Pressing for Elaboration in Student Talk about Texts

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the practice of one accomplished teacher who uses follow-up probes to press her fourth- and fifth-grade students to clarify and articulate their ideas more fully. Qualitative analysis of field notes, teacher and student interviews, and video recordings of instruction, and discourse analysis of reading conferences revealed four features of the classroom context that made it safe, sensible, and possible for this teacher to press students to extend their thinking during discussions. The teacher's positioning of students as capable and framing of reading as collaborative and interactive made questions that pressed students for elaboration fit naturally into instruction.

INTRODUCTION

From a sociocultural perspective, language is a cultural tool that mediates human action, including thinking (Wertsch, 1991, 1998; Luria, 1979). We think *with* language. In Carol Lee's words, language can be used as "both a socially communicative act and a medium for the internal organization of experience. [These uses] require give-and-take, a dialectical interaction among interlocutors" (2000, p. 192). In this vein, Boyd and Rubin argue that "theory, research, and practice all converge on the conclusion that engaged, elaborated student talk in the classroom enhances student learning" (2006, p. 142). By talking about texts, readers not only *perform* their understandings and meaning constructions, they can also *clarify* or *deepen* those understandings and actively construct new meanings.

It is worth considering how teachers can orchestrate classroom dialogue in a way that encourages students to express more complex, substantive ideas. This article explores the practice of one accomplished elementary literacy teacher who uses follow-up probes to press her students to clarify and articulate their ideas more fully, grounding them more explicitly in the texts they are reading. I examine the discourse patterns, social norms, and instructional practices of her classroom and present four essential practices that make it safe, sensible, and possible for her to press students' thinking in this way. This study extends the "dialogic turn" (Wilkinson & Son, 2011) in research on reading comprehension instruction by using the lenses of *press* (McElhone, 2012) and *positioning* (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) to identify characteristics of instruction that enhance text-based discussion by fostering elaborated student talk.

The "E" Position

Although talk is an essential learning tool, the kind of talk that most frequently occurs in classrooms today closes down dialogue and limits opportunities for learning (Nystrand, 1999). Students have inadequate opportunities to engage in sustained, elaborated talk and to pursue their own lines of inquiry through discourse (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). For decades, researchers have observed the frequent use of the initiate-respond-evaluate (IRE) pattern in teacher–student talk (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979). Such an exchange is typically initiated with a *display* question for which there is a predetermined correct response, thus limiting student opportunities to elaborate and explore ideas.

Prior studies have pointed to the "E-slot" in IRE exchanges as a powerful lever for changing the course

of classroom discourse and have suggested that non-evaluative feedback (Nassaji & Wells, 2000) that is contingent on student contributions (Boyd & Rubin, 2006) can engage students, elicit elaborated talk, and promote learning. In their study of eighth-grade English classes, Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) found that when teachers incorporated previous student responses into subsequent questions, which they termed *uptake*, students were more substantively engaged, demonstrating "sustained personal commitment" (p. 262) to understanding academic content. Nystrand (1997) also found that the use of *authentic* questions, those for which the teacher does not have a particular answer in mind, promotes dialogic interaction and learning.

Press

Building from this research base and from research on engagement and intrinsic motivation, McElhone (2012) proposed *high press* talk moves as tools for opening up dialogue and encouraging student elaboration. High press talk moves fall in the "E slot" and pose open-ended questions or requests in response to students' ideas. High press moves also set up individualized optimal challenges (challenges that can be overcome with some effort) for students by pressing them to think further about their own ideas and interpretations. Ryan & Deci (2000) have identified *optimal challenges* as an important feature of motivating learning environments. A high press move might respond to a student contribution with a request for clarification, elaboration, evidence, or examples (See Table 1).

In contrast to high press moves, *reducing press* talk moves (McElhone, 2012) reduce the cognitive load on students. These moves let students "off the hook," for example by turning an open-ended question into a multiple choice or a yes/no question. (See Table 1.) When teachers respond to student contributions by reducing press, they take away the opportunity to think through and grapple with ideas in order to better understand them. Reducing press moves tend to close down dialogue and funnel students toward predetermined responses, rather than elaborated talk. In a large-scale, quantitative study, McElhone (2012) found that students whose teachers reduced press more often had weaker outcomes in reading achievement and engagement.

Teacher–student interactions are simultaneously situated within the larger social context of the classroom and actively construct that context. Teachers' follow-up responses to student contributions are important, but particular response types are not simply isolated features of instruction that can be dropped into any classroom with identical effects. The norms for interaction and the socio-cultural context in some classrooms might make it near impossible, unnatural, or even threatening for a teacher to follow a student contribution with a high press question. I used positioning theory to identify the features of

TABLE 1

High Press and Reducing Press Talk Moves

Type of Talk Move	Examples
High Press	• Requests for clarification, elaboration, evidence, or examples. • "Say more about that." • "What do you mean?" • "What evidence supports that?" • "Can you say that in your own words?" • "How did you figure that out? What will you do next?" • "Can you give an example?" • "Why do you think so?" • Ask reluctant or stuck student to attempt a response.
Reducing Press	• Narrow open-ended questions by offering a limited number of answer choices ("Is it A, B, or C?") • Reformulate open-ended questions as yes/no questions. • Provide hints ("It starts with a P.") • Teacher answers own question.

the focal teacher's discourse, instruction, and classroom context that made it safe, sensible, and possible for her to press her students' thinking during reading discussions.

Positioning

Positioning theory is a framework for understanding human interactions based on the interplay between *positions*, *speech acts*, and *storylines*. The social and intellectual norms around classroom activities (storylines) and the patterns of talk that unfold in classrooms (speech acts) work together to make particular positions available to students (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Collins, 2011). According to Holland and Leander (2004), positioning "involves socially producing particular individuals . . . as culturally imagined types such that others and, even the person herself, at least temporarily, treat her as though she were such a person" (p. 130). Positions are fluid and afford participants the rights or opportunities to make certain comments and engage in certain actions, while constraining them from other comments or actions. Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) explain, "Positioning can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific locations" (p. 16).

How one is positioned (or positions oneself) during an interaction is determined in part by speech acts and in part by the storyline surrounding the interaction. In a school, possible storylines include teacher-led instruction, play time, or punishment for misbehavior. Within a given storyline, which is constructed by and constructs the ongoing talk and positioning in an interaction, only certain positions are readily available to the participants. While positions are dynamic, they can have important long-term implications. "Episodes of positioning create what we might think of as a laminate. They leave memories laced through feelings, bodily reactions, and the words and glances of others" (Holland & Leander, 2004, p. 131). When individuals engage repeatedly in interactions that position them in particular ways, those positionings can contribute to stable, if socially situated, identities.

While all participants have agency in their language use and in the ways they position self and others during any interaction, the larger context of schooling imbues teachers with a great deal of power over teacher–student interactions. Whether they offer evaluations, prompts to say more, or invitations for others to help a student offering an incorrect answer, teachers' responses (speech acts) tell students something about the activity they are engaged in (storyline) and about who they are in that context (position).

The ways literacy teachers use language to locate knowledge (i.e., as residing with the expert teacher, with the students, or shared between teacher and students) and to position students (i.e., as capable readers, as struggling readers, or as people who have worthy ideas about texts) can send powerful messages to students about what reading is and about who they can become as readers (Vetter, 2010). If students take up positions as competent, capable readers with valuable knowledge to share, teachers may be able to press them to elaborate and extend their thinking without making students feel threatened. If the storyline around reading and discussion allows elaborated talk and examination of ideas to fit naturally, high press questions may also feel natural to students.

The research question guiding this analysis was: How do the teacher's talk moves, positioning moves, and portrayal of reading and text discussion activities (storylines) contribute to a classroom context where it is safe, sensible, and possible for the teacher to press students for elaborated talk? This study extends prior work on classroom discourse by exploring not only the teacher's use of particular discourse moves or types of questions, but the relational and instructional conditions that made those moves a natural part of classroom activities. Using an individual reading conference as an illustration, this article offers a pathway toward connecting positioning and teacher responses to student talk in order to increase the efficacy of classroom literacy discussions.

METHOD

Study Overview

The data presented in this article are grounded in a yearlong mixed methods study examining teacher–student discourse patterns in the context of reading instruction. To better understand the dynamics of talk about texts and the social contexts surrounding and constructed by that talk, I conducted qualitative case studies (Merriam, 2009) of five fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms in a Western state. These five classes were selected from a sample of 21 classes because they represented a range of student growth on comprehension and engagement measures and because they shared common pedagogical methods (the reading workshop structure), which facilitated comparisons of micro-level features of teacher-student discourse.

Participants

Kris Hammond. At the time of data collection, Kris Hammond (participant and school names are pseudonyms) was in her fifteenth year of teaching fourth and fifth grade and her second year teaching at Lewis

Elementary. Lewis is located in a somewhat rural area populated by a large number of migrant farmworkers. Latino students make up 60.9% of the student body at Lewis, while 32.7% of students identify as White. The remaining 6.4% of students identify as Asian American, Filipino, African American, multiple ethnicities, or declined to report their ethnicities. More than half of Lewis's students qualify for free and reduced price lunch (55.1%) and nearly half (47.5%) are identified as English Language Learners.

An accomplished reading workshop teacher, Kris had been featured in professional development videos used to introduce other teachers to workshop methods. Her workshop sessions typically began with students gathered on the carpet for a minilesson regarding strategies for constructing meaning with texts, productively collaborating with fellow readers, and responding to texts. Kris's students read self-selected texts, often within a genre that was the focus of a class unit. Students spent the majority of their workshop time reading and responding to texts individually and in small groups. This structure enabled Kris to conduct individual and small group reading conferences before concluding with a classwide closure activity reiterating key points or asking students to share their learning. Of the 21 classes involved in the larger study, Kris's demonstrated the greatest growth in reading comprehension and engagement.

Alicia. Alicia was a fourth grader who was skilled in her use of conversational English and effectively navigated many academic conversations in English, but was categorized as an English Language Learner. At the time of the reading conference discussed here, Alicia had scored in the lowest quartile of her class on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, but had made substantial improvement over the course of the school year.

Data Sources

I visited each case study classroom at least nine times over the course of the school year and video-recorded reading instruction once during the winter and twice during the spring. Lessons were recorded based on scheduling availability and teachers were asked to continue with their normal instruction on observation days. I transcribed the videotapes and incorporated field notes from each observation in order to create a thicker description. Each teacher was interviewed twice using a semi-structured protocol. Interview topics included their approaches to reading instruction, goals for students as readers, career and educational backgrounds, and perceptions about classroom discussions. Interviews included stimulated recall segments in which teachers viewed video of interactions with students and talked me through their thinking as the interactions unfolded. I also interviewed four students in each classroom (a high and low achieving boy and girl) about their perceptions of themselves as readers, their ideas about what reading is and what good readers do, and how they experienced their teacher's pattern of interaction (again using stimulated recall with videos).

Data Analysis

Case study data analysis proceeded in two main phases. The first phase involved within-case and across-case qualitative analysis of the interviews, fieldnotes, and videos from the five case study classrooms, guided by the constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through an iterative process of open coding, focused coding, and analytic memo writing (Merriam, 2009), I identified initial themes across the cases regarding the use of high press and reducing press talk moves, the positions made available to students (e.g., "low" reader, gifted reader, imaginative student), and the storylines around reading instruction. The second phase of the analysis involved a fine-grained discourse analysis of one individual reading conference in each of the five classrooms. I chose to focus analytical attention on individual reading conferences due to my interest in teacher–student talk. Reading conferences offer teachers opportunities to respond to an individual student through sustained interactions and therefore provide useful windows into teachers' patterns of response to student contributions.

From the spring round of data collection, the first individual reading conference from among the interviewed students was selected. I chose to analyze videos recorded in the spring due to an interest in discourse norms that had been established over the course of the year. Selecting a conference conducted with an interviewed student allowed for triangulation across observation and interview data. Selecting the first conference in each class meeting these two conditions prevented selection bias.

Employing a fine-grained approach to discourse analysis adapted from Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2005), I conducted multiple passes of coding at the message unit level, using a table in which the transcript occupied the first column and codes and notes from each pass of coding occupied subsequent columns. Coding passes addressed the use of high press and reducing press moves, the implicit location of knowledge (i.e., with the teacher, the student, or both), the location of power (e.g., to initiate an interactional unit or dispute a claim), messages about what reading is and what readers do, and positions opened up for (and taken up or refused by) students. Notes about the themes identified in

the qualitative analysis of interviews, field notes, and videos were added to the discourse analysis tables, which facilitated the examination of propositions and emerging themes in light of the themes derived from the first phase of the analysis. For example, I found that in a classroom where reading was repeatedly portrayed in interviews and observations as a process of correctly applying strategies or procedures, the teacher also used moves in the conference to position herself as the authority on correct procedures and funneled the student toward predetermined responses with a series of reducing press questions.

To identify the distinguishing features of Kris's instruction presented below, I read across and down the columns for her case repeatedly and identified common threads that ran through her practice and her discourse during the focal conference. This stage of the analysis also included examination of the tables from the other four classes in which teachers rarely used high press moves. The purpose of this portion of the analysis was to determine whether a feature was unique to or particularly strong in Kris's practice and to identify features of Kris's practice that made high press moves useful and meaningful in her classroom.

FINDINGS

I identified four key features of Kris's classroom that worked together to make it a place where it was safe, sensible, and possible for her to press her students to elaborate on their thinking during discussions. First, Kris's close relationships with her students set the stage for high press questions in two ways. They established a safe climate for risk taking and afforded Kris deep knowledge of her readers, which shaped her talk moves by enabling her to press students for elaboration in targeted ways. Second, Kris used her knowledge of her students' reading lives to position them as capable, competent readers, which set them up to feel confident when faced with high press questions. Third, Kris strategically incorporated reducing press moves into discourse in a way that made it safe for her to pose high press questions. Fourth, the instructional practices (such as book clubs) in Kris's class framed reading as a collaborative, interactive process and made it sensible for her to ask questions that would get students elaborating and developing ideas about texts. Below, I grounded my description of these four features in a close analysis of a reading conference between Kris and Alicia in order to highlight the micro-dynamics of positioning, discourse, and social norms around reading activities.

Close Relationships with Students

Rapport and risk taking. Kris had a special rapport with her students that was apparent from my first moments in the room. Not only did Kris know her students well as human beings, she knew them well as readers. These relationships contributed to a sense that the classroom was a safe environment for risk-taking and exploring ideas. Knowing her students well enabled Kris to be highly responsive to them both in her interactions with them and in instructional planning.

When I asked Kris to tell me about some of her students as readers, her first statements addressed their engagement and offered specific details about the kinds of books they enjoy rather than focusing on reading levels or test scores. For example, when I asked about Mindy, Kris catalogued Mindy's preferred genres, such as biographies and animal stories, and offered specifics about how Mindy relates to texts ("When she reads she emotes, she gets all the characters' voices in, she has all these little plays going on in her head"). An interview with Mindy confirmed Kris's perceptions about her preferred genres and reading style.

Kris developed knowledge of her readers by observing their reading habits and listening to them closely. Throughout her interviews, she emphasized the importance of listening to students, respecting their ideas, and giving them opportunities to talk "long and windingly." The climate of respect in Kris's classroom was built interaction by interaction. The students came to trust that Kris would listen carefully to what they were saying, and that she was authentically interested in them and valued them, qualities which made this classroom a place where high press questions did not feel threatening.

When I asked the students about instances when Kris asked them a series of high press questions during a conference or minilesson (in most cases showing them video of the interaction), students described this practice as "normal" and "helpful." No student reported feeling uncomfortable with or threatened by Kris's pattern of talk.

Deep knowledge of readers as a foundation for targeted press. Kris described conferences as a venue for learning about students as readers and all of the students I interviewed from her class reported that she conferred with them as a regular part of reading instruction. These ongoing interactions with students offered Kris opportunities to understand each child's thinking about texts and to refer back to previous conversations about texts during conferences. Kris made these sorts of references

explicitly and implicitly in her conference with Alicia. The eight-minute conversation occurred when Alicia was in the middle of a lengthy chapter book, which was the third in a series of *Sisters Grimm* (Buckley, 2007) books she had read with her book club. Kris opened her conference with Alicia by calling her from across the room and referring back to a previous conversation in which they had discussed adding more members of the group. After Alicia explained the practical circumstances of the situation, Kris posed the question in turn 7 below, which responds to another comment Alicia had made on a previous day with a high press talk move. ([ ] = overlapping speech; XXX = undecipherable; + = elongated sound)

7.   **Kris:** You said you weren't getting any more ideas. What do you mean?
8.   **Alicia:** No– it's that Isobel– no not Isobel, I mean, I mean, Daniela, she said that it's better, like cause we don't have that much of talking, that it's better to start like with a whole group, 'cause then we kept on popping ideas, because it's everybody.
9.   **Kris:** Oh+.
10.   **Alicia:** Like it's only me and her, and we mostly have the same ideas half the [time
11.   **Kris:** Oh you] do?
12.   **Alicia:** *Nods slightly*
13.   **Kris:** Why don't you start taking a risk then and popping out some ideas that you– that you're not sure will be like Daniela's?

Kris continued turn 13 (below) by elaborating her question, referring a sticky note (a post-it) Alicia had written prior to the conference, and issuing a request or directive ("explain it to me"). The note acted as a pre-existing student response (R), so Kris's request for explanation fell in the "E slot" of the exchange and constitutes a high press move.

13.   **Kris (continuing):** You know, take a different way of – force yourself to take a different way of responding. Like eh– um, here, I'll bet she didn't write this post-it on her book. You wrote "Every time I read this it feels like I wrote this." Tell me about that. I'll bet she doesn't have a post-it in her book like that, 'cause that's really unusual. It's surprising. And explain it to me.
14.   **Alicia:** Because like you know, like, I forget what page it was –
15.   **Kris:** Oh.
16.   **Alicia:** I think over here, on this page.

17.   **Kris:** Uh-huh.
18.   **Alicia:** Um, like, the author was um, like writing XXX like how she XXX (5 seconds of static). She was um, catching, um Daphne. And I'm like, and XXX … When I read it I kept saying XXX and also this book and I felt like I was writing it.
19.   **Kris:** Oh+. You got pulled in so thoroughly that you could have easily been the one penning this story because you were so close to the character?

Alicia offered an elaborated response, particularly in turn 18. Although some of Alicia's comments are unfortunately obscured by static, it is clear that she was talking about events in the text and explaining which events made her feel "as though [she were] writing it."

By engaging in ongoing conversations with students over the course of a book or series, Kris developed deep knowledge of what was going on day-to-day in her students' reading lives. This knowledge made it possible for her to jump into an interaction with talk moves that pushed students' thinking further. It would be nearly impossible for a teacher who confers with students infrequently to begin an interaction by picking up on an ongoing thread of a student's thinking. Kris's knowledge of her students' reading lives also made it possible for her to ask specific, targeted high press questions, rather than more generic high press questions (e.g., Can you tell me more?) and this specificity seemed to pay off in elaborated student talk.

Using Talk Moves to Position Students as Capable

In whole group, small group, and individual interactions, Kris afforded her students a great deal of agency in terms of how conversations about texts unfolded. She used talk moves to open up positions for students as people with valid, interesting ideas about texts, and worked with students to place those ideas in the starring role of their conversations. Rather than viewing children's interpretations as naïve in comparison to her own, Kris hoped to hear from students "things that are new" and explained that she felt best about interactions with students "when they make [her] see things [she] had not thought about... when they get [her] to see parts that [she] hadn't. And they do that a lot." Kris acted on her belief that students were capable of proposing valid interpretations by communicating genuine interest in her students' thinking and using talk that positioned students as leaders, as exemplified during her conference with Alicia.

For example, although it was Kris who brought up the topic of Alicia reporting that she had not been "getting

any more ideas" (turn 7), once Kris posed the question "What do you mean?" she positioned herself in a responding, rather than an initiating role. As Alicia talked about the problem she and Daniela were facing, Kris offered neutral responses ("Oh+" "Oh, you do?") that opened a space for Alicia direct the conversation. In turn 13, rather than offering a clear directive ("What I want you to do is . . . "), Kris brought up "taking a risk and popping out new ideas" as an option Alicia could choose to take up. During the same turn, Kris positioned Alicia as someone who had unusual, surprising ideas that merited consideration.

At times (as in turns 19 and 21), Kris seemed to position herself not so much as a teacher, but as a co-inquirer discovering things about the text and about Alicia's response to it alongside her. In turn 33, she said she wanted to see "if *we* can figure out, 'Okay, how has the author written this so it's positioning *us* to feel [sympathy]'" (emphasis added), again positioning herself as a collaborator rather than an evaluator or instructor. Turns 13 through 34 all address Alicia's response to the text ("Every time I read this it feels like I wrote this"), rather than an agenda imposed by Kris from a teacher position.

Throughout their conversation, Alicia seemed "step into" (Davies & Harré, 1990) the positions Kris made available to her and also to actively position herself as a reader who refers to text to support her talk and as someone whose ideas and responses to text merit attention. For example, after turn 34, with no prompting from Kris, Alicia initiated an interactional unit around a word that was unfamiliar to her ("exhausted"), describing how she found it in the text, looked it up, and concluded, "that was a very powerful word." These moves suggest that Alicia saw initiating topics as appropriate to her position and that she believed her teacher would be interested in what she had to say about the new word. Both of these implicit beliefs signal a sense of partnership between teacher and student, rather than a strictly hierarchical dynamic that locates all important knowledge with the teacher.

By positioning Alicia as capable and competent (and setting up a context in which Alicia was able to take up that positioning), Kris made it more likely that Alicia would have the confidence to take on high press questions. I observed Kris positioning students this way in individual, small group, and whole group interactions throughout the year. She offered students—including those who might be labeled "struggling readers"—multiple opportunities to step into the position of capable reader with valuable ideas. Such episodes have the potential to "laminate" on top of one another, developing a stronger, more stable and positive reading identity that becomes less likely to crumble when faced with challenges such as high press

questions. In this way, Kris made it safe to pose high press questions to her students.

Reducing Press Questions as a Springboard, Not a Funnel

When I set out to study high press and reducing press talk moves, I expected that students would elaborate on their thinking when teachers posed series of high press questions and limited their use of reducing press questions. I expected reducing press questions to curtail student elaboration and cut off opportunities for thinking and thought that the regular use of reducing press moves would set up a dynamic where high press questions might feel unnatural or even threatening. However, in interactions like the segment of Kris and Alicia's conference below, Kris seemed to use several reducing press questions followed by a high press question to help a student extend their own thinking. The yes/no and either/or questions, while not prompting elaborated responses, did seem to push conversations forward and establish groundwork upon which students could construct elaborated responses to high press questions.

In her conference with Alicia, Kris used reducing press questions in turns 19 and 21 (below). In turn 23, she seems to have started out with a high press question in mind (a request that Alicia provide evidence by pointing "to the spot where [she] really felt deeply"). During this turn of talk, Kris reformulated the request in a way that was narrow and easily accessible for Alicia ("Like have you ever felt sorry for Sabrina, really sorry for her?"). She continued posing yes/no and either/or questions through turn 31, when she returned to the high press move she had started to articulate earlier (a request that Alicia locate evidence to support her own thinking) in turn 33.

19. **Kris** (continuing): And were you worried about the character?
20. **Alicia:** Yeah.
21. **Kris:** So if you're feeling it you must b– are you able to pull yourself back – so you can say, "Oh I know why the author's making– er– writing it this way, the author wants me to feel sympathy for that character. I'm saying 'Get away! Get away!'" Right?
22. **Alicia:** *Nods, smiling*
23. **Kris:** So where in this – can you point to the spot where you really felt deeply? Felt something like um, you could feel that the author was using certain words or certain pictures to make th– the text take on that slant? Like have you ever felt sorry for Sabrina, really sorry for her?
24. **Alicia:** *Nods*

25. **Kris:** Do you know where that is in the book?
26. **Alicia:** In the beginning
27. **Kris:** In the very beginning?
28. **Alicia:** *Nods*
29. **Kris:** Is it the way the author describes her?
30. **Alicia:** Mm-hmm
31. **Kris:** Or describes something that happens to her?
32. **Alicia:** Something that happens to her
33. **Kris:** So, so find that spot. 'Cause I want – what I wanna do is see if we can figure out, "Okay, how has the author written this so it's positioning us to feel [sym–"
34. **Alicia:** It's] when she was in the hospital that she like– she kept um like going different places to figure out the mystery, like look for her mom, and then she got tir– tired, and then, um, I think she fell down. And then she went to the hospital and I felt bad for her because, you know like in The Crash [unclear] said, described her room? I felt like I was like right there also.

In this interactional unit, Kris's reducing press questions acted as scaffolds or even springboards that launched Alicia into an elaborated response. When Kris asked Alicia to use the text ("find that spot") to help her explain her affective response to the text ("Every time I read this it feels like I wrote this"; see turn 13), Alicia was able to use the groundwork laid in her responses to the reducing press questions (e.g., locating the precise part of the text that was relevant to her reaction) to construct an elaborated explanation. During the study, I observed many teachers using series of reducing press moves as funnels, rather than as springboards, narrowing the range of possible responses and directing students toward the teacher's preferred interpretation or response. In contrast, Kris was able to use reducing press moves as a springboard by building toward a high press move, setting her students up to examine and expand their own ideas and interpretations. This discourse pattern likely made high press questions less threatening and more productive.

Reading as a Collaborative Endeavor

Kris's use of high press questions operated in a context where the storyline framed reading as a highly social, collaborative endeavor focused on the generation of ideas. Talk was emphasized explicitly during minilessons and through the book club structure. Alicia explained that she enjoyed talking about ideas and trying to "figure out" things like clues in mysteries with her book club. In Kris's class, students used the book clubs and other social interactions (including reading conferences) as opportunities to "figure things out" and talk about ideas and responses to texts. The problem Alicia raised prior to the conference (that she was not "getting any more ideas") was rooted in her experience as a member of a small book club. When Kris drew Alicia's attention to a particular post-it (turn 13), she referenced not only Alicia's individual thinking, but also her reading relationship with Daniela.

In interviews, students spoke repeatedly about the importance of group discussion to the daily activities of the reading workshop. Discussions were an essential part of the storyline around reading in this classroom. Alex, Alicia, and Bradley each described good readers or improved reading in terms of participation in group discussions. Alicia explained that Isobel and Rosario are good readers because "they talk about the book a long time" and highlighted how she had improved as a reader through Kris's instruction on how "to talk stronger on book clubs."

The portrayal of reading as a collaborative endeavor engaged students and offered opportunities for them to take up positions as eager, passionate readers. For example, Mindy explained that during independent reading, if a student found something in a text that they "just [couldn't] wait to discuss for the next time," they could go into a room adjacent to the classroom and discuss it. She said, "One time we did that, and we actually were so into it that we accidentally missed writing session. That's how important it got." The social, collaborative nature of Kris's classroom made it an appropriate space for pressing students to "talk long" about their reading. Thus, high press questions made sense in this classroom in a way they might not in a classroom where reading is framed as an individual activity aimed at following procedures or identifying correct answers to narrow comprehension questions.

DISCUSSION

This analysis of the instructional conditions that make it safe, sensible, and possible for a teacher to pose high press questions and prompt elaborated student talk builds on prior research on dialogic instruction (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991, Wilkinson & Son, 2011) by illuminating the interplay between particular kinds of teacher discourse moves, the positions made available to students, and the norms around ongoing classroom activities. Better understanding the relational and instructional contexts surrounding the use of particular discourse moves is important because, as Michaels, O'Connor, and Resnick (2007) point out, "A single utterance can accomplish

multiple functions at once, and the very same words can accomplish different functions in different contexts" (p. 293). Using positioning theory as a frame for this analysis made it possible to identify how particular components of classroom contexts shaped the ways high press questions functioned within those contexts.

Past process-product research has identified correlates of student achievement in the form of generic teacher behaviors with limited attention to the disciplinary, relational, and discursive contexts in which teachers engaged in those behaviors (e.g., active instruction, structured presentation of information, academic uses of class time) (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005). The quantitative study out of which the analysis presented in this article arose examined correlations between teacher use of particular discourse moves and student engagement and achievement outcomes in the context of reading comprehension instruction and discussions of texts (McElhone, 2012). The study discussed here expands on these quantitative approaches by investigating relationships among the instructional, relational, and discursive contexts in a classroom where students demonstrated strong achievement and engagement outcomes and by identifying a set of local conditions that facilitated particular teacher discourse moves.

In Kris's classroom, high press questions that prompted students to elaborate were a natural part of discourse. Kris's close relationships with her students laid a foundation from which she could challenge students to extend their thinking about texts. Supported by these relationships, students felt safe taking risks and taking on challenges. Kris leveraged her deep knowledge of her students' reading lives into specific high press questions that targeted the work they were doing as readers. Through her talk moves, positioning of students, and instructional practices, Kris worked with students to construct a storyline about reading that framed it as a collaborative, interpretive activity focused on generating ideas and "talking long" about them. Students were cast as characters with important ideas in this storyline, making high press questions a natural part of classroom talk.

Some might be concerned that when teachers follow their students' leads in conversations about texts, discussions can quickly stray off-topic (Reninger & Rehark, 2009) and devolve into free-for-alls where "anything goes" as an interpretation or response. Kris's teaching offers us a glimpse into the ways teachers can simultaneously open spaces for students to explore their own ideas and engage them in intellectually rigorous work with texts. Along these lines, Wolf, Crosson, and Resnick (2005)

found that the academic rigor of reading comprehension lessons was strongly correlated with teacher use of questions that elicited student thinking and explanations. This kind of classroom discourse aligns with the College and Career Ready goals of the Common Core State Standards, which call for students to "cite specific evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a text . . . [and to use] relevant evidence when supporting their own points, . . . making their reasoning clear" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 7).

Arguably, when teachers funnel students toward the kinds of interpretations likely to be valued on typical comprehension tests, they may give those students opportunities to state "correct answers" while taking away opportunities to reason and work with language and ideas in a way that adds up to meaningful learning (Luria, 1979). Kris's conversations with her students demonstrate that within a supportive classroom context where reading is framed as a process of collaborative sense-making (Aukerman, 2008) and students are positioned as people with worthwhile ideas, a teacher can effectively use requests for evidence, examples, elaboration, or clarification to challenge students intellectually and to promote learning.

Opportunities to engage in elaborated talk and to explain and support their ideas can prepare students to engage in "critical, elaborative discourse, [in which] participants assume different points of view and use arguments, counterarguments, and refutations to resolve their conflicting opinions . . . [and generate] connections among ideas and between ideas and prior knowledge" (Nussbaum, 2008, p. 349). For students to develop the skills to engage in more formal, critical argumentation with other students, they must first develop facility in sharing, explaining, clarifying, and elaborating on their own ideas. Interactions with a teacher who presses them to "say more" about their thinking in these ways develop an important base from which students can build argumentation skills.

Research has made the connection between dialogic instruction and achievement clear (Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009). For decades, researchers and teachers have known that IRE recitation does not effectively engage students or promote dialogue (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 2001), but these patterns of talk persist in many classrooms, perhaps because teachers have trouble envisioning and enacting alternatives. The idea of press in teacher responses provides a simple, useful heuristic that can help teachers move toward more dialogic instruction that simultaneously challenges students to read closely and to back up claims with evidence.

The findings presented here suggest that teachers need not pepper students with high press questions to spur elaborated talk. When teachers are committed to helping students deepen and expand their own ideas, rather than to funneling students toward predetermined responses, they can use reducing press questions to help students construct a foundation from which they can effectively address high press questions. The findings also suggest that high press questions alone cannot construct dialogic interactions. Teachers' efforts to develop deep knowledge of their students, to open up positions for them as capable and competent, and their portrayal of learning as a collaborative process lay the groundwork upon which high press questions can feel like a safe, natural part of learning and thinking together.

Implications for Teacher Education

Research is needed to help teacher educators understand how best to prepare pre-service and in-service teachers to use high press responses within a framework of positioning students as capable and an instructional context that casts learning as a collaborative endeavor. It is evident that merely knowing that an instructional practice is outmoded or not supported by research does not prevent teachers from using it (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009). Research that seeks to collaborate with teachers, to understand the factors that may help them break the pattern of IRE recitation, and to support them in exploring new ways of talking with and positioning students could be productive and powerful (McElhone & Tilley, 2013).

While more research in this area is needed, the following recommendations for practice in teacher education may prove helpful. It is important for teacher educators to recognize that Kris's instructional practices and discourse with students reflected sophisticated understandings about reading, texts, how children develop as readers, and how they learn through talk, and demonstrated well-honed skills at engaging in meaningful interactions with students. Novice teachers may find this example daunting and out of reach. To make discourse practices like Kris's feel more accessible and concrete, teacher educators might present the key conditions found to support the use of press in Kris's class as a conceptual framework for teaching children to construct meaning with and analyze texts. Discussion of these four features of instruction and discourse in literacy methods courses would lead naturally to consideration of the reading program as a whole.

For example, working with novice teachers to examine Kris's use of literacy structures that actively framed reading as a collaborative endeavor focused on generating ideas about texts could spur conversation about approaches such as Book Clubs (Raphael & McMahon, 1994), Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002), Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), and Collaborative Reasoning (Chinn & Anderson, 1998). Teacher educators could ask their students to research one of these approaches and to classify it as taking an expressive/aesthetic, efferent, or critical–analytic stance toward texts (Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009). Novice teachers could build their skills by engaging colleagues in discussions of texts, following the model of their chosen approach. Such experiences would afford aspiring teachers opportunities to compare and contrast multiple approaches to organizing classroom talk around texts and would also foreground *planning for talk* as an essential component of planning for instruction.

Kris's deep knowledge of her students' ongoing reading lives was essential to her ability to pose targeted high press questions and to position students as capable readers. It could prove near impossible for a teacher to develop such knowledge in an instructional context where students are not offered opportunities to read independently in self-selected, authentic texts. Teachers learn about students as readers in part by observing and inquiring about their reading choices. Teacher educators should help novice teachers envision ways to structure their reading instruction so that students can make these kinds of choices, even in schools where core reading programs are mandated. Further, novice teachers might prepare reading biographies of students, based on repeated observations of student text selections, student interactions with others about texts, and multiple interviews with students over the course of a term or year. Such an assignment would help novice teachers develop an understanding of the dynamic nature of reader preferences, interests, experiences, and identities, and would provide information these teachers could use to help them craft targeted high press questions about students' reading.

Asking novice teachers to record and transcribe brief segments of instruction, such as minilessons or individual reading conferences, could draw their attention to positioning processes and their use of high press and reducing press talk moves. Novice or experienced teachers could collaborate productively with one another to inquire into their discourse practices, using video and brief transcripts as tools. This kind of analysis would also facilitate attention to students' use of talk and could help teachers develop assessment tools, such as protocols for structured observation. Highlighting student talk about texts as an important object for assessment, rather than an incidental

aspect of learning, would offer teachers and teacher educators opportunities to confront the reductionist pressures of current curricular and assessment policies. Teachers could collaborate to identify the content and structures they hope to hear in student talk about texts (e.g., making claims about characters' motives, following symbols across a text, comparing information presented in multiple texts, supporting claims and opinions with evidence from texts). Observation protocols or rubrics for assessing student participation in text discussions could be used to demonstrate student growth in this area, for investigating relationships between student talk and performance on convergent measures of reading comprehension (e.g., standardized multiple choice tests), and to foreground talk about texts as an important area for instruction, assessment, and teacher professional development.

Implications for Future Research

This study was motivated by a desire to understand what conditions make it safe, sensible, and possible for a teacher to utilize a discourse approach that was used infrequently by teachers in a quantitative study. The framework may prove useful to researchers studying other discourse or instructional approaches that have theoretical or empirical backing, but that teachers tend not to use. By investigating the conditions that make it safe, sensible, and possible for teachers to use recommended (but infrequently employed) instructional practices, researchers have the opportunity to approach important problems of practice from strengths-based perspectives. While research into the conditions that prevent teachers from using recommended practices can help scholars and educators identify important obstacles to improved teaching, strengths-based research examining cases of teachers who do implement recommended approaches can provide clearer road maps for practice. This approach may also prove empowering for teachers and literacy coaches conducting informal inquiry within their school contexts and may help them find ways to improve instructional practices even when they face an array of constraints and obstacles.

The findings from the cross-case qualitative and discourse analyses presented in this article highlight the value of positioning theory as a framework for interpreting classroom interactions. Kris was able to use sincere, active listening, ongoing knowledge of students' reading lives, and strategic combinations of reducing press and high press talk moves to position students as competent, capable readers and individuals with worthwhile ideas about texts. Through positioning, teacher–student interactions have the potential to influence not only learning, reading development, and engagement, but also the gradual construction of literate identities. As researchers increasingly turn their attention to classroom talk as an important lever for the development of students' reading comprehension and text analysis abilities (Wilkinson & Son, 2011), positioning theory offers a useful conceptualization of relationships between discourse processes and cultural practices (e.g., reading and text discussion) that can further these efforts. Positioning theory also provides an in-the-moment window into the construction of identity, a topic of growing interest to literacy researchers and educators. Examining the interplay of discourse patterns, cultural practices and activity, and positioning in classroom interactions may enable researchers and teachers to better understand how we can help all students come to see themselves as capable, competent, curious readers with ideas about texts that merit discussion and consideration.

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