Becoming Racially Literate about Data and Data Literate about Race
A Case of Data Visualizations in the Classroom as a Site of Racial-Ideological Micro-Contestations

Guest Lecture by
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Abstract: In this talk, I nuance and complicate the push for data literacy in STEM reform efforts. I explore a curricular reform project that integrated explicit attention to “data science” in an introductory computer science course. While the study of data in this unit emphasized viewing and approaching data in context, neither the teacher nor the students were supported in negotiating the racialized context of data that organically arose in classroom discussions. Through an in-depth analysis of a classroom interaction, I explore how localized struggles over the meaning of race emerged when data visualizations from the public media - representations of complex sets of data, which facilitate their communication and exploration - were incorporated into a STEM learning environment. Specifically, I analyze the contestations over the meaning of race that unfolded during a classroom discussion of a data visualization that portrayed Netflix movie rental patterns. Based on these findings, I argue that access to learning about data visualization, without a deep interrogation of race and power, can be counterproductive and that efforts to develop data literacy require the concomitant development of racial literacy.

Thomas Philip’s research is focused on the relationship between ideology, particularly racial ideology, and the work of teachers. He explores how teachers make sense of the purpose and nature of their work in a society where competing ideologies emerge from, reproduce, and challenge systems of power. He also studies how the larger ideological context influences teaching and learning and how teachers might engage in reshaping the ideologies that partially enable and constrain their work. This line of research explores how commonly invoked discourses in policy, research, and practice, particularly about the use of new digital technologies and cutting-edge STEM content, impact the substance and manner of teaching in ways that often narrow the democratic purpose of schooling. Dr. Philip received his Ph.D. in Cognition and Development in 2007 and his BA in Electrical Engineering & Computer Science in 1998, both from UC Berkeley.