



Where We Read from Matters: Disciplinary Literacy in a Ninth-Grade Social Studies Classroom

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Where We Read From Matters: Disciplinary Literacy in a Ninth-Grade Social Studies Classroom

Teachers can guide students in discussing, comparing, and contrasting the cultural and contextual knowledge they have to make sense of texts in order to learn more with and from one another about the resources, experiences, knowledge, and perspectives they bring to the classroom.

James Damico | Mark Baildon | Marisa Exter | Shiau-Jing Guo

Guiding secondary school students to be strategic readers in the disciplines (e.g., mathematics, science, social studies) comes with many challenges. These challenges stem from several sources: Content area teachers resist the idea that responsibilities for reading instruction reside with them; the institutional structure and organization of secondary schooling reinforces a compartmentalized view of subject area instruction, one inhospitable to the integration of reading instruction; and students themselves have low expectations that reading instruction should be integrated into the core disciplinary subjects (Moje, 2008). Notwithstanding these challenges, or in response to them, there are calls to reconceptualize secondary school literacy in terms of *disciplinary literacy instruction* (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008) in which an emphasis on “what it means to *learn* in the subject areas and what counts as knowledge in the disciplines that undergird those subjects” (Moje, 2008, p. 99) is central to literacy instruction in these subject areas.

This article considers the possibilities of disciplinary literacy in social studies as we examine how four classes of ninth-grade students in an international school in East Asia used a set of Web-based technology tools to evaluate two competing webpages about the Taiwan Straits, a contentious issue between Taiwan and Mainland China. Our findings highlight the ways these students used these tools as they evaluated the two texts.

Implications of this work point to the potential benefits of understanding secondary subject matter teaching and learning as an integration of metacognitive reading strategies and metadiscursive skills of the discipline, especially how this integration might center upon the cultural resources and contextual knowledge that readers bring with them to texts. From a pedagogical perspective, we contend that guiding students to access and mobilize their own cultural and contextual knowledge is a core disciplinary literacy practice in social studies. Findings from this study bring this to light in one secondary school context. The findings also point to a necessary next pedagogical step: the willingness and ability of teachers and students to rigorously evaluate this knowledge.

Although earlier generations of historians tended to view history and historical writing as mostly objective (with clear distinctions between facts and values and between the knower and the known), scholarship in the past few decades more forcefully posits the perspective that all historical works reflect the views and values of historians.

earlier generations of historians tended to view history and historical writing as mostly objective (with clear distinctions between facts and values and between the knower and the known), scholarship in the past few decades more forcefully posits the perspective that all historical works reflect the views and values of historians (Jenkins, 1997; Novick, 1988; White, 1987). These scholars pay particular attention to historiography (the writing of history and how different historical methods shape this composing process) to help us see how and why different historians assign different meanings to the same historical events. Most germane to the scope of this article is the way an emphasis on historiography (a metalevel view of how histories are constructed) undergirded the development of the set of Web-based tools and the goals of the teacher in this ninth-grade classroom, especially his focus on issues of authorship, sourcing, contextualizing, interpretation, bias, and audience.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by an attempt to integrate two sets of perspectives: disciplined inquiry in social studies and content area literacy instruction, especially cognitive reading strategies instruction. Social studies scholars (e.g., Barton, 2005; VanSledright, 2002) have described investigative techniques of inquiry as processes of knowing how to find claims and evidence that can shed light on the question or problem one is investigating, checking and cross-checking claims and evidence to build contextualized interpretations, and making judgments about authorship, perspective, and validity.

Our understanding of disciplinary inquiry in social studies also reflects a shift in perspective in the social studies disciplines, especially the discipline of history, which is our focus in this article. Although

Building from Pressley (2006), Conley (2008) defined cognitive strategy instruction as “constructive interactions with texts, both written and digital, in which good readers and writers continuously create meaning” (p. 84). The guiding premise here is that successful or expert readers employ a range of strategies in making sense of texts and that these strategies can be taught to all readers. The primary goal of cognitive strategy instruction is for readers to become more strategic and self-reliant, and this includes becoming more aware of their own thinking or metacognitive about their own reading. The strategies that “active, expert” readers employ include asking questions, determining importance, drawing inferences, using existing knowledge, synthesizing information, repairing or fixing comprehension when necessary, and monitoring comprehension throughout the reading process (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992, pp. 153–154). The strategies most applicable to this study are determining importance, drawing inferences, and using existing knowledge, especially the cultural, familial, and contextual knowledge that readers bring to bear on their meaning making.

Review of Related Research

Educational researchers have noted the importance of sociocultural experience, knowledge, frames of reference, and beliefs in learning (e.g., Au, 1998, Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001). However, there is much more to learn about the specific ways cultural factors shape readers’ meaning making (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). We do know that readers’ responses to texts can be informed by the cultural knowledge and resources they bring to texts. Lee (1995), for example, employed a culturally based cognitive apprenticeship model, which identified ways African American youth tapped into their knowledge of *signifying*, a form of figurative oral language used in African American communities, to enrich their meaning making with literary texts. Similarly, Brooks (2006) demonstrated how African American readers cultivated literary understanding through accessing the knowledge and experiences of particular African American themes, patterns, and practices.

In social studies education, Epstein (1998) has highlighted how different perspectives and

understandings about the past held by African American and European American students shaped their ideas about the credibility of secondary sources, such as history textbooks. African American students viewed family members as the most credible sources about the past, while European American students considered history textbooks to be most authoritative. Epstein attributes these differences to the sociocultural contexts in which students were raised and concluded, “Young people’s perspectives about the social world, like those of historians and teachers, are shaped by their identities as members of families, communities, regions, and nations, as well as by their affiliations with racial, ethnic, religious, and other groups” (Epstein & Shiller, 2005, p. 201).

However, there is scarce work that has investigated how students access and use cultural resources and knowledge in secondary school classrooms, especially when reading websites. Kuiper, Volman, and Terwel (2005) noted that although making sense of information is an interactive process between the user and the Web, student characteristics have not been an object of research. If student characteristics were a focal point in studies, researchers tended to focus on students’ attitudes toward research using the Web, their age, or gender issues. Students’ prior knowledge was typically treated as skills or basic knowledge of particular topics rather than cultural resources students drew upon to evaluate Web information.

Methods

The study is situated in a prominent international school in Taiwan with 2,200 K–12 students who must possess a U.S. passport to be enrolled. The participants in this study include four ninth-grade social studies classes in an Asian Studies Social Studies curriculum. The students are American citizens, yet most identify as Taiwanese or Taiwanese American, and most are ethnically Chinese and practice cultural traditions of China, such as speaking Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, and other dialects) in their home and in most other settings outside the classroom and observing holidays like Chinese New Year. Of 70 participants in this study, 56 identified as Taiwanese or Taiwanese American. Ten students were from non-Taiwanese backgrounds, and four identified as having

one Taiwanese or Chinese parent. This article focuses on the culminating part of a “Conflict and Change” unit when a veteran teacher, Mark (second author), designed a Web-based activity for his students to focus on the Taiwan Straits, specifically on cross-Straits relations between Taiwan and China, a relationship that centers upon the long-standing dispute about Taiwan’s legal status (whether it is part of China or if it is a sovereign nation).

Description of Two Webpages and Pedagogical Purposes

Mark (the teacher in this classroom) selected two webpages with different perspectives about cross-Straits relations. The first Web text, “Four-Point Guideline on Cross-Straits Relations Set Forth by President Hu” (english.people.com.cn/200503/05/eng20050305_175645.html), can be found on the site *People’s Daily Online*. As a newspaper, the *People’s Daily* began publication in June 1948 and quickly assumed the role of institutional newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party. In January 1997, it launched its online version (www.people.com.cn); the online English version (english.people.com.cn) began in January 1998. According to the site’s “About Us” link, the goal of this English version is to bring the “latest news dispatches of policy information and resolutions of the Chinese government.” The content of *People’s Daily Online* consists mainly of translations of major news releases about “new policies, resolutions and statements of the Chinese Government.”

The specific text Mark used with his students, “Four-Point Guideline on Cross-Straits Relations Set Forth by President Hu,” is imbued with an authoritative tone and lists no author; it is essentially a transcript from a speech by President Hu in which he makes the overarching claim that “relevant personages and political parties in Taiwan...make the correct historic choice to maintain peace across the Taiwan Straits, promote cross-Straits relations and realize peaceful reunification.”

The second text, “What Is Taiwan’s Correct Position?” (www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2006/01/15/2003289102), is located on the *Taipei Times* website, launched in June 1999. The primary readers of *Taipei Times* online are from the

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United States, Canada, England, France, and Germany (70% of the total) while the rest (30%) are from Taiwan and other Asian countries. The stated objective of the website is to provide information “on local politics, society, economics and culture, as well as balanced and comprehensive analysis of Taiwan’s political scene.” The *Taipei Times*, however, tends to favor Taiwan Independence over Chinese reunification. This is particularly evident in the editorials.

The specific text Mark selected, “What Is Taiwan’s Correct Position?” is an editorial that appears to describe and critique

multiple perspectives within the current Taiwanese political arena. The author first describes the opposing stances of the two major political parties in Taiwan: the pan-Blue camp (national unification) and the pan-Green camp (sovereignty and independence). Next, the author lays out the main claim of the article that Taiwan should correctly position itself by neither closing itself off to the world nor placing all its bargaining chips in China. The author does this in part by posing the rhetorical question “If Taiwan becomes a member of China’s economic sphere and a tight structure for the division of labor between the two is put in place, will China allow Taiwan to enjoy democracy and freedom and continue to be a sovereign and independent state?”

Mark selected these two texts because they offered important historical and policy information on cross-Straits relations. Each makes main claims (e.g., about China’s “guidelines” in dealing with Taiwan, about Taiwan’s “correct position”) and each invites students to tap into their prior knowledge and, for most of the students, their cultural and familial backgrounds.

Backgrounds, Roles, and Stances of Researchers

The four of us came to this project with different backgrounds but with some shared interests. James (first author), a literacy researcher and teacher educator

in the United States, is a cocreator of the Web-based tools and the director of a university-based Web reading project. Mark (second author), also a cocreator of the tools, is a U.S.-born social studies researcher and teacher educator currently working in Asia. Mark also recently worked for two years in Taiwan as a ninth-grade social studies educator and was the teacher in this study. Marisa (third author), a doctoral student in the United States, is a technology specialist and researcher while Shiao-Jing (fourth author), also a doctoral student and a researcher on the project, is a native of Taiwan with research interests in language acquisition and development.

Web-Based Critical Reading Tools

Mark used a set of Web-based tools designed to guide readers as they work with websites (cwr.indiana.edu). These tools attempt to integrate disciplinary reading practices in social studies, especially history, with cognitive reading comprehension strategies. Building from the three dimensions model of literacy (Durrant & Green, 2001; Green, 1988), these tools include four “lenses”:

1. A *descriptive lens* guides readers to discern the reliability and relevance of a site.
2. An *academic lens* guides readers to activate relevant prior knowledge and examine claims and evidence on a site.
3. A *critical lens* guides readers to identify included and omitted perspectives and to evaluate how the authors/creators of a site attempt to influence them (Damico, Baildon, & Campano, 2005).
4. A *reflexive lens* guides readers to examine how their own beliefs, values, and experiences affect their reading.

Each lens takes a webpage and places it within a frame. Alongside this framed webpage are guiding questions or prompts, tips and suggestions, as well as a place for students to type their responses to the guiding questions.

The lenses promote disciplinary literacy in social studies—that is, metacognitive reading strategies with disciplinary practices, primarily drawn from the discipline of history. From a history perspective, these

lenses emphasize the importance of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating sources of information, each a core disciplinary practice (Wineburg, 2001). Specifically, this includes questions within the lenses that focus on determining the credibility of a source (e.g., “Who is the author, sponsor, and intended audience of the webpage?”), detecting bias (e.g., “What perspectives are included and omitted in the text?”), and evaluating claims and evidence and corroborating across sources (e.g., “Are the claims and evidence convincing? Explain.”). From a cognitive reading strategies perspective, these lenses emphasize determining importance (e.g., “What claims does the author make? What evidence is used to support the claims?”—similar to “determining the main idea and supporting details,” a common reading comprehension strategy), drawing inferences (e.g., “What does this text want you to think, believe, or do?”), using existing knowledge (e.g., “What do you already know about the topic?”), and analyzing the structural components of each text (e.g., “What techniques does the author use to influence you?”). The writing tool within the lenses also functions as a response log, providing students with opportunities to document and view their thinking.

Using the four lenses, the students read and responded to the two Web texts Mark selected, working individually across two 45-minute class periods.

Research Question and Data Analysis

The research question that guided our analysis was “In what ways do students mobilize personal, familial, or cultural knowledge when evaluating two Web texts about the cross-Straits relationship between Taiwan and China?”

This led us to focus on the students’ responses to the question “What affects the way I read this site?” (within the reflexive lens), a question that prompts readers to consider their values, opinions, emotions, and background in composing their answers. Using a constant comparative method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), two of us worked individually to code all the students’ written responses to this question. The four of us then talked through points of divergence from the initial coding and came to consensus about a set of categories that best represented the students’ responses. To be as comprehensive as possible, we coded each instance

of a given category, which often led to multiple codes within a single response. For example, we identified the following response from a Taiwanese student to the *Taipei Times* text as fitting with three categories: *prior knowledge*, *parents/family*, and *opinions/values*.

From my *past experience* and my *family influence* I do think that it's very right that Taiwan should not depend on China so much economically.... However, I *don't like the way the author described this issue*. I *don't see some people going to China to prevent the independence of Taiwan as a selling out of Taiwan*....

At times it was difficult to tease out distinctions across categories. Consider the previous example. The student explicitly indicated that previous experience (prior knowledge) and family (parents/family) influenced the reading of this text, and the student also offered an opinion. Although there is overlap across these categories (opinions often reflect familial and cultural influences), we coded for explicit language use that corresponded to each category (e.g., responses that included “I think,” “I believe,” “I like,” or “I dislike” were coded as opinions/values).

What Readers Brought to the Two Web Texts

We discerned 10 categories from the students’ responses to the question “What affects the way I read this site?” Here we provide an example of each category and indicate the student’s cultural background:

1. *Opinions/values*—“*I favour the status quo over reunification. I do not think that reunification is the best solution, because it would bring a lot of uncertainty.... Also, I do not particularly favour being united with a Communist nation. I believe strongly in democracy*” (Background: Taiwanese).
2. *Where I live*—“*Maybe my view would be different if I lived in China, but that's another story*” (Background: Taiwanese).
3. *Background/culture*—“*my background.... I was born in Taiwan and that's my culture*” (Background: Taiwanese).
4. *Parents/family*—“*it didn't really affect my opinion on this issue until my parents explained it to me*” (Background: Taiwanese).

5. *Prior knowledge*—"the way I read this article which could be mainly of *what I know* and how I see China as" (Background: Taiwanese).
6. *Friends/media*—"the people around me (*friends*, family), *media*" (Background: Taiwanese).
7. *Social studies class*—"the propaganda in the social studies classes also affects my reading on this issue" (Background: Caucasian/Swedish).
8. *Design of page*—"I like things to be very neat and organized and legible with *non-colored backgrounds*" (Background: Taiwanese).
9. *No opinion/neutrality*—"Well I do live in Taiwan but I have no opinion on the government parties here" (Background: Hispanic/Costa Rican).
10. *Unclear*—"The thought of how Taiwan is under China" (Background: Taiwanese).

Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of the students' responses reflected the influence of contextual factors. Table 1 shows the frequency with which Taiwanese students referred to each of these contextual factors as playing a role in their responses. As Table 1 demonstrates, most Taiwanese students acknowledged being influenced by their *opinions/values*,

where they live, background/culture, and parents/family. For some, these influences suggested an unwavering stance toward the topic of cross-Straits relations between China and Taiwan or toward relations between China and Taiwan more generally. For example, one Taiwanese student responded to the *People's Daily* text, stating: "What affects the way I read this site is that I've been raised by my parents that 'declaration of independence for Taiwan' is right.... Even after reading this site, I still dislike the idea of unifying with China." Another Taiwanese student wrote: "I value democracy and free choice very much which explains why I am so critical of China. Whenever I read something about China, I will always interpret it negatively." The Taiwanese students, however, did not all respond in this way; different experiences, backgrounds, or familial influences led to less critical interpretations of China's position. One student, for example, responded to the *Taipei Times* text: "My dad owns a company in China, and he spend(s) most of his time there. I often hear him talking about how the economy there is booming, and how it benefit(s) Taiwan." Here we see how a student's more favorable stance toward China is shaped by family experiences.

Although there were significantly fewer non-Taiwanese students who participated in this study, their responses signal the importance of how

Table 1 Responses of Taiwanese Students When Asked What Affects the Way They Read Each Text

Impact factor	<i>People's Daily</i>		<i>Taipei Times</i>	
	# of responses (from 85 coded responses)		# of responses (from 71 coded responses)	
Opinions/values	24	(28%)	24	(34%)
Where I live	14	(16%)	9	(13%)
Background/culture	23	(27%)	17	(24%)
Parents/family	15	(18%)	12	(17%)
Prior knowledge	3	(4%)	3	(4%)
Friends/media	1	(1%)	0	(0%)
Social studies class	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Design of page	3	(4%)	2	(3%)
No opinion/neutrality	1	(1%)	2	(3%)
Unclear	1	(1%)	2	(3%)

Note. Each student answer may include multiple responses, each of which is coded separately.

Table 2 Responses of Non-Taiwanese Students When Asked What Affects the Way They Read Each Text

Impact factor	<i>People's Daily</i>		<i>Taipei Times</i>	
	# of responses (from 13 coded responses)		# of responses (from 11 coded responses)	
Opinions/values	1	(8%)	2	(18%)
Where I live	7	(54%)	0	(0%)
Background/culture	1	(8%)	2	(18%)
Parents/family	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Prior knowledge	2	(15%)	2	(18%)
Friends/media	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
Social Studies class	0	(0%)	1	(9%)
Design of page	0	(0%)	0	(0%)
No opinion/neutrality	1	(8%)	3	(30%)
Unclear	1	(8%)	1	(9%)

Note. Each student answer may include multiple responses, each of which is coded separately.

contextual factors shaped their meaning making. Table 2 shows the degree to which non-Taiwanese students referred to each of the factors identified as playing a role in their responses.

Seven of the 10 non-Taiwanese students stated that living in Taiwan influenced them to have a more favorable stance toward the position of Taiwanese independence. (See “Where I live” category and *People's Daily* column in Table 2.) For example, a student from Israel responded to the *People's Daily* text: “Since I live in Taiwan, I am on Taiwan’s side, so this Web site goes against my beliefs.” This student linked her beliefs to geographic location, situating her response and striking a solidarity stance with most of her Taiwanese classmates.

Another student, who self-identified as Chinese and Caucasian, occupied a seemingly more complicated social location as a reader. After living in China for five years and in Taiwan for four, she viewed herself as “half Chinese by blood, as in the Mainland, and not Taiwan.” Her response to the *People's Daily* text was,

Even though I’m pretty much neutral when it comes to anything relating to politics, it’s hard not to get caught up in everything that’s happening between China and Taiwan. However, I did not find this article in any way offensive, but I think some other people might.

Her response to the *Taipei Times* text was different:

Ethnically, I am half Chinese (from the Mainland), and some parts of this article anger me, and a lot of the views are very different from what I grew up believing. My background in both places strongly influences the way I feel about the issue.

Although we would like to know more about these “strong influences” and what policy stance she would take about the cross-Straits relationship if she were compelled to “choose a side,” what we do see here is a student negotiating what it means to respond to two competing texts about a politically divisive issue from her vantage point of living on “both sides” of the issue.

Evaluating Claims and Evidence

After we identified what students viewed as key contextual factors shaping their reading of the two competing Web texts, we endeavored to ascertain a more concrete understanding of the impact of these influences. We were particularly interested in the impact of contextual factors on the students’ evaluations of claims and evidence within the two Web texts. When we looked across all the students’ responses with a focus on claims and evidence, we noted that both the Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese students tended to

find the claims and evidence with the *Taipei Times* text more convincing than the *People's Daily* text. Moreover, even when the Taiwanese students viewed the *People's Daily* text to be convincing, they typically qualified their responses, as the following two responses demonstrate: "Yes, the claims and evidence are convincing but it is obvious that the writer is on China's side" and "The claims are convincing for neutral readers who do not already stand on a side, but for me it's not convincing at all because I think Taiwan is a nation."

Most of the students, regardless of background, were also able to identify several factors to explain their reasoning for why claims and evidence on each site were or were not convincing. We categorized these explanations from the students with the following descriptors:

- *Data support*—"Good use of quotes, statistics, facts, etc."
- *Perspective and prior knowledge*—"The claims and evidence are likely credible *because I know from past knowledge* what Taiwan's standpoint is." Or a reference to knowledge the student has but others may not have, for example, "Seems convincing *if the reader doesn't know* that China has over 400 missiles aiming at Taiwan and if we gain independence we would be attacked."

- *General statement*—"The claims and evidence are convincing."
- *Tone*—"The author has a really *strong voice*...and uses smart words."
- *Bias*—Student indicated the author was biased.
- *Source*—"The Chinese *writer is writing to support China*."
- *Quotes/paraphrasing*—Student directly quoted or paraphrased the words of the author as a basis for their explanation for whether the claims and evidence were convincing.
- *Lack of evidence*—"There is no evidence provided."
- *Other*—"This makes me ask questions"; "This is unrealistic."

Table 3 summarizes the frequency of each of the factors to support students' opinions regarding the claims and evidence. Across both articles the students' own prior knowledge and personal perspectives played an important role in judging the value of the claims and evidence provided. When examined more closely, we noted that the students who agreed that the claims and evidence were convincing most frequently referred either to facts, statistics, examples, or use of quotes as convincing supporting evidence. Students who were unconvinced by the claims and

Table 3 Factors Students Refer to When Asked to Determine Whether Claims and Evidence Are Convincing for Each of the Two Articles

Factor	<i>People's Daily Online</i>		<i>Taipei Times</i>	
	# of responses (from 64 coded responses)		# of responses (from 58 coded responses)	
Data support	13	(23%)	11	(20%)
Perspective/prior knowledge	14	(22%)	6	(14%)
General statement	6	(11%)	15	(28%)
Tone	8	(14%)	7	(13%)
Bias	7	(13%)	6	(11%)
Source	6	(11%)	2	(4%)
Quotes/paraphrasing	2	(4%)	3	(6%)
Lack of evidence	3	(5%)	1	(2%)
Other	3	(5%)	5	(9%)

Note. Each student answer may include multiple responses, each of which is coded separately.

evidence frequently cited their own personal knowledge about the topic and contrasted it to hypothetical readers who would not have such knowledge and may be more easily convinced (e.g., “Seems convincing if the reader doesn’t know that China has over 400 missiles aiming at Taiwan...”).

However, because many of the students’ responses tended to remain in the realm of generalities (e.g., the site is convincing because the author employs “good statistics”), which likely was, in part, due to the wording of the prompts, we looked closely at the students’ responses across the lenses to see if we could identify more specific uses and applications of readers’ contextual knowledge in their evaluations of the two Web texts. As we did this, we noticed that some students accessed and applied their contextual knowledge to identify two rhetorical techniques employed in the two Web texts, especially the *People’s Daily* text.

The first technique, using disputable historical facts, involves statements that read like historical facts but which may not be recognized as such by all stakeholders in the given context. For example, the *People’s Daily* text includes the claim that “China and Taiwan have always been one,” which a group of Taiwanese students found problematic but no non-Taiwanese students identified.

The second rhetorical technique, using emotional appeals, includes statements such as “Chinese people and Taiwanese compatriots *all love peace*” and are “blood brothers” in the *People’s Daily* text article or the use of the term “China fever” in the *Taipei Times* text. Again, the Taiwanese students rather than the non-Taiwanese students referred or alluded to this technique to problematize the claims and evidence of the two Web texts. This leads us to tentatively claim that because the Taiwanese students in general have more contextual knowledge of the cross-Straits relationship between Taiwan and China, they are more apt to apply this knowledge to identify the rhetorical moves embedded in the two texts.

Where We Read From Matters

This study represents an initial attempt to better understand how readers use their cultural and contextual resources in meaning making with politically sensitive Web-based content. As an exploratory study, it

just scratches the surface of what cultural and contextual knowledge a group of readers mobilized and how they employed this knowledge to evaluate two texts. Nonetheless, this study does offer several implications for practice.

One implication relates to the differences between the ways historians and history students do historical work (Wineburg, 2001). History students often fail to consider author intentionality, tend not to situate texts in a historical context (and social, political, and economic contexts), and often do not carefully corroborate sources. Historians, in contrast, strive to understand an author’s intentions as well as reactions from different audiences while weighing their own reactions (Wineburg, 2001). With the lenses from the Web-based tools and the teacher to guide them, the ninth-grade students began to do some of this work. The students were guided to focus on issues of authorship, evaluate the claims and evidence used by the authors, and explicitly consider potential factors that were shaping their responses to the two texts.

A second and related implication for practice is for educators to be more explicit about the relationship between metacognitive reading strategies and the metadiscursive skills that are part of the social studies. Findings from this study help elucidate specific metacognitive reading strategies needed in the social studies, such as determining the credibility of a source, detecting bias, and maintaining a vigilant commitment to evaluating and corroborating claims and evidence. This involves teachers’ guiding students to understand how different kinds of texts “work” (Luke & Freebody, 1997); discern the ways authors and texts position readers; identify how and why particular accounts are created, legitimated, and disseminated; and recognize how these versions serve larger political and social purposes (Segall, 2006).

A third implication centers on technology, namely rethinking the development and implementation of the Web-based instructional lenses (descriptive, academic, critical, reflexive) used with the two Web texts. Although Mark found the four instructional lenses responsive to his instructional goals to facilitate careful and critical examinations of Web-based content, the actual use of the lenses by the students evinced a linear implementation with this technology tool—that is,

working methodically through each lens in a predetermined order. There are benefits to this approach (being systematic and orderly does help manage complexity), yet any overly structured or formulaic approach might not be responsive enough to challenges involved in Web reading. With this in mind, we could revise the Web reading activity described in this study to be even more intentional in promoting reflexive reading. The students in this study, for example, responded to the question “What affects the way I read this site?” at the conclusion of this Web reading activity. However, their responses to the other prompts (especially prompts about evaluating claims and evidence) might have differed if they were asked to keep the reflexive question “What affects the way I read this site?” in mind throughout the activity. This type of reflexive reading helps us better understand Web-based inquiry and reading as highly dynamic and fluid activities in which a number of factors converge to shape the ways readers transact with texts (Damico & Baildon, 2007).

Final Thoughts

Moje (2008) has argued that “producing knowledge in a discipline requires fluency in making and interrogating knowledge claims, which in turn requires fluency in a wide range of ways of constructing and communicating knowledge” (p. 99). Part of this fluency must be seen in terms of students accessing and using their cultural and contextual knowledge and being more fully aware of how this knowledge shapes their reading: what it helps them see and what it hinders them from seeing. The students in this study mobilized certain kinds of knowledge based on their identities, their sense of place, their experiences, and familial and cultural backgrounds. They became more aware of these resources when prompted to think about questions like “What affects the way I read this site?” The next step is to better guide them to identify how these resources/knowledge might lead to certain interpretations and understandings while limiting others. This is especially the case when readers feel strongly about, for or against, the political or ideological content in a text. In these situations, a priori beliefs and understandings, rather than open-minded and substantive engagement, often can govern meaning making.

This speaks to the need for teachers to guide students in discussing, comparing, and contrasting the

cultural and contextual knowledge they mobilize to make sense of different texts. This would enable students to learn more with and from each other about the resources, experiences, knowledge, and perspectives they bring to bear in their meaning making. This creates opportunities, for example, for the student from Israel in Mark’s class to draw upon her experience growing up in Israel to potentially help the rest of the class better understand how conflict can arise due to different understandings about the past. It also creates opportunities for a teacher like Mark to acknowledge how his understandings are shaped and filtered in many ways through his experiences as a white American middle class male. These types of discussions, for teachers and students alike, promote the quality of self-reflective reading necessary for the demands of disciplinary literacy in social studies.

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