecting a whole lot of information about you. OK.
	Stephanie:	The ethnic stuff. It says that I'm white.
	RB:	[laugh] And sometimes the ethnic stuff is not true. OK. OK.
	Tavor:	Well, she really is. . .
	RB:	Well, it's partially true, it's partially true. Right. Laura.
20	Laura:	There's a question that says something about teachers, about if they give you credit, about teachers, and that's kind of like being really rude to your teachers. Yeah, something like does my teacher judge me by my color and you don't really do that, so. . .
	RB:	Right. Where is that one?

25	Laura:	37. 36.
30	RB:	Right. [reading the question] I can do well in school without being called a credit to my race. How many of you understood that question when you first heard it. How many of you didn't know what the heck they're asking? [kids raise hands to answer RB; most hands are raised] So, how reasonable do you think the answers are that they're going to get if you don't understand the question? So, you're being asked to say things about your teachers. So, that's another privacy issue. It's a privacy issue about the kids and the teacher [writing on board].
	Zack:	You don't want to hurt the teacher's feelings.
35	RB:	I appreciate that. I'm just a lovely, wonderful teacher. A little irritating sometimes, but not so bad. Luke.
	Luke:	You know, under ethnicity, what does AI stand for?
40	RB:	AI? American Indian. That's the label they put on you. Anybody else want to check out their ethnicity if they're not sure what it means on there. What do you have?
	Laura:	VI?
	RB:	VI. Vietnamese.
	Asma:	EI?
	RB:	EI? EI? East Indian! They're saying you're from India.
45	Asma:	I'm not from India!
	RB:	Geez, I thought you were from Pakistan.
	Asma:	I am!
	RB:	OK. Now, you're labeled as East Indian. OK---K. Yes?
	Kofi:	BL?
50	RB:	Black.
	Kofi:	OK.
	RB:	Anybody else have an ethnicity that they want to check out? Zack, what did they give you?
	Zack:	BL
55	RB:	They say you're black, they find Stephanie's white. OK---K. [laughter]
	Student:	They should say BH or something. Black and white.
	RB:	Don't talk out. Yes?
	Tavor:	They're saying the BL if you're black, right? But I'm not black, black. I'm not only black, I'm Ethiopian.
60 65	RB:	They don't have a category for Ethiopian. So, anybody who has a black skin, who comes originally from Africa, whether you came from Africa four years ago or four hundred years ago you get a BL. You are black. And, if you have a white skin and you originally came from Europe whether it was two years ago or four hundred years ago, you get a WH for white.

The children construct several, and sometimes, conflicting arguments about race in this excerpt. Stephanie, a biracial African American/white girl who had also been central to the class's previous discussion of race and racial categories, initially argues that race "shouldn't

really matter" in who you might choose to play with. She also raises the "guilt by association" theme, articulating what is surely one of the goals of the survey ("to know if you're racist or not"), but raising it as a critique of the survey. Grace raises a different argument about race, that it "shouldn't matter" at all. Hers is different from the "race as personal or private" argument raised by some of the other students (all of whom to this point in the conversation have been children of color). Grace is making a more general argument, and a common argument in the liberal tradition, that knowing someone else's race/ethnicity is not important because it "shouldn't matter," period. This argument that race "doesn't matter" is not explicitly challenged in this excerpt, but as the children begin to talk about racial categories, their arguments undermine the liberal argument that race and ethnicity shouldn't matter.

Laura raises another issue related to race and privacy—the children's desire to protect and not be "rude" to their teacher (line 20). Laura refers to the question we discussed in our analysis of the survey document, "I can do well in school without being called a credit to my race." Her description of the item, "about teachers, if they give you credit," demonstrates both her misunderstanding of the meaning of the item and her concerns about its potential consequences. She reads the item through a very personal lens; it's not about teachers in general, it is about her teacher ("you don't really do that"). The language of the survey conveys that teachers might be racist and answering such an item seems "like being really rude to your teachers." Zack echoes Laura's concern (line 34), though his concern for hurting a teacher's feelings brings the issue even closer to his personal relationship with teachers. The children's response to this item emphasizes our earlier point that the language of some of the items about race were likely to prompt children to provide answers they believed to be the most innocuous for themselves and their teachers. Whether out of affection (which was the case here) or fear,

children are not likely to respond in any way that would imply that their teachers discriminated against them. Of course, the complexity of children's relationship to this particular item is compounded by the fact that they are likely to misunderstand it.

Ruth's response to Laura (lines 26-33) emphasizes that this is a question the children were not likely to have understood. The grammatical construction of her query, "How many of you didn't know what the heck they're asking?" suggests a critique of the survey and that their misunderstanding this item was understandable. Her query serves to raise further questions about the validity of the survey. Her response also confirms that the children are right to be concerned about questions that probe their teachers' actions and links this concern to children's other concerns about privacy ("you're being asked to say things about your teachers. So, that's another privacy issue"). This exchange links privacy to race and racism in complicated ways. Ruth's validation of the children's concern about the teacher-focused items is understandable, for it is issues of privacy, identification and accountability that were of most concern for teachers and that prompted the swift response by the teachers' union and the ACLU. On the other hand, the personal nature of the children's response to the race items on the survey and Ruth's response to Laura's concerns does not allow the class to critically engage with the role that racism could potentially play in some children's interactions with teachers.[2]

The bulk of this excerpt focuses on the racial and ethnic designations that were printed on each child's copy of the district survey. The issue of racial/ethnic categories is first introduced

[2] Ruth does, later in the conversation, suggest that there could be good reasons why the district would ask some of the questions on the survey. Tavor [examining his copy of the survey] says, "Ok, Ok, does your teacher listen to you. I think that's not a good question, but most all teachers do listen." Ruth replies, "But maybe there're some teachers who don't listen to their students and maybe, maybe—I'll try to speak a little bit to defend this survey, just a little, not that I necessarily believe what I'm saying. . . But, don't you think it might be important for the school district to know if they had a whole classroom of kids who felt that their teacher didn't listen to them? Do you think that would be important?" Ruth's argument, though it does present what in this discussion is a decidedly devil's advocate position, is highly qualified by her aside ("not that I necessarily believe what I'm saying") and is the only time she articulates a possible defense of the district's intention.

by Grace in (line 7) who points to the printed categories to support her argument that race/ethnicity should not matter. Ruth appears to realize for the first time that the survey includes a racial/ethnic category and she goes on (lines 11-15) to provide a reason why the district might want that information ("they can go, 'ah, all the black kids who answered this. . ."). She then links her explanation to the issue of personal privacy, signaling that the inclusion of a racial/ethnic category provides the district "with a whole lot of information about you," and suggesting that such information is a violation of privacy. Stephanie's announcement that the district has identified her as white and Ruth's response of laughter and "sometimes the ethnic stuff is not true. OK. OK." work to further call into question the validity of the survey. Ruth's words in this exchange are expressed in a skeptical tone that, along with pronoun usage, works to position her in opposition to the survey and those who constructed it. Her stance confirms that a document with authority can be flawed and can and should be questioned.

The theme of racial categorization that Stephanie raises early in this excerpt returns when Luke asks Ruth what "AI" means (line 37) and this becomes the focus of the rest of the excerpt. These children's past conversations about racial categories made this a particularly salient issue for them. For instance, when Ruth responds to Stephanie by agreeing that the survey was wrong when it designated her 'white', Tavor responds by insisting that 'she really is' (line 18). Given their recent experiences, it makes sense that these children would be invested in 'getting it right' and being very mindful of whether these printed 'official' racial and ethnic designations matched their peers' self-inscribed identities. Stephanie, Zack, and Jeff had made strong arguments for why their identities as biracial people were important and Tavor's comment signals his sensitivity to that issue.

As children share their racial/ethnic labels and the class determines the validity of those categories, the language used places positive value on individuals' rights to identify themselves and negative value on an authority's right to make arbitrary designations. Ruth makes this explicit when she tells Luke, "that's the label they put on you." Luke is, in fact, American Indian, but her words critique the "they" that are imposing identities on the students. Her invitation to "check out" the racial/ethnic labels and her sardonic tone throughout this section of the discussion invites and supports the children's critical stance toward the survey.

Asma's misidentification as East Indian, rather than Pakistani, made a significant impression on many of the children (lines 43-47). In interviews and written reflections following the survey experience, children often raised Asma's experience as an example of the survey's flaws. Although her classmates most likely did not understand the political context that lay behind Asma's response to her ethnic designation, the emotional, adamant nature of her response certainly signaled that a significant mistake had been made. She was very indignant when Ruth told her what "EI" meant and her response worked to make an already ideologically contested issue (racial categories and who assigns them) even more significant for the children.

Ruth's agency in shaping a particular conversation about racial categories in the context of the survey is apparent when she asks Zack to share the category he was assigned (line 52). By asking Zack, one of the biracial children whom was central to the class's previous discussion of racial categories, she invokes that previous discussion and provides the class with another example of the arbitrary nature of the survey's designations. In this case, it turned out that Zack provided a contrast to Stephanie—both were biracial, but were placed in different categories—which became another example that made a significant impression on the children.

Kofi and Tavor, both of whom had emigrated from Ethiopia as young children, raised another issue around race within the survey that was particularly salient to several immigrant children in the class. After Kofi confirms that "BL" designates black, Tavor returns to the issue, expressing resistance to being designated 'Black' by the district (lines 58-59). As Ruth points out, the district has only one category for students with roots in Africa, "black", even though that identity was not salient for Tavor. The category includes no nuances for strong ethnic identifications such as Tavor's self-identification as Ethiopian, "not only black." Unlike Asma, Tavor's category is not wrong; instead, his experience points to a more subtle issue of racial categorization that allows Ruth to emphasize the nuances of identity that are lost when arbitrary racial categories are assigned.

By the end of the larger discussion, the majority of the students voted to make a videotape expressing their critiques of the survey to the district. Their decision to create a visual response seemed connected to race. As Tavor said, "when you tell them, they see *how you are* and they see how you feel" (emphasis added). Ruth followed, saying, "They will see how you are and I think it would be, in some ways, pretty powerful with this class because this is a very diverse class." And, Grace also spoke to the importance of visual representations of identity, saying, "we should have Asma stand there, because she's not East Indian, okay? Even I know that." In spite of the arguments some of the students made periodically in the discussion that race "shouldn't matter," the conversation about racial categorization and the children's decision to videotape their protest confirmed that race matters very much.

Discussion and Implications

The district survey represented an attempt by the district to learn about potential racism that children might be experiencing in schools with the goal of proactively addressing the issue.

The language and form of the survey, however, worked to reinforce power hierarchies, invoke accountability for both students and teacher, and potentially mislead and confuse children. These features, coupled with the children's previous experiences with discussions of race in this classroom, resulted in the children and Ruth adopting a defensive stance toward the survey that directly undermined the district's seeming intention (i.e., to gather valid data that would allow them to address racism and other social issues in their schools). Below, we discuss our developing interpretations of our analyses and thoughts on the implications of this event.

These students recent experience of discussing complex issues of race and racial categories provided an important launch for their critiques and protest of the survey. They had acquired some vocabulary and context for talking about race, as well as sensitivity to how those issues differentially impact individuals and groups. Those previous discussions facilitated the opportunities to critique certain aspects of the survey and, in turn, the survey provided a context through which the children could build on those prior conversations by again confronting the arbitrary nature of racial categories

The coupling of race and privacy that occurred throughout the classroom discussion had at least three potential effects. First, it framed race and racism as issues about which the district had no right to inquire. Second, it contradicted experiences these children had shared and talked about in previous discussions—that is that as much as they might argue that racial identity *should* be a personal matter, individuals are often misread and misplaced by others who make assumptions about race and racial identities. Third, it functioned to close off opportunities to use the language of the survey to talk about the realities of racism and that schools as institutions are not immune from racism. The survey's form and language, however, particularly the identifying information that was so prominently displayed, makes the linking of privacy to all issues

addressed in the survey understandable. When all responses can potentially be traced directly to the responder, it is just too risky to decouple an issue such as racism from the issue of privacy. There is too much at stake.

Our analysis shows that some opportunities to discuss the realities of racism in schools were lost. Those moments certainly emphasize the difficulties inherent in tackling such ideologically contested topics, particularly in a context in which power differentials had been subtly and not so subtly emphasized by the document being critiqued, leaving both students and teacher in a defensive stance. Ruth, a teacher who was very open to discussing both race and racism, seemed constrained by her own personal response and the teachers' collective response to the survey. The issue that resonated most strongly for her during the survey experience was that of privacy and the threat of personal accountability. Given that this issue was also a key concern of the students, the issue of privacy was primary in the discussion. In addition, delving into the topic of racism in schools would require conceding that the survey was addressing important issues. Aside from a few instances in which Ruth and Tavor took rather tepid devil's advocate stances, this was not a concession made in this discussion. Although Ruth now sees opportunities in the transcripts for moving the conversation to more critical territory, it was arguably the hierarchical, power-laden language of the survey and its accompanying directions that helped to block those paths. The value of the kind of close analysis we present here is that it points to those paths in ways that make it more likely to see and anticipate those important conversations in subsequent discussions with students. Such analysis also allows for the recognition and critique of the contextual factors that may have made those opportunities even difficult to see.

As our analyses emphasized, the survey was a document brimming with linguistic signals of its authority and the power of those behind it. Therefore, one of the most powerful elements of the children's experiences with the survey was the opening of such an official and authoritative text to rigorous questioning and critique. Encountering a text that clearly attempted to enforce its authority, the children felt empowered—with Ruth's encouragement and facilitation—to voice and act on their protests. We view this aspect of the experience as an example of critical literacy in action and believe that this and other instances of critical inquiry in elementary classrooms are crucial for educators to study if we are to understand how these opportunities can be fostered and best employed to support children.

The district survey was striking in the directness with which it raised issues of race and racism. If the intent had been to raise points of discussion for students and teachers, it may have been a very fruitful endeavor. However, the intent was not discussion; rather, the district wanted the surveys completed quickly and efficiently and returned promptly. Absent a larger agenda to raise issues of race and racism in critical ways, students and teachers were left to flounder their way through a very provocative text. As our case illustrates, students and teachers were likely to respond in ways particular to their own experiences, discussions, and perspectives. At the very least, the district should have ensured anonymity. Just as importantly, the district needed to provide guidance for teachers on how to begin and facilitate discussions of some of the important issues raised by the survey. We believe a key implication of this analysis is the need for districts to consider the process, form and language they employ when their intent is to learn from children about very personal and sensitive, and crucially important, issues such as racism in schools. It may very likely be that a quick and efficient survey will never accomplish such a goal. Rather, such information could be best gathered through a more involved and rigorous

process of qualitative data gathering (including focus group interviews, teacher-led classroom conversations, and open-ended anonymous written responses). Further, in order to be effective such as process needs to include teachers as collaborators and issues of accountability need to be carefully considered and collaboratively resolved.

Conclusion

Although some urban schools are becoming increasingly racially segregated (Lewis, 2003;), new and continuing immigration trends in many areas of the United States mean that numerous other schools are becoming spaces of increasing diversity, where many racial and ethnic groups, languages and cultures converge (Garcia, 2000). These highly diverse classrooms increase opportunities for students and teachers to confront difference in explicit and productive ways. These highly diverse contexts also call for districts to be more proactive in addressing equity and the social climate in schools. However, the interactions in these spaces often reveal the assumptions, misunderstandings, and power issues that can accompany those confrontations. We have attempted to mine an event that occurred at the district and classroom levels for what it reveals and reflects about how race is understood and enacted within a highly diverse district and classroom, exploring the potential of such contexts as sites of, challenge to, and transformation of racial inequities. Research and classroom inquiry that engages in "making race visible" (Greene and Abt-Perkins, 2003) is crucial if we are to confront and understand race as both a central way in which people define themselves and one another *and* as a construct that continues to be a significant factor in how society parses its resources.

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