

Chapter to appear in: Christensen, P. and James, A. (eds.) (2008)
Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices, Second Edition,
London: Routledge.

RACE, GENDER AND CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Paul Connolly

Introduction

This chapter focuses on some of the ways in which race and gender can impact upon research with young children. It provides a critically reflexive account of a previous ethnographic study I conducted in a multi-ethnic, inner-city primary school in England that examined the peer cultures of 5-6 year old children and the place of race and gender within these (see Connolly 1998). The arguments presented in this chapter are built upon three core premises. While each of these premises is well recognized and accepted, it will be shown in this chapter that, when they are drawn together, they offer a new and important way of understanding the power dynamics that underpin research with young children.

The first premise is that there is nothing natural nor inevitable about the ways in which race, gender and childhood manifest themselves in young children's lives. All three of these social dimensions can be said to be socially constructed in that the particular nature and forms that each takes is context-specific and the product of particular times and places. There is thus no universal form that either race, gender or childhood takes but rather they tend to vary as they reflect the particular social, political and economic forces that are at play within

any specific context. This is an approach captured well in relation to race and gender in terms of notions such as 'racial formations' (Omi and Winant 1994) and 'gender projects' (Connell 1995) and is also clearly an approach that underpins the diverse range of work within the sociology of childhood (James *et al.* 1998; Mayall 2002; Corsaro 2004; Jenks 2005).

Within this, poststructural perspectives have been important in developing our understanding of the non-essential and context-specific nature of discourses on race, gender and childhood and how they tend to construct particular subject positions and binary opposites – such as 'black'/'white', 'boys'/'girls' or 'adult'/'child' – that locate individuals in particular relations of power to one another (MacNaughton 2005; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). By definition, these subject positions are therefore highly contested as individuals and groups struggle to re-negotiate these identities in order either to challenge, maintain or to reinforce the relations and structures of power they are located within. As such, identities forged around race, gender and childhood are also not universal nor fixed but are forever changing and evolving as they reflect the way in which power relations are reconfigured over time and across place.

The second key premise is that children are socially competent and actively involved in the negotiation of their social worlds (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998). This is a particularly important assumption when conducting research with young children given the continued influence of traditional developmental models of childhood with their emphasis on children progressing through a fixed number of universal and invariant stages (Burman 1994; Morss 1996). Such models tend to locate 5-6 year old children, for example, within Piaget's (1977) 'pre-operational stage' that constructs them as socially incompetent and thus lacking the basic skills to: appreciate the perspectives of others (egocentrism); look beyond the immediate to see the wider picture

(centration); and think logically and rationally (lacking an appreciation of reversibility and conservation). It is not surprising that researchers that have this as their starting point would not only be working with a particular model of childhood but would also be led to see the children of this age as being passively socialized into the pre-existing racial and gender identities that have been set for them. In contrast, accepting young children's social competence and agency offers a very different way of understanding the impact of race and gender in their lives; one that focuses on the active role that the children themselves play in appropriating, re-working and reproducing particular racial and gender identities within the specific contexts that they find themselves (Skelton 2001; Connolly 1998, 2004; MacNaughton 2000, 2005; Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001).

The third and final core premise is that it is impossible to divorce the researcher from the research process itself, as if the latter can be undertaken in a clinical and objective manner. Rather, the research process is inevitably a product of the relationships forged between the researcher and the research participants and will therefore ultimately reflect the decisions made and approaches taken by the researcher as well as the particular responses adopted by the participants to these. Essentially, this final premise can be seen as little more than a recognition of the need for researchers to be critically reflexive – in other words recognizing the role they have played in informing and shaping the research process and thus the data and findings that result (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Brewer 2000). It is something that is captured well by Bourdieu (1990) when he argues for the need for researchers to take 'two steps back' from the research process; the first step representing the traditional one taken by researchers in attempting to gain an overall impression of what is going on and the second representing the researcher stepping back from themselves in order to understand how they are as much a part of and contribute to the unfolding social milieu as everyone else.

Clearly, none of these three premises is new nor original and certainly none should come as a surprise to readers of a book such as this one. However, it is when these three assumptions are combined and applied to research with young children that they raise important issues and challenges. In this sense, bringing these three premises together requires researchers to acknowledge and reflect upon the power relations and struggles that are inherent in the research process between themselves and the young children. As Christensen (2004: 175) has argued: '[i]n the process of research, power moves between different actors and different social positions, it is produced and negotiated in the social interactions of child to adult, child to child and adult to adult in the local settings of the research' (see also Robinson and Kellett, 2004). Not only does this require a recognition of the active role that young children can play in resisting and challenging the relationships created between themselves and the (adult) researcher, but also an understanding of how this can be played out around the subject positions created through wider discourses on race, gender and childhood.

It is this sense of research with young children being a dynamic, context-specific and contested enterprise that provides the focus for this present chapter. In particular, I examine how my identity as an adult white male researcher informed the particular nature and forms of relationships developed with the young children in the ethnographic study mentioned earlier and what the implications of all of this is for conducting future research in this area. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the study itself and the methodology used before then describing four critical incidents from the fieldwork that capture some of the struggles and tensions involved in the research. These incidents are then used as the basis from which to draw out a number of key points to be considered more broadly in relation to qualitative research with young children.

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the main aim of my ethnographic study was to gain an understanding of the significance of race and gender in young children's social worlds. The researched focused on 5-6 year old children in three Reception/Year One classes at East Avenue Primary School^[1], located in an English multi-ethnic, inner-city area. I spent a year and a half at the school (between January 1992 and June 1993) attending for three days per week on average and following the classes around the school and observing the children in a variety of settings. Alongside this I facilitated a large number of group discussions with the children from the three sample classes (73 in total). These took place in a separate room in the school and would generally include three children. One child would be chosen from the class and asked to nominate two others to come with her or him for an interview. This usually ensured that the children were 'friends' with one another and thus had already developed a certain rapport among themselves.

During the discussions I would usually sit around a table with the children and ask them to continue working on whatever they had brought with them from their class (usually drawing and colouring). Once they had started their work I would facilitate a discussion among the children by asking them very general questions such as: 'What were you doing in the playground today?' or 'What do you like to do when they you are at home?' This was usually enough for the conversation to begin to take on a logic of its own as the children would engage in discussions among themselves. This approach is similar to what Christensen (2004) has advocated elsewhere in relation to working with and respecting children's 'cultures of communication' which gives children the space to raise whatever themes and issues they wished to discuss but also to discuss it in their own ways. Moreover, and as Mayall (this volume) has also found,

informal conversations like these provide important insights into children's knowledge and experiences.

My main interest was in the ways that the children appropriated and reproduced discourses on race within their social worlds. Because I wanted to understand where and when racism became significant in their lives, I never introduced the issue of race myself but allowed the children to raise the issue 'naturally' during their conversations. My only other involvement in the children's discussions took place when they did choose to raise and discuss issues of race and/or make racist statements. In not wishing to be seen to condone such ideas and behaviour, I would purposely ask the child(ren) to explain what they had said and would give the clear impression that I did not agree with them by asking them to justify what they had said and also asking questions such as: 'Do you think that is a nice thing to say?' or 'How would you feel if someone called you a name like that?' From an ethical point of view, alongside ensuring that the children were not left assuming that I condoned their views, the use of such questions was also important in encouraging the children to reflect upon the consequences of their attitudes and behaviour and thus to begin challenging these.

A more detailed discussion of some of the particular methodological and ethical issues associated with this approach are discussed in detail elsewhere (see Connolly 1996, 1997). For the purposes of this present chapter, the key point to draw out regarding this use of largely unstructured group discussions with the children is the fact that it reflected an attempt to at least partly redress the imbalance of power between myself as an adult and the young children (see also Morrow and Richards, 1996; Christensen, 2004; Mayall, this volume). By participating with their friends and also being given the space to raise whatever concerns they wished to, such an approach certainly helped to give many of the children greater confidence. The relative freedom

they were given in the discussions also provided the basis upon which a certain amount of trust and rapport developed between myself and the children. As one of the incidents to be discussed below will show, many of the children came to enjoy and look forward to the interviews.

Moreover, and of relevance to the present chapter, adopting this approach meant that I found myself in a contradictory position in relation to the children (see also Mandell, 1991; Christensen, 2004; Mayall, this volume). On the one hand I was an adult who, simply because of my position, was expected to adopt a 'teacher' role while in the more formal spaces of the school and classroom. Among other things, this role required me to monitor the children's behaviour and to intervene in situations where children were deemed to be behaving inappropriately within the context of school (i.e. throwing objects or disrupting the work of other children in class; running or shouting in the school corridors; and/or swearing or fighting while on the playground). However, and on the other hand, I was also someone they could confide in, to a certain extent, within specific contexts (such as the interviews and in more private conversations in the corridors and playground). As such, and within these specific contexts, the children were able to engage in particular forms of behaviour that I would otherwise have had to censure in my 'teacher role' if it occurred elsewhere. This included the children being able to swear and, in the context of the interviews, 'mess about' and not have to continue with their school work. Perhaps most importantly it also included the children having the space to introduce and talk about 'adult' topics that would normally be considered to be taboo in the presence of teachers and/or in the more public and formal spaces within school. It was partly because of this contradictory role that I adopted in school that the children were able to test and challenge the adult/child boundaries that were in place and, as will now be shown in the following section, it was from within such a context that the children also introduced discourses on race and gender.

Critical incidents

To give some sense of the type of dynamics involved in the research process as explained above, four critical incidents are reported below taken either from transcripts made of the group discussions or from my field notes. Following Tripp's (1993) use of the term, I refer to these as 'critical incidents' not because of the intrinsic nature of the incidents *per se* but because they provided a vantage point from which I was able to recognize and understand some of the underlying dynamics evident in my relationships with the children. This is certainly the case in terms of the four incidents to be recounted below. On the one hand they were actually notable in their own right, given the unexpected nature of the racialised and sexualised discourses that the children introduced. In this sense they demanded some form of explanation. However, and on the other hand, what made them *critical* incidents was the fact that the search for an explanation led to the realisation that these incidents were indicative of more underlying relationships that existed between the children and myself as the researcher. The nature of these relationships and the social dynamics which informed them will be drawn out and discussed in the following section. For now each incident will simply be reported in turn.

Incident one

The following transcript^[2] is taken from an interview with three white six-year-old girls. Part-way through the interview and without prompting, Nicky began to 'complain' about the fact that all the boys keep saying that they 'go out' with her (i.e. that they are boyfriend/girlfriend):

Nicky: Everyone keeps saying they go out with me!

PC: Do they?

Nicky: Yeah
PC: Who says that?
Nicky: Don't know their names, but they know my name
PC: Why do they keep saying that, do you think?
Nicky: Don't know
PC: Do they just say it about you or do they say it about anybody else?
Nicky: About me!
PC: Jamie and Daniel from Mrs Scott's class - they play with you a bit, don't they?
Nicky: Yeah, he says he goes out with me
PC: Which one?
Nicky: Daniel
PC: There's also somebody from Mr Wallace's?
Nicky: No, that's Emma's boyfriend [...] Emma goes out with James and Michael [*both black*] ... I hate black boys!
PC: You hate black boys?
Nicky: Yeah
PC: Which black boys do you hate?
Nicky: Kylie said to me that Michael and Devan go out with her!
Kylie: No, James goes out with me! [...]
PC: But why do you hate black boys, Nicky?
Kylie: Because they're always around us, ain't they, Nicky?
Nicky: Yeah! ... What? Kissing?
Kylie: [*laughs*] No, chasing!
Nicky: Well, Daniel's always chasing me!
PC: But Daniel's white, isn't he?
Nicky: Yeah
PC: So it's not always black boys that are around you, is it?
Kylie: Yeah
Nicky: No!

Incident two

This second incident took place during a discussion involving three six-year-old boys. Their friend, Jordan, was not at school on that day and the transcript begins with me asking them if they knew where he was:

PC: Where's Jordan today?

Stephen: He's at home boiling his head off!

Jamie: No! Kissing his girlfriend!

PC: Kissing his girlfriend? Who's his girlfriend?

Stephen: He's waiting at his girlfriend's house

PC: Is he? Who's?

Jamie: Yeah, waiting for her

Stephen: And when she comes in, he's hiding right, and when she comes in he's going to grab her and take her upstairs and then she's going to start screaming and he's going to kiss her ... and sex her!

PC: And sex her? And why's she going to be screaming?

Stephen: Because she hates it!

PC: Because she hates it?

Stephen: Yeah!

PC: So if she hates it why does he do it?

Stephen: I don't know!

Jamie: Because he loves her!

Stephen: He'll sing 'I want to sex you up!'

Incident three

This third incident arose in a discussion between three other boys who formed a close friendship group. Two of the boys (Clive and Mark) were white and the third (Amit) was South Asian:

Clive: I don't like Pakis!
Amit: You do like Pakis, stupid!
Clive: No, I don't - I only like you!
PC: Why don't you like them?
Mark: 'Cos they speak Gujerati!
[...]
PC: Clive, why don't you like them?
Mark: Because they smell horrible.
Amit: 'Cos they smell like a clock!
Clive: Yeah, like Amit does!
PC: You like Amit, don't you Clive?
Clive: Yeah.
PC: You like Amit, and yet Amit's an Asian as well, isn't he?
Clive: Yeah.
PC: So, you said you don't like them - why not?
Clive: 'Cos he ain't a proper Paki!
PC: Why isn't he a proper one?
Clive: Because he doesn't smell right!

Incident four

This final incident occurred in the classroom where I was sat with a group of five- and six-year-old children helping them with their work. It began with Daniel who was excited and rushed over to the table:

Daniel: Miss! Miss! Miss! [*referring to PC*] me and Annette we broke off Stephanie's peg! [*in the cloakroom*]. When we're upstairs [*i.e. for an interview*] we'll tell you!
PC: What peg?
Daniel: Annette saw it wobbling and Annette broke it off!
[*Annette walks over to the table and remains*

standing]. Annette, didn't me and you break off that
peg?

Annette: [*nods and smiles before calmly putting her work on
the table*]

Jamie: And me!

Annette: [*Shakes head*]

Jamie: Yeah! I did didn't I Daniel?

Daniel: [*no response*]

Jamie: Come and sit here Annette [*pulling back the chair
next to him for her to sit on*]

Annette: [*walks over and sits next to Jamie*]

Daniel: [*to Jamie and Annette*] Are you two going to have sex?
[...] He pinches your bum!

PC: Who pinches your bum?

Daniel: Jamie!

PC: You've just said they're going to have sex - who do
you mean?

Daniel: Yeah them two are going to have sex! [*pointing to
Jamie and Annette*]

Jamie: No! Them two! [*pointing to Annette and another boy
sat at the table*]

Daniel: No! Her and him [*pointing to Annette and then PC*] are
going to have sex!

Annette: Nnoooo!

Taking two steps back

The incidents recounted above were in no sense representative of the relationships I had developed with the children. While discussions about girlfriends and boyfriends were quite popular among many of the children (Renold 2005), discussions that directly implicated me and/or were explicitly racialised or sexualised were relatively rare. Rather, it is clear that these incidents were at least partly the

products of my presence and involvement in the events that were taking place. What the children chose to say and do, and in particular the way they drew upon discourses on race and gender within this, would certainly suggest that they were partly directed towards me, as an adult white male.

In attempting to understand the underlying motivations and social dynamics that gave rise to these incidents, it is important to place them within the overall framework introduced at the beginning of this chapter. In this sense I want to suggest that these incidents may at least partly reflect the social competence and agency of these children and, in particular, their attempts to draw upon discourses on race and gender to resist and challenge their subject positioning as children.

To understand this argument it is important to begin with a recognition that the primary school environment is probably one where the discursive positioning of adults and children is most explicit and pervasive. The very organisation and structure of the school constructs what it means to be an adult/teacher and a child/pupil and marks out the boundaries of what is and what is not regarded as acceptable behaviour. The power and authority of the teacher is inscribed in all aspects of school life from the organisation of the school day (Pollard 1985) right down to the organisation of desks and tables in classrooms (Giddens 1985). Moreover, it is also evident in the fact that, while there are clearly marked out areas where children can and cannot go within the school (i.e. the staff room, anywhere in the school building at playtimes and so on), adults/teachers are 'allowed' to intrude in all and every aspect of the children's social spaces. All of these social structures therefore underline the authority of teachers/adults and create the climate within which children are expected simply to conform and be obedient.

Given such an environment it is not surprising to find that children are actively involved in attempting to challenge and subvert these boundaries. From my own fieldwork observations such activity took on many forms and was testament to the ingenuity and social competence of the children. For example, the children would attempt to create space for themselves away from the teacher's gaze in more secluded parts of the playground or, in class time, at the back of the classroom and/or by escaping to the toilet. In addition, the children would also engage in a number of different practices aimed at subverting the teacher's authority either directly, through simple defiance, or more commonly and routinely indirectly through coughing, making other noises and/or completing tasks set at a slower rate than was expected of them (see Connolly 1998).

These discursive positions of adult and child and the routine struggles that took place over the boundaries that marked them out provides one of the principal contexts for understanding the children's behaviour in the four incidents recounted above. As already stated, I adopted a rather contradictory position in relation to the children. While I was an adult and would be forced to adopt the authority of the teacher in more public and formal settings within the school, I had also purposely created particular spaces within which the children were not subject to the same degree of authority and control. These spaces were most commonly found in the group discussions with the children but were also, as evident in incidents three and four above, also to be found in the more private and informal interactions between the children and I in other settings within the school. Against the background of the general struggles that the children engaged in to subvert the authority that adults had over them within the school, this effective 'blurring' of boundaries in relation to my own position quite possibly provided the context within which some of the children would attempt to play upon and capitalise from the contradictions evident in my relationship with them (see also Christensen, 2004).

The introduction of discourses on race and gender in their interactions with me can therefore possibly be seen as partly representing a more fundamental struggle that the children were engaged in: the aim of challenging my authority over them as an adult. In this sense, the children's introduction of explicitly adult ways of thinking and knowing could possibly be seen as a particularly effective challenge to the dominant discourses of what it means to be a child. A significant number of the interviews I conducted with the children, for example, included incidents where the children would swear, curse and/or be racist (see Connolly 1998). One way of understanding the tendency for the children to do this in my presence is that the children may have associated such behaviour with being an adult. It thus arguably reflected, at least in part, an attempt to challenge and re-negotiate their discursive position as children.

However, it is the introduction of specifically sexualised themes – as evident to varying degrees across all four incidents – that is arguably one of the most significant ways of attempting to undermine the boundaries that mark out the adult/child relationship. This is something that Walkerdine (1981) classically drew attention to over 25 years ago when she recounted an incident in which boys of nursery age were being disciplined by a female teacher. In their attempt to subvert her authority, they introduced sexualised discourses which attempted to shift the dominant relationship from one of adult/child to male/female and, consequently, re-position the female teacher into a more subservient role as an object of the boys' talk. Indeed, such attempts to appropriate and evoke differing discourses in attempts to gain power and status can be seen in Incident Four above. In this case, Annette was clearly afforded a significant degree of status among the boys for her behaviour. However, when she appeared to snub Daniel by sitting next to Jamie, Daniel attempted to re-position

Annette within a gendered and sexualised discourse within which she was forced to assume a more subservient identity.

Clearly, the fact that I was an adult *male* meant that the introduction of such discourses on boyfriends/girlfriends, sex and violence as recounted in some of the incidents above would not have had the effect of re-positioning me in the same way as it did either for the female teacher in the account offered by Walkerdine (1981) or, to a differing extent, for Annette. However, it certainly had the potential to undermine the authority I had over the children as an adult. By engaging in the type of violent, misogynist discourse as evident in Incident Two, for example, the boys were challenging their subject position as children by encouraging me to recognise their 'adult' knowledge and status. Similarly, the suggestion that I might 'have sex' with Annette, as detailed in Incident Four, can be seen as another attempt to subvert the generational differences that exist and re-position me within the children's own sub-culture (albeit momentarily).

Beyond the possible use of explicitly racialised and sexualized discourses as a tactic to subvert adult authority, it would also seem from the four incidents recounted above that the knowledge and behaviour displayed by the children were also valued by them. It was certainly evident from my wider ethnographic study that the successful acquisition and reproduction of adult ways of being brought with it a significant degree of status among some of the children (Connolly 1998). The more that a child could successfully engage me as an adult, the more they could therefore successfully demonstrate their own adult competence to me and their peers. The key point arising from this is that some of the children's behaviour may well have represented what they felt I would positively value and respond to as a white male. As already touched upon above, for example, the boys in Incident Two could possibly be seen as

attempting to undermine the boundaries between myself and them by engaging in a discourse that they felt would impress and/or appeal to me as an adult *male*. Similarly in relation to Incident One, Nicky and Kylie's trading of knowledge and experiences of boyfriends, and also the explicitly racialised manner in which this was done, could also be seen as an attempt to gain status among themselves and in front of me by demonstrating 'adult' competences. Incident Three can also be read, at least in part, as the white boys attempting to appeal to me as a *white* male through their claims that they do not like 'Pakis'. Indeed this particular incident is also interesting in the way it illustrates the fluid and contested nature of children's social identities. In a similar vein to the way in which Annette was re-defined from being 'one of the boys' to being a girl, it can be seen here how Clive and Mark have attempted to de-signify Amit's identity as a South Asian and to claim him as white.

Implications for the interpretation of data

It has been argued that the four incidents recounted above can at least in part be understood in terms of the active role that young children are playing in resisting and attempting to subvert the existing discursive positions of 'adult' and 'child'. It is certainly clear that the data derived from these four incidents is at least partially a product of my own presence and influence as an adult white male. It would clearly be disingenuous to claim that the incidents recounted above, or the accounts of the children's lives offered in my research more generally, were 'true' and 'genuine' representations of the children's social worlds. The inevitable question that arises, therefore, is how can we interpret and analyse the data given these potential influences?

However, before discussing what claims we can reasonably make from the data, it is important to assess the status of the data. In particular,

there will undoubtedly be some who would argue that my influence on the children's talk and behaviour has clearly rendered the data unreliable and/or invalid. In this sense it would presumably be argued that the data presented offer a rather distorted and unrepresentative account of the children's lives and behaviour. However, such an argument is based upon the premise that there is a 'true' and 'accurate' representation to be identified and recounted. The problem with this is that there is no unitary, authentic account of children's lives to be found, only a diverse range of accounts (see Connolly 1997). As soon as we acknowledge the social competence of children then we have also to accept that they will approach and respond to particular social settings in differing ways. How a child talks to a teacher, for example, will be different from how they talk to their parent, which will also be different to how they talk to their friends. It is therefore meaningless to attempt to identify which of these represents that child's 'true' and 'authentic' voice. In a sense they are all equally authentic. Rather, the task is to understand the child's behaviour in the specific context within which it takes place (i.e. in front of a teacher, parent or friend).

The key argument from the foregoing discussion is that all data need to be fully contextualised. Ultimately, this means accepting that interviews and other forms of interactions with the children that researchers engage in also represent particular contexts that need to be taken into account (see also Christensen, 2004). Once we abandon the fruitless search for the true and authentic account of children's lives, we can dispense with the equally meaningless concern with avoiding the 'contamination' of data and, instead, begin understanding the interview or discussion as a particular social context that can help to provide additional insights into particular aspects of the children's lives (see Mayall, this volume).

With this in mind there are at least two key insights that can be reasonably drawn from the data illustrated in the four incidents recounted above. First, the data clearly demonstrate the social competence of these children and offers some insight into their levels of knowledge concerning gender, sexuality and race. This, in itself, is an important point that needs to be established within the broader context where dominant discourses on childhood continue to deny that issues of race and sexuality are even salient feature of young children's lives. Moreover, what the data suggest is that children of this age are actively engaging with and exploring knowledge and attitudes regarding race, gender and sexuality. While it clearly cannot be concluded that all, or even the majority of children, are doing this to the extent evident in the incidents above, what they do demonstrate is that children of this age are at least *capable* of doing so. More research along these lines with a diverse range of children in differing situations and contexts would certainly help to inform the development of diversity programmes that could be introduced in the early years and that are sensitive to and engage with the realities of children's lives.

Second, the data offer some insight into the significance of this knowledge in the children's social worlds. While no claims can be made regarding how prominent or representative such discussions on race, sex and relationships were among the children, the above incidents do suggest that knowledge of such matters was valued and struggled over by these children. Within the context of the broader findings of the research study, it was clear that being and/or behaving like an adult provided one particular aspiration for some of the children (Connolly 1998). Arguably, the four incidents outlined above offer some indication of how the children have come to construct what it means to be an adult by drawing upon discourses on race and gender.

Conclusions

This chapter began by outlining three key premises regarding: the socially constructed nature of race, gender and childhood; the social competence and agency of young children; and the need for researchers to be critically reflexive. While all three of these premises are now largely recognized and accepted within social science research, it was argued that they do raise new and important issues when drawn together and applied to research with young children. In particular, and as illustrated through the four critical incidents that have been recounted above, they demand that researchers develop a much more critical appreciation of the power relations inherent within the research process; not only between the adult researcher and the children but also between the children themselves. In conclusion there are three key issues worth drawing out from this.

The first is the active role that young children can play in challenging and re-negotiating their subject positions; not just as 'children' but also in relation to their gender and racial identities. This can be seen, for example, in the white boys' claims that their Asian friend, Amit, is not 'a proper Paki' (Incident Three). It is also evident in Annette's fluid gender identity (Incident Four) where she was accepted as 'one of the lads' for the most part but was always susceptible to being repositioned as a girl. As stressed at the beginning of this chapter, such examples remind us that there is nothing natural nor inevitable about the ways in which gender and race impact upon children's lives. Rather, and as shown, children play an active role in determining the particular nature and forms that gender and race take in their lives. It is in recognition of this that researchers therefore need to avoid approaching their fieldwork with preconceived notions of how significant gender and race will be in children's lives. Rather, there is a need to begin with an acceptance that discourses on gender and race are context-specific and that they can only be understood within

the context of particular sets of social relations that the children are actively involved.

The second key issue to draw out is the need to understand how my position as an adult white male is likely to have played a role in influencing what the children chose to say and do in my presence. At one level, the introduction of explicitly sexualized and racialised discourses can be seen at least in part as a response to my identity as white and male. For example, it is unlikely that the boys in Incident Two would have introduced such violent and misogynist themes had I been a woman. It is certainly the case that my identity as a male was explicitly recognized in Incident Four when one of the boys claimed that Annette and I were 'going to have sex'. It would seem, therefore, that the particular discourses on gender that the children decided to introduce in conversations were at times influenced by my presence as a male. In a similar vein, it is difficult to believe that the children would have made so many racist comments during the many conversations they had with me during the course of the fieldwork if I had been black or Asian instead of white. It is in this sense, therefore, that there is always the possibility that a researcher's gender and race are likely to have some impact upon their relationships with the children and thus the particular ways in which the children choose to behave in their presence.

At another level, my position as an adult is also likely to have had some influence on the children's behaviour in my presence. While the particular nature of the racialised and sexualized discourses that the children chose to introduce in conversations with me may have partly been influenced by my identity as a white male, the fact that they chose to introduce such explicitly adult knowledge at all is at least in part likely to reflect their recognition of my position as an adult. In this sense, and as argued above, the introduction of adult themes in conversations is a particularly effective way of undermining the

dominant discursive positions of 'adult' and 'child' that tended to structure our relationships. Within this it is impossible in retrospect to determine whether any specific incident was motivated by a desire explicitly to challenge and undermine my authority or simply reflected the fact that the children had come to trust me and to accept me as a confidant. Unfortunately, I only fully became aware of the potential influence that I could have had on the children long after the fieldwork had finished and have therefore not had the opportunity to explore the motivations underlying the children's conversations any further.

However, and as explained earlier, some of the children were routinely observed during my fieldwork to engage in activities aimed at avoiding and/or subverting the authority and control that adults exerted over them in school. Some of these activities were carefully planned and fairly sophisticated in nature. Given this I would argue that it is therefore reasonable to conclude that at least some of the incidents involving children introducing such explicitly adult knowledge into conversations in my presence will have been similarly motivated by an explicit attempt to undermine their positioning as children; either by directly challenging the authority associated with my position as an adult or by attempting to appeal to me as a white male and thus move beyond the discursive boundaries that marked out our respective subject positions as adult and child. Perhaps the key point to draw out from the incidents recounted in this chapter is simply that adult researchers need to be aware of the possibility that what children say and do in their presence can sometimes reflect their attempts to challenge and undermine the authority and control that the researcher exerts over them as an adult.

The third and final issue raised by the recognition that research with young children is underpinned by power relations and struggles is that associated with how the data derived from research with the children can be interpreted. One of the main conclusions to arise from

the arguments made in this chapter is that it is a fruitless task for ethnographic researchers to attempt to seek the authentic voices of young children. Rather, the agency of young children requires us to recognize that there are only multiple voices that reflect the very different contexts and sets of relations that young children find themselves in. In this sense the research process simply creates one more context within which young children are left to negotiate their attitudes and identities.

NOTES

- [1] Pseudonyms are used for the local area, the school and the teachers and children to maintain their anonymity.
- [2] Key to transcripts:
- / Indicates interruption in speech
 - [...] Extracts edited out of transcript to aide clarity
 - ... A natural pause in the conversation
 - [*italics*] Descriptive text added to indicate the actions and behaviour of the children and/or to clarify the nature of the discussion

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