

Testing and Student Engagement with Literature in Urban Classrooms: A Multi-layered Perspective

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Though high-stakes testing currently dominates educational policy, few studies examine the consequences of such testing for the teaching and learning of literature in secondary English classrooms. This study takes a multi-layered approach to specify how a high-stakes exam positioned students as readers of literary texts. Drawing on both critical discourse analysis and socio-cultural literacy studies, the study traces the discursive processes through which the exam entered into tasks and talk about a novel in two classrooms to marginalize and contain students' substantive engagement with the issues of race and racism central to the novel. The study points to the need for close analyses of testing texts and of how they influence the ways in which teachers and students read and respond to literature.

In 1996, the leadership of the Chicago Public Schools unveiled an educational accountability agenda that became a model for urban school districts around the country. The agenda centered on the use of standardized reading tests to determine student promotion and to identify, intervene in, and close low-performing schools (see Wong, Anagnostopoulos, Rutledge, Lynn & Dreeben, 2003). In 1997 and 1998, the district began piloting its own district-wide tests, the Chicago Academic Standards Exam (CASE), in the 9th and 10th grades. District officials heralded the CASE as improving teaching and learning by enforcing rigorous standards (CPS, 1997, 1999). The district intended to use CASE results as another criterion to determine student promotion and to intervene in low-performing schools.

Recent studies have examined English teachers' responses to such tests, both at the state and district levels. These studies suggest that teachers' subject-matter beliefs, years of experience, departmental status, and involvement in professional learning communities mediate their responses to external testing (Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002; Zancella, 1992; Zigo, 2001). More experienced teachers with high departmental status, constructivist views of subject matter, and connections to professional networks tend to resist "teaching to the test," while novice teachers, and those with conventional subject-matter views and low departmental

status, often acquiesce to testing pressures by altering their curriculum in ways that fragment and narrow its scope.

These studies illuminate the variability of teachers' responses to external tests. None, however, closely examine the tests, making it difficult to specify the relationships between the tests and teachers' instructional practices. Hillocks's (2002) study of five state writing assessments is an exception. Through close analyses of state writing prompts, scoring guides, and benchmark papers, Hillocks reveals the disconnection between the high standards embedded in the state standards and writing prompts, on the one hand, and the poor quality of the sample benchmark papers, on the other. Drawing on these analyses and on interviews with elementary and secondary teachers in the five states, Hillocks concludes that the writing assessments tend to promote traditional instruction focused on grammar and surface-level features, and to encourage students to produce unfounded arguments and vacuous compositions.

The present study builds on the existing research to examine how external tests influence the teaching and learning of literature. In it, I draw on the concept of *positioning* from critical discourse analysis and socio-cultural literacy studies to develop a multi-layered perspective that includes both a close analysis of Chicago's test, and an examination of the relationship between the test and the classroom tasks and talk that mediated students' engagement with the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In 1997, the district designated the novel as a core work for 10th grade English and tested students' knowledge of it on the second-semester CASE. By identifying the reading positions the CASE constructed for students in two case-study classrooms and how teachers and students took up, resisted and transformed these positions, the study specifies the discursive processes through which tests can become operative in classrooms to shape students' interactions with literary texts. As such, it illustrates the potential of a multi-layered perspective to take into account the complex and situated nature of teaching and learning (Gutierrez & Stone, 2000), and to illuminate the cognitive and political consequences of testing for teaching and learning about and through literature.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis centers on identifying the discursive processes through which the production and interpretation of texts reflect and constitute social relationships and ideologies. A central goal of such analysis is to specify the linguistic elements that texts employ to construct particular reading positions, or stances, that readers take up, often unconsciously, to make sense of textual features and information and to reconstruct and reciprocate the author's view of the social relations and worldviews embedded within the texts (Kress, 1989). For example,

Freebody, Luke, and Gilbert (1991) detail how a short story in a high school literature anthology includes pronominalization, imperatives, and “mental” verbs to conflate the narrator’s and reader’s identities and to position the reader to take up the narrator’s sexist view of the story’s female characters. Similarly, Luke (1995) shows how texts as diverse as history textbooks, rental leases, and job applications use pronominalization, imperatives, and lists of polysemous moral codes to call upon readers to situate themselves within the social relations embedded within and constituted by the texts, and to regulate and discipline their behaviors in ways aligned with the worldviews these relations endorse.

While acknowledging that texts construct reading positions that promote particular interests and power relations, Fairclough (1992a,b) also acknowledges readers’ capacity to critique, resist, and transform the subject positions texts construct. This capacity for critique and transformation stems, in part, from the polyvalence and ambivalence of texts. Because texts are double-voiced, or are made up of and in turn make up other texts, they embed multiple and often competing social languages and ideologies. This intertextuality makes available not one, but a range of reading positions for the individuals and groups who read and use texts (Beavis, 2001).

At the same time, Fairclough (1992a) argues that the polyvalence of both textual production and interpretation is socially constrained in two ways. First, composers and readers of texts rely on sets of norms and conventions, such as genre and speech types, for producing and consuming particular types of texts. Second, the norms and conventions of the institutional contexts within which people process texts limit how they read and produce texts. For example, recitation is a dominant form of text processing in secondary English classrooms (Applebee, 1993; Nystrand, 1997). The norms and rules that govern recitations typically confine reading to text reproduction in which the text is positioned as immutable and authoritative. Student responses are valued according to their proximity to the facts and details of a text, and to the teacher’s framing of it (Bloome & Kinzer, 1998). Because the teacher rather than the students asks questions about the text and evaluates answers, the authoritative text gives power to the teacher. Students who depart from the text, or from the teacher’s framing of it, are labeled wrong or disruptive as they violate the social relations and conventions of recitations and text reproduction (Edwards & Furlong, 1978; Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

Fairclough’s (1992a) emphasis on the polyvalence of textual production and interpretation, on the one hand, and on the constraints of conventions and norms on the other hand, extends critical discourse analysis to specify not only the positions texts construct for readers, but also how, both in the text and its interpretation, boundaries are constructed between these positions. Further, Fairclough identifies the need to consider both the structure of discursive practices and the events

through which they get articulated. Analyzing both how texts construct reading positions and how readers take up or transform these positions helps to illuminate how particular power relations get entrenched and contested structurally, through conventions and codes and through the events of textual production and interpretation.

Sociocultural Literacy Studies

Recent sociocultural literacy studies are helpful in understanding how tests can enter into and shape the literacy events through which teachers and students interact with and respond to literary texts. Drawing upon Bakhtin's work, these studies identify the discursive processes through which students "rent" the social languages and worldviews of others, both within and outside of literary texts, as they engage with literature and develop literacy skills (Hicks, 1996; Lensmire, 1994; Schultz & Fecho, 2000). According to Bakhtin (1981, 1986), literary texts, particularly novels, contain a diversity of social languages that reflect and constitute the social groups and worldviews that exist within a given society at a particular historical period. Understanding literary texts involves readers in taking up some of the social languages voiced by authors, literary characters, and representatives of contemporary social groups, and distancing themselves from others, to identify, evaluate, and take up their own moral and political stances toward the social dilemmas the texts raise. For example, in his study of an AP English classroom, Knoeller (1998) documents how students gave voice to the author, characters, and extra-textual social groups depending on their own gender, race, and ideological stances. When the class read Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the girls "rented" the author's words to express their emergent feminist views, while African American students voiced the views of civil rights groups when the class discussed Alex Haley's *Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

Knoeller (1998) shows how the act of positioning themselves (in relation to each other, authors, characters, and social groups represented within and outside of texts) enabled students to develop skills in identifying the key details and structural elements of literary texts, and in constructing interpretations and critiques of literary texts. Nystrand's work (1997; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) further substantiates this relationship. In a two-year study of 58 eighth grade and 54 ninth grade English classrooms, Nystrand and his colleagues found that when students engaged in discussions that included authentic questions and voicing of multiple perspectives to co-construct interpretations of literature, such discussions had a positive effect on students' understanding of literature. In contrast, recitation negatively affected students' recall of basic details and events and their ability to construct interpretations of literature.

In light of growing evidence that engaging in acts of positioning increases students' understanding of literary texts, it is important to recognize that these

acts are inherently political (Gutierrez et al., 1995); that is, teachers and students construct stances with or against each other as they take up particular voices within and outside of literary texts. For example, Wortham's (1992) study of a humanities class details how working-class white teachers imputed negative stereotypes onto their low-income minority students by casting particular students as unscrupulous characters in the hypothetical examples they created to compare contemporary and ancient societies. The students contested this casting by situating themselves differently in the same examples. Wortham's study illustrates how classroom talk about literary texts serves multiple academic, social, and political functions (Gutierrez & Stone, 2000; Wortham, 1992).

In this study, I use a multi-layered approach to examine the relationship between testing texts and the classroom tasks and talk through which teachers and students interact with literature. The approach is multi-layered in two ways. First, it considers how testing texts move across the levels of the school system to get recontextualized and transformed into other texts (Anagnostopoulos, in press; Ball & Bowe, 1992). Second, the study examines both the structure of discursive events, or the norms and conventions that organize how people read and produce texts in particular social contexts, and the events through which people take up and transform these norms and conventions (Fairclough, 1992a; Hicks, 1996). Examining discursive events illuminates the conflict and tensions that emerge as teachers and students make sense of both testing texts and literary texts, and how these tensions get resolved to reinforce or alter discursive conventions and social relations within classrooms.

The study addresses the following questions:

1. How does the CASE define reading and position students in relation to a given novel?
2. How do teachers and students take up, negotiate, and/or contest these positions?
3. What are the consequences of both 1 & 2 for students' engagement with the novel?

I pay particular attention to how the district test shaped the ways in which teachers and students talked about issues of race and racism in relation to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. These issues are central to the novel and to the other texts the district designated as core works for 10th grade English. Because the district selected texts that deal directly with racism, Chicago provided a rich site for examining how tests can position students in relation to the social worlds of literary texts and shape their opportunities to construct substantive understandings and critiques of these worlds.

Context of the Study

Tests and Testing in Chicago

Chicago's district assessment, the CASE, was embedded in a broader agenda centered on holding principals and teachers accountable for student outcomes. The agenda was supported by state legislation enacted in 1995 that granted Chicago's mayor control over the school district and, as indicated in the introduction, authorized the district to use test scores to identify, intervene in, and close poorly performing schools. The law reflected the increasingly suburban legislature's discontent with the district, which had intensified in the early 1990s as district test scores on state assessments remained well below state averages (Wong, Dreeben, Lynn & Sunderman, 1997).

A key component of the district's accountability agenda was a school probation policy. In 1996, the district placed 109 schools, or nearly 20% of its schools, on probation for having less than 15% of their students scoring at national norms on standardized reading tests (the district used the Test of Academic Proficiency [TAP] at the high school level [Scannell, Haugh, Loyd, & Risinger, 1996]). The district assigned probation managers to oversee the principal's decisions in these schools and required the schools to select from a district-approved list of external partners charged with improving instruction. In 1997, the district reconstituted seven high schools that failed to raise test scores while on probation, firing five of the schools' principals and requiring all teachers to reapply for their jobs.

The CASE

In order to complement its use of nationally normed standardized tests, the district began implementing its own standards-based curricular assessments in 1997. That year, the district adopted a revised version of the Chicago Academic Standards (CAS) for all grade levels, produced Programs of Study for 9th and 10th grade academic courses that specified core content, skills, and processes to be taught each semester, and began piloting the Chicago Academic Standards Exam (CASE) in the high schools. For English, the Program of Study outlined three- to twelve-week units that specified literary texts, instructional objectives, and sample activities and resources. The CASE tested students' knowledge of the texts and skills identified in the Program. It had two parts, a multiple-choice section that contained questions about literary terms and devices, and a constructed response essay that included three short-answer questions that students developed into a three- to five-paragraph essay in response to a final question about the semester's core work. The district scored the multiple-choice section, while teachers at each school scored the constructed response essays using district rubrics. Students had to earn at least a 50% to pass the CASE. Each section of the test was weighted equally. In 1998-99, the year of this study, the district intended to use CASE results as another criterion for placing schools on probation and for determining students' promotion from 10th to 11th grade.

District-wide 10th Grade English Core Works

The district mandated that all teachers of 10th grade English teach specific texts, or core works, each semester. The CASE tested students' knowledge of these texts. The core works for 10th grade English dealt explicitly with issues of racial prejudice in American society. *To Kill a Mockingbird* tells the story of two white children, Scout and her brother, Jem, coming of age in the Jim Crow South. Narrated by the adult Scout, the novel has several plotlines that involve Scout and Jem encountering and learning to empathize with characters who, because of their race, class, gender, or personal histories, the middle-class white townsfolk cast out. One of the central plotlines revolves around the trial of Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping Mayella Ewell, a poor white woman. Scout's father, Atticus, serves as Tom's lawyer. Several of the novel's plotlines intersect and are resolved through the story of Tom's trial and eventual death.

Issues of race and racism are also central to the other texts the district selected for 10th grade English. Chief Joseph's surrender speech details the destruction of Native American societies by white settlers and the U.S. government. The selection from J.A. Roger's *Biography of Frederick Douglass* and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* deal with the struggles of African Americans to overcome slavery and racial discrimination, respectively.

The Study Site: Colson High School

Colson High School (a pseudonym) was a large neighborhood school that housed a vocational-tech magnet program. While most of its 2,000 students lived within the school's catchment area, the magnet program drew students from across the city. The school served a racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse group of students. The district classified 90% of Colson's students as racial and ethnic minorities and categorized 30% as LEP, or Limited English Proficient (CPS, 2000). In addition, 80% of the students were deemed low income. In contrast to the diverse student body, of the 19 English teachers in Colson, only one was Asian American and two were African American. The remaining 16 were white.

In 1996, the district placed Colson on probation. In response, the principal mandated that English teachers administer and review sample standardized reading tests every Wednesday. Faculty resistance throughout the school, however, derailed the principal's effort to implement a school-wide reading strategies program aimed at improving test scores in addition to the test review. The CASE also became a point of contention between the principal and English teachers. In teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the teachers, faced with time constraints arising from standardized test preparation mandates, decided to teach the screenplay and watch the movie, rather than teach the novel. However, the principal insisted that teachers comply with the Program of Study and assigned an administrator to ensure that they taught the novel. The principal's reaction reflected, in part, the school's probation history. In 1998-99, the year I focus on in this study, Colson faced a

third year of probation. The principal felt strong pressure to adhere strictly to all district policies, a pressure he passed on to teachers. Because the district focused on reading scores to determine school probation, this pressure was most acute for Colson's English teachers, whom other faculty saw as primarily responsible for teaching reading and, thus, for the reading scores (Wong et al., 2003).

The Teachers: Ms. Chey and Mr. Jones

In the present study, I examine how the CASE operated in two 10th grade classrooms in Colson, one taught by Ms. Chey, the other taught by Mr. Jones (all teacher and student names are pseudonyms). Ms. Chey and Mr. Jones in this study differed in their experience and departmental status, two factors found to influence English teachers' responses to external testing (Zancella, 1992). They also held different views of the district's testing policies.

Ms. Chey was in her first year of teaching, prior to which she had worked in social services. She was enrolled in a career-change program at a local university through which she was earning a master's degree and a teaching certificate. She was the only Asian American teacher in the English department. Given her novice standing, Ms. Chey had not yet established a reputation within the department. While she referred frequently to the Program of Study and stated that the school provided her with ample test preparation materials, she felt unprepared to negotiate the district's testing policies. She said that she "never realized how test-driven everything was" at the school, and felt torn between preparing students for the TAP test and for the CASE.

Mr. Jones had taught English for nine years and spent five of those years at Colson. Like most of the English teachers, he was white, though he was one of only three male teachers in the department. Mr. Jones was perceived and perceived himself as somewhat of a maverick within the department. He disagreed with the department's emphasis on Shakespeare because he believed that Colson's students needed to deal with texts that would help them, as he put it, "function in the job world."

Mr. Jones supported the district's efforts to hold schools and teachers accountable through its testing policies. He believed that the CASE addressed the high mobility rate within the district and provided "some continuity" for students who moved "from school to school." In addition, he felt that Colson needed to be "re-engineered" to "get rid of" teachers who no longer cared about the kids. Finally, he believed that the tests provided students with information they needed to set educational and career goals. In 1998-99, Mr. Jones decided to devote 12 weeks to preparing students for the TAP. I observed Mr. Jones' class six times during this period. In these classes, students worked in pairs or small groups to complete sample tests and test preparation worksheets, with Mr. Jones encouraging them to explain and support their answers. Mr. Jones also administered several timed reading tests to simulate the TAP during these classes.

The classes in which I observed Mr. Jones and Ms. Chey teach were racially and ethnically diverse. In Mr. Jones's class, 74% of the students were African American, 10% were European American, and 16% were Latino. In Ms. Chey's class, 44% of the students were African American, 17% were European American, 17% were Asian American, and 22% were Latino. All the students in Ms. Chey's class were "demoted." Because of low test scores on the TAP or insufficient course credits, all the students retained their grade-level status though they enrolled in 10th grade courses. This was the result of a district policy that tied students' progress from the 9th to the 10th grade to attendance, course credits, and standardized test scores. The district heralded the merit promotion policy as helping all students to meet the same academic standards, and as "the first substantial step to put(ing) value back in the diploma" (Rossi, 1996, p. 9). Several teachers in Colson, however, felt that the school's decision to create "demoted" sections of 10th grade courses contributed to rather than remedied the students' failure (Anagnostopoulos, 2003). Observations of both promoted and demoted sections of 10th grade English in Colson that I conducted as part of another study (see Anagnostopoulos, 2000) indicate that teachers assigned the same instructional activities and curricular materials in both types of classes. Teachers reported in interviews that the district standards and the CASE prevented them from differentiating the curriculum for promoted and demoted students.

Method

Data Collection

Data reported in this article were collected as part of a longitudinal study, conducted from 1995 to 2001, of governance changes in the Chicago Public Schools and their effects on teaching and learning (Wong et al., 2003; Wong, Anagnostopoulos, & Rutledge, in press). The study examined the reorganization of district policy that occurred when the city's mayor took control of the school district, and how teachers and principals in four case-study high schools responded to it. In particular, the study considered how the probation policy shaped the allocation of instructional resources in math and English classrooms.

In this study, I draw on data my colleagues and I collected at Colson. I visited Colson weekly from 1996 to 1999 to interview administrators, teachers, and students, and to observe 10th and 11th grade English classrooms. This fieldwork enabled me to identify the patterns and variation in curricular and instructional approaches within and across English classrooms in the school.

Interviews

During the 1998-99 school year, we collected semi-structured interviews with the principal, instructional coordinators, and 18 of the 19 English teachers. Interviews focused on how each individual understood the district's standards and assess-

ments and how they affected her work. In the present study, I focus on interviews I conducted with Ms. Chey and Mr. Jones. I interviewed both teachers three times during the school year, once for a general interview and once before and after classroom observations (see below), in order to understand how they designed their instructional units, how the CASE affected their teaching, and how they assessed student learning. I also interviewed Ms. O'Reilly, the special education teacher who was assigned to Mr. Jones' class and who co-taught the novel with him.

Classroom Observations

I observed Mr. Jones teach the same section of 10th grade English 12 times during the year. Here, I draw on the six observations that occurred during Mr. Jones' unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I also observed Ms. Chey teach one section of 10th grade English seven times over the course of her novel unit. During each observation, I recorded student attendance; noted postings about the novel, unit assignments, the CASE and the TAP on the chalkboards and walls; and constructed descriptive notes of all classroom activities that identified the time each activity began and ended, the materials used, and the classroom arrangements, i.e., small groups, individual seatwork, and so on. I also audiotaped all whole-group talk that occurred during each class, and transcribed the tapes verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

The central purpose of analysis was to specify the discursive processes through which district testing texts shaped teachers' and students' interactions with literary texts, and to illuminate their political as well as academic consequences. Both critical discourse analysis (Bloome & Carter, 2001; Fairclough, 1992a) and dialogic analyses drawn from socio-cultural literacy studies (Hicks, 1996; Nystrand, 1997; Wortham, 2001) frame my analysis. Both share a view of texts as reflective and constitutive of social struggles, and therefore as heterogeneous and often ambiguous. This view foregrounds the interpretive nature of textual analysis, and the need for analysts to be sensitive to the limits and social reasons for their own interpretations. Analysis focused on district testing texts, teacher interviews, and the written and oral texts that teachers and students read and produced in their classrooms. Along with allowing me to specify the relationship between these texts, the selection of these different types of texts helps to ensure that the diversity of discourse practices and meanings are represented and acknowledged (Fairclough, 1992a).

Testing Texts

I analyzed district testing texts to identify the reading positions they constructed for students. Because we were not given access to actual tests, I analyzed sample questions for the constructed response essay that appeared on the second-semester CASE, and the scoring rubric for it that the district provided all 10th grade English teachers. I also examined the Program of Study for 10th grade English, focusing

specifically on the unit centered on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Following Bloome and Carter's (2001) critical discourse framework for analyzing educational reform documents, my analysis of these testing texts focused on the *transitivity of verbs*, and the *nature of reading content*. These discourse dimensions construct and privilege particular relationships between readers and texts.

Regarding transitivity, transitive verbs link a subject with an object, while intransitive verbs do not explicitly do so. For example, Bloome and Carter (2001) contrast "Bob reads a book," with "Bob reads." In the former, "reads" is a transitive verb that positions Bob as acting upon the book, while in the latter, "reads" is an intransitive verb that defines Bob as a literate person. Transitive verbs position subjects as acting in and upon the world; intransitive verbs open the subject to being positioned by others as a particular type of person.

Regarding reading content, Bloome and Carter (2001) distinguish between "hallowed" and "hollowed" reading content. "Hallowed" content is listed in policy texts without justification. For example, one reform text Bloome and Carter analyze stated that students should read multicultural literature, but did not provide a rationale; the value of reading the literature was assumed. Because understanding multicultural literature requires engaging with multiple and often competing ideologies and perspectives, policy texts intended to guide reading pedagogy typically list "hollow" content items to avoid potential conflict. A hollow reading content item focuses on skills and processes, rather than interpretive frameworks or political and social concerns and/or issues. Expectations that students "improve comprehension by interpreting, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating written text," for example, make no mention of interpretive perspectives. This obscures the ideological conflict and processes entailed in reading texts, and privileges a view of reading as a set of neutral processes and skills that position students as uncritical consumers of texts and the perspectives they privilege.

In analyzing district testing texts, I first read the texts to identify the types of verbs, transitive or intransitive, that were used. To analyze the nature of the reading content, I examined the testing texts to locate the following: a) explicit rationales or justification for the selection of literary works to be read; b) explicit statements of the purposes for reading these works; c) direct statements of the interpretive frameworks students could or should employ to construct understandings of these texts; and d) explicit statements of skills and processes students were to use and engage in to read literature. I also examined the texts to determine whether and how they referred to issues of race and racism in relation to reading the core literary works the district selected.

Teacher Interviews

I read the teacher interviews for evidence of how the Program of Study and the CASE entered, both as individual texts and as parts of the district's broader accountability agenda, into teachers' instructional decisions. I first noted the

teachers' stated instructional objectives for their courses and the unit on the novel, comparing the words teachers used to identify these objectives with those used in the district testing documents. Following Fairclough (1992b), I also focused on the metaphors, images and repeated phrases the teachers used as they talked about the testing texts, and about their curricular and instructional decisions. In oral speech, individuals often take up other texts through metaphors and images. Identifying how teachers voiced the testing texts both manifestly and metaphorically provides insight into how they were positioned by the texts, and how they thought about their practices and their students in relation to the texts.

Classroom Observations

I analyzed classroom observations first to identify the dominant patterns of classroom tasks and talk. Another coder and I chunked classroom transcripts into episodes bounded by changes in instructional objectives, materials or arrangements (Hillocks, 1999). We coded episodes for the number of minutes they lasted, and the type of instructional activity they involved. Drawing on both Nystrand (1997) and inductive analysis of the transcripts, we classified instructional activities according to their instructional objectives and how teachers and students related to each other and classroom texts (Appendix A). Inter-rater reliability for the number and length of episodes was $R < .92$. I used Scott's (1955) inter-coder agreement formula to determine reliability for types of activities. The agreement was .85.

Using inductive coding techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994), my colleagues and I also categorized the type of written work teachers assigned over the novel unit, and then classified the types of questions teachers asked on these assignments using Hillocks and Ludlow's (1984) taxonomy of questions about literature. These analyses allowed me to compare the reading positions displayed by classroom tasks and talk with those the testing texts displayed.

I then re-read classroom transcripts to identify the explicit references teachers and students made to the CASE, and how such references displayed what and who counted as good readings and good readers, and what and who did not. I inductively grouped each reference according to the speaker (teacher or student), the type of information about the test it contained, the elements and content of the novel that it highlighted, and how it related these to the test. More specifically, I attended to how the explicit references labeled particular elements and content of the novel or of teachers' and students' statements about it as important or irrelevant to the test. I identified four types of explicit references to the CASE that occurred in Mr. Jones' and Ms. Chey's classrooms: *sample questions*, *tested content*, *exhortation*, and *authoritative readings*. The first two dealt explicitly with the test and those elements of the novel relevant to it. The third were statements that teachers used to motivate and encourage students to do well on the CASE. The fourth type of references, what I call authoritative readings, occurred after or dur-

ing classroom talk about race and racism, and explicitly marked some readings of the novel as legitimate and others as marginal. I analyzed the talk surrounding these references to identify the voices from the novel, the classroom, and the larger social world that teachers and students voiced, and to identify how the explicit references to the CASE legitimized or marginalized these voicings. I was particularly concerned with how explicit references to the test related to the borders teachers and/or students created between different ways of responding to and talking about the novel.

Findings

Testing Texts and Reading Positions

According to district documents (CPS, 1997), the Program of Study for English Language Arts transforms the district's curricular standards for language arts into guidelines for teachers that specify the skills, processes, and content tested on the CASE. Analyses of the Program of Study and the CASE suggest that the texts privilege a definition of reading as text reproduction and position students as minimally skilled readers. Though the texts display reading stances that value students' critical examination of the social worlds and issues represented in literature, these stances are marginalized in the movement from the Program of Study to CASE questions and scoring rubrics.

Transitivity and Hollowed Reading Content

The section of the Program of Study that deals with novels and short stories, for which *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the core work, contains a list of suggested activities that require students to "evaluate," "comment on," and "critique" texts. For example, the first suggested activity states:

Students will present findings on the treatment of a single issue by American writers across genres, e.g., compare the treatment of prejudice in *To Kill a Mockingbird* with the treatment of prejudice in two short stories structured around the same issue. The presentation may be in either oral or written form. (CPS, 1997, p. 26)

Note that "present" and "compare" are both transitive verbs with explicit objects; students present findings and compare the treatment of prejudice in the novel and in two short stories. The transitivity positions students to act upon and through texts. Students are to interpret the stances the different texts take on a particular social issue and produce their own texts to present these interpretations, thus constructing their own stances as well. The activity also acknowledges the social and political dimensions of reading literature. It depicts texts as being "structured around" social issues and valorizes readings that engage students in analyzing how texts treat social issues and that consider the relationship between texts and their social and historical contexts.

While the use of transitive verbs depicts students as acting on texts and in the world, the Program ultimately privileges a highly conventional and narrow definition of reading literature. A sentence located at the top of the list of suggested activities calls on students to “evaluate the relationships between a plot and its subplots, connecting themes, character traits, motives, tone, point of view, and setting” (CPS, 1997, p. 26). The statement emphasizes the identification of and connections between literary elements within a text. The lack of any mention of interpretive frameworks, or of any goals for making such connections, attenuates the transitivity of “evaluating.” Because the statement appears as the objective for the unit, it privileges a reading position that largely contains students to acting within the text, and brackets the more explicitly political readings displayed by the suggested activities such as the one cited above.

Similarly, analyses of reading content reveal that the Program treats *To Kill a Mockingbird* as both “hallow” and “hollow” content. The district does not justify its selection of the novel as a “core work”; its value is simply assumed. At the same time, the Program contains no explicit references to issues of race or racism. Even the term “prejudice,” which can encompass numerous types of discrimination, appears only once in the entire Program, in the activity cited above. The lack of explicit references to race and racism signals that readings that directly addressed these issues are not central to understanding the core texts that the district designated, even though these texts all deal explicitly with such issues. While the district assumes the value of reading texts “structured around” issues of race and racism, the Program privileges readings of the texts that identify details, techniques, and themes within texts rather than those that grapple with how the texts represent the social, political, and moral issues at their center.

In short, the Program of Study positions students as active readers engaged in “evaluating” and “critiquing” texts and their social worlds, but also neutralizes the political and ideological content of the texts. Because the reading content is hollowed by both the Program’s silence on issues of race and racism and by its privileging of the processes of drawing connections of elements within texts, “evaluating” and “critiquing” become polysemous imperatives opened to being emptied of their critical possibilities.

Reading as Text Reproduction, Students as Minimally Skilled

The CASE texts further narrow and neutralize what count as “good” reading, and defines “good” readers as minimally skilled consumers of texts who accept, uncritically, the narrator’s perspective. The sample constructed response for the second-semester CASE requires students to write a four- to five-paragraph essay in which they identify two characters with whom Scout, the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, learns to sympathize, what she comes to understand about each of these characters, and the “impact” these understandings have on her. The district’s answer key identifies three white characters, what Scout learned about each, and

states that she became “more empathetic and more compassionate in her interaction with or in her views of these characters” (CPS, 1999).

The response prompt situates students in the narrative audience (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998), asking them to walk in Scout’s shoes and explain how she changes her perspective on the different characters in the novel. By positioning the students to take up Scout’s perspective on the other characters rather than to evaluate or critique it, the prompt and sample answer key signals that “good readers” do not need to move beyond identifying with the narrator to identify larger themes or to evaluate the author’s use of the narrative voice in relation to the novel’s “treatment of social issues.” Further, like the Program of Study, the answer key made no mention of issues of racism.

The scoring rubric the district provided teachers to grade the response essays constructs students as not only uncritical, but minimally skilled as well. The following were the criteria for a passing score:

- Reader demonstrates an accurate but limited understanding of the text.
- Reader uses information from the text to make simplistic interpretations of the text without using significant concepts or by making only limited connections to other situations or contexts.
- Reader uses irrelevant and/or limited references.
- Reader generalizes without illustrating key ideas; may have gaps. (CPS, 1998)

While the verbs are transitive, references to accuracy, “information,” and “simplistic interpretations” display a definition of reading as text reproduction in which students are expected only to restate details from the novel. According to these criteria, “good readers” can cite details from a text. They do not, however, use these details to identify key ideas, or “significant concepts.” In fact, the details that students include in their essays could be “irrelevant” to the “simplistic interpretations” of the novel that students develop.

Teachers’ Responses: Time Constraints and Standard Practice

Before I examine how the CASE operated in and through classroom tasks and talk about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I consider how Mr. Jones and Ms. Chey responded to the Program of Study and the CASE. It was largely through teachers’ instructional decisions that the testing texts entered into the classroom. Analyses of the metaphors and repeated phrases that appeared in Ms. Chey’s and Mr. Jones’ interviews suggest that pressure emanating from the district testing policies led the teachers to take up the definition of reading as text reproduction and to position their students as minimally skilled readers. Both teachers repeatedly invoked the metaphors of “time constraints” and “covering” the novel to describe how these pressures shaped their teaching.

Time Constraints and “Covering” the Novel

Preparing students for the CASE preoccupied Mr. Jones and Ms. Chey in both the planning and teaching of the novel unit. When I asked what his objectives were in teaching the novel, Mr. Jones responded, “I tried to anticipate the CASE essay questions.” Later in the interview he explained, “Really the focus was on them to be ready for the CASE exam.” Similarly, Ms. Chey said that she had the exam “in the back of [her] mind” as she planned and taught the novel unit. She made repeated references to the Program of Study throughout the interview, noting that she drew both objectives and activities from the document. For example, when I asked what the objectives of 10th grade English were, she stated, “I could rattle them off, but they’re in the Program of Study,” and said that she “got my objectives” for her unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the Program. In fact, it was often difficult to distinguish between Ms. Chey’s talk about her instructional decisions and the language of the Program. She reported the following objectives for her unit on the novel:

To identify the elements of a novel, plot development, theme, setting, character, also point of view. . . to practice at sustained individual reading. . . to identify the differences between the novel and the screenplay and the movie to compare three genres. To define characterization for them by showing them the development of Scout’s and Jem’s character.

Ms. Chey used several words and phrases that appeared in the Program of Study. Her first objective restated almost verbatim the objective for studying novels and short fiction listed in the Program. Further, her references to comparing genres and examining characterization parallel the descriptions of two suggested activities also listed in the Program.

The teachers’ preoccupation with preparing students for the CASE related to the references to “time constraints” and “covering” the novel that permeated their interviews. Both Ms. Chey and Mr. Jones explicitly referred to the “time constraints” imposed upon them by demands that they prepare students for both the TAP and the CASE. Because the district used TAP scores to determine school probation, the teachers prioritized the TAP, and spent less time on the novel. When I asked if she had assigned any writing about the novel, Ms. Chey explained that the writing tasks she assigned as extra credit were “the things I would like to do, but I was pressured for time with the TAP and the CASE. I had to cram in as many details as possible about the novel.” She also noted that she “didn’t have time” to meet all the objectives listed in the Program of Study. Instead, she described how she “just modified some and took some out because I was so pressed for time.” Most significantly, Ms. Chey said that she had students stop reading the novel at Chapter 22, and assigned the screenplay as a “fast-forward version” of it because she “had to cram it in time for the CASE.” Similarly, Mr. Jones explained his decision to do

the same by saying, “I decided to read the screenplay because of time constraints . . . time constraints with the TAP. . . You’ve got two things tugging at you. You’ve got time constraints you have to deal with.” While Mr. Jones spent 12 weeks preparing students for the TAP, he taught the novel in three weeks.

Time constraints associated with the district’s testing policies contributed to the teachers “covering” the novel. Mr. Jones explained his decisions to have students watch the movie and read the screenplay as “covering all the bases for the CASE.” Later in the interview, when I asked how he taught the different themes he had selected, he noted, “Because it had eight possibilities for the essay question. We didn’t know for sure which one they would be tested on. We wanted to cover all the bases for the exam.” Ms. Chey said that “I covered the elements of a novel—plot development, theme, setting, character and point of view.” For both teachers, covering the novel translated into asking, as Ms. Chey put it, “a lot of literal-level questions.”

The following comment from Ms. Chey illustrates how the time constraints and pressure to prepare students for the CASE worked together to support teaching practices that narrowly defined reading and limited students’ opportunities to engage substantively with the novel.

I didn’t delve into *To Kill a Mockingbird* on the applied level. I would have needed to have them make big generalizations about life from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I don’t think they were ready. Maybe doing an essay on comparisons about racism or insensitivity and apply it to their life and the world. I was teaching for the test, I guess. I knew the CASE wouldn’t have asked those types of questions. I would have had to complete the whole novel. Otherwise I get this feeling that I would have ended up just feeding them examples and ideas, and it would have been transferred knowledge instead of instruction. I used a lot of literal-level questions to see who was reading and who wasn’t.

The nature of the CASE and the time constraints stemming from the district testing policies combined to result in Ms. Chey’s limiting the range of questions she posed about the novel. She explained her decision to focus on literal-level questions as a response to the literal level of the CASE questions. Ms. Chey also felt that she could not ask students to engage on an “applied” level, in which they drew connections between the novel, its historical setting, and their own lives, because she did not have time for students to read the entire book. Significantly, Ms. Chey distinguished readings that prepared students for the CASE from those in which students engaged with issues of “racism or sensitivity.” In the end, her instruction became focused on holding students accountable for showing that they possessed a merely literal understanding of the novel. Reading was reduced to a procedural display (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989); students earned credit for “reading,” even if they did not engage with the themes, ideas, or perspectives presented in the novel.

Classroom Tasks: Reading as Text Reproduction

Analyses of the instructional activities and written tasks teachers assigned indicate that the press for “coverage” Ms. Chey and Mr. Jones described reinforced highly conventional teaching practices that positioned students as largely passive, uncritical readers. Table 1 indicates the number of minutes of classroom time the teachers allocated to different types of instructional activities. Though there was some variation, recitations and seatwork were the dominant forms of instruction in both classrooms. Mr. Jones spent 131 minutes, or 35% of class time on recitations, while Ms. Chey spent 91, or 26% of time on them.

In Mr. Jones’ class, recitations typically occurred as he and Ms. O’Reilly reviewed worksheet questions with the students. In Ms. Chey’s class, recitations centered on journal responses, quizzes, and study guides. Seatwork in both classes meant completing study guides. In one class, Ms. Chey allowed students to complete small-group projects and individual assignments. I categorized this activity as seatwork because few students worked in their small groups to develop joint work. Instead, they worked to finish individual assignments. I observed no discussions in either classroom.

The majority of written tasks the teachers assigned required students to reproduce details from the novel to answer worksheet questions or multiple-choice and true/false quiz questions. Table 2 shows that 90% of the written tasks Mr. Jones assigned were worksheets. The only extended writing task he assigned was a five-paragraph essay structured to prepare students for the CASE constructed response question. Ms. Chey also assigned mostly worksheets, 67%, though she did assign three journals that elicited students’ personal responses to issues and characters related to and in the novel. Fully 65% of the questions Mr. Jones posed on the written tasks and 70% of those Ms. Chey posed were literal level, while 23%

TABLE 1: Minutes Spent on Types of Instructional Activities

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY	Teacher				
	JONES		CHEY		
	N	%	N	%	
Management	37	10	75	22	
Discussion	0	0	0	0	
Student Report	0	0	10	3	
Recitation	131	35	91	26	
Seatwork	63	17	66	19	
Reading Aloud	0	0	16	5	
Silent Reading	0	0	0	0	
Movie	142	38	0	0	
Test	0	0	25	7	
Standardized Test	0	0	56	16	
Other	3	0	7	2	
Total	376		346		

TABLE 2: Types of Written Tasks Assigned during Unit

Teacher	Type of Written Task					
		WORKSHEET	EXTENDED WRITING	TEST/QUIZ	OTHER	TOTAL
Jones	N	19	1	0	1	21
	%	90	5	0	5	100
Chey	N	12	3	2	1	18
	%	67	17	11	6	101
Total	N	31	8	2	2	43
	%	72	19	5	5	101 *

*Percentages add up to more than 100 due to rounding.

and 18% were simple inferential, and 10% were complex inferential, respectively, on both teachers' assignments (see Wong et al., 2003). Other than the journals Ms. Chey assigned, students were seldom asked to respond to, critique, or evaluate the novel. As Mr. Jones noted, he prepared students for the CASE by teaching them how to "plug content from the novel" into a five-paragraph essay.

When considered along with the teacher interviews, the analyses of written tasks and classroom activities suggest that Mr. Jones and Ms. Chey took up the definitions of reading as text reproduction and of readers as uncritical and minimally skilled consumers of texts that the CASE displayed. The highly conventional nature of Mr. Jones' and Ms. Chey's practices, however, makes it difficult to specify how the testing texts became operative in their classrooms. Recitations and seatwork dominate most secondary English classrooms in the U.S., while discussions are extremely rare (Applebee, 1993; Nystrand, 1997). In order to understand better how the CASE was implicated in and shaped students' engagement with the novel, I turn to analyses of the explicit references that teachers and students made to the exam. While I observed a relatively small number of these references, they worked much like conversational disruptions (Fairclough, 1992a; Mehan, 1979), exposing the tacit relationships between the classroom tasks and talk, and the test.

Classroom Talk: Defining Authoritative Readings

The teacher's explicit references to the CASE fell into four categories: exhortation, sample questions, tested content, and authoritative readings. Table 3 reports the types and frequency of teachers' explicit references to the CASE.

I observed only one student make an explicit test reference. This occurred in Mr. Jones' class when Jackson asked what the test would cover. Mr. Jones said it would cover the novel and literary terms. The class then proceeded to watch the movie. The apparent discrepancy between the CASE testing students' knowledge

TABLE 3: Types of Explicit References to the CASE Observed

Teacher	Type of Explicit Test Reference				TOTAL
	EXHORTATION	SAMPLE QUESTIONS	TESTED CONTENT	AUTHORIZING READERS	
Jones	5	0	3	2	10
Chey	2	1	2	2	7
Total	7	1	5	4	17

of the novel and the class watching the movie rather than completing the book illustrates how the test entered into Mr. Jones' and Mr. Chey's classrooms to displace the novel. Because the test did not require students to evaluate or critique the novel, students could glean from the movie the basic information they needed to answer the test questions.

Exhortation and Sample Questions

The first type of reference was *exhortation* (Smith, 1991). The teachers used these statements to motivate students to do well on the CASE. Mr. Jones frequently told students that if they paid attention in class, read the novel, and completed the worksheets, they would do well on the CASE and could "have fun" after the test. For example, he began one class period saying, "No homework, no anything, as long as you work hard for the CASE. I promise you fun for the whole month of May and part of June if you study hard." Exhortation references signaled that the primary purpose for reading the novel was to prepare for the test; they thus subordinated the curriculum to the test. Anything not related to the test became extraneous.

The category of sample questions refers to teachers' use of the sample questions and writing prompts the district distributed to teachers. These types of references directly imported the test into the classroom. When teachers made such references they were not only teaching *to* the test, but were teaching the test itself. I observed Ms. Chey assign one sample question, though I did not observe Mr. Jones do so.

Tested Content: "This could be the question . . ."

Tested content references were the most common type of explicit reference to the CASE in Mr. Jones' and Ms. Chey's teaching. These were statements in which they explicitly told students the details or themes of the novel that they needed to attend to for the test. The statements emphasized memorizing information and tended to reduce themes to details to be recalled. The following exchange illustrates how tested content references operated in the two classrooms.

After the class finished watching the movie, Mr. Jones led a recitation focused on identifying which characters in the book could be characterized as "mocking-

birds.” The reference to mockingbirds comes from the novel’s title and, more explicitly, from a statement made by Atticus, Scout and Jem’s father. After giving the children air rifles, Atticus told them it was “a sin to kill a mockingbird.” The family’s neighbor, Miss Maudie, explained Atticus’ comment by saying “... (mockingbirds) do not do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, they don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us” (Lee, 1960, p. 90).

In the following exchange, the class talked about Boo Radley, a reclusive white character whom the townsfolk shunned and whom Scout and Jem attempted to coax out of hiding throughout the novel. In the end, Boo saved the children from being killed by Bob Ewell, the novel’s villain. After he announced, “This could be the question,” Mr. Jones led the students in citing examples of the “good things” Boo had done. (Transcript conventions are endnoted.¹)

MR. JONES: Well/ let’s talk about it//What good things did he do?

MICHELLE: He saved the kids//

Z

MR. JONES: He saved the kids// What else did he do?

JACKSON: Gave them gifts//

Z

MR. JONES: He gave them gifts//

Z

JACKSON: Boo gave him his kids [back/

JESSICA: [He stabbed

Bob [Ewell.

MICKEY:

[Sewed Jem’s pants up.

After five more lines in which Jackson and Elias each provided an example of Boo helping other characters that Mr. Jones validated by repeating, Mr. Jones ended the talk about Boo by saying:

GOOD JOB//You guys are getting it all// Wouldn’t it be wonderful if they gave that question?//That could be a potential essay question//They could ask you what is the importance of the title/and who are the mockingbirds in the title//And you would have/ You would be the WHIP because you understand it//You would put your opening sentence/your opening paragraph//You would set it up//You would have paragraph one/ paragraph two/ paragraph three/ and then your conclusion//We think that may be the question//...

The classroom excerpt illustrates how tested content references reinforced the conventions and social relations of text reproduction. Mr. Jones drew on his au-

thority over the text to present an interpretation of Boo as a mockingbird. The students fulfilled their role in text reproduction by recalling details that fit into Mr. Jones' framing of the novel. After they offered a series of plot details, Mr. Jones congratulated the students on "getting it all," and stated that, if the question appeared on the CASE, the students would do well because they "under[stood] it."

While the type of talk Mr. Jones and his students engaged in here is highly conventional, it is worth examining in closer detail, particularly because Mr. Jones' reference to the CASE served to authorize this type of talk and the reading it sustained as what "good" readers do. Mr. Jones congratulated the students on recalling the numerous "good things" that Boo Radley did. As he noted, they were "getting it all." It is unclear from the talk, however, what the students actually understood. While they offered details from the novel to support Mr. Jones' claim that Boo Radley was a mockingbird, they did not engage with the larger question Mr. Jones says could be on the CASE, "the importance of the title." The title refers to the killing of a mockingbird. If Boo was a mockingbird because he "does good things," then to understand how the title relates to Boo's situation, it would be necessary to engage with the notion of how, if at all, Boo was somehow harmed. Further, as Jessica points out, one of the "good things" that Boo did was to stab and kill Bob Ewell. This raises the question about whether Boo only "does good things" and, ultimately, raises questions about the author's treatment of class issues throughout the novel. Bob Ewell was indigent and was referred to throughout the novel as "white trash." By merely assuming that killing Bob Ewell was a heroic act, as Mr. Jones and the students do here, the students were positioned to take up, uncritically, the author's perspective. What is significant is that Mr. Jones' reference to the CASE valorizes this uncritical reading position. The students count as "good readers" because they can assemble a constructed response by plugging details into a five-paragraph essay.

Authorizing Readings: Containing Talk about Race and Racism

The last type of explicit reference I observed was *authoritative readings*. Though few, all these references in both Ms. Chey's and Mr. Jones' classes bordered on talk about issues of race and racial prejudice. As such, they played a particularly important role in defining "good" reading and positioning students as particular types of readers.

Both Ms. Chey and Mr. Jones intentionally talked about race and racism within the novel and in contemporary American life. Both said that racism was one of the major themes they wanted students to examine. In Ms. Chey and Mr. Jones's classrooms, however, explicit references to the CASE worked to marginalize readings of the novel that directly explored these issues. The following excerpts of classroom talk illustrate how teachers and students interacted with the novel and established boundaries between talk about race and talk that prepared students for the CASE.

“The Whole Point”

During one class I observed, Ms. Chey assigned a journal prompt that asked students to write about a time they experienced or witnessed prejudice, either as a victim or perpetrator. Four of the five students who shared their journals in class wrote about being victims of racial prejudice; the fifth student wrote about being judged because of her age. Sharonda shared the following example:

Like/ I was in/like third/or second grade/right//like there was this little white girl//She used to come up to me (in high-pitched voice) /You ain’t supposed to have straight hair//All black people have nappy hair//I had a perm/right?//She was like/ You’re not supposed to have straight hair/ right//So I had came to school the next day and I didn’t like comb my hair/right? ’cause I thought I was supposed to have nappy hair and I felt really bad//So then this other girl had came in//I think she was a mix of African American and Spanish/ and she came in and kicked her butt//

Though students did not comment on each other’s experiences or explicitly relate them to the novel, Ms. Chey’s assignment disrupted the general patterns of classroom talk to create space for students to talk openly about the racial prejudice they had experienced or witnessed. This was the only time in either classroom that I observed students exerting considerable control over classroom talk. Ms. Chey also shared her own story of prejudice.

Ms. CHEY: Okay/here’s my story//I was five years old and I was trick-or-treating//I don’t remember what I was//I was something//I rang the doorbell and//Actually I was being forced to trick-or-treat/because I wasn’t having a good time/but my mom wanted me to do the American thing//So/I did that//So I rang the door and I said trick or treat and the lady said oh my god/ you speak English//That was my first/and she was so SHOCKED and SURPRISED that I knew English//

Z

MONIQUE: You should have changed to another language
Z

Ms. CHEY: Yeah// Actually I should have said/Yes F-you//I do know another language//Anyway//What we’re going to do is all stand up//

As she shared her story, Ms. Chey altered the patterns of talk and power relations in the classroom. She placed herself alongside her students, as a young person who had also experienced racial prejudice. Monique responded to the story by clearly situating herself with the five-year-old Ms. Chey, suggesting a way that Ms. Chey could have countered the woman’s racist assumptions about her language abilities.

Monique's response provided a floor for Ms. Chey to assert a more direct and explicit response to the woman's racism. Ms. Chey's comment, "Yeah, actually I should have said, 'Yes, F- you, I do know another language,'" built on and amplified Monique's comment. Ms. Chey's use of slang further signaled her solidarity with her students.

In effect, the stories of racial prejudice shared in Ms. Chey's class had an effect similar to that of the hypothetical examples Wortham (1992) discusses. However, instead of being a site of racial and class conflict between students and teachers, in Ms. Chey's class the examples created a space in which she and the students joined together to counter the prejudice they had experienced. Each of the stories ended with either the student or Ms. Chey constructing resistant responses, some of which had actually occurred and some of which were hypothetical. Sharonda ended her story by describing how a "mixed" race girl defended her by "kicking (the racist white girl's) butt." Similarly, Monique offered a way for Ms. Chey to confuse the woman who insulted her five-year old self, providing an opening for Ms. Chey to take up a more explicitly resistant stance.

The stories shared in Ms. Chey's class illustrate the spaces that the teachers and the students were able to create to examine issues of race and racism. At the same time, however, the CASE entered into the class to establish boundaries around this talk, re-positioning students as minimally skilled readers and reading as reproducing details. Ms. Chey's use of "anyway" at the end of her story signaled the transition between activities. It announced the end of the journal activity and the beginning of a game focused on memorizing details to prepare for the CASE, which Ms. Chey explained as:

The whole point is that you slowly start to memorize//You're going to have to do this for the CASE exam//You're going to have to memorize action in the novel/and Boo did what/and you get familiar with the characters//

Here, Ms. Chey signaled the importance of students accurately recalling information from the novel; memorizing the plot and characters was "the whole point" of the activity. Because she made no connections, either explicitly or implicitly, between the journal and the memorization game, her reference to the CASE worked to separate students' talk about racial prejudice from their remembering the novel's details. Exploring questions of racial prejudice in the students' lives was thus positioned as irrelevant to preparing for the CASE. Significantly, Ms. Chey was so impressed by the amount of detail the students recalled during the game that she decided to extend the game the following day.

The use of explicit references to the CASE worked to bracket talk about racism in Mr. Jones' class as well. During an episode in which students watched the film version of the novel, Mr. Jones contrasted its treatment of Tom Robinson's

death to the novel's treatment and made explicit connections between the racism depicted in the novel and the racism that occurs in contemporary America:

MR. JONES: ... The white people are much more racist in the book than in the screenplay//(student mumbles)// ...

JESSICA: What if they make a new movie about it?

MR. JONES: I think they should//In fact it would be a great IDEA//... //The real movie would be they shot Tom Robinson 17 times//Think about that//Just like the guy in New York they shot/What? 19 times/that they are on trial for/the cops//But anyway//So/just let me say//You should REALLY read the book//The rest of the book/I want you to//You have to read certain sections to answer your questions//But I highly suggest over the next week and a half//We won't collect these packets until after the CASE//You will bring them to me that Wednesday after the CASE//... //I really believe that if you do the packet you will get the answers right...

Like Ms. Chey, Mr. Jones distinguished talk about racism and the novel from preparing for the CASE. Mr. Jones connected the consequences of racism in the novel, the death of an innocent African American man at the hands of the legal system, to contemporary events. At the same time, as he urged students to read the novel because it dealt more honestly with the brutal realities of racism than the film and screenplay did, Mr. Jones asserted the primary importance of preparing for the CASE. Much like Ms. Chey's "anyway," Mr. Jones' "but anyway" signaled to students that engaging with the issue of racism as represented in the novel and the film, and as experienced in contemporary American society, was distinct from and secondary to "get(ting) the answers right" on the test. Interestingly, Mr. Jones distinguished "really reading the book," which would involve engaging with the issues of racism, from "reading certain sections to answer" worksheet questions and prepare for the CASE.

Restoring "Academic" Reading

While Mr. Jones and Ms. Chey may not have intended to marginalize talk about race and racism in the novel and the students' own social worlds, their references to the CASE tended to produce that effect. The following episode from Mr. Jones' class illustrates how the district test and the discourse of testing which sustained it operated to contain students' own attempts to talk about race and racism.

Like Ms. Chey, Mr. Jones and his co-teacher Ms. O'Reilly taught the novel primarily through recitation and worksheets. In the following episode, Ms. O'Reilly, the special education teacher assigned to Mr. Jones' class, stood at the front of the classroom, students sat in rows facing her, and Mr. Jones sat at the back of the classroom maintaining class records. Mickey answered the following worksheet question after Ms. O'Reilly read it aloud.

Why does Jem knock the top off her flowers?

MICKEY: She said that (. . .) Atticus was no better than Tom Robinson the one he's defending and that he's a nigger lover and all that//

Z

JESSICA: But he is a nigger lover// That's what it says in the book//

MICKEY: I don't mean/ I don't mean/ I don't mean/ nothing [personal//

O'REILLY: [Wait/

JESSICA: [But they say it in the book//

JONES: [Raise your hands//

O'REILLY: Wait a minute// Wait means wait// Let her [finish//

JONES: (Moving to the front of the room.) [Raise your hands//

In this exchange, Mickey, an African American girl, and Jessica, a white girl, violated the structural and substantive norms of classroom talk about the novel; the girls responded to each other rather than to the teacher, and they talked explicitly about issues of racism. Ms. O'Reilly and Mr. Jones attempted to repair the talk by inserting themselves into the girls' exchange, demanding that the girls "wait" and "raise (their) hands." The girls ignored the demands and continued:

MICKEY: I don't mean to be rude or nothing/ but I don't like you know/ "nigger lover" because nobody's really a nigger// Nobody's [a nigger//

JESSICA: [I know//

MICKEY: So/ if you want to say it's from the book that he does like black people or African Americans/ don't say he's a nigger// I was just quoting from the book//I wasn't saying he's a nigger//

JESSICA: I was quoting from the book too//

MICKEY: No/ you said he is a nigger/

Z

O'REILLY: Okay// What did you mean?//

JESSICA: I was saying is that Scout asked Atticus if he was//

Z

MICKEY: And what does Atticus say?//

Z

JESSICA: He says, yes I do//

The conflict between Mickey and Jessica was essentially about what types of readers had the right to voice the different views about race expressed in the novel.

In response to the worksheet question, Mickey gave voice to Ms. Dubose, one of the racist white characters who called Atticus a “nigger lover.” The conflict emerged when Jessica took up Atticus’ stance to assert that he *was* a “nigger lover,” alluding to the point in the novel when Atticus said that he respected all people regardless of their race. At this point, Mickey stepped out of the recitation discourse she initially took up to voice her concerns (as an African American student) about Jessica (a white student) using the novel’s racist language in the classroom. When Mickey told Jessica “if you want to say it’s from the book, that he does like black people or African Americans,” she offered Jessica language she felt was more appropriate for a white reader in a multi-racial classroom. Jessica initially rejected the offer, defending her words as “in the book.” At the end of this portion of the exchange, however, rather than repeating the term “nigger lover,” Jessica quoted Atticus as saying, “Yes I do,” signaling her accommodation to Mickey’s concerns and a shift in her stance towards the novel’s language and her classmate.

Throughout the exchange, each girl sought to authorize the reading positions she took up by casting her reading as text reproduction. Each defended her use of the novel’s racist language by asserting that she was “just quoting from the book.” The girls’ exchange, however, disrupted the social relations and conventions of text reproduction and made explicit the political and ideological dimensions of reading obscured by them. The girls both took up the different social languages in the novel and invested those languages with their own meanings and voices as contemporary readers located in a multicultural classroom. As they voiced different characters from the novel, each other, and their own views, they challenged the authority of both the teacher and the text to position them as particular types of readers.

After nine more lines of exchange in which Mr. Jones defended both the novel and Jessica’s “anti-racist” stance, and admonished Mickey’s response as “sensitivity,” Mr. Jones ended the exchange:

MR. JONES: I don’t want to hear this argument//This is a (...)childish argument and I’ll tell you why//We’re talking academically/Ok// If there was a book that said/There ARE books that say you know/ white trash/ trailer trash// In fact/ we’re going to be talking about it in the section of this book that is about the trailer trash/ the white trash//It’s going to be an actual thing called “white trash”//I’m going to give you/ Don’t worry about it//I’m not going to worry about it//What I want/We’ve got to move on// We’ve got two and a half weeks//In JUNE we’ll be able to cruise and have a good time//But, May 24, and 26, we got to break for the CASE//We don’t have time to argue about stuff like this//...

While the girls’ talk exposed the political and ideological dimensions of reading, Mr. Jones defined “academic” reading as a neutral process. In effect, he hollowed

the novel's content. His assertion that as a white man, he would not take offense to the term "white trash" in the novel positioned him as an "academic" reader. His comments, however, obscured the fact that a white woman authored the novel, and that the white rather than the African American characters used the term "white trash." His social position in relation to the term was quite different, then, from Mickey's relation to the term "nigger-lover." Mr. Jones contrasted his ostensibly neutral reading stance to the racialized stance Mickey took up, ultimately delegitimizing Mickey's reading by asserting that the class needed to "move on" in order to prepare for the CASE. Mr. Jones' reference to the test established that preparing for it was more important than engaging with the social languages in the novel and, in particular, with the stances towards racism that the languages embodied. Preparing for the CASE relegated issues of race to "childish stuff."

While the exchange ended at this point, five minutes later Ms. O'Reilly repeated her initial question concerning Jem's knocking the tops off a neighbor's flowers. This time Mickey answered, "Because Mrs. Dubose said that Atticus was no better than Tom Robinson." Race and racism went un-named in Mickey's answer, and the recitation continued uninterrupted for the remainder of the class period.

This episode illustrates the discursive processes through which the CASE explicitly entered into and shaped classroom talk about the novel, positioning students as particular types of readers. Ms. O'Reilly's worksheet question framed reading as text reproduction and subordinated the novel to the test; that is, students read the novel to locate details in preparation for the CASE. Mr. Jones made this relationship explicit when he silenced Mickey's response by situating the CASE as the authoritative text and re-positioning the students as "academic" readers who read the novel from an ostensibly race-neutral and uncritical position.

Mr. Jones and Ms. O'Reilly clearly viewed the girls' exchange as disruptive. The teachers wanted to "move on" to ensure that their students were prepared for the test. Given the negative consequences students faced if they did poorly on the test, this goal was justifiable. At the same time, the girls' exchange represented a nascent attempt to evaluate and critique the novel and its treatment of race and racism. As the girls challenged each other to clarify their stances and who and what they were voicing, they moved toward a critique of the social languages used by characters in the novel and, thus, of the ideology of racism around and through which the novel and their own exchange were structured. They moved, that is, toward constructing an understanding of the novel that went beyond collecting details and drawing simplistic interpretations. The CASE entered into classroom talk, however, to contain and de-authorize the girls' attempt to build such an understanding.

Discussion

Constructing “Good” Readers

Concerns about the consequences of testing on teaching and learning have intensified as policymakers increasingly rely upon tests to leverage instructional change and to reward and punish teachers and students. These concerns are particularly pressing in urban schools, the primary targets of district and state interventions and takeovers. Though this study examined only two classrooms, by employing a multi-layered approach that includes both close analyses of testing texts and classroom texts, the study specifies some of the discursive processes through which tests can shape how students engage with literature and identifies possible cognitive and political consequences of testing in urban classrooms.

The critical discourse analysis presented here documents how tests can endorse narrow definitions of reading that work against, rather than support, efforts to raise standards and improve students' learning opportunities in urban schools. The district standards and Program of Study contained multiple definitions of reading, including those that engaged students in “evaluating,” “assessing,” and “critiquing” texts. The testing prompt and scoring rubric, however, marginalized these definitions to position students as uncritical and minimally skilled readers. In contrast to the language of the standards and to the district's rhetoric about “rigorous” expectations, passing the test ensured only that students possessed a very limited understanding of how to draw even simple inferences.

The analyses of classroom tasks and talk suggest that the test reinforced conventional teaching practices and classroom discourse that defined reading as text reproduction. The written tasks the teachers assigned, with their multiple-choice, short-answer formats and literal-level questions, displayed to students that good readers read literature in order to identify information and accurately reproduce it on worksheets and tests. The general structure of classroom talk reinforced this definition. Students had few opportunities to voice and examine the multiple perspectives represented in the novel and those held by their classmates and teachers.

These instructional patterns are highly conventional. Though they have been found to limit rather than foster students' understanding of literature, the patterns are typical of many high school English classrooms in the U.S. (Applebee, 1993; Nystrand, 1997). What is significant here is that the test entered into the classroom talk to reinforce and authorize these practices. Explicit talk about the test, in the classrooms studied here, established borders between talk that prepared students for the test, and talk that grappled with the social issues and dilemmas around and through which the novel was structured. Because preparing students for the test was crucial for teachers facing a third year of district intervention and the threat of school closure, explicit references to the test positioned talk about the novel's core themes as inconsequential or disruptive.

This study ultimately raises questions about whose interests the current emphasis on tests and testing serve. In part, this study suggests that tests like Chicago's, which define reading literature as text reproduction, reinforce teachers' authority over literary texts and, by extension, their students. The teachers in this study did respond to the district test in ways that enabled them to control and contain students' responses to the novel. Teachers used the test to cast students who challenged their control over classroom talk and texts as disruptive, and to re-position them as "academic" readers who uncritically accepted the author's and the teacher's perspectives. Teachers also used the test to contain talk about the issues of racism that were central to understanding the novel. References to the test served to neutralize both the content of the novel and the political and ideological dimensions of reading.

At the same time, the test exerted power over the teachers. The teachers in this study worked in a school that had been deemed "failing" and faced possible closure if test scores did not improve. The district's use of multiple tests to measure and monitor students and schools created both time constraints and ethical dilemmas for teachers who had to raise standardized reading test scores and who had to ensure that their students passed the district's curricular assessment. These demands pitted teachers' interests in helping the school to get off of probation, and thus securing their jobs, against their interests in helping their students to learn. Both teachers, regardless of their years of experience or departmental status, responded to these constraints by explicitly teaching their students how to read literature in order to pass the exam. Within this context, talk and tasks that engaged students in evaluating and critiquing the novel and its treatment of social issues, such as racism, *was* disruptive. As the test became the authoritative text in the classrooms, it subordinated both the novel and the teachers.

It is clear that the emphases on tests and testing did not serve the students in the urban classrooms I studied. Though proponents of test-based accountability claim that testing can compel teachers to address the learning needs of all students (especially those most at risk of failing), when tests privilege low expectations and minimal skills, they not surprisingly do not move teachers to address students' learning needs. In this study, passing the exam ensured only that the students were minimally skilled readers. Further, the exam cast students as passive, uncritical consumers of texts.

Bakhtin (1981) describes novels as planes on which the competing ideologies and social languages of a given historical era and social setting interact. As they engage with literary texts, readers also situated within particular eras and settings take up some of these ideologies and social languages to construct their own stances. It is through these processes of voicing that readers form particular understandings of literary texts and of their own social worlds and selves. Significantly, the district assigned literary texts that directly and explicitly addressed issues of race

and racism in the U.S. The testing texts, however, contained no references to these issues and operated in the classrooms I studied to contain and silence students' emergent attempts to engage with and construct understandings of and stances towards these issues. In short, while the district selected core works that could have prompted students to grapple with issues of race and racism that continue to be of critical significance to our society, the district test worked to deny students the opportunities to do exactly this.

Spaces for Maneuver

While this study documents how tests can become operative within classrooms to contain students' engagement with literary texts and their social worlds, it also illuminates some possibilities for countering these effects. Critical discourse analysis helps to specify the range of reading definitions and positions contained within testing texts. Standards documents typically contain multiple, competing definitions of reading. For example, Chicago's Program of Study contained activities that engaged students in critiquing, evaluating, and producing texts "structured around" the treatment of social issues. Similarly, the constructed response question, at least in form, displayed a view of readers as acting upon texts in creating their own interpretations. It did not assume, as do multiple-choice questions typical of standardized tests, that authoritative interpretations of texts exist, nor did it position students merely to select the right interpretations. Instead, the constructed response genre allowed students to present and justify their own responses and interpretations of the novel.

The existence of competing visions of reading within policy documents creates spaces for maneuver (Ball & Bowe, 1992) that educators and others can use to counter the increasingly punitive uses of testing. Different beliefs about and stances towards schooling, towards teaching and learning and, most importantly, towards students can be taken up to promote public debate about the purposes and consequences of tests and testing, and about the value of the types of teaching and learning they are supporting. In Chicago, a group of English teachers publicly refused to administer the CASE, defending their decision by drawing on the district's own standards to expose the disconnections between those standards and the test (Wallace, 2002). The teachers used the spaces for maneuver available within the standards to resist the test's encroachment on their students' learning opportunities. In December 2002, the district, responding to several factors, withdrew the exam.

Conclusion

Efforts to raise standards and improve learning opportunities for all students can focus attention on the needs and strengths of students in urban schools who have often been disadvantaged by low expectations and inadequate resources. It is naïve to believe, however, that tests alone can support and sustain these efforts. In

addition to the question of resources which tests cannot address and may in fact exacerbate, this study illustrates the challenges of teaching literature in ways that allow for students to evaluate and extend meaning from literary texts. Engaging substantively with literature entails taking up different social languages that reflect competing ideologies and beliefs. While there is growing evidence that such acts of positioning enrich students' abilities to recall basic details and information and to construct understandings of literary texts, such acts attenuate teachers' authority and open classrooms to conflict. In the three years that the school in this study was under district intervention for low test scores, teachers received little if any support to teach literature in ways that engaged their students substantively with attendant social issues and dilemmas (Wong et al., 2003).

Literature instruction has long played a role in shaping particular kinds of moral, social, and political identities (Luke, 1995; Willinsky, 1991). Tests of literature inherently construct particular types of readers as they endorse particular types of readings, labeling some as "good" and others as "failing." In this study, "good" readers were constructed as minimally skilled, and "good" readings centered on the reproduction of facts and details. The increasing reliance on tests to measure, monitor, and intervene in schools raises questions about what kinds of identities are being made available for students who attend the urban schools that have become the main targets of district, state, and, now, federal testing policies. As the stakes attached to testing increase, it is crucial that we ask what the tests are actually testing, and whether they are supporting or restricting the opportunities students in urban schools have to develop their capacities to engage critically with literary texts and the social issues at their core.

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NOTE

1. / is equivalent to a comma.

// is equivalent to a period.

[indicates overlapping speech.

Z indicates that a speaker is starting at the same time the other speaker is finishing.

- (...) indicates pause.
 () indicates inaudible speech.
 CAPITAL LETTERS indicate stress.

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APPENDIX A: DEFINITION OF ACTIVITY TYPES

Management: During these episodes teachers discussed issues relevant to the organization of the classroom and/or a specific activity. Management activities included teachers giving instructions, talking about students' grades, the day's agenda or future agendas, placing students into small groups, disciplinary issues, taking attendance, and record keeping.

Discussion: Discussion involves students elaborating upon ideas or interpretations of an individual text, across texts, or between texts and the larger world. It has two distinguishing features: uptake and authentic questions. Uptake occurs when teachers incorporate student responses into subsequent questions, and when teachers and students elaborate upon student ideas and responses. Authentic questions do not have pre-specified answers. They are open-ended questions that students have to provide evidence or support to answer. Both uptake and authentic questions have to be present at the same time for talk to be considered discussion (Nystrand 1997).

Student Report: Students presented material, including their own writing, to the class. If talk about these reports with the teacher and other students occurred and lasted longer than two minutes, we counted it as an episode, and coded it as either recitation or discussion.

Recitation: Recitation typically involves a pattern of the teacher asking a question, students providing a response, and the teacher either evaluating the response or simply taking the response and moving on to the next topic. Recitation is marked by questions that the teacher believes have a right or wrong answer. Recitation is also marked by teachers moving from one topic to another, or from question to question with little coherence between them.

Seatwork: Students worked independently or with partners to complete worksheets or journals.

Reading Aloud: The teacher read aloud to students, students read aloud in turns or parts, and students read aloud in small groups.

Silent Reading: Students read assigned work by themselves.

Movie: Students watched the movie version of the novel. Teachers typically stopped to talk about different parts of the movie. When this talk lasted longer than two minutes we counted it as an episode and coded it as either recitation or discussion, as defined above.

Test: Students took a teacher-created quiz or test in class.

Standardized Test: Students took practice tests that simulated the content or format of standardized tests.

Other: This included lecture episodes (because they accounted for 1% or less of time in any class), and diversionary episodes (during which time was spent talking about issues not relevant to understanding course content, a teacher was not in the room, or free time).

African American Read-In Scheduled for February, Black History Month

On Sunday and Monday, February 1 and 2, 2004, NCTE will join the NCTE Black Caucus in sponsoring the fifteenth national African American Read-In Chain. This year's goal is to have at least one million Americans across the nation reading works by African American writers on Sunday, February 1. Monday, February 2, is the date designated for read-ins in schools.

The event is an opportunity for schools, libraries, community organizations, businesses, and interested citizens to make literacy a significant part of Black History Month by hosting and coordinating read-ins. These activities may range from bringing together family and friends to share a book to staging public readings and media presentations featuring African American writers.

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