Facilitating Peer Discourse to Support Third Graders' Comprehension of the News

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how one third-grade teacher facilitated daily peer-led discussions around articles from a local newspaper. Two students were assigned to select and summarize an article, then lead a whole-class discussion with the teacher's help. The teacher differentially scaffolded engagement with newspaper articles, adaptively responding to different pairs of student-reporters as he corrected comprehension failures and guided summarization attempts. The teacher played two main roles during the whole-class discussions: facilitating construction of meaning by acting as an intermediary between students and the complex texts, and supporting students' self-management of conversation by acting as a discussion moderator. Illustrative examples are provided and implications for practice are discussed.

Keywords: classroom interaction, classroom practice, discourse analysis, discussion, early literacy instruction, teaching, literacy instruction, informational texts, pedagogic discourse, peer collaboration

INTRODUCTION

This study explored the conversational roles that one third grade teacher played as he helped students collaboratively construct meaning around newspaper articles. The 18 students in his class began each morning knowing they would play either the role of reporter or audience member in the discussion that would shortly ensue. Two students, designated reporters for one week, were responsible for selecting, reading, summarizing, and preparing to present an article from a local newspaper each day. This preparation was followed by presentation of their summary and then a whole-class discussion led by the reporters with the support of their teacher.

To reflect on the affordances of this instructional activity, called In-the-News, consider the characteristics of local daily newspapers (and their corresponding web presence): dynamic texts that change daily, meant to be read on an ongoing basis as breaking stories unfold. Such news sources are local both in space and time, privileging information pertaining to places near intended readers and pertaining to current events (Jordan, in press). Much like many online informational resources, newspapers cover a plethora of topics and so require multiple search strategies to navigate their complicated structures and find information of interest to a reader (Afflerbach & Cho, 2010). Thus, newspapers and other local news sources deserve consideration as authentic classroom texts wherever teachers hold both interactions with one's local community as well as interacting with our complicated and evolving world as important goals for students.

A shared belief in the value of such goals brought the two authors of this article together to investigate how one third grade teacher's discourse moves scaffolded students' joint efforts to summarize, comprehend, and discuss newspaper articles. The first author's interest in peer interaction around complex informational texts led her to the door of the second author's classroom just as he was implementing the first year of In the News. The second author saw participation in the study presented here as an opportunity to continually improve his practice.

Within the context of a diverse literacy curriculum, the teacher purposefully designed In-the-News to address several objectives. First, he hoped that peer interaction facilitated by a student-centered structure would improve students' abilities to comprehend and summarize informational texts. When students summarize text, they can develop better understanding of complex material, increase competence at expressing their understanding, improve knowledge retention, actively construct meaning, and increase metacognitive awareness (Kintsch, Steinhart, Stahl, & LSA, 2000). However, summarization is challenging for young readers. Children's abilities to use summarization strategies effectively can change based on their familiarity with the form and content of a particular text type or the strategy (Day, 1986). Because In-the-News occurred daily, students built up conceptual knowledge of the text type. Thus, the newspaper became a familiar and safe non-fiction "playground" where students could practice summarizing.

A second goal turned on the teacher's belief that successful comprehension depends on the interaction of reader, text, and task purposes (Gill, 2008). Simply being taught comprehension strategies may not be sufficient for improving understanding of textual content. The teacher wanted students to become metacognitive, actively managing their comprehension. He encouraged students to talk together, making their thinking overt and explicit in order to develop awareness of their processes for constructing meaning from text. The reporters were held accountable for understanding the text by their responsibility to present a summary of the article to their classmates, a task that further necessitated self-evaluation of their comprehension.

The teacher's next goal involved matching this activity with real world materials and practices. Authentic classroom texts closely resemble texts that are used outside of a learning-to-read-or-write context. The teacher chose newspaper articles as a classroom textual genre because accessing news sources represents readily available and everyday texts. Thomas Jefferson wrote of newspapers in a democratic society: "[W]ere it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them" (Welling, 1997). If Jefferson was writing today, he may well have included radio, television, and online news sources, as these also engage students in critical reading of easily-accessible information about the current social world. Students in this class also read an online version of Scholastic News, a weekly age-graded news magazine. Although the teacher felt that students benefited from this reading, he did not feel that these texts enabled the timely community connections found in the daily local newspaper.

As a final goal, the teacher intended the use of these authentic materials to promote authentic practice. Authentic literacy practices match activities in which people participate in reading and writing outside of a learning context (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006/2007). In-the-News performed a genuine communicative function for the children: to share understanding and analysis of articles of mutual interest with their peers, and to consider the relevance of current events for their lives. The teacher hoped to increase students' awareness of themselves as local community members, inspire them to make connections between their city and other communities, and help them think critically about how writers portray information.

Overall, rather than a complete understanding of every article, the teacher hoped this daily activity would provide students with multiple opportunities to practice comprehending complex informational texts in a supportive environment. He saw value in facilitating what Aukerman (2008) called comprehension-as-sensemaking - children actively engaging in purposeful decision-making about what a text might mean, how it fits with their understandings of the world, and how they can use it for what they want to accomplish. In the teacher's words, "Through their willingness to struggle and keep trying, the reporters gain skill, confidence, and metacognitive awareness. I try to be clear to present their work in this way. It's okay to make mistakes or not completely understand everything in an article. Can you get the big ideas? Do you know about this topic well enough yet to present it to your peers? Can you talk to your partner or me and gain a bit more understanding? Can you connect it your own personal experiences or to what we've been learning in science? Or social studies?" These goals seem important in an era in which children are likely to encounter in their daily lives a plethora of print and digital texts that are beyond their current reading abilities.

Classroom Discussion of Informational Texts

Elementary educators and policy makers have increased their awareness of the need to expose students to a wide variety of informational texts, recognizing that text types differ considerably in their organization, features and functions, and thus present different cognitive demands for readers. For instance, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), adopted by most states in the U.S., promote an integrated model of literacy instruction that emphasizes collaborative reading and student engagement with complex informational texts in "a variety of rich, structured conversations" (CCSS Initiative, 2012). In addition, the CCSS call for an increased interdisciplinary approach to reading and the integration of reading instruction with content-area learning. Teachers are urged to increase the variety of authentic informational genres students read and the authenticity with which students use those genres. However, informational texts continue to be under-represented in primary-grade classrooms (e.g., Jeong, Gaffney, & Choi, 2010) and many unknowns remain about how teachers scaffold students' engagement with informational genres (Palmer & Stewart, 2005). There is a particular need for research on how teachers address challenges associated with reading text that is beyond students' independent reading levels. We argue that children can benefit from opportunities to grapple with complex texts when their engagement is carefully scaffolded by a thoughtful teacher (Jordan & Massad, 2010). Such support can come in the form of classroom discussion, during which the teacher can play instrumental roles.

In dialogic contexts, teacher participation may be critical to facilitate authentic student talk that leads to deeper comprehension of text (Maloch, 2002; Wolf, Crossan, & Resnick, 2005). Researchers have investigated how teachers support productive talk about texts in paired interaction (Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 2002), small-group settings (Jadallah et al., 2011), and whole-class contexts (Herrenkohl & Guerra, 1998) - all structures encouraged by the CCSS. Previously, we found that teachers and students can improvise dialogic discussions around authentic genres such as newspaper articles and foster co-construction of meaning when teachers organize learning around moderately-open re-occurring talk structures (Jordan & Santori, in press). Also, third grade partners can help each other navigate the complex textual features of newspapers and facilitate one another's comprehension by sharing intertextual connections and negotiating understandings through exploratory talk (Jordan & Massad, 2010). Here we focus on the roles one teacher played in scaffolding peer-led discussion around newspaper articles.

METHOD

Participants and Instructional Context

This third-grade class, located in a middle-class neighborhood, was home to nine boys and nine girls (15 White, 2 Hispanic, and 1 African-American). Nine students began the year reading slightly below grade level according to the district's beginning-of-year benchmark. All 18 students met the standard for reading achievement on the end-of-year state assessment, eleven were commended. Their teacher had 15 years of experience and was National Board certified.

The teacher introduced In-the-News during the first week of school. Through mini-lessons he described newspaper structures and functions. The class analyzed and summarized articles together. The teacher was forthright with students that newspapers are typically written on a sixth-grade level, which meant that they would likely encounter unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts. Recognizing that inadequate content knowledge and excessive decoding problems can present challenges as students interact with difficult texts (Neufeld, 2005), he assured students that they would work collaboratively to address these needs.

Daily, In-the-News included two phases: a reporter paired-reading and a whole-class discussion. In phase one, the majority of students engaged in independent reading or guided reading while two reporters completed four interrelated tasks. To select an article, reporters scanned headlines looking for interesting topics that they and their classmates could understand (they were instructed to avoid articles with violent or otherwise inappropriate content). Scaffolding one another's genre knowledge, they navigated the text's macro and microstructures (Jordan & Massad, 2010). After agreeing on an article, the reporters checked in for approval of their choice. At this point, the teacher questioned them to gauge whether they had adequate prior knowledge to understand the article. If they did not but the teacher surmised that they could understand the article with assistance, he provided background knowledge.

The teacher explicitly established the expectation that the reporters read aloud together, switching at paragraphs to reinforce the idea of paragraph structure. This practice also encouraged students to remain engaged; as one reporter read, the other often helped with unknown words. The teacher taught students to stop at intervals and orally summarize the section's big idea before moving

on. While reading, students highlighted information they considered main ideas or interesting details that they could share in the whole-class discussion. Reporters then filled out a summary sheet identifying main ideas and events of the article.

Of the four tasks, reporters typically spent the least amount of time explicitly reflecting on the audience, and they rarely did so without teacher prompting (Jordan & Massad, 2010). However, the students' talk often implicitly revealed their consideration of their audience, particularly when they prepared to interpret an article's maps and photos to share with the audience on the document camera. Knowing that they were responsible for helping their classmates understand the article gave the reporters an authentic purpose for reading.

In phase 2, the reporters had much responsibility in the whole-class discussion since they were the only students who had read the article. Beyond presenting their summary in a way that would make the article understandable to classmates, the reporters also led a discussion, fielding questions and comments. Audience members also had a complicated task. Interacting with the written text primarily through the reporters' words, they were charged to make sense of the summary and evaluate its completeness, ask questions and share inter-textual connections. Students improved their ability to meet these responsibilities as the year progressed. Reporters used more elaborated explanations when presenting their summaries; student comments comprised a greater percentage of talk turns and more of their turns were directed to peers (Jordan, 2010). Students made more connections to past articles and content learning. They reported reading and discussing articles with family members. We take this as evidence that they were deepening their interest and self-awareness via their community and world knowledge.

Data Collection and Analysis

As part of a larger study, the first author observed In-the-News a total of 30 times, three consecutive weeks in September, and two weeks in November, February, and May (10 weeks total). She took field notes and video recorded each In-the-News session, transcribing them later. She conducted brief interviews with the reporters and one or two audience members immediately following each session. She collected students' written summaries and the highlighted articles.

Both authors participated in data analysis using the constant-comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

and sociolinguistic analysis of classroom discourse (Mercer, 2000). To address our purpose to investigate how one third-grade teacher scaffolded comprehension and summarization of newspapers articles through his discourse moves, we concentrated on the teacher's interactions during 14 paired-reading sessions and 14 whole-class discussions selected at random from across the school year. The two authors met periodically throughout data collection. Prior to meetings, we independently read transcripts, jotting theoretical notes. Beginning each meeting with a review of our research questions ensured that our discussion was guided by them. We worked to establish shared understanding of our purpose and process and make sense of the data by comparing notes and creating preliminary coding categories. Thus, we took advantage of our different perspectives and developed intersubjectivity about our goals.

We first conducted open-coding of the reporter paired-reading sessions, looking for themes and patterns related to the teacher's discourse moves. We began by meeting to code one transcript selected at random. Together we examined every teacher comment, using contextual cues as well as our knowledge about the class, individuals in the class, and the class's history with In-the-News to guide our interpretation. We then independently coded the teacher's discourse moves in a different transcript, labeling and describing each one before meeting again to compare categories and tentatively identify themes about the teacher's participation. After establishing our initial coding scheme of the teacher's discourse moves during the reporter paired-reading sessions, both authors coded transcripts independently before meeting to compare codes, establish consensus, and refine our coding scheme. The first author then read through the uncoded transcripts of the paired-reading discussions, looking for confirming and disconfirming evidence and checking for consistency. We followed a similar process to categorize the teacher's discourse moves and identify his roles in the whole-class peer-led discussions.

RESULTS

Analysis revealed three conversational roles the teacher played in supporting peer interaction around and learning from newspaper articles. One role was associated with the reporter paired-reading sessions and two roles were enacted during the whole-class discussions. To illustrate the teacher's roles, we use here some examples in which the teacher is doing the largest amount of talking.

We wish to note that these examples are not necessarily representative of the classroom discourse. For instance, in the nine whole-class discussions observed at the end of the school year, 77% of all talk turns were made by students (Jordan, 2010).

Role 1: Differentially Scaffolding Comprehension during Paired-Reading Sessions

Checking periodically with the reporters, the teacher made brief formative assessments of their progress. Table 1 lists seven discourse moves he used in paired-reading sessions. Because the teacher sought to respond adaptively in the moment, his discourse moves depended on his evaluation of students' comprehension and strategy-use. Below, he checked for understanding through open-ended questions, letting Eric and Jacob lead with what they considered the important ideas from an article about polluted water flowing onto a local farmer's land.

Teacher:	What did you find?
Eric:	The one about Runyan Creek.
Teacher:	What does it say about Runyan Creek?

Eric:	Dirty water is being washed onto this man's property on Runyan Creek.
Teacher:	Really? Why?
Eric:	Well, they think it's because some construction people or something are dumping all the dirty stuff into the creek.

Eric and Jacob continued to exhibit accurate understanding as the teacher checked their interpretation of the text. One result of the exploratory discussion was the teacher's marking important information he deemed critical to comprehension and summarization. Quickly skimming the article, he realized that Eric and Jacob had not yet brought up an important point about responses to the water pollution. In the exchange below, he asked for further details, drew from Eric a point of confusion, and worked to deepen the reporters' existing understanding.

Teacher:	Is anyone going to do something about it?
Jacob:	They're going to try to go find the people who are doing it and talk to them and see

Table 1

Teacher Discourse Moves to Facilitate Peer-led Discussion

Phase 1: Teacher Discourse Moves in Reporter Paired-Reading Sessions
Check understanding
Provide background knowledge
Mark important information
Press for clarity, specificity, and accuracy
Reinforce decoding, comprehension, and summarization strategies
Monitor time and task completion (increasing self-regulation of task)
Offer suggestions to improve communication with audience members

Phase 2: Teacher Discourse Moves in Whole-Class Discussion	
Intermediary Role:	Moderator Role:
Facilitating construction of meaning	Supporting self-management of discussion
• Provide access to texts by providing or helping students recall prior knowledge • Promote transfer of content areas knowledge and skills by reviewing/applying/extending • Press for accuracy, specificity, completeness, and accountability to the text • Foster cognitive engagement by encouraging and modeling connections and questions • Support critical thinking through analysis/application/evaluation	• Praise students for discussion moves deemed effective and appropriate • Remind students of their roles • Prompt for change of topic to re-focus or advance discussion • Monitor logistics to free students' attention for discussing text • Refrain from participating when conversational flow is productive • Model attentive listening and responding

why they're doing it.

Teacher: (scanning article) Okay. It looks like they're going to send environmental specialists to do tests.

Jacob: Yeah, this is who they think is responsible, some Watershed Protection and Development Review Department. I don't know if that means who's responsible for stopping it or who's responsible for doing it.

Teacher: If she works for the Watershed Protection and Review Development, I would think it would be her job to stop it.

The teacher's inquiry offered Jacob an opportunity to identify a point about which he was uncertain and to receive an interpretation from a knowledgeable adult.

Once he felt the boys had an adequate understanding of the article's main ideas, the teacher offered suggestions to improve communication with audience members, saying, "If you highlight things, try to avoid just reading those word for word. Talk to the group like you just talked to me."

Eric and Jacob showed in their brief discussion with the teacher that they had a good basic grasp of the article. However, this was often not the case. Because students were interacting with a complex text, misunderstandings occurred due to unknown vocabulary and inaccurate conclusions were drawn due to faulty logic or lack of prior knowledge. When misunderstandings arose, the teacher provided background knowledge, pressed for clarity by asking targeted questions, or reinforced students' use of comprehension strategies. For example, when Rebecca and Trisha revealed comprehension difficulties with an article about decreased brain functioning in people over 40, the teacher encouraged them to refer back to the text.

Teacher: What does it say at the beginning of the article? Remember we said that's usually where they have the big ideas? Put it down here where both of you can see it.

Girls: (reading in unison) "The part [of the brain] in charge of motion may start a gradual downhill slide as we reach 40. How fast you can throw a ball... depends on how speedily brain cells fire off commands to muscles. Fast firing depends on good insulation for your brain's wiring."

Teacher: Did you understand what that means?

Trisha: No.

Teacher: What word do you not know?

Trisha: Insulation.

Teacher: What is insulation? Where have you heard that word before? (pause) Have you not heard that word when we're talking about our houses?

Trisha: Oh! Yeah!

The teacher guided Rebecca and Trisha in using the text structure ("Remember we said...") and each other's support ("Put it down here where both of you can see it") to make sense of the article. These desired behaviors hinge on the idea that comprehension and summarization would be enhanced when both students verbally share their thinking processes. He led the girls in identifying an unknown word, insulation, and recalling prior knowledge to aid meaning making.

When article content included topics beyond the experiences of third graders, the teacher provided background knowledge to enable reporters to make sense of an article. At times, he offered analogies to connect new information to knowledge the students already had or to which they could relate. For instance, even though Trisha seemed excited at recognizing the word insulation, neither she nor Rebecca could immediately define it.

Teacher: Okay, so we need to talk about insulation. Insulation in this case is a coating; it's protective cover. Like when you have protective wires [in a house], do you see just bare metal?

Girls: No.

Teacher: What do you see on the outside of those wires?

Rebecca: Oh! (makes a round gesture) You see that rubber.

Teacher: (nodding) You see that rubbery stuff. That's also called insulation. It's a covering.

Trisha: Oh!

Teacher: Does that make sense now?

Rebecca: It means basically good covering.

After working through comprehension problems over several more turns, the teacher led the girls in metacognitive reflection on their comprehension monitoring (Teacher: Alright, now what did we have to do to make sense out of this? Trisha: We had to talk about it, the word insulation.). Over ten more talk turns,

the teacher helped the girls consider what they needed to do next time they came across a word crucial to their understanding of a text.

Roles 2 and 3: Moderating the Discussion and Intermediating Relationships with Text

The teacher played two main roles during the whole-class discussions: (1) supporting students' self-management of conversation by acting as a moderator of the discussion, and (2) facilitating the construction of meaning by acting as an intermediary between students and the complex texts. Table 1 lists the discourse moves through which he fulfilled these two roles.

Moderating the discussion. An important role of the teacher was providing scaffolding for high-quality peer-led discussion. To help students learn to engage in academic discourse, he helped them navigate topics of their choosing. He frequently reminded students of their roles and responsibilities, as in his instruction to audience members:

"You're going to be ready to be an active listener, which means you're thinking about what you're hearing. You're deciding…does it have any connection to your life. Can you think of anything that sounds familiar that you already know about when you hear about this article? And then you'll think of some good questions. Did the reporters explain everything so that it makes perfect sense to you, or does it leave you with some questions, some things that you're not sure about?"

The teacher set the conversational context in this opening statement, thus facilitating students' self-management of the discussion. The teacher also responded to students' needs at any moment. For example, in the following episode the teacher helped moderate discussion about the planned repair of local dams as Curtis and Rebecca completed their initial presentation.

Curtis:	They're upgrading the dams because they might flood and cover a big part of the city.
Rebecca:	They're adding more layers of sediment to the 57 dams to keep it from flooding.
Teacher:	Fifty-seven of them; that's a lot.
Curtis:	And there's 161 of them but they're only repairing 57 of them. And the study started in 2003. And two of the dams will cost $350,000 to fix and one of the biggest ones will cost $2.5 million to repair.
Rebecca:	And, if you could see on the map...

(points to map from article)

Teacher:	We'll let you come up in a minute to put that on the document camera. Is there anything else you want to tell us?

The teacher first modeled attentive listening through an appropriate affective response. He monitored logistics in his second comment, assuring Rebecca that she would get to show her map in order to encourage students' to maintain attention on discussing the text.

Sensing that some students had the wrong idea about dams, the teacher presented a question and then helped Jacob, an audience member, articulate his idea.

Teacher:	(addresses audience) What do you know about dams? What are dams?
Thomas:	They hold water back.
Jacob:	A big wall between water… [in audible]
Teacher:	That holds the water back?
Curtis:	That keeps it from flooding the city.
Jacob:	Or anything else.
Rebecca:	Yeah.
Teacher:	What questions do you have? I know I'm thinking of a few.

His last comment prompting for a change of topic to advance the discussion was followed by multiple audience inquiries. The reporters addressed each one as the teacher refrained from participating in the productive conversational flow, ready to lend support if needed.

Jacob:	Does it say where any of the dams are?
Rebecca:	Yeah, it shows on the map. Like six of them.
Bill:	[Are any on] Lake Austin?
Curtis:	(looks down at map) No, none on Lake Austin.
Will:	(objection based on personal knowledge) There is one.
[Rebecca calls on Anthony]	
Anthony:	What were the walls made out of, do you know?
Rebecca:	Cement.
Curtis:	Yeah, cement's expensive. That's why it costs so much money...

Thus, in his role as discussion moderator, the teacher guided the conversation in directions he approved of at the same time he supported students' self-management of the discussion.

Acting as intermediary to facilitate the construction of meaning. For these third-grade

students, comprehending these complex texts required the acquisition of new vocabulary, concepts, and ideas. The teacher facilitated textual engagement in a number of ways. He supplied relevant knowledge when articles included topics beyond students' experiences. He interpreted complicated content, provided feedback about accuracy and validity, explained characteristics of the textual genre, or marked important contributions. Because newspaper articles privilege information the writers and editors believe to be of interest to an adult audience, the challenge for students was not only to make meaning of the texts but to make the texts meaningful to themselves (Jordan & Massad, 2010). Therefore, the teacher's role as intermediary also entailed aiding students in their efforts to synthesize and make relevant article topics, to use the text as a springboard for discussion about issues that helped students better understand their world.

Understanding a text in this case means bringing to a discussion personal experiences, content knowledge, and cultural understandings that allow individuals to make and share personal connections. The teacher's scaffolding included encouraging extrapolation of cause/effect relationships, forming opinions, assisting with inferences about application to students' lives, and posing questions about the writer's choices. With the teacher's help, In-the-News offered students repeated opportunities to practice doing what adults often do when they read a newspaper – analyze and evaluate the content, decide how it affects their lives, and consider how it may influence their opinions and decisions.

In the following episode, the teacher made several intermediary discourse moves as the class continued to discuss the article about repairing dams.

Aaron:	[Referring to a past article] Is it like, in that picture, like Eric and Jacob did about the hurricane? Was that a dam?
Teacher:	That's a good question: Are levees and dams the same thing?
Rebecca:	Basically... [inaudible]. They have different materials than dams and maybe they're not as strong, maybe they're stronger.
Teacher:	That's related to my question. Because when I think of a dam, I think of something huge, like the Miller Dam on Lake Austin that holds back the whole huge Colorado River. Is that what you're talking about?
Curtis:	Yeah, and smaller dams too that hold

	back ponds.
Teacher:	This is talking about smaller dams.
Curtis:	Yeah, small and big ones.
Teacher:	These are the ones that you see in neighborhoods, like behind streets when you're by a big grassy area and you see a big wall and then a pond area.

Marking Aaron's question as important, the teacher supported critical thinking through evaluation. Rebecca, a reporter, attempted to respond but was not certain of the relationship between dams and levees. From listening to their discussion, the teacher became concerned that students were visualizing large dams. His next two comments therefore were aimed at helping students recall or gain relevant prior knowledge. His last comment encouraged connections by urging students to recall experiences they might not realize were relevant. A cascade of student connections followed this talk move (e.g., "I think there's one by my house," "There's one north of us"), signaling that students were making meaningful associations.

Once satisfied that students understood the scale and purpose of the dams discussed in the article, the teacher asked, "What could happen if these malfunction?" By posing this question he supported critical thinking, inviting students to extrapolate beyond the text and apply it to their world. Later, when the reporters displayed a map describing the planned timeline for dam repair, the teacher promoted transfer to content area knowledge through application of previously learned map skills ("What did they put on this map to make it easy to interpret?"). He then used the map to present an opportunity for students to include themselves and their neighborhood in their thinking about the article, asking, "So, are there any of those close to where we live?"

DISCUSSION

By investigating this uncommon daily practice of discussing a non-traditional classroom genre, we contribute to teachers' and researchers' growing understanding of how authentic informational texts can be used in elementary classrooms to promote purposeful focuses for reading. We also contribute to identifying classroom discourse practices that support students' meaningful experiences with complex informational texts, as called for in the CCSS.

[S]tudents must have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations—as part

of a whole class, in small groups, and with a partner. Being productive members of these conversations requires that students contribute accurate, relevant information; respond to and develop what others have said; make comparisons and contrasts; and analyze and synthesize a multitude of ideas in various domains, (CCSS Initiative, 2012).

The two phases of In-the-News facilitated rich structured conversations; students worked in reporter pairs for two to four weeks across the year and took part in whole-class discussion nearly every day. Previous analysis suggests that students participated as productive members of these conversations, leading discussions, initiating topics, and negotiating understandings of text features and textual content as they took on reporter and audience roles (Jordan & Massad, 2010; Jordan & Santori, 2012). However, given the complexity of the texts with which they engaged, it is doubtful their success could have been achieved without significant teacher scaffolding.

Findings from the current study identified critical roles enacted by one third grade teacher during paired-reading and whole-class discussion of self-selected newspaper articles. The teacher differentially facilitated peer discourse, adaptively responding to different pairs of student-reporters as he corrected comprehension failures and guided summarization attempts. He played two main roles during the whole-class discussions: facilitating construction of meaning by acting as an intermediary between students and the complex texts, and supporting students' self-management of conversation by acting as a discussion moderator. Analysis of talk moves indicated that the teacher was attentive to students' knowledge and adaptively scaffolded their reading and thinking together. Such flexibility is a hallmark of effective teaching. As Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2000) noted, effective teachers are "studying the kids from the moment they enter the classroom….preparing to modulate as they get information on what the kids can do and how they do it" (p. 12). Adaptive response was particularly important for functioning of In the News since the selected texts were new each day and thus, the teacher could neither prepare instruction ahead of time nor predict peer interaction.

Reviewing and synthesizing the categories of teacher discourse moves and roles identified in the findings, we were struck by the blending of support for social practices, metacognitive reading strategies, and the acquisition and organization of new concepts necessary for accurate understanding of content. Joyce et al. (2000) argued that "[c]omplex growth often requires a multidimensional approach" (p. 417) and that successful teachers "engage their students in robust cognitive and social tasks" (p. 7). Accomplishing this requires that teachers apply a range of teaching models. We argue that In the News relied on elements of social, informational processing, and personal teaching models to enable the multiple purposes that underpinned the activity. The overarching structure of In the News was based on social models of teaching in which developing a community of learners is of paramount importance. Many of the teacher's discourse moves, particularly those enacted in his mediator role, fostered students' participation in social practices and emphasized students' responsibility for their social environments. He incorporated information processing models using his intermediary role to help students increase their ability to collect and organize information, develop concepts and language for conveying concepts, and increase metacognitive awareness by monitoring their own, their partner's and their audience's understanding. He drew from personal models of teaching by promoting self-directed independence and choice, supporting choice through well-placed discourse scaffolds.

Some would question the viability of engaging students with such a complex text type, arguing that instructional time would be better spent with independent level texts (Billman, Hilden, & Halladay, 2009). We recognize the importance of a steady diet of independent level texts, and indeed, In-the-News took place within a comprehensive literacy curriculum leveled texts and other child centric resources were prominent. We argue, however, that there is efficacy in having students read and discuss difficult texts – particularly in the digital age when such texts proliferate the landscape for readers of all ages. We agree with Moss (2008) that "reading to learn from text, whether textbooks, newspapers, trade books, or the Internet, is critical to student survival in the Information age" (p. 211).

Children in the 21st century often have access to reading material in a variety of media. Many of those texts do not perfectly match students' reading levels, yet students often choose to read them (Kragler, 2000; also see Halladay, 2008). As we have argued elsewhere (Jordan, 2010), difficult texts such as newspaper articles hold particular affordances for learning; for instance, helping students develop adaptive learning strategies (Rohrkemper & Corno, 1988) and practice effective tactics for locating and selecting information in multi-genred texts (Dreher, 2002; Eagleton & Guinee, 2002), and exposing students to rich language and content that could sustain reading comprehension in higher grades (Chall, 1983). The results

of this study suggest that teachers can be instrumental in helping children learn to navigate complex informational texts as sources of information about the world.

In-the-News provides one tool teachers can use to scaffold children's encounters with informational texts, raising the rigor of students' interactions with texts and peers, both of which receive increased emphasis in the CCSS. The teacher's goals of instruction for In-the-News were consistent with reforms encouraged by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010) to engage students in rigorous content and disciplinary practices. They further supported recent calls for increased civic and global awareness among American citizens (Klein, Rice, & Levy, 2012, p. 11). If enacted with thoughtful teacher facilitation of peer discourse, this activity provides access to disciplinary content, practice using comprehension and summarization skills, and opportunities to discuss and analyze informational text.

Like any recommended practice, this activity may not be appropriate in every context. The third grade students observed in this study all read at or above grade level by the end of the year, although half read slightly below grade level at the beginning of the year. This may not reflect the majority of third grade classrooms across the United States, where it is not unusual for many students to read far below grade level. Based on the needs and abilities of their students, some teachers may find leveled texts more suited to encouraging peer-led discussion about current events than a local newspaper. Further research could investigate whether the same teacher discourse moves and conversational roles identified in this study would be needed to facilitate peer interaction around leveled texts such as Scholastic News. Researchers could also explore the use of In-the-News with older students. Finally, one could argue that online news resources should be used exclusively, due to print media's continuing decline (Poindexter, 2009). Future research should therefore examine teacher facilitation of peer interaction around digital newspapers and other online news sources.

The daily activity described here moves beyond the mere selection of text. Our hope is that our description of In-the-News and the teacher's roles in it will encourage teachers to incorporate authentic texts, tap authentic literacy practices, and engage in dialogue that carefully scaffolds discussion around informational texts. We urge teachers to reflect on how their literacy practices support repeated engagement with informational texts, where in their curriculums do students practice skills needed for comprehending, summarizing, and analyzing informational texts, and how their discourse moves facilitate peer-led discussion through with students can support each other's comprehension of informational texts. The end goal, after all, involves expanding children's abilities to engage with texts that they read in and out of school, and, ultimately, enabling their development as literate community and world citizens.

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