



## Research

### **“I am not an American girl”: resisting discourses of agency, innocence and patriotism**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper presents a case study of a young Arab-American girl struggling against a united front of innocence, patriotism, and peer culture in an American first grade class one year after ‘9/11’. Through her writings, language interactions, and play, Hanan, a six year old student in the first grade class I taught, asserted an ethnic identity and resisted interpellation as an *American* as she coped with ritualized post-9/11 patriotism in the school culture and in the peer culture.

## **Introduction**

A great deal of concern has been focused on assuring America's children that everything will be all right as we cope with the uncertainty and threats that surround global terrorism. From children's books to public service announcements, messages of reassurance and patriotism tell children that powerful adults care for them and will protect them; that America is strong and brave; and that they are part of America. However, far less attention has been given to examining the direct and indirect effects of terrorism on one particularly vulnerable group of children, Arab-American schoolchildren. The events of 9/11 activated powerful forces of nationalism and school-based patriotism, which converged to make schools uncomfortable places for Arab-American children (Economist, 2002; Hoff, 2002; Kromidas, 2004).

This paper presents a case study of a young Arab-American girl struggling against a united front of innocence, patriotism, and peer culture in an American first grade class one year after 9/11. Through her writings, language interactions and play, Hanan - a six year old student in the first grade class I taught - asserted an ethnic identity and resisted interpellation as an American as she coped with ritualized, post-9/11 patriotism in the school culture and in the peer culture. On the first anniversary of 9/11, our class participated in a school-wide ceremony that culminated in an emotional, silent gathering around the flagpole. Following the anniversary memorial, schooldays opened with patriotic songs and the Pledge of Allegiance, which were broadcast over the school loudspeaker. Each classroom displayed at least one American flag and, during the 2002-2003 school year, many

rooms were decorated with stars and stripes motifs. What does it mean, then, to stand outside this imagined community (Anderson, 1991) of America, to reject the identity of American in the face of overwhelming patriotism?

Hanan's resistance ran counter to widespread messages of child vulnerability and helplessness during a time when Americans were highly concerned with issues associated with terrorism, ensuring the nation's material and psychological safety and especially protecting children's innocence and assuaging children's fears (perhaps as proxies for our own). In schools, these messages of child vulnerability and helplessness took the form of patriotic displays aimed at reassuring children that their country is powerful and well-equipped to protect them. Hanan's rejection of an American identity appears puzzling when viewed within the naturalized model of childhood innocence and its supporting discourse of nation as benevolent protector. Understanding her reaction necessitates a critical examination of the power relations associated with the interplay of discourses about nation, education, and childhood at work at national and local levels. Taking a teacher-researcher stance, I investigate how societal discourses of patriotism and childhood innocence<sup>i</sup> were manifested in a democratic classroom, a child-centred model where children are encouraged to vote on classroom rules, resolve differences through cooperative mediation, and express their ideas 'freely' to each other. (For a description of similar democratic early childhood classrooms, see DeVries & Zan, 1994.) In this article, I use critical discourse analysis and

childhood studies to examine two questions:

- How did the tensions between discourses become embodied in Hanan's emphatic resistance to interpellation as American and in other children's hostile reactions to her resistance?
- How did the democratic classroom structures of community, free expression, and class meetings exacerbate the denial of American identity by (and to) Hanan?

### Locating discourses of patriotism and innocence

Critical discourse analysis (Gee, 1999; Fairclough, 2001), informed by childhood studies and supported by ethnographic methods, are analytic tools with which to explicate the discursive roots of child identities in a first grade child-centred classroom. Ethnographic methods of participant observation, video-recording, field notes and collecting children's writing samples allowed me to gather a rich data field that enables close, detailed critical discourse analysis of naturally-occurring speech in classrooms. Informal interviews with parents, teachers' anecdotal notes, and a research journal supplemented classroom data to record teacher and parent impressions of Hanan's overall learning and of her relationship with other children in the class. The combination of critical analysis and ethnographic detail links global and local aspects of identity (Rogers, 2003), thereby revealing a number of available subject positions that help explain classroom language interactions in post 9/11 school cultures.

A first step in locating discursive effects is to recognize that language actively constitutes social subjects (Foucault,

1972). In this case, societal discourse at the global level and the teacher's and children's classroom language and literacy practices at the local level constitute the pre-existing social subject positions *American* and *Arab* just as educational discourse at the institutional level and classroom language at the local level constitute the social subjects *teacher* and *student*.

This recognition coexists with a mitigating awareness of the impact of material reality and individual action. Fairclough (1992) explains that in studies of discourse, subjects' agency tempers the deterministic effect of discursive practices:

While I accept that both 'objects' and social subjects are shaped by discursive practices, I would wish to insist that these practices are constrained by the fact that they inevitably take place within a constituted, material reality, with preconstituted 'objects' and preconstituted social subjects. The constitutive processes of discourse ought therefore to be seen in terms of a dialectic, in which the impact of discursive practice depends upon how it interacts with the preconstituted reality. ... It also suggests that constituted social subjects are not merely passively positioned but are capable of acting as agents ..." (p. 60)

In discourse exchanges, subjects actively shift their 'ways of interacting, ways of representing, and ways of being that constitute the repositioning of self (and others) within various contexts that counts as learning and, consequently, transformation of self' (Rogers, 2004, p.

68). Critical discourse analysis, 'attends to (a discourse's) functioning in the creative transformation of ideologies and practices as well as its functioning in securing their reproduction' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 36). In this article, I analyse one interaction between two children that represents a moment of discursive confrontation and potential transformation, using discourse microanalyses of two children's texts to identify the local effects of macro-discourses and their associated subject positions within the classroom context.

Childhood studies suggest the multiple subject positions that are available to children, each corresponding to a larger societal discourse that constructs and explains a particular vision of childhood. Poststructuralist theorists in childhood studies (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003; Luke & Luke, 2001; Walkerdine, 1999) identify educationally romantic discourses that typify democratic classrooms: the natural innocence of childhood, the primacy of the individual, the agency of discovery learning, or the sanctity of free expression. At the same time, poststructural theory attends to the societal constraints inherent within performances of self in ways that problematize agentic notions of individualism and free expression (Tobin, 1995a). Walkerdine (1999) notes that such subject positions are site specific; that is, spaces determine the subjectivities that children can access. The romantic discourse of the democratic classroom (Dewey, 1926 [1916]) constitutes children as interactive agents who use language and discovery freely to shape their social environment, drawing on notions of inherent purity and individual determinism of the naturally

innocent child (Rousseau, 1979 [1762]). The discourse of patriotism (Apple, 2002; Giroux, 2002) resonates with the discourse of innocence through notions of child susceptibility and adult competence, stressing a need for safety and protection through adult (national) control and a need for unity and strength, rather than individual agency. In the school space, children's agency is constrained as these patriotic discourses construct children variously as novice citizens, vulnerable innocents and racialized threats. The disjunctions among these discourses spark a tension between children's rights as agents to express themselves freely or to form social alliances and the teacher's obligation to protect children from harm, including any harmful effects of their own agency. The tensions between discourses are illustrated below in the social history of the classroom, as conflicts arose between Hanan and other children in our class.

### **Hanan and the democratic classroom**

Hanan began first grade as a student new to the school, transferring from another elementary school across town. Our class was one of three first grade classrooms in a school of approximately 450 students in a middle-class American Midwestern suburban school district. Hanan was the only Arab-American child in the classroom, where 21 of the 25 children were white<sup>ii</sup>. Although bilingual in Arabic and English, Hanan rarely spoke during the first month of school; she was a quiet member of the class with little to say to the other children during centre play or in large group activities. Two popular girls in the class with considerable status in the peer culture frequently sought to play with Hanan in the first few weeks of school. However, Hanan often disagreed with the

girls over what or how to play, refusing to compromise for the sake of playing with these friends if she found the play theme or her role objectionable. An on-again, off-again relationship developed among the trio, not untypical in first grade friendships, but in Hanan's case, these flare-ups served not just to exclude her from a specific pair of friends but to isolate her from the group as a whole. In the peer culture, word of what typically would have been construed as a momentary tiff travelled quickly along the network of friendship alliances, where the disagreement was discussed in small groups, prompting some children to side with the more popular pair while shunning Hanan or exhorting her to 'be nice'. Although the estrangement was usually short-lived, it was also frequent and the inclusion/exclusion cycle became an established pattern of Hanan's playground interaction, despite my attempts at mediation.

*Community circle: agency, innocence and free expression*  
Within the classroom, Hanan became more vocal and began to participate regularly in the daily routine of 'community circle', an open or student-led class meeting. Although the notion of a democratic, child-centred classroom is something of a misnomer - after all, the teacher chooses how much agency children will exercise - our class frequently engaged in whole-group discussions and generated rules to address problems or issues raised by the children and resolved by the children. My constructivist approach (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; DeVries, 2001) encouraged peer negotiation and collaboration and allowed children to participate in decision-making that created class rules and shaped the class

social structure (DeVries & Zan, 1994). Operating under the assumption that the vehicle of community circle would develop peer acceptance among the children, I encouraged the children to brainstorm solutions to playground and classroom problems. During community circle, Hanan often raised complaints about playground interactions. She wanted to have more opportunities to direct recess play, to play 'Arabic school' with children at recess and to teach Arabic words to other children. When it was time to vote, Hanan proposed mandates that would force children to play with her, on her terms.

Despite my attempts to mediate a compromise, Hanan refused to 'go along' with group decisions that she found unfavourable, even when she was the sole dissenter. She disagreed frequently and vociferously with the majority position, rejected compromises, and spurned invitations to participate in alternate activities. Increasingly, Hanan was excluded from recess play and had to resort to registering a complaint with supervising adults or older children to oblige peers to talk or play with her during recess. Through these meetings, it became clear that Hanan was regularly experiencing rejection from the other children. I worried about my thwarted attempts to bring Hanan into the classroom community and I was concerned that the open discussions in community circle only further ostracized her within the peer culture on the playground.

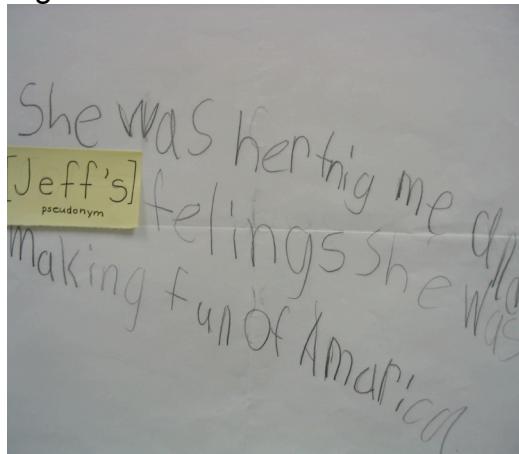
*Peer culture: confronting 'half-American'*  
The tensions on the playground erupted in March as Jim, a popular first grader, and Hanan argued in the classroom over her status as American. Their voices rose

steadily as the argument at Hanan's table grew more heated, attracting onlookers as children stopped their activities to investigate the angry and emphatic voices.

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| Jim   | You live here. This isn't the Arabic world.                           |
| Hanan | I am in the Arabic world, not America.                                |
| Jim   | Well, you're half-American 'cause you're here.                        |
| Hanan | I am not half-American; I am Arabic world.                            |
| Jim   | Well, this is not Arabic school. This is America and you're American. |
| Hanan | I am not American. I am Arabic!                                       |

In the letters below, transcribed from their invented spellings, the children explained each side of the argument. Jim accused Hanan of hurtful and unpatriotic behaviour.

Figure 1: Jim's letter

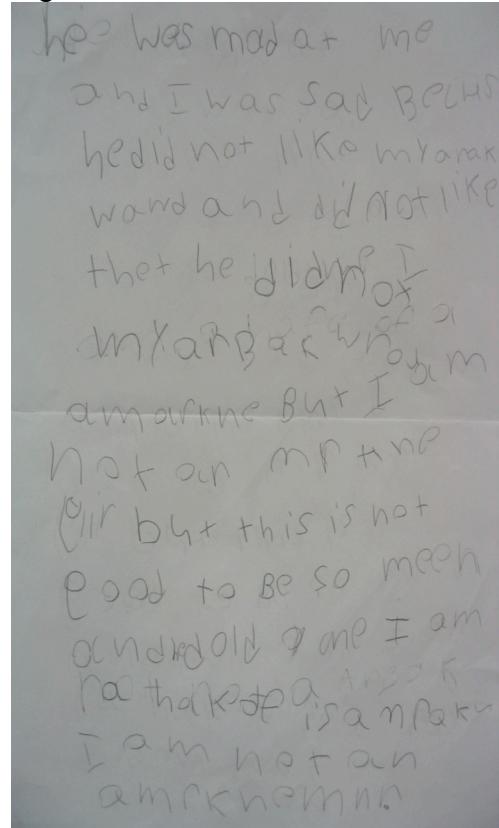


Text of Jim's letter

She was hurting me and Jeff's feelings. She was making fun of America.

Hanan denied an American identity vehemently and defended her position.

Figure 2. Hanan's Letter



Hanan's rereading of the text of her letter

He was mad at me and I was sad because he did not like my Arabic world and I did not like that he did not [like] my Arabic World. I am Arabic but I am not an American girl but this is not good to be so mean. And he told me I am half American of his America. I am not an American.

I met individually with the children as described in the following entries from my teacher journal:

Hanan wanted to bring [the argument] up in community circle. I offered to talk with them together but said that I would not take it before the group since only two children

were involved. In talking to both children, Jim said that Hanan was saying that this school was not as good as the Arabic school. Angered, he told her that because she was here, she was at least half American. Hanan refused to accept that identity, saying that she 'was not half American, she was lots of Arabic'. I asked if she couldn't be both Arab and American, which she answered by vigorously shaking her head no. I told her to talk it over with her mother at home and see what her mother would say. I offered to call and talk to her mother. She quickly said that I should not call her mother and seemed to abandon her position, by saying 'OK, I am American'. Perhaps she thought she was in trouble. I said, 'You should just ask your mother about this and see what she thinks.' I don't want to impose an identity on her that she rejects. How does her family feel?<sup>iii</sup>

I explained to Jim that it was just a misunderstanding; that Hanan was a part of our class and of America; and Americans believe it is important to let people choose who they are. Both children were less than convinced.

When I talked with her the following day, Hanan told me that:

...she had talked with her mother and her mother told her that she is both American and Arab: However she also added, "I am half American and *all* Arabic. I am in the Arabic world." (Fieldnotes, March 2002)

### School culture: institutional patriotism

Historically, one of the justifications for public education within the United States has been to produce an informed citizenry who can participate effectively in a democracy. Since 9/11, this educational function has been reinterpreted as a mandate to produce not just citizens, but patriots. A 'compulsory patriotism' arose in schools after 9/11 as local manifestations of a nationalist ideology that, 'provided a stimulus for the formation of a "real" community, an organization to "win back" the space of schooling for patriotism' (Apple, 2002, p. 306). The first anniversary of 9/11 was an occasion for nationwide displays of patriotism and communal bonding that stretched across geographic regions, reaching into the rural Midwest. A New York Times reporter (Wilgoren, 2002, p. B4) describes a typically patriotic 9/11 memorial held in West Branch, Iowa:

Two dozen residents held hands around a flagpole and sang a verse of 'God Bless America' at 8:46 a.m. Four mothers spent the morning putting temporary red, white and blue tattoos on young cheeks before the big American flag photo.

The imagery of nation as community is evident in this quote from West Branch's mayor:

"Iowa is the same as New York, Iowa is the same as Texas -- America is America. If it happens to one of us, all of us feel it", Mayor Quinlan said. "I've got to believe that if something tragic happened in Iowa, people in Montana would respond, people in Arizona. We're not Iowans. We're Americans." (ibid)

In our school, children bonded with this imagined community through daily rituals that signified preparatory citizenship and budding nationalism as they sang patriotic songs and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

### *Analyzing identities and splitting subjectivities*

#### The appropriately free-speaking American and patriotic innocent

As the year progressed, children in our class pressured Hanan to accept American beliefs and ideals and to stop talking to them about her 'Arabic world'. In the conflict in question, Jim demanded a single, unvarying performance of citizenship at school that privileged an American identity over all others. Critical discourse analysis of Jim's letters shows that he effectively and efficiently assumes a patriotic - perhaps McCarthyist - role of the novice citizen when he says, 'she was making fun of America'. He also occupies the position of vulnerable innocent by positioning himself as the passive object of the sentence: 'she was hurting me and Jeff's feelings'. The democratic notion of innocence assumes that children's actions are motivated by the material issue at hand, in an attempt to collaboratively work out a solution. This overlooks the significant social organization that children accomplish through language and play, particularly through conflict. As Orellana (1996, p. 361) suggests:

Students' voices [are] often turned against each other, with language used as a weapon to achieve status within this activity setting, rather than to forge a collaborative re-vision of the world.

Jim's proposition was to split Hanan's identity into two halves - half American, half non-American, of which only the American half was to be recognized at school. Divisions that create difference also create inequities, privileging one side over the other (Willinsky, 1998). Globally, more power inheres in Western ideals, practices, and subject positions than in those of the East (Said, 1979). Locally, identifying as an American carries cultural capital in both the school and peer cultures. In the official classroom culture, my child-centred approach supposedly offered equal status to all children. In fact, it privileged proto-citizens such as Jim, who enacted innocence as well as patriotism, that is, who spoke 'freely' during sharing time, invoked a need for protection and mobilized other children to join the majority position during class discussion.

#### The inappropriately free-speaking (non) American and self-endangering innocent

What does it mean to hold national citizenship and to belong to an ethnic group whose features and whose culture exist to one side of a mainstream that seems blissfully unaware of its own hegemony? (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 962)

In the incident above, Hanan defended an ethnic identity passionately against the onslaught of school and classroom images of red, white, and blue conformity. Although speaking freely in accordance with the expectations of the democratic classroom, the content of her interactions appeared problematic, since it did not mesh with the other children's goals for performances of emergent citizenship or with my agenda for co-operative problem-solving. Hanan refused to take up the position of novice citizen, both in her

classroom actions and in her language. She did not recite the Pledge of Allegiance, she objected to classroom voting practices, and she would not acknowledge majority rule when she found the outcome unfavourable. She openly denied being American.

The institutional discourse of patriotism and the unofficial peer culture demanded that Hanan make a choice and identify as an American - a choice which Hanan rejected. Perhaps she saw this as a renunciation of her faith and culture, or perhaps she resisted the devalued ethnicity that accompanies a split subjectivity. Valdés (1996, p. 26) problematizes the imposition of identities as 'hyphenated Americans', demonstrating that it often results in a diminished status for immigrants within a 'caste minority'. Initially, Hanan identified herself in either/or terms, opposing Jim: she would accept all-Arab only and wanted no part of an American identity. But later, perhaps due to her mother's influence, Hanan softened her stance from an all-or-nothing binary of 'Arabic, not American!' to a compromise position that preserves and privileges her Arab identity: 'half-American and lots of Arabic'.

Analysis of my intervention in this incident as the teacher reveals that my interpretation of the democratic classroom positioned Hanan further. Although I maintained eventually that Hanan could make a choice about her stated identity, Hanan's right to choose rested on an invocation of an American ideal of individual determinism:

I explained to Jim that it was just a misunderstanding; that Hanan was a part of our class and of America; and Americans believe it is

important to let people choose who they are.

Critical discourse analysis of my attempt at conciliation shows that the modifier 'just' trivialized Hanan's opposition as 'just a misunderstanding'. Further, my rhetorical organization first imposed an American identity by stating that Hanan "was a part of our class and of America", then granted back a qualified form of agency that allowed Hanan to choose an identity ... but only because America grants her the right to do so. Of course, Hanan was always/already American, but my pronouncement implied a naturalized 'American-ness' in Jim and denied it in Hanan.

As a young child, Hanan is positioned as a vulnerable innocent opposing the massive forces of institutionalized patriotic fervour. I questioned whether I should continue to allow Hanan to express freely her preference for the 'Arabic world'. Would allowing this free expression exacerbate her detachment from the classroom community? Would Hanan's voiced opposition to America draw censure from other children or adults in the larger school community? This reading of innocence invites intervention and protection even where none is solicited.

### **Confronting free (appropriately innocent) expression**

Innocence is a powerful shield, but is itself vulnerable to other discursive attacks. Ferguson (2000) suggests that racism can negate even the powerful protective effects of innocence in constructions of childhood. Her research on African-American boys in United States elementary schools shows that

adults used a racialized lens to overlook the innocence usually ascribed to children in order to construct 'bad boys' who possess older and more delinquent intentions and, therefore, are culpable and in need of punishment: 'They come to stand as if already adult, bearers of adult fates, inscribed by a racial order.' (Ferguson, 2000, p. 96). A racist climate exacerbated by racial profiling in the current 'war on terror' negates the protection of innocence and its connotation of powerlessness that is attributed ordinarily to young children and raises the spectre of retribution if Hanan is constructed as an unpatriotic child, as explained through a racialized lens rather than a young innocent, protected by 'not knowing any better'.

How freely can/should children express themselves within the confines of school? And how free is 'free expression'? Hanan's surrender of her total Arabic identity and acceptance of a self-representation as half-American and half-Arab may simply have been simulated to please her mother and her teacher. In early childhood education, we often require children to set aside authentic emotional responses and supplant these with watered-down simulations of approved responses. Other examples of the simulation and inauthenticity of emotion can be seen in early childhood educational settings that have rules such as "We don't use mean words here", or "You are not allowed to tell someone 'I won't be your friend'" (Paley, 1992), or "You can come out of the time-out corner when you are ready to apologize" (Tobin, 1995b, p. 231).

At the same time, Tobin warns against overzealous encouragement of free expression: 'Post-modern deconstructions

of the inauthenticity of daycare centres run the risk of repeating modernism's romantic fallacy. (i.e.) If adults would only get out of the way and not impose rules on discourse, children's authentic voices will come through.' (Tobin, 1995a, p. 256). Tobin maintains that children learn in early childhood classrooms to distinguish between self-presentation and self-disclosure, that is, children learn not what to share but what to leave out, to censor content that is not acceptable at school. They also learn conventions of social resistance within the boundaries in the classroom. Preschoolers and kindergartners know how to invoke class rules strategically and how to employ classroom structures to access power (Jordan, Cowan & Roberts, 1995).

How children express themselves is as socially shaping as the content of their messages. The body of research on cultural differences in spoken and written expression (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1983; Miller, 1982; Wells, 1986) shows that classroom discourse privileges the already-privileged white middle-class view by naturalizing its more indirect cultural style of self-expression. For example, children talk about affect in action terms but middle-class parents and teachers temper the raw emotionality of children's messages by rephrasing them, substituting emotion-words ('I felt sad'), I-statements and meta-discourse about feelings (Tobin, 1995a). Hanan's direct style of expressing her anger made her look irrational to her peers, who were more familiar with the indirect style of tightly controlled rationality that typified conventional school structures such as our class meetings. Even in the playground, her tearful outbursts of pain and rage drew immediate attention and remedies for controlling violent feelings.

Adults reacted with conflict mediation that mandated compromise - 'Say you're sorry. Now go back and play' - and that required Hanan and an opponent to state parroted phrases of compliance - 'I do not like it but I will accept it' - in order to simulate a school-acceptable emotional state.

In class meetings, the expectation that all children should speak and speak freely combined with the socially organizing effect of community circle to further isolate Hanan, as children initiated and gelled social alliances through interaction within the discussion. Interactional aspects of language in group discussions reflect and solidify personal social connections, as children's turns affirm or reject particular members and index distant, more powerful speakers and discourses (Orellana, 1996). Popular members within peer culture take more turns and create majority views as their positions are taken up more often than those of less popular members (Wohlwend, 2005). Following our class meetings, the performances of overt cooperation by the children ended at the classroom door, transforming into outright exclusion in the hallways and in the playground. Although children would mouth compromise and tolerance in the classroom, class-created rules mandating inclusion lost their authority in school spaces outside the teacher's direct surveillance as children reverted to established patterns of play.

### Transforming school spaces

Like many early childhood teachers and researchers, I believed that I should work to create a welcoming and accepting classroom atmosphere for all children. Hanan's case prompts the question:

'What do we do about children who do not want to trade their identities for acceptance?' Although sacrificing identity is not an overt goal of education, the covert effects in enforcing conformity were made visible by Hanan's and Jim's argument. Here, the belief that children act upon their environment and upon each other as interactive agents created a school space where Hanan's identity could be expressed and also called into question.

This space allowed children to investigate ideas about identity that are emerging, fluid and dynamic (Martinez-Roldan & Malave, 2004). Many of Hanan's notions of her Arabic heritage were partial understandings based upon her prior knowledge. Her love and knowledge of the Arabic world came from her family, mosque and Saturday school experiences. Although her parents were Palestinian immigrants, she identified with another country - 'my Jordan' - that she had visited during a family summer vacation. She spoke and wrote frequently about activities at Saturday school or upcoming religious events, replacing school nationalism with her own passion for her religion and culture. The provision of a space within the classroom for free expression allowed Hanan and other children to grapple with issues of identity and for Hanan to air her grievances against mainstream messages of patriotism and whiteness.

However, I missed the opportunity that Hanan had opened for discursive transformation by not supporting her fully against messages of conformity and community. As a student in a school that served predominantly European-American families in flag-flying suburban neighbourhoods, Hanan had few

opportunities to see her ethnic identity as valued. Despite the school district's avowed appreciation for multicultural diversity, a colour-blind heuristic worked against recognition and acknowledgment of ethnic difference and, in this way, ignored Hanan's ethnic identity at school. In sharp contrast, the 'Arabic school' that Hanan loved to attend each Saturday provided ethnic validation in addition to instruction in Islamic religious study and in Arabic language and literacy.

The ideal of community in the democratic classroom, when layered with a nationalistic institutional agenda, operates as a mandate for conformity, enforcing a sameness in expectations of expression and equating a monocultural, homogenized America with an authorized patriotism. In our class, the school culture, peer culture and classroom culture worked together to marginalize Hanan's ethnic identity, as these laminated spaces amplified each other and intensified the inculcation of a mainstream identity and suppression of ethnic culture and individual agency. The paradox of suppressive effects of supposedly agentic practices, 'illustrates how power may be reconfigured rather than equalized, despite efforts to democratize classroom relations. It forces us to recognize the complexity of enacting truly "liberatory" practices.' (Orellana, 1996, p. 361). To create transformative spaces, teachers need to do more than mediate disputes or provide a seemingly neutral space for free expression, a space that is usurped easily by children to position each other for their immediate social purposes in ways that reproduce societal inequalities. Critical awareness of the political nature of discourses and their pervasive effects would help teachers support children, particularly children who

face obstacles in accessing power in the classroom or in society at large, manage the multiple identities and subject positions that they encounter in successfully navigating everyday life in schools.

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- (The children's names are pseudonyms).
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- <sup>1</sup> Additional theories that would yield further discourses at play cannot be addressed adequately within the space of this article but could further expand a view of Hanan's identity: postcolonial theory could address the exoticization of Hanan and the domination of nationalistic discourse that rendered an Arab ethnic identity intolerable within the classroom. A feminist lens could explain how gender constructs Hanan's subjectivity at home and at school. Critical race theory might illuminate the subtle marginalization processes that constructed Hanan as ethnic enemy; and Marxist theory could shed light on the material effects that Arab immigrants endure in post 9/11 America.
- <sup>2</sup> As identified by their parents, according to ethnic and racial categories on school registration forms.
- <sup>3</sup> Hanan's mother migrated to America as a young child and is bilingual and biliterate. When I talked with her following the incident, she seemed puzzled by Hanan's rejection of a blended Arab-American identity. During other conversations with Hanan's mother, I found that Hanan's parents want her to do well in school and discouraged this resistance, expressing the belief that following the rules at school is necessary for success as a student. Her mother finds Hanan headstrong and

worries about her 'always trying to have things her own.'

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