Disrupting rules of emotion in an urban English classroom

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Abstract

Our study focuses on regulation of emotions in critical literacy, its resulting racial oppression, and students' response to emotional control. We examine a student discussion of a poem, looking specifically at the affective responses of students' interactions as these open possibilities for identifying ways that students confront, resist, and subvert emotional control. Our research question asks how students resisted limited forms of emotion and enabled opportunities for varied affective forms of engagement. In our analysis, we explored both emotions and discourse (broadly defined as language, actions, embodied acts, etc.) as they construct the flow of activity in this discussion. We also looked at past familiar practices which make the present one recognizable and meaningful. Findings indicate black students resisted emotion rules by discussing racism, a highly taboo subject in schools. Students also rallied against an interpretation that felt as distraction, an attempt to negate or shut down the naming and sensing of racism in the poem and in the classroom. Despite the constant regulation of emotions before, during and after the discussion, black youth firmly indicated their right to judge the interpretation that the poem had nothing to do with racism as inadequate and steeped in whiteness. In schools, critical literacy often fails to attend to how emotions are managed and reflect racial control and dominance. In order for critical literacy as an anti-oppressive pedagogy to confront the oppressive status quo of schools, it must no longer remain silent or leave unquestioned rules of emotional dispositions that target marginalized students.

Key words: Emotions, Critical literacy, Youth resistance

Disrupting Rules of Emotion in an Urban English Classroom

Early in the school year, Mr. Kline's 9th grade English class began with five adults modeling an interpretative discussion of a short poem. This discussion was intended to demonstrate how individuals explore themes, build on each other's understandings, and deepen their meaning-making through sharing ideas, connections, and questions. Following this, students were given a different short poem to read aloud and discuss as a class.

Using the discussion by adults as context, we analyze the student discussion, focusing on the role and regulation of emotions in critical literacy, its resulting racial oppression, and students' response to emotional control. A focus on student emotions is essential to decolonization and social change (Worsham, 1998). By attending to emotion, we take up the charge by educational philosophers and writing scholars to consider the destructiveness of teaching practices when they fail to attend to how emotions are regulated (hooks, 2003). In this vein, we argue that emotion is central to critical meaning-making; emotion is knowing. Thus, we look at the affective responses of students' interactions closely as these open possibilities for identifying ways that students confront, resist, and subvert emotional control. Our research question asks how students resisted limited forms of emotion and expression and enabled opportunities for varied affective forms of engagement.

Critical Literacy and the Irrational Other

According to Janks (2010) and other literacy scholars (Street, 2003), it is impossible to separate literacy from questions of power. This is seen in how what counts as meaning-making is defined by institutions that favor the practices of the middle class over those of working class communities. These social practices become the conventional ways of being literate as defined by dominant culture and regulated by social institutions. hooks (2003) argues that classrooms are

shaped by middle-class values, thus requiring behavior consistent with Eurocentric norms and values. Students quickly learn that “[l]oudness, anger, emotional outbursts, and something as seemingly innocent as unrestrained laughter [are] deemed unacceptable, vulgar disruptions of classroom social order. These traits [are] associated with being a member of the lower classes” (p. 143). The censoring process that happens in schools includes harsh forbiddance of emotions in ways that threaten a democratic exchange of ideas—a central value of critical literacy demanding that all voices be heard.

While critical literacy emphasizes a recognition of the imposition of a dominant framework of meanings, it fails to recognize how it inculcates patterns of affect to sediment gender, race, and class designations (Worsham, 1998). Literacy’s emotional dimensions of empowerment are often unrecognized as critical pedagogy “provides and limits a vocabulary of emotion and, especially to those in subordinate positions, it teaches an inability to adequately apprehend, name, and interpret their affective lives” (p. 223). It is no wonder then that discussions that explicitly address issues of race in classrooms are rare (Brown et al., 2017). “When discussions do take place, they often fail to focus on unequal social and structural distribution of power [and] often produce silencing and power-laden talk” (AUTHOR 1, 2019, p. 2).

Ellsworth (1989) contends that critical pedagogy’s key assumptions and goals, what she calls “repressive myths,” are based on a rationalism that exacerbates unjust conditions. She argues that, “[b]y prescribing moral deliberation, engagement in the full range of views present, and critical reflection, the literature on critical pedagogy implies that students and teachers can and should engage each other in the classroom as fully rational subjects.” (p. 301) This sets up a binary of the rational (usually the white teacher) and an “irrational Other,” (women, students of

color, “different” others) that further reinforces regulation of emotional expression. For example, anger is often authorized only to those deemed rational, those “who can presumably discipline emotion with reason” (Stenberg, 2011, p. 351).

Refusing expressions of anger and other emotions by nondominant students makes it nearly impossible to view such emotions as legitimate and that in discussions related to social oppression and injustice, may offer “a form of political insight” (Worsham, 1998, p. 225). When emotions are separated from social contexts and power relations, it reinforces a dehistoricizing of particular contexts from which emotions emerge and results in regulation of social responses and emotional expression to trauma and injury (Boler, 2004).

In this way, critical literacy fails to address how its theories of identity, voice, and politics generate affective experiences but demand that issues such as racism and trauma be treated as problems to be objectively analyzed and rationally solved. Critical pedagogy thus “overlook[s] the complexity of students’ emotional investments in particular social positions and discourses” (Zembylas, 2013, p. 179) leading emotions to be viewed as irrational distractions from the work of disrupting dominant ideologies (Lewis and Tierney, 2011) regardless of the fact that "[h]istories and politics of race influence emotional identifications and shape affective stances" (Crawford, 2002, p. 680). This leads to emotions labeled as inappropriate, especially when shared by members of marginalized communities, to be viewed as “outlaw emotions” (Jaggar, 1989).

Emotions and Affect

Recent work on the affective experience of learning (Ahmed, 2010;; Grinage, 2019; Neville, 2018) indicates that affect and its related aspects of feelings and emotions are consequential toward learning in classrooms. Emotions are never simply individual or internal

(Ahmed, 2004) but strategies grounded in collections of knowledge and histories of participation (Zembylas, 2013). As Micciche proposes, "Emotion is dynamic and relational, taking form through collisions of contact…between people and the objects, narratives, beliefs and so forth that we encounter in the world" (2007, p.28).

Because emotions are socially organized and governed (Boler and Zembylas, 2003), in institutions like schools, emotions are "not free agents, but rather operate as commodities subject to control and regulation" (Lindquist, 2004, p. 195). Teachers often become authorities in emotional management and motivate and constrain students' own affective responses. For example, Thein et al. (2015) examined the ways in which emotion rules were perceived, taken up, and transformed by a white, middle class student, Nina, in two discussion contexts, a seminar circle, and a literature circle. During seminar circle, Nina's responses aligned with formalist or New Critical approaches, a perspective consistent with her teacher's stance. This led Nina to position herself as emotionally sensitive and aware of race and gender issues and her emotions as distanced and rational. Nina took up different emotional rules during literature circle. In this small group, the conventions related to interpretation "allowed for visceral reactions, vicarious voicing and direct address of characters, and expressions of anger, outrage, and confusion" (p. 214).

Regulation of emotions becomes more targeted when marginalized students partake in race-related discussions. For example, Lewis and Tierney (2013) explored how emotional interactions in a race-related discussion were mediated by texts, discourse, and histories of participation. Theorizing emotion as action linked to identity and language, their work examined the role of emotion within a diverse English classroom. Though the class was intended for emotion-driven dialogue, particular dispositions were controlled in a way that Janelle's, (a white

student) feelings were affirmed and explored, whereas Vanessa's (a black female student) resentment and anger were not.

Emotions are part of the assemblages within which identities are constructed. Classroom events are imbued with affect, which has significant implications for what is discussed and how discussion takes shape. Grinage (2019) makes the case that classroom discussions about race are always angled to indicate how affect or the "feeling of the atmosphere" has significant consequences for emotions produced and resulting learning opportunities.

Work by Crampton (2019), Neville (2018) and others (Stenger, 2011) indicate how emotions are not only sites of control but also sites of resistance (Boler, 2004), which is seen in ways that race-related discussions in classrooms try to move beyond discomfort and disengagement. Jaggar (1989) reminds us that "the hegemony that our society exercises over people's emotional constitution is not total" (p. 166). That is, there is always the potential for those marginalized to express and use emotions in ways that resist and defy hegemonic control. Because, "[e]motional rules reflect power relations and thus are techniques for the discipline of human differences in emotional expression and communication" (Zembylas, 2002, p.200), the cost of breaking such rules comes at varying costs. As will be described in the findings, the cost of violating emotional rules can include discredit of insightful interpretative contributions.

The Study

This work draws from a year-long study focused on classroom discussions and activities aimed to support students in sharing their embodied experiences and related understandings of the social world, while explicitly learning interpretive strategies necessary to connect their insights to literary texts. Students were encouraged to question the assumed meanings of texts and ideas—an understanding promoted by critical literacy. This critical literacy stance, along

with the approach enacted in the adult modeled discussion, permeated the space with emotion rules and consequences for learning.

Description of Lesson

The instructional goal for this lesson was to model a discussion of a short literary text and then allow students the opportunity to engage in their own discussion of a similar text. This type of modeling, (in this case an administrator, a fellow English teacher, a Spanish teacher, Mr. Kline, and the PI/first author), was not a common occurrence. The group read aloud and discussed themes in the short poem “Prospective Immigrants Please Note” by Adrienne Rich (Figure 1). Students had a copy of the poem and were asked to write down what they noticed about what and how participants discussed. After the discussion, the three outside participants left the classroom, leaving students to share what they had noticed with the teacher and PI. Students then had a whole-class discussion of the poem “For Black Poets Who Think of Suicide” by Etheridge Knight (Figure 2). The poems were chosen because they offered opportunities to explore multiple interpretations and experiences of people who are often the object of prejudice and othering based on race, language, immigration status, etc.

[Figures 1&2 here.]

The modeled discussion was introduced to students by the classroom teacher as one that would help “integrate all perspectives as opposed to someone just talking.” He introduced the activity by saying, “You guys have done this a couple of times, and we thought after the last time, it's not that it was bad, we just thought we needed to model it for you maybe so we can improve a little bit.” This reasoning emphasized both the content and the form of the discussion.

The discussion began with the fellow English teacher reading the poem aloud. She then referenced the title, indicating that she always looked at titles to get at thematic meaning. She

concluded her analysis with a question about what others thought and whether they agreed with her. Others then contributed their thoughts, commenting on each other's interpretations and ideas.

Through their discussion and in line with critical literacy practices, the adults indicated that inviting nuanced interpretations of the text was valued and that personal connections were expected: "Living in the United States changed a lot for my children…" and, "We all are immigrants in the U.S. in one sense or another…" These personal connections to the poem guided interpretations and indicated the rules governing emotion in this context. Responses modeled interest in others' ideas and enthusiasm for the developing themes indicated by the nodding of heads in agreement, the expanding of others' interpretations, and the acknowledgement of personal connections. There was frequent use of phrases including, "I agree" and "I like that a lot." The discussion also emphasized polite norms of interaction, such as waiting patiently to speak and positively addressing the points made.

Both the politeness and the nature of the comments were captured in students' comments after the discussion: "It was a great little conversation," "I like it when you were making connections," "I like how everyone participated." After sharing what they noticed, students were given the poem by Knight to read silently while noting anything that stuck out to them. They were also given time to discuss with their neighbors before discussing it as a whole class. The details of what happened during the student discussion will be described in the findings. However, it is important here to describe a moment that happened after the discussion.

The student discussion ended on a tense note. Immediately after the discussion, the teacher berated students for their failure to have the type of discussion he was expecting,

especially given the example modeled by the adults. The PI was then invited to add further comments. She made the following statement.

> We kind of do have to get better at respecting and reacting to each other's opinions more fairly. But I believe you did an excellent job at interpretation. This idea of getting at big themes like, is there racism, is it about do not do what others do…That's interpretation, that's what we're after. You all were doing that; you all were doing that fantastically well. What we want to work at is your delivery towards each other.

The teacher's and PI's comments led to the choice to analyze this particular discussion. The PI wanted to better understand the permeations of the taken-for-granted approved emotions and their contradictory nature when asking students to partake in discussions related to racism and oppression. A close focus on the regulation of students' emotions can be an avenue towards social change.

Researcher Positionality

The first author was the PI of the project and served as participant observer (often co-teaching) throughout the time of the study. As a Latina scholar, her scholarship reflects a communion with a collective experience of oppression and serves as a lens from which she details how, within these experiences, marginalized students manifest their literacy expertise, knowledge, and self-determination.

The second author, who was not involved in this project, brought an outside perspective to the data and analysis. As a white learning sciences scholar, she has focused her work on the various ways students engage with instruction designed around the practices of literary reading and how teachers learn to support exploration of multiple perspectives through classroom discussion.

Author three was not involved in the project but worked with the first author analyzing data from this project over two years and therefore has extensive knowledge of the project and data. Author three is a black doctoral student whose research interests include examining how students' race, ethnicity, and culture influence their experiences in school.

Participants

Maple Ridge High School [1] is part of a large exurban school district in the Midwest. The school serves 2500 students with a racial and ethnic makeup of roughly 52% black, 16% Latinx, and 24% white. At the time of this lesson, the class had 29 students: 22 black, three Latinx, two "mixed race," and two white. The teacher is white. We include this demographic snapshot although it is problematic because we do not know how students self-identified as we did not ask or have access to classroom demographic data.

Data and Analysis

Our principal data source is the videotaped discussion and other naturally occurring interactions from previous lessons that indicate social dynamics and social organization. Video captured information about the engagement and physical location of participants, their actions produced through semiotic resources, including the body, gesture, facial expression, and the constructed classroom environment. Through videotape and transcription of interactions, we were able to examine affective aspects that provide further meaning to the interactions among students.

Viewing classroom events as situated activities, (Goffman, 1961) we see classroom encounters as "emergent patterns of practice recognized by participants… which are bound up with questions of value and with local moral order" (Wetherell, 2013, p. 360). Such patterns of

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

practice are governed by rules, these include rules of emotion and affect that influence participants and their opportunities in their immediate environment (Lewis and Tierney; 2013).

We explored both emotions and discourse (broadly defined as language, actions, embodied acts, etc.) as they construct the flow of activity in this discussion. We also looked at past familiar practices which make the present one recognizable and meaningful. How talk unfolded in this discussion is based on patterned, past practices, open to new approaches, and imbued with emotions and tacit norms.

Our analysis is "multimodal" meaning that the flow of situated activity engages bodies and talk, organizes spaces, physical objects, and reflects their histories of organization (Goodwin, 2006). Such a focus is on the assemblages of practices across multiple modalities making up the classroom discussion. The focus on students' dealings with each other and the classroom world provides better understanding of how issues of power around emotions connect with discursive, material and other semiotic resources and how these can be read as reifying or disrupting colonized social practices.

We created multimodal transcripts of sequential talk and specific video clips. These included transcripts/video clips from previous lessons in order to analyze existing histories of participation and social organization. For the present student discussion, the transcript was divided in three sections: beginning of discussion, Noreen partaking in discussion, and the closedown of the discussion.

Our first column included the transcripts of sequential talk. The second column included video stills of moments selected to illustrate participants' movements and expressions in that specific segment. In the third column, we included utterances, focusing on linguistically expressed feelings and dispositions as well as noted volume, intonation, body movements,

glances, and gestures indicative of how students make visible the meanings of their interactions. The last column included interpretations related to emotion regulation and disruptions/resistance through affect, allowing a focus on power relations and how talk, context, and meanings are coproduced in the midst of the activity (see Table 1 for an excerpt).

[Table 1 here]

Existing Histories of Participation

In Table 1 we provided two moments that relate the existing histories of participation and social organization that give insight into how Noreen was identified. Noreen's encounters with students, mainly black young women, and her alignment with Karl, the sole white male in the class, provide insight for why her interpretations in the following analysis were challenged.

Noreen's skin tone and phenotype thrust her into a socially constructed (rather than self-identified) "mixed" race category and her alignment with Karl and frequent absences made her an outsider in the class. Noreen's obvious moves in going out of her way to sit next to Karl and her interest in defending Karl's strong views and opinions reinforced her alliance with Karl and clearly indicated her preference for siding with him. Noreen's history of interaction may have been read as opposition to black students and/or opposition to the opinions of her black peers as indicated by her pattern of alignment with Karl. The pattern of tension and mistrust between Noreen and black students (mainly a few black female students) reemerged during the student discussion, to which we turn next.

Student Discussion

When students were asked if they were ready to discuss by the PI, Anya responded, "Yeah, let me go first." When the teacher stated, "Alright, let's go ahead and report out," Anya raised her hand and Leila sitting next to her quickly stated, "She wants to go first."

Before the discussion was turned over to the students, the PI emphasized guidelines for conversation, including building off each other's ideas and bringing in new understandings. These guidelines served as emotional rules and set up a type of acceptable discussion to be carried out by students. When the PI stated that Anya would start, Anya began dancing in her chair, arms raised, swaying side to side.

> 1.1 Anya[2]: Okay I'm going to start. Okay I said I think it is, hold on (.). Okay (.) [*lightly to herself*] you know what? I'm going to say it. (.) It was ↑racist to me (.) because, like, it's not the part that he said like, like the white boys do. I think it was more racist like like (.) he was basically saying white people get better education than black people. That's how I saw it.

Anya's comment began with self-talk of hesitation followed by determination, her body still. She then accused the poem of being racist through the idea that white people receive better education than black people. Anya's voice began low in volume and she constantly looked down at the poem. When she stated "It was racist to me," her voice got higher in pitch and volume, pausing noticeably and looking at the PI, before she continued to explain. Anya's body barely moved, her arms to her sides and only her head moved to look at the poem and then at the PI. Students looked at Anya, sitting silently, attentively listening.

Anya's talk and body movements indicate an expected shift in the classroom environment. Her pause before explaining why she saw the poem as racist can be read as space for a possible rejection of her emotional statement. Her dancing movements before she began the discussion and then her body stillness as she explained how she felt about the poem suggest an embodied reaction to a sense of how what she said might be taken up and challenged. Anya

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[2] See appendix for transcription conventions

began a race discussion that violated emotional norms. Forceful accusatory statements of racism are often quickly shut down and not tolerated (Jaggar, 1989). Anya may have been testing the racial waters by explicitly naming racism and at the same time regulating her tone, indicative of conditioning by institutions to watch how things are said by the marginalized.

Anya’s opening statement was followed by a clarification question and some banter by Kevin, another student. The conversation was picked up again by Ella.

> 1.2 Ella: Okay I’ll go. I don't agree, I don't agree about the education part but I did↑ notice that they was comparing black and white people.

After a brief pause, Kevin stated he was confused, not clear if the poem was trying to say white people were killing themselves. Samantha and Emma clarified that the poem did say suicide both in the title and poem lines. Their comments quickly ended his bid for clarity. Talia brought the conversation back to Anya’s statement.

> 1.3 Talia: Okay I agree with Anya about the racist part but felt it was more, what that’s word? <It’s like discrimination>. ↑Because and you can tell it was written a long time ago because they still saying <Blacks and Whites got differences and all that make you do different things> and they not the same.
>
> 1.4 Samantha: I noticed that she used descriptive words and she was highly racist to me.

Anya’s contribution was supported in that Samantha, Talia, and Ella indicated a type of difference drawn between blacks and whites. Here, there was no overlap in talk, a normal speaking voice level, and the tone indicated a concise and academic appraisal of the poem. Each student waited their turn, built on similar ideas, and used “academic” language such as

"descriptive words." Another valued practice is seen when Talia aimed to more precisely label the poem as discriminatory than racist.

The emotions employed here are very similar to the ones that are highly acceptable in classrooms and consistent with the adult modeling. However, while the structures of talk and regulations of emotions may have constrained other forms of affect, students were discussing racism explicitly, a highly controlled subject in schools bound with its own emotional norms and insistence on "the prevailing ideology of 'colorblindness' (Bonilla-Silva 2006)… in which students in American schools are taught not to see color and not to talk about it" (Goodwin & Alim, 2010, p. 180). The taboo that surrounds race talk is connected to feelings of guilt, responsibility, and redress that hegemony refuses to address.

The direct confrontation of racism by Anya, Talia, Samantha, and Ella changed the general feeling in the classroom (Grinage, 2019). This change was the result of emotions expressed that pushed against dominant norms of whiteness. Grinage (2019) describes this as an "occurrence of collective discomfort, anxiety, or nervousness" (p. 131). Despite the clear rules of emotions at play, their talk of racism created a charged classroom environment. Begun and supported by participants who up to this point are all black youth, students resisted emotion rules by discussing racism, their defiance informing other affective stances that followed.

The PI entered the discussion to ask, "Should we wonder if E. Knight is a male or female and should we wonder if it's a black person or white person?" This can be read as an attempt to deescalate the intensity building in the classroom atmosphere by decentering racism through attention to gender and race. A move away from racism as the interpretative focus is indicated by the PI adding, "does this help us with interpretation?" suggesting that what was being said so far needed guidance. As the conversation continued, Noreen entered the discussion.

1.5 Noreen: I don't think it has anything to do with racism. I think it’s/

1.6 Kaleb: (*interrupts*) OH: MY: GOD:! ((*laughter*))

1.7 Kevin: ↑I agree; I agree.

((*Multiple students talking. Some ask Kaleb why he is interrupting*.))

1.8 Samantha: Alright, let’s go.

1.9 Noreen: <That was it.> I don't think it has ↑anything to do with racism.

1.10 Anya: [*At the same time as another student*] <Alright so I have a question.>

1.11 Samantha: What do you think it's about?

1.12 Noreen: He's making a ↑point about ↓umm slavery.

1.13 Anya: <I got another question for that,> for what you said…

1.14 Noreen: NO! [*Responding to another student’s inaudible question related to slavery and racism*] It’s not the same thing.

1.15 Samantha: There was racism back then.

1.16 Kevin: [No, slavery and racism—it’s different.

1.17 Talia: Y’ALL DON’T EVEN KNOW WHAT RACISM IS….

1.18 Anya: Alright (.) my question to you is, why don't you think it's racist? Why don't you think it's racist?

1.19 Noreen: Umm (.) he's black

1.20 Leon: Racist, racist°

1.21 Anya: I know but…

1.22 Kevin: [*interrupts*] <Black people can be racist to their people>.

1.23 Anya: Yeah (.)

1.24 Leon: Anybody can be racist°

1.25 Talia: I feel like it's…

1.26 Noreen: Cause it's ↑my opinion.

When Noreen stated the poem had nothing to do with racism (1.5), there were clear reactions, such as laughter, side chatter, and an exclamation of disbelief, "Oh my god!" (1.6). Because the poem's interpretation by black young women thus far centered racism and discrimination based on difference between blacks and whites, the poem became a vehicle that encapsulated historical understandings of race relations and a means to identify how students, as black youth, are positioned in relation to whites. Noreen's interpretation manifested tensions that began when the black young women explicitly violated emotion rules about expressing feelings related to and naming racism. These tensions were indicated by students' voice level, repeated questions, and incredulity.

How Noreen's counterclaim was taken up can also be seen in Leon's statements and gestures. Leon, a young black male, entered the conversation briefly in lines 1.20 and 1.24. His contributions seemed to be for Omar, a black peer sitting next to him, as indicated by the low volume and his head turn to address him. However, his statement, "racist, racist," was accompanied by raising his hand above his head to emphasize the word, "racist' with a quick snapping of fingers and a flicking of the wrist. These embodied feelings were accompanied by much overlap in talk and are indicative of emotion as action against an interpretation that felt as distraction, an attempt to negate or shut down the naming and sensing of racism in the poem and in the classroom.

Noreen's claim in line 1.9 was a refusal to elaborate on her interpretation. This ignited the emotions of her peers who were displeased with her unwillingness to explain. Noreen's

refusal to elaborate, except for her response line 1.19, served to disrupt the discussion that had taken shape and reinforce emotional rules. For example, her unwillingness can be considered a form of silence, a technique often used by whites to avoid heightened tension and anxiety in race discussions (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Noreen also used the concept of unknowability, when she stated later on, “you don’t know that for sure” (1.30) as students continued to make their case that the poem had everything to do with racism. Unknowability is a method for developing an argument found in the new racism discourse. As Anagnostopoulos et al., (2013) indicate, unknowability “renders judgement and the attribution of guilt for racist actions, both past and present, impossible” (p. 175). Here, silence and unknowability function towards an attempt to move away from racism, an emotionally charged and highly prohibited topic.

Noreen’s response (1.12) that the poet was making a point about slavery is also important. Slavery, when compared to racism, can be viewed in purely historical terms, as a horrific event that happened in the past and contained within a period of American history. Noreen’s response can be seen as an attempt to rework the talk about racism, a concept that cannot be simplistically framed in some historical past. This adaptation is disrupted by students’ attempts to connect (1.14) and differentiate (1.16) slavery and racism. Their attempt to link, yet differentiate slavery and racism can be viewed as connecting the past (slavery) with present (racism) conditions rooted in oppression stemming from the trauma of slavery which Noreen’s statement attempted to separate.

Noreen’s tone and gestures also were an attempt to reinforce “proper and acceptable” behavior. She never raised her voice nor interrupted students as they demanded responses from her, and she answered all of the questions asked. She sat forward in her chair the entire time, turned her head toward whoever was asking her questions, and kept her body still, yet relaxed.

Her voice level, stillness of her body, and gaze served as clear contrast to how other students, all black, were reacting to her statements. This contradiction reinscribed a sense that the rules for “appropriate” emotions were being challenged by black students.

Students demanded evidence, sounding frustrated and aggrieved by the suggestion that the poem’s thematic meaning was not about racism and difference. Talia’s claim (1.23), “Ya’ll don’t even know what racism is” can be considered a clear condemnation of Noreen’s interpretation lacking an embodied experience. In this moment, the shift in the classroom atmosphere was of heightened tension, supported in part by the overlapping but often indistinctive comments by students, the speed by which the contradictions or remarks were voiced, and the loud accusation by Talia (1.17) along with the physical engagement, e.g., Leon’s chant “Racist, racist”-finger-snapping-wrist-flicking action. The intensity continued with Talia’s assertion.

> 1.27 Talia: I feel like he was just saying, don't do that cause that's what white boys do! Like that's not normal, that's what white boys do. Don’t do that cause that’s what white boys do! That's what he was saying.
>
> 1.28 Samantha: Don't lay your neck on that railroad. White boys do that! ↑Don't do that.
>
> 1.29 Talia: [*Multiple students talking*] THAT’S WHAT HE WAS SAYING!
>
> 1.30 Noreen: You don’t know that for sure though.
>
> 1.31 Anya: <But ↑that’s what he said>
>
> 1.32 Leon: Facts, facts
>
> 1.33 Samantha: That’s how we’re taking that, as our opinion. That’s why we’re like when we're reading, that's what we're thinking. °Like the white boys do!°

Talia (1.27) introduced a more nuanced idea, that the author is cautioning black people to stop doing what white boys do because “that’s not normal.” Samantha and Anya supported Talia’s assertion. The assertions and assertiveness of their statements were palpable and as the argument begun by Talia in line 1.27 gained insistence and support, Kevin nervously smiled, looked at his peers, tugged at his collar, and fanned his face in a gesture indicating an uncomfortable classroom atmosphere. When Samantha made her point about how they are reading and thinking about the poem (1.33), Kevin, nervously smiling and still fanning his face, stated, “It got hot in here.” Kevin’s gestures and statements served as comic relief and several students laughed.

As mentioned previously, when Noreen (1.34) stated, “You don’t know that for sure,” she used unknowability to introduce a sense that there is no way to know what the poem is really about. Noreen’s refusal of the interpretation that the black female students constructed, along with the existing tensions due to her alignment with Karl, came to be read as an embodiment of threat to calling out racism. Hence, emotions aligned Noreen to whiteness and its permeations. However, the moves to shift the interpretation to something perhaps more palpable—to slavery as a historical past—was refused and so were the rules of emotion upheld in schools to be rational, that is, to separate embodied experience from the topic.

The physical location of participants during this discussion also reveal affective aspects that provide further meaning to the interactions among students. Students were seated in a circle of desks, large enough to include every student and the PI. Mr. Kline, who joined the discussion after it began, sat outside of the circle, almost directly behind Samantha.

The PI, Samantha, Kevin, Talia, and Anya were all seated in that order, one next to the other. Noreen was seated next to Karl (who left the room before the discussion and did not come

back from his excused absence until the very end of the discussion) almost exactly across from Kevin. In this way, the back and forth went across the empty middle. This positioning provided a sense of direct confrontation, with Noreen facing the four vocal students head on. During Samantha's insistence (1.33), Mr. Kline got up and moved as far as he could towards the midpoint between Noreen on one side and the four vocal students on the other. Because of the arrangement of desks, he was unable to move toward the back of the room where Noreen was sitting. Kevin was still fanning his face when Mr. Kline stepped in, almost cutting off Samantha.

> CLASS LISTEN. [*Class still talking*] One of the things that we wanted to model for you up there was that not all of us were talking at one time. So, you know (.) and also a couple of you pointed out that when somebody had an opinion no one kind of put them down for it or you know, disagreed in a bad way...There are ↑:MULTIPLE : POSSIBILITIES for a poem like this. It's possible for ALL OF YOU to be right or maybe a little bit off base... So, <don't be so quick>…↓don't be so quick to say this is what it means. ↓Or what you saying is not right….

Mr. Kline explicitly noted how the 'rational' discussion by adults was not practiced by students. He pointed out that in the modeled discussion, "not all of us were talking at one time." The emotional rule broken was an inability to stay composed and to suppress fervor when defending one's view. He also pointed out that the adults did not disagree "in a bad way." Disagreements in American society, often viewed as indicative of rudeness, lead those disagreed with to feeling offended. Because disagreements, including those in classroom discussions, are heavily influenced by institutional norms, systematic opportunities to minimize their occurrence exist along with performative-specific ways to carry them out (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). Specifically, "disagreements are normally prefaced by silence, an object such as "well," and even

tokens of agreement (e.g. "yes, but")" (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p. 297). Students transgressed these norms, as seen in their quick and consistent disagreement with Noreen's interpretation. Such violation of affective norms positioned the black students as rude and the culprits of discomfort.

Mr. Kline's statement regulated the emotions of the black students and diminished the importance of their (embodied) interpretation. It also served to reproduce racialized identities, mainly of Anya, Samantha, and Talia as loud and aggressive black girls (Fordham, 1993). As Zembylas (2002) asserts, "The 'appropriateness' of an emotion is assessed by making a comparison between emotion and situation; this situation lends the teacher a socially 'normal' yardstick" (p. 196). In this case, all emotions expressed by the black students were deemed as excessive and unreasonable.

Mr. Kline's notion that one should reserve quick judgments of the poem's meaning is an insistence on positioning students' emotional investments as irrational. Specifically, the quickness described by Mr. Kline is so contrary to the demanded prefacing of disagreement by silence, that in this case, quickness signifies insistence fueled by exasperation. Anger or exasperation are not tolerated in classrooms and much less by marginalized students: Anger and frustration, as indicated by the multiple voices, voice levels, overlap in talk, and repetition of phrases, such as "racist, racist," according to Jaggar (1989) are especially seen as violation of acceptable emotions because of the perceived threat they represent to the dominant group and "because it surely signals that subordinates take themselves seriously; they believe they have the capacity as well as the right to be judges of those around them" (267). Black youth firmly indicated their right to judge the interpretation by Noreen as inadequate and steeped in whiteness.

The tension and emotions, along with the time left in class, ended the conversation, and Mr. Kline addressed the class. “By looking at this poem, we tried to have a little bit of a conversation. For me personally, I don't think that we did very well today. So somewhere along the line, not just—. ” Students interrupted Mr. Kline’s comments by gasping audibly, indicating surprise and displeasure. Some inaudible comments ensued. Mr. Kline continued.

> There is no need to respond, to react. You are not a bad person. I'm telling you for me personally as much time as we took to model for you guys, I don't feel that we got back what you saw and what you all identified when you went around the room….

Ironically, the teacher’s words exemplified other instances in which student emotions are targeted for suppression, in this case, affective reactions to unfair evaluations. Yet, despite the relentless patrolling and price paid for outlaw emotions, students found ways to reassert their insights and to confront hegemonic oppression.

Discussion and Implications

In schools, critical literacy often fails to attend to how emotions are patrolled and managed and reflect racial control and dominance (Langstraat, 2002). In order for critical literacy as an anti-oppressive pedagogy to truly confront the oppressive status quo of schools, it must no longer remain silent or leave unquestioned rules of emotional dispositions that target marginalized students.

Boler and Zembylas (2003) contend that emotional investments are largely unexamined because they have been woven into the everyday fabric through hegemony. This was seen in how students were repeatedly provided with rules of discussion and constantly monitored and disciplined for outlaw emotions. For example, before the modeled discussion, students were

asked to note *how* adults were discussing as well as what was said. Right before beginning their own discussion, students were again reminded of school-sanctioned guidelines for conversations. During the discussion, Mr. Kline emphasized that the modeled discussion meant to serve as a guide for the student discussion. At the end of the discussion, Mr. Kline indicated how students did not do well and the PI again emphasized ways to react and deliver their interpretations—a move towards "rationality." In all these instances, students' emotions were the target.

Yet, in schools, these rules are considered necessary, as part of guidance and support. As Zembylas (2002) contends, emotional control is not easily identified because "emotional rules are disguised as ethical code, professional techniques, and specialized pedagogical knowledge" (p. 201). Such endorsed techniques are reflected in approaches like dialogic teaching and accountable talk that rely heavily on the emphasis of logical connections and student discussion contributions based explicitly on facts (Michaels, et al., 2008). These regulations largely limit students' chances for expression and engagement with texts. The insistence on a correct set of emotions, a correct way to discuss, even when critical textual interpretations connect to students' social, racial, and experiential lifeworlds demonstrates the little value placed on students' insights and tellings informed by their emotions.

Because emotional control is hard to recognize, we must support teachers in recognizing emotions as an important component of meaning-making and that when we ask students to make sense of texts, we are asking for their affective reactions. While making connections with texts is a desirable goal, the immediate relationship between reader and text, including judgments about aesthetics, are not universal and are shaped by both emotional investments and reactions to social, political, and historical conditions that cannot be ignored (Lewis, 2000).

As teachers, we must begin by noting and discussing emotional responses to texts that address racism, oppression, and marginalization head on. For example, we can begin by asking students to document and speak about their emotional responses to texts and investigate the sources of their own emotions. In doing so, we can begin to establish a new understanding of emotions as part of the intellectual work as well as begin a practice of looking to, addressing, and delineating the source of our affective responses.

Discussing emotional responses to texts with students can also lead us to consider why certain emotions are seen as outlaw and how these can be used as starting points for meaningful discussions using emotional inquiry as part of rhetorical inquiry (Stengers, 2011). Guiding attention to emotions and their importance in our inquiry can support an understanding that "outlaw emotions are not 'private' or 'individual' and instead [are] connected to larger societal structures and felt by others" (Neville, 2018, p. 324).

As teachers, we can also consider with our students the impact of colonization on our language, affect, moderation of voice, and meaning. Stenger (2011) suggests we begin to question the rhetoric of anger by introducing Jaggar's (1989) claim that "while members of subordinate groups are expected to be emotional, their anger will not be tolerated" (p. 264). Through statements such as this, we can begin to analyze with students why and how this statement is felt particularly strongly and by whom. We can discuss and note the regulation of emotion through the regulation of our words, tone, voice level, and so on. By doing so, we can begin to discuss the school norms that strongly patrol and guide responses and reflect on how we as teachers are conditioned and implicated in upholding them. In this way, we might be able to help students trace the source of their emotions as well as the emotions they are responding to during race-related discussions. Emotions can then become a "key site of investigation"

(Stenberg, 2011, p. 350) that offers disrupting and resisting responses to racists and oppressive enactments of hegemonic power.

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