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A Closer Look at One Elementary School's Use of Informational Text in Classroom Instruction

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
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Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this action research study was to explore the use of informational text in kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms in one elementary school. The research was based on analyzing responses given by teachers on a self-report survey; which addressed various aspects of their use of informational texts. The survey included questions about the sources teachers used to find informational texts, the criteria used in selection of such texts, and the frequency and purposes for informational text use. These data were then compared according to teachers' years of teaching experience and grade level taught to see the influence of such groupings. Findings indicated that teachers tend to use the sources for informational texts that are most readily available within a school. Further, findings indicated that not all teachers use the same selection criteria for picking informational texts to use in their classrooms and teachers value different criteria for selection of such texts. Next, frequency of use of informational texts varied from teacher to teacher, with some teachers using informational texts often and some using informational texts very little. The use of such texts was almost always tied to specific content, but the purposes for use of informational texts varied from teacher to teacher, with some teachers being very specific in their purpose, to others being very vague about their purpose for the use of such texts. Finally, findings show that there were differences in the ways teachers in two grade-level groups selected and used informational texts.

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Brigham Young University

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The thesis of Marjean P. Sorensen is acceptable in its final form including (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory and ready for submission.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Informational texts have an important place in the lives of elementary students as an instructional tool (Yopp & Yopp, 2006). They provide answers to children's questions about their world and build students' background knowledge (Hirsch, 2003). They expose children to vocabulary (Duke & Kays, 1998), supplying them with the language needed to discuss concepts they are learning. Informational texts offer children experiences with text structures and features differing from narrative text, thus providing them with knowledge to process the information (Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). Informational texts also prepare them for future interactions with content area texts, as well as the texts they are most likely to read and write as adults (Ogle & Blachowicz, 2002). Informational texts prompt discussions that are different from those sparked by narrative texts, and they call for different types and uses of comprehension strategies (Smolkin & Donovan, 2002). In addition, informational texts serve as a reading catalyst for some children (Caswell & Duke, 1998); children who are not motivated to read narrative text might be eager to explore the pages of a book about spiders, dinosaurs, or real events. The effective use of informational text in elementary classrooms can provide critical skills necessary for success in the information age (Pearson & Duke, 2002).

Despite the clear importance of informational literature being used in the classroom, some educators have failed to develop strong informational reading and writing skills in many students (Duke, 2000). Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) have suggested that difficulties with informational reading may explain the fourth-grade slump in overall literacy achievement and progress. Perhaps the most common and long-standing response to concerns about poor

informational reading and writing skills has been to encourage educators to provide students with more guided experience with informational texts, particularly in the early grades (e.g., Pappas, 1991; Sanacore, 1991).

Despite this encouragement for greater attention to and more effective use of informational texts, there has been little research available about the degree to which informational texts are actually used in the classroom. Also, research is limited on the sources used by teachers for informational texts, what teachers use as criteria for selection of informational texts, the frequency and purposes for use of informational texts, and how years of teaching experience or grade level taught impacts the use of informational texts. In short, there is little research that tells what is actually happening in kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms with informational texts. When there is a call for instructional improvements such as this, it is vital for educators and others to know where to begin. A comprehensive understanding of the state of current practice is fundamental to efforts aimed at reform.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' current use of informational text in classroom instruction in a single school setting. This action research was important to do because it directly relates to my position as literacy facilitator at this elementary school. Factors that may impact the use of such texts include the sources teachers use for locating informational texts, the criteria they use in selecting informational texts, the frequency and purposes for which they use informational texts and the influence of years of teaching experience and the grade level they teach. Because researchers have called for more experiences with and guided exposure to informational texts, a better understanding of how teachers use informational texts can inform

potential reform and professional development opportunities to encourage teachers' use of informational texts (e.g., Caswell & Duke, 1998; Duke, 2000; Duke & Kays, 1998; Moss 1997).

Research Questions

The questions guiding this research are

1. Where do teachers find informational texts to use in their classrooms?

2. What criteria do classroom teachers use when selecting informational texts?

3. How frequently and for what purposes do teachers use informational texts as a tool for instruction?

4. How do years of teaching experience and grade level taught influence teachers' use of informational texts in K-6 classrooms?

Limitations

This is a descriptive, action research study of the use of informational text by K-6 teachers in one elementary school. Like any other study, there are limitations to this research. The population being surveyed will not be a random, statistical sampling, but will be limited to participating teachers in one elementary school. Though this information may provide some basis for making a prediction that might hold true for a larger population, it is not the intent of this study to generalize the findings to a larger population.

Although there may be numerous issues that need to be addressed in relationship to informational texts in classroom use, the inquiry I am conducting will be limited. It will explore only the descriptors specified in the research questions. This is not to suggest that there are not other issues that need to be addressed in relationship to informational texts.

The last limitation is that I am a researcher in my own school. Therefore, there will likely be some researcher bias in the study. As a new literacy facilitator and new to the school, I only

know a few teachers, but consider some of them to be friends. I also have constant contact with all faculty, I am teaching a few of their students in intervention reading groups and I work with them in their classrooms. Therefore, my objectivity in the research may be influenced by the close proximity between the teachers and myself.

Definitions of Terms

Opinions differ about what is meant by informational texts. For the purpose of this study the terms expository text, non-fiction, and informational texts will have the same meaning. Informational text will be defined as texts primarily written to inform, explain, describe, and present information or to persuade (Saul & Dieckman, 2005). According to the National Science Teacher Association (NSTA, 2008a), high quality informational texts contain information that is clear, accurate, and up to date; theories and facts are clearly distinguished; facts are not oversimplified so that the information is misleading; generalizations are supported by facts, and significant facts are not omitted; and text should contain structures and features that are not normally found in narrative texts. Further, informational books should be free of gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic bias, have realistic photographs, and accurate easy to follow illustrations. These qualities informed the content and structure of the survey instrument in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The use of informational texts has received increased attention in recent years (Hall & Sabey, 2007). Several factors have influenced this interest. Children's use of informational texts typically increases as they enter advanced grades. By sixth grade, more than 75% of school reading is done with non-narrative texts (Moss, 2004). Children use informational texts far beyond the walls of the classroom and informational texts are a better match to the types of literacy found in the home (Caswell & Duke, 1998). Approximately 96% of text that appears on the Internet is informational (Kamil & Lane, 1998), and the majority of students' eventual adult reading, both on and off the job, will be informational (Venezsky, 2000).

Historical Background

Informational text use for young students is not a new concept. In his review of a hundred years of children's non-fiction, Giblin (2000) stated that as early as 1900 informational texts appeared in issues of *St. Nicholas* magazine, the best known and respected children's periodical at the turn of the century. In 1918, the Macmillan Company was the first to launch a department devoted exclusively to the publication of books for children. Recognizing a new market, many other publishers founded children's book departments in the 1920s and 1930s. Many informational texts were included in this new market.

Two important historical events changed children's non-fiction texts. The first was the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Among other things, the act provided funds for the purchase of science books by school libraries. Then, increased support for school libraries came as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's *"Great Society"* program of 1964. This new financing benefited all types of children's books, but the funding in all content areas especially benefited

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nonfiction texts by providing a large portion of the funding to go to this genre of text (Giblin, 2000).

As federal funds dwindled in the 1980s, children's book publishers shifted their focus away from the school market to the bookstore market (Giblin, 2000). To attract consumers, publishers created nonfiction texts that were more visual with less and easier text to read. After two decades of innovation in the children's nonfiction book field, the 1990s were largely a time of consolidation. Young people today, accustomed to getting so much of their information from television and the internet, want emphasis on the "visual" in their books. In contemporary books there is more attention to younger audiences, increased importance and sophistication of illustrations, and greater use of unusual formats (Kurkjian, Livingston, & Cobb, 2006). As we enter the 21st century it is evident that informational texts are marketed for individual consumers as well as the field of education.

Informational Text Use

Content Area Instruction

The content areas (e.g., science, social studies, math) provide learning contexts in which reading and writing are used for a purpose (Morrow, Pressley, Smith, & Smith, 1997). Based on the definition that integration is the interweaving of ideas from different processes, subject areas, or domains of human inquiry (Pearson, 1994), the purpose of integration is to help students realize that what they are learning in one domain can transfer to another. The integrated language arts perspective is based on the belief that reading and writing are functional tools not to be mastered in isolation, but to be used in authentic activities (McGinley & Tierney, 1989). This perspective involves the concurrent teaching of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and

viewing, the incorporation of these language arts into content areas, and using children's literature as a major source of instruction (Morrow, Pressley, Smith, & Smith, 1997).

Theoretical and practical support for integration of the language arts into content area instruction date back to the progressive education movement, associated with the work of John Dewey. In pursuing his concern for teaching children how to learn, Dewey (1916) hypothesized that interest drives thought. He argued that because children play a role in deciding what they study, it is the teacher's responsibility to weave skills through the pursuit of topics of interest. Dewey suggested learning experiences should include problem solving and discovery in social settings.

Morrow, Pressley, Smith, and Smith (1997) posit that combining children's literature with related activities can advance attainment of some of the goals for learning that Dewey envisioned. The use of informational texts integrated into the content areas lends itself to drawing on background knowledge as students interact with peers and adults during reading, writing, listening, and speaking about topics that are interesting to them. Informational texts have become an important component of content area programs in elementary schools. Many educators choose to use children's literature including expository and narrative as a method for teaching mathematics, science, and social studies.

According to Whitin and Wilde (1992, 1995), literature motivates students to learn mathematical concepts, provides a meaningful context for math, celebrates math as a language, demonstrates that math develops out of human experience, fosters the development of number sense, and integrates math into other curriculum areas. Literature can be the vehicle for providing a meaningful context for learning in mathematics as it helps learners value mathematics, encourages learners to be mathematical problem solvers, provides a meaningful context for

children to communicate mathematically, supports learners in reasoning mathematically, and explores a variety of mathematical topics.

The use of informational books in the instruction of science has been advocated for decades as a means of including more relevant, more focused, and more interesting scientific information within science curricula (Ford, 2002; Madrazo, 1997). Informational books in science classrooms portray a welcome alternative to textbooks, providing the benefits of up-to-date content in the thousands of books published each year (Patent, 1998); their focus on select science topics (as opposed to the catch-all seen in a majority of elementary science textbooks); their production quality; and their overall appeal to children (Saul & Jagusch, 1991). Through a mixture of quality writing, excellent photography, engaging graphics and layouts, and topic selection, the books directly address children's interests. In addition, accountability testing in writing and reading across grade levels can be seen as an opportunity to emphasize literacy practices within science; this includes attention to text (Ford, 2006).

Using literature in social studies teaching has shown a persistent, attractive connection (Erickson, 1996). If social studies is taught with or without textbooks, appropriate children's literature is essential (Laughlin & Kardeleff, 1991). The major purpose of social studies is to create informed citizens who can make a positive difference within our democratic and interconnected global society (National Council of the Social Studies, 1994). Children's informational books cover many of the concepts found in the social studies curriculum. They also reflect many of the traditions and values found in our society (Coonrad & Hughes, 1992). Many informational books address important social studies content standards of culture, time continuity and our relationship to the past, global awareness, science and technology, and society in our global world (Kurkjian, Livingston, & Cobb, 2006).

Literacy Instruction

Informational texts, while supporting content learning, are essential to literacy development because they provide students with opportunities to read for different purposes, utilize different reading strategies, develop understandings of diverse text structures and features, and build background knowledge and vocabulary. In addition to sharing informational text through read-alouds, literacy experts have encouraged teachers to provide diverse classroom libraries that include access to informational texts. To provide informational writing experiences that differ from narrative writing. To organize research groups that use informational texts as one resource. To teach with and about informational texts, pair informational text with narrative selections and content area textbooks, and display informational materials in their classrooms (Yopp & Yopp, 2006).

In recent years, arguments for increasing attention to informational texts in grades K-6 have gone beyond preparing children for later schooling and life (Duke, 2000). Scholars have pointed out that informational text can play an important role in motivating children to read in the first place. Some young children find a way into literacy through informational texts that they do not find through narrative and other forms of text (Caswell & Duke, 1998). Informational texts can capitalize on children's interests and curiosities, provide opportunities for children to apply and further develop areas of expertise, and provide valuable links to children's home literacy experiences.

Although researchers emphasize different opportunities and possibilities available through the reading of informational text, most agree that students should be in classrooms that permit access to a wide array of high-quality information books (Saul & Dieckman, 2005). Moss (2004) commented specifically on the need to acquaint students with more high-quality

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informational texts. Researchers also agree that even young students are capable of learning from informational text and greater exposure to informational texts generally increases students' capacity to work with such text (Duke & Kays, 1998).

The existing literature also recommends specific practices useful in the teaching of informational literature. Children should be given the opportunity to browse and choose from the wide variety of informational books (Moss, 2003). High-quality information books should be used for read-alouds (Saul & Dieckman, 2005). There is value in connecting informational books to students' real-world experiences. As students connect their book experiences to real-world experiences with reading and writing, content is both taught and reinforced (Duke, 2004). Students learn academic languages as they become engrossed in and engaged with informational books. Teachers would do well to embed the language associated with specific academic discourses into classroom reading and discussions (Gee, 2004). Explicit instruction in the characteristics and uses of informational text are also recommended (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003).

Explicit Instruction

In their discussion of informational trade books, Palmer and Stewart (2003) found that for students to successfully interact with these texts the classroom teacher must play a critical role. The teacher should be knowledgeable about informational books while increasing students' access to them. Although primary-level teachers have begun to recognize the importance of including informational texts into classroom routines, selecting the best books can be confusing for classroom teachers and students (Stephens, 2008).

Smolkin and Donovan (2005) proposed a number of paths by which teachers can strengthen their students' connections with informational texts. Deepening children's encounters with high-quality nonfiction is important to promote children's ultimate success in content area

studies. Informing children about the multimodal aspects of nonfiction helps students understand the multiple dimensions of representing knowledge. Knowing about multimodal literacy enables children to think more deeply about information located in the text and information located in visual representation, as well as ways in which these two sources interact. Finally, connecting children with high-quality nonfiction writers serves multiple purposes, the amount of work and thought that goes into producing one informational text, how authors and illustrators check their facts, think about their audience, and how authors are willing to rewrite again and again to make sure their messages are as clear as possible.

Teachers need to show children how to use some of the characteristic features of informational texts and how to navigate their way through those unique features (Hall & Sabey, 2007). Teachers can support children in their understanding of these text features by explaining the purpose of the features (i.e., bold words, captions, and text-boxes), teaching children to understand the purpose and use of headings/subheadings, and providing children with the necessary skills to read graphics and other texts that are presented in a non-traditional format.

Informational books can provide an important and unique opportunity to practice comprehension strategies (Saul & Dieckman, 2005). Teachers should be encouraged to look for informational books they can use to model strategies that help students comprehend content-rich literature. These informational texts can be used to help students use their existing knowledge to make sense of what they read, ask questions before, during, and after reading, and create images or visualize what they read. Students should also be helped to determine what is important in the informational texts they read, monitor comprehension throughout the reading process, repair comprehension once they reader realizes it has gone awry, draw inferences during and after reading, and synthesize information while they read.

Goldman and Rakestraw (2000) make a case for the use of informational texts. "Generally speaking, readers appear to have rather incomplete knowledge of the rhetorical structures of expository genre by the end of high school" (p. 324). This suggests the need to examine the impact of explicit instruction in genre structure on students' acquisition of useable knowledge about these structures.

Researchers (e.g., Hall & Sabey, 2007; Ogle & Blachowicz, 2002; Pearson & Duke, 2002) call for using informational texts as a way of strengthening comprehension. Research suggests that to improve comprehension educators should plan instruction focused on vocabulary text structure (Hall, Sabey, & McClellan, 2005), and creating meaningful experiences that allow children to have multiple opportunities to use informational texts (Palinscar & Duke, 2004). However, there has been little research that documents whether or not informational texts are being used for comprehension instruction in younger grade classrooms.

Prior Research

Much of the literature found for this review examines the importance of informational text use in content area curriculum and the teaching of explicit literacy skills. There is also a call (e.g., Palinscar & Duke, 2004; Palmer & Stewart, 2003; Stephens, 2008) to teachers to use informational texts in the classroom. There are, however, two key pieces of research that detail why this study should be done. Research studies conducted by Duke (2000) and Yopp and Yopp (2000), were conducted with students in the early grades of schooling. Both studies show the need for further research into how teachers use informational text in classroom instruction.

Duke (2000) conducted a study in which she observed 20 first grade classrooms in 10 school districts in the greater Boston metropolitan area. Among the aims of the research was a comparison of print environments and experiences offered to students in very low- and very

high-socioeconomic status (SES) schools. Each classroom was visited for four full days over the course of a school year. Observation days were across days of the week in order to decrease the likelihood that a particular unit of study or weekday routine would unduly affect the overall findings for that classroom. While in these classrooms, Duke was an observer only and did not participate in classroom activities or interact with students. Duke occupied her time recording information regarding various types of print posted on classroom walls, print materials in the classroom library, and classroom activities that involved print in any way. Results of this study revealed an overall scarcity of informational print in these first grade classrooms. The scarcity of informational text was particularly acute in the low-SES classrooms.

Duke (2000) concluded in her study of low- and high-SES first-grade classrooms that first, the call for substantial attention to informational text has apparently not succeeded in sufficiently affecting classroom practice. Second, theories about the primacy of narrative in genre development still appear to have a hold on early schooling. Third, content area instruction does not necessarily provide substantial informational text experience in first grade. Fourth, continued low levels of achievement in informational reading and writing should not be attributed solely to the difficulty of these forms of text. Fifth, there is potential for informational text to be a productive part of early-grade curricula. Finally, children in low-SES schools are provided with even less access to and experience with informational text in school than their high-SES counterparts.

In another study of informational text used for read alouds in early grades, Yopp and Yopp (2000) asked teachers who were attending workshops throughout the southwest United States, to anonymously identify the grade level they taught, whether they read aloud to their students during the school day, and if so, to provide the complete title of the book or books read

aloud the day before the workshop. Titles for the study were obtained from 1,144 teachers. This information was gathered at the beginning of their workshops and saved for later analysis. The researchers decided to categorize the titles as narrative, informational, mixed (e.g., *Magic School Bus*), or other (e.g., poetry, menus, instructions, or rules). Each author independently categorized the first 208 books. Inter-rater agreement was high, with identical ratings for 95% of the books. Differences of opinion were resolved through discussion. When categorization was complete, the number of books was calculated and percentages given. Teachers reported reading 1,830 books, of which 1,487 (81%) were identifiable and categorized. Only 8% of the read-alouds were informational texts with only 1% mixed texts. The data were then sorted to reveal grade level and to determine the numbers and percentages of each genre for preschool through third grade. Very few informational or mixed texts were read aloud at each grade level, ranging from 5% to 9% for informational and 0% to 2% for mixed texts.

The Yopp and Yopp (2000) study yielded three major findings. First, informational texts make up a very small proportion of read-alouds in early childhood classrooms, grades K-3. Even when teachers make an effort to include informational books on their classroom shelves, unless they chose to read these texts aloud, students did not tend to take advantage of their presence and interact with them independently. Second, preschoolers, like kindergarten through third-graders, are highly unlikely to hear informational texts read aloud. No significant differences were found among grade levels, indicating that students experience the same low proportion of informational texts read aloud throughout their early years. Third, informational books maintain their low status as read-alouds even when teachers read more than one book. This finding suggests that "narratives are standard fare and that teachers not only rarely replace them with informational texts, they also seldom supplement them with informational texts" (p. 47).

Despite these two studies, little is known about the presence of informational texts in early childhood or elementary classrooms. In their questions for further research Yopp and Yopp (2000) state, "additional studies, including observational studies of classroom activities and materials, are needed to ensure a richer view of students' opportunities with informational texts" (p. 49).

Summary

There is overwhelming evidence to support the importance of informational text use in classrooms. A historical look shows that informational text has been part of our school culture for over one hundred years (Giblin, 2000). Many researchers (e.g., Coonrad & Hughes, 1992; Ford, 2002; Morrow, Pressley, Smith, & Smith, 1997; Pearson, 1994; Whitin and Wilde 1992, 1995) have explained the importance of using informational text in teaching the content areas of mathematics, science, and social studies. There is research (e.g., Goldman & Rakestraw 2000; Hall & Sabey, 2007; Saul & Dieckman, 2005) that supports the use of informational text as a tool for literacy instruction of comprehension strategies, vocabulary, text structures and text features. Finally, there is research (e.g., Smolkin & Donovan 2002, 2005; Stephens, 2008) explaining teachers' responsibility in regard to informational text use in the classroom. With the exception of Duke (2000) and Yopp and Yopp (2000), studies showing the scarcity of informational texts in early grade classrooms, very little research has been done to show *if* and *how* teachers use informational text in their classrooms. No research was found examining the influence of years of teaching experience or grade levels on the use of informational texts. Thus, the purpose of this action research study was to further explore the use of informational texts in K-6 grade classrooms.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers use informational text in their elementary classrooms. This research was a descriptive study, using a one-time self-report survey developed for this study. This action research study was conducted with the purpose of research in one elementary school to inform my own practice.

Specific questions of the study were

1. Where do teachers find informational texts to use in their classrooms?

2. What criteria do classroom teachers use when selecting informational texts?

3. How frequently and for what purposes do teachers use informational texts as a tool for instruction?

4. How do years of teaching experience and grade level taught influence teachers' use of informational texts in K-6 classrooms?

Context of the Study

The school selected to participate in this study was an elementary school of approximately 1055 students. William Elementary (pseudonym) was located in one of the fastest growing suburban cities in the state having a higher social economic status (SES) with a median household income of $75,433. Demographics of the city include ethnic populations of White 95.5%; Black 0.3%; American Indian 0.1%; Pacific Islander 0.5%; Hispanic 3.3%; and Other 0.3% (Quickfacts.census.gov, 2009). School records indicate that William Elementary reflected the SES and ethnicity of the city, with less than 17% of students on free or reduced lunch and less than ten percent of students needing ELL services.

When asked, the school librarian reported that William Elementary had over 3,000 titles of informational texts available in the media center, approximately two to three per child. The guided reading leveled library had approximately seven to ten sets of informational texts per guided reading level A-Z, according to the inventory of leveled books. Further, several teachers reported having informational texts included in their classroom libraries.

The school was on a year-round schedule with students being grouped into four tracks. Three tracks were always on session and one track was always off session. The tracks were on session for approximately forty-five days and off session for approximately fifteen days. The whole school had fifteen days of off-track time in July. It is important to understand the context of William Elementary since the findings of this study are limited to the context in which the research was conducted.

Participants

There were 43 certificated teachers at William Elementary who were assigned as classroom teachers. The principal of William Elementary was very supportive of this study and wanted to use the data to inform additional professional development opportunities on the use of informational texts. So that all tracks, on and off, were represented, teachers were given information about the study during two separate faculty meetings. Even though survey results were solicited from the entire faculty, 25 teachers or 58% of the faculty, chose to participate by completing the survey. Informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers. Pseudonyms were used when reporting findings of the study in order to insure confidentiality of the participants. Teachers were not compensated financially for participating in the study but were offered a small token of appreciation for completing the survey.

I conducted this study in the fall of 2008. The survey was presented to teachers on September 26 for Track A and on October 15 for Tracks B, C, & D. This enabled me to gather information from the teachers on each of the four tracks. All tracks had completed eight weeks of school at the time the survey was administered. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from school district officials, the school principal, and the Institutional Review Board at Brigham Young University.

I was a new faculty member and a first-year literacy facilitator at William Elementary when the research was conducted. Being the literacy facilitator at William Elementary, I had knowledge of the schools' informational text sources in the guided reading leveled library and the teachers who used these sources. I did not have knowledge of personal classroom libraries, media center usage, or sources of informational text teachers may have used outside of the school.

Instrument

Survey of Informational Text in Classroom Instruction

I developed the Survey of Informational Text in Classroom Instruction (SITCI) to answer the research questions. The self-report survey was grounded in the professional literature on informational texts in classroom use and on standards from the NSTA. I created SITCI following a similar format of other questionnaires, which presents participants with a series of questions or statements to which they should respond either by selecting from existing options or open ended questions asking for a written response (Brown, 1997). Questionnaires are particularly efficient for gathering information on a small or large scale and are employed as an alternative to interviewing individual participants (Brown, 1997). The survey was created specifically for this study to match the research questions.

The survey had four general sections that aligned with the four research questions (see Appendix A). The first section was designed to give the information needed to answer research question four about the influence of years of teaching experience and grade level on the use of informational text. Items one through four pertained to the demographic information of the participants, including participants' total years of experience and current grade level.

The second section was designed to address research question one about where teachers located the informational texts they used in their classrooms. Items six through eight helped identify teachers' sources for informational texts. Item six was constrained by a list provided in the survey for sources of informational text to use in classroom instruction. The list included (a) school library, (b) school leveled library, (c) classroom/personal library, (d) textbooks, (e) another teacher, (f) school professional library, (g) internet/web site, (h) professional development class, (i) county library, (j) literacy specialist, and (k) principal. Teachers were encouraged to circle all of the sources they used. Item eight gave the participants the opportunity to list other sources not in the survey.

Section three was designed to address research question two about criteria classroom teachers use in selecting informational text. This section included items nine through 13 that addressed different criteria for choosing an informational text. Item nine was designed to determine criteria that teachers thought were most and least important when selecting informational texts. Criteria selections were also constrained by a list provided in the survey. Those ten criteria included, (a) classroom relevance, (b) currency of information, (c) clear and easily understood facts and theories, (d) not over simplified or above grade level facts presented in the text, (e) readable text appropriate for grade level, (f) realistic photographs, (g) accurate and easy to follow illustrations, (h) text is free of bias, (i) appropriate grade level text structures and

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features, and (j) ready availability for use. The criteria included in this section were based on recommendations for high-quality informational texts from NSTA (2008b).

From the criteria listed above, participants were instructed to mark an *M* for the three most important criteria to them and an *L* for the three least important criteria. The criteria of informational texts that mattered most and least to the participants was used to inform what participants based their decisions on as they choose informational texts for classroom instruction. Participants also had the opportunity to list additional criteria in item 10 that had not been provided in the list or that were important to the participant.

Item 11 was an open-ended question which gave participants the opportunity to identify the most important text structures or features they looked for when selecting an informational text to use in their classroom. When asking about text features or structures a list was not given but there were some suggestions, (i.e., captions, labels, headings, readability, large print). The last two items of this section, items 12 and 13, were again open-ended so that the participant could give an individual response to what encourages and impedes the use of informational texts. By examining what encourages and impedes the use of informational texts, I was provided with a deeper understanding of criteria that is important for teachers as they choose informational text to use in their classrooms.

Section four was designed to address research question three about how frequently and for what purposes teachers used informational texts as a tool for instruction. This section consisted of items 14 - 20. Item 14 was an open-ended question that asked participants to look back in their plan books for two weeks and identify how often, when, and for what purpose informational text had been used in their classroom. Two weeks was chosen simply to give the teachers a long enough time period to see a pattern of use but short enough to be manageable.

Two weeks was not too lengthy of a time period for the teachers to go through to establish purposes for use and do frequency counts in their own plans. Then item 15 gave teachers a chance to describe any use of informational text over the course of a year.

Item 16 presented participants with a list to help them think about their purposes for using informational text in their classroom. Included as purposes for use were, (a) as a read-aloud, (b) choral or shared reading, (c) guided reading, (d) independent reading, (e) literacy center or a content area center, (f) to explain or introduce a topic, (g) assigned group work on a topic, (h) self-directed periods of reading and writing, and (i) specific teaching of a social studies or science concept. As participants had been instructed to do earlier in the survey, they were again asked to place an *M* by the three most important ways they use informational texts and to place an *L* beside the three least important ways they use the texts in their classrooms. This was followed by an open-ended question, item 17, which gave them the opportunity to identify any other contents or purposes not included on the list.

Items 18, 19 and 20 addressed how often teachers use informational texts as a tool for instruction by having teachers look back in their plan books over the first 8 weeks of the school year and identify the frequency of use of informational texts from their written plans. Item 18 asked participants to look over the beginning eight weeks and identify specifically how many times informational texts had been used in the teaching of (a) mathematics, (b) science, (c) social studies, (d) the arts, and (e) healthy lifestyles. These five content areas were chosen because in the state of Utah, the core curriculum is divided for grades three through six into these areas. Eight weeks were chosen as a parameter because each track had been in session for eight weeks when they were asked to complete the survey.

This section included an open-ended question, item 19, in which the participants were asked to identify how often they had used informational text in teaching the language arts core in the last eight weeks. Then, item 20 allowed the participants to give another open-ended response for any other purpose that informational text had been used as a tool of instruction in their classroom.

Pilot Study

I piloted the survey with four teachers from another year-round school located near William Elementary. These four teachers provided feedback on the ease of taking the survey, the clarity of the questions being asked, the design of the survey, the amount of time it took to complete the survey, and whether they would prefer taking the survey electronically or on paper. My goal was to obtain the information I needed while not overburdening the participants by having the survey be too lengthy or taking too much of their time. The piloting of the survey was done during the month of September.

Based on feedback from the pilot, I made minor adjustments to the survey. The main decision was to keep the survey on paper instead of converting it to an electronic survey. This decision was based on the responses from the pilot indicating that the survey took 20 minutes or less to complete. Further, those who participated in the pilot study suggested I might have a higher response rate by using a hard copy, as many teachers fail to check email regularly and may not respond to an electronic version of the survey.

Procedure

The original intent was to have the faculty take the survey during two faculty meetings. However, due to the fact that both faculty meetings were held in the morning before school, were only a half hour in length, and that other business was conducted, there was not enough time for

participating teachers to complete the survey during the faculty meetings. In the time allotted in the faculty meetings, I presented the teachers with the topic of informational text, distributed the consent form to sign, and asked the teachers to complete the survey on their own time. Only five teachers signed the consent form at the first faculty meeting with A Track teachers. During the second faculty meeting seven more faculty members signed the consent form. After the teachers saw the survey 13 more teachers decided to give consent to be part of the study. As the 25 surveys were completed and compiled, data analysis began.

Data Analysis

As the surveys were analyzed, frequency counts for responses to each question were compiled with percentages of responses being shown for the group as a whole. Individual questions were analyzed section-by-section, using groups of questions in each section that had been established to specifically answer each of the research questions.

Using demographic items one through four on the SITCI, two different groupings of teachers were formed, one grouping based on years of teaching experience and the other based on the grade level the teachers were teaching. Item one and three on the survey were used to group teachers into three ranges of teaching experience. Novice teachers were those with one to three years of teaching experience. Experienced teachers were those with four to ten years of teaching experience. Seasoned teachers had 11 plus years of teaching experience. Ten teachers were in the novice group of teachers. There were only four teachers in the experienced group and there were 11 teachers who were seasoned teachers (See Table 1). When making comparisons between these groups, it was important to keep in mind that the sizes of the groups were different. There were approximately the same number of novice and seasoned teachers, but less than half as many experienced teachers in the sample.

Table 1

Groupings of Teachers According to Teaching Experience and Grade Level (N=25)

	Years of Experience		
Grade Level	Novice 1 to 3 years	Experienced 4 to 10 years	Seasoned More than 11 years
K – 2	4	3	4
3 – 6	6	1	7

Item two was used to break the participants into the groupings of grades K – 2 teachers and grades 3 – 6 teachers (See Table 1). These groups were formed to reflect differences in the Utah State Core for Social Studies and Science. In the state core, grades K – 2 have an integrated core of social studies and science. Grades 3 – 6 have separate core curricula for social studies and science. For this reason, it seemed reasonable to expect differences in the ways these two groups of teachers used informational texts in their classrooms. The first group was kindergarten through second grade teachers. There were 11 teachers in the grade K – 2 group. The second group was third through sixth grade teachers. There were 14 teachers in this group.

Items 6 – 8 were closed response questions. Closed response questions are those forced choice questions that offer the participants options from which to select their answers and can be analyzed with straightforward averages or percentages (Brown, 1997). Frequency counts were taken for items 6, 7, and 8 with percentages of teachers' responses being calculated for each. Item by item comparisons were made between the whole group and the two different grade level groupings and the three groups showing length of experience to determine whether the groupings revealed any patterns of differences in the sources teachers used to locate informational text.

Items 9 – 20 were both closed response and open-ended response questions. Open-response questions are questions that require the participant to produce an answer, in either oral

or written form (Brown, 1997). For this research, I coded open-ended responses for common

themes, categories and patterns that emerged from the questions asked (Johnson & Christensen,

2004).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this action research was to examine how kindergarten through sixth grade teachers in one school used informational text in their classrooms. The research was based on analyzing the responses teachers gave to SITCI survey items addressing various aspects of their use of such texts. Findings will be discussed under the following headings: (a) teachers' sources for informational texts; (b) teachers' criteria for selecting informational texts; (c) teachers' use of informational text; and (d) influences of teaching experience and grade level taught.

Teachers' Sources for Informational Texts

Teachers reported using a broad range of sources for informational texts in classroom instruction. As teachers responded to the survey items about their sources, they had the opportunity of reporting all sources used. Many teachers responded with more than one source. Sources located within the school, including the school library, the school leveled library, their own or other teachers' classroom libraries, textbooks, another teacher, and the school professional library were most commonly used. Teachers reported that they used the Internet or websites and professional development less than sources located within the school. Only a few teachers relied on the sources of the county library, the literacy facilitator, or the principal for choosing informational texts (See Table 2).

In order to understand whether teachers had used any other sources that had not been listed, an open-ended question was asked. Only three teachers wrote an additional source and the first of those participants wrote "personal library" which was already part of the survey and which had already been circled by the participant as a source used in the original response. The

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second teacher responded with an "author or publishing company." The third teacher responded with "newspapers or magazines."

Table 2

Number and Percent of Teachers Using Sources for Informational Text (N=25)

Source	*f*	%
School library	21	84
School leveled-library	21	84
Classroom/personal library	20	80
Textbooks	18	72
Another teacher	16	64
School professional library	15	60
Internet	13	52
Professional development	12	48
County library	8	32
Literacy facilitator	5	20
Principal	1	4

Note. The values represent the number of teachers indicating sources chosen for informational texts. The percentages represent the proportion of the total number of participants who chose that source. More than one source may be reported by each teacher.

In summary, teachers' responses showed that the three sources that were chosen the most for use by teachers were the school library, the school leveled library for guided reading, and their own personal/classroom library. The three sources that were chosen least often were the county library, the literacy facilitator, and the principal. Using textbooks, another teacher, the school's professional library, Internet, and professional development were sources that some but not all of the teachers used.

Teachers' Selection of Informational Texts

In order to examine teachers' uses of informational text, it was important to understand what criteria teachers used as they selected informational texts for their classrooms as well as what encourages and impedes the use of informational texts. The second section of the survey gave information on what criteria enticed teachers to use some informational texts but not others. Teachers were asked to identify criteria they valued when choosing informational texts for classroom instruction.

Most and Least Important Criteria

The teachers' responses suggest that the criterion that was most important to them was classroom relevance (f=23). Readable text appropriate for grade level ((f=12), currency of information (f=11), text structures/features (f=10), and availability (f=10), were the next most important criteria that teachers marked. Clear and easily understood facts and theories (f=7), texts containing facts that were not over simplified or above grade level facts (f=5), and texts that were free of bias (f=3), were lower on teachers' choices for the most important criteria. Only one teacher chose realistic photographs and accurate illustrations as the most important criteria for selecting texts (See Table 3).

The teachers were asked to respond to an open-ended question about what other criteria were important to them that may not have been on the list provided. Responses varied with the most common one being "interest of students" (f=8). Teachers responded with comments such as, "Is the information presented in an interesting way to my students?" "Does the text keep the interest of my students?" and "Does it capture the interest of my students?"

Table 3

Number and Percent of Teachers Using Selection Criteria for Informational Text (N=25)

Criteria	Most Important		Least Important		
	f	%		*f*	%
Classroom relevance	23	92		0	0
Readability for grade level	12	48		4	16
Currency of information	11	44		1	4
Appropriateness of text structures/features	10	40		2	8
Availability	9	36		6	24
Understandability of facts and theories	7	28		1	4
Not oversimplified or above grade level facts	5	20		7	28
Freedom from bias	3	12		17	68
Accuracy of illustrations	1	4		9	36
Realism of photos	1	4		18	72

Note. The values represent the number of teachers indicating criteria as most or least important. The percentages represent the proportion of participants who chose the criteria as being most or least important. Multiple criteria in each category (most and least important) were reported by each teacher.

Another criterion that teachers considered important was whether the informational text was related to their grade level core curriculum (*f*=7). Teacher responses included, "Does the topic apply to the core?" "Does the text fit our curriculum?" and "Must be aligned with core curriculum."

Teachers also responded that, "number of copies of the text was important, enough for each student or for every two students," "text features such as table of contents, index, glossary or dictionary," and "accuracy and correctness of information" were important criteria for them to consider. Other criteria mentioned by teachers included, "color – It needs to be colorful to grab

my students' attention," "easy to follow and well organized," "Does it increase their [student] love for reading?" "Age-appropriate material," "sometimes it is just a fun read for the kids," "if it's a read aloud is it big enough for my students to see," and "easy to obtain."

As teachers responded to questions about the least important criteria to them as they looked for informational texts to use in their classroom, realistic photographs were considered to be the least important (f=18). The second least important criterion to teachers was that the text was free of bias (f=17). Both of these criteria had also been low on what were most important criteria to the teachers. Other criteria such as accurate illustrations (f=9), simplified and not above grade level facts (f=7), and availability (f=6), were chosen several times as least important to teachers. Readability for grade level (f=4) and text structures and features (f= 2) of informational text were chosen only a few times by teachers as being least important. Currency of information, facts and theories, and classroom relevancy were chosen only once as least important criteria to teachers. There were no responses from teachers indicating that classroom relevance was least important to them (See Table 3). One teacher marked all criteria on the list as "most important."

Most Important Text Structures or Features

Teachers were asked to identify the most important text structure or feature they looked for when selecting an informational text to use in their classroom. The open-ended question allowed them to respond with more than one structure or feature. Readability was the most common text feature mentioned by teachers (f=18). Captions (f=7), headings (f=6), and print that is large enough to be seen by students (f=5), were the next most important text features to teachers. Labels (f=3), table of contents (f=2), and length of text (f=2) were also mentioned as important text features. Other responses by teachers included, "pictures," "organization and

presentation," "can use as a read aloud," "glossary and index," "grade level or appropriate level for students," "format that is easy to follow," "fit topic, meet goals for area of learning," "information in neat, small paragraphs, no busy illustrations," "nice visually," and "bolded key words or phrases," indicating these were text feature criteria they identified when selecting informational texts for classroom use.

Criteria That Influence the Use of Informational Texts

Factors that encourage use. When teachers were asked to identify factors that encourage the use of informational text in their classrooms, their responses were most commonly focused on the core curriculum. The two most common responses were, first, informational text as used in support of the social sciences, which included history and biographies, current events, holidays, and magazines and newspapers (f=11). The second most common response was in support of language arts instruction (f=11). Some of those responses included, "variety of reading levels," "used for shared reading," "read alouds," "reading groups," "books on tape," and "take home readers." Other responses included, "sets the purpose for reading," "uses text structures," "builds background knowledge," and "can be used in an author study."

Teachers indicated that the use of informational text was encouraged when the purpose was to teach the science curriculum (f=8). Other curricula areas such as math and art were mentioned by teachers as reasons for encouragement in using informational texts (f=7). "Extension or to integrate curriculum" were identified by two teachers as a factor that encouraged the use of informational text in their classrooms.

Teachers responded with "interest of students, important for students, or interesting for students in what they are learning about" when considering their use of informational texts (f=9). This is consistent with teachers' comments about other criteria that were important to

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them when selecting informational text for their classrooms. Additional responses about factors that encouraged the use of informational text included, "student friendly material," "tool for teaching," "availability of informational texts," "ease of use of text," and "use of Weekly Readers, newspapers, or other classroom magazines," although these were not common among responses.

Factors that impede use. Teachers had the opportunity in the same open-ended format to identify reasons that impede their use of informational text. Teachers reported that the availability of text was the most common impediment (f=10). Some of those responses included statements such as, "not enough access to current informational text resources," "not enough copies of the text for the students," and "lack of materials." These statements conflict with other responses that show many sources those teachers could use.

Another concern voiced by teachers was that informational text was "boring to students" and impeded its use (f=7). For example, teachers asserted that they were not likely to use "text that is dry or hard to understand." They were hesitant to use informational text when "the kids think it's boring." One teacher stated, "I don't think informational text is viewed as being as entertaining as other genres," and another, "You don't want students bored and tuning out." "Hard words" and "hard vocabulary for students" were also mentioned as impeding the use of informational text and one of the reasons that informational text could be boring to students (f=5). Three teachers accounted for the tendency for informational text to be boring to students by asserting that there could be too much text or length of text. Their responses included phrases such as, "a ton of words on each page," "too many words on a page," and "the general length of informational texts are too long."

Teachers noted the lack of time as an impeding reason in the use of informational text (*f*=4). Teachers' responses included "time curriculum restraints," "time, time to find the books and time to fit it in," and "time, not enough time to cover every interest." "Lack of money to buy informational texts" was also a common response as well as "lack of space to have books out in my room."

Teachers' other statements about factors that impede the use of informational texts included, "poorly written text," "not enough texts on different reading levels," "irrelevance to curriculum," "text too difficult to understand," "beyond comprehension levels of the students," and "outdated texts," but these concerns were not common among their responses.

In summary, the factors that most encouraged the use of informational text for teachers were the relationship of the text to the core curriculum and the interest of the text to students. On the other hand, teachers identified a wide range of factors that might impede the use of informational texts in their classrooms. Those that most likely impeded the use of informational text for teachers were a lack of availability, text that was boring to students, and a lack of time, money, or classroom space.

Teachers' Use of Informational Text

When responding to the survey, only 21 of the teachers, addressed how often or for what purposes they used informational text. All responses given were tallied (See Table 4).

Frequency of Use

Teachers' responses about how often they had used informational text in the past two weeks varied greatly, ranging from 0 – 23 times per teacher over a two-week period. Of the 21 teachers who responded, six teachers reported 10 or more uses of informational text in two weeks. Twelve teachers responded with a frequency of two to nine uses in a two-week time

period. Three teachers responded with a frequency of one use in two weeks and four teachers responded with a frequency of zero uses in two weeks. One out of the four teachers, who were counted as no reported use, had responded with "not too often" but since there was no numerical value, it was counted as no reported use. Reported uses totaled 143 for the two-week period from 21 teachers.

Table 4

Number of Teachers Reporting Frequency of Use in Content Areas in Two Weeks (N=21)

Content Area	1 Use	2 to 9 Uses	10 + Uses	Total
Language Arts	1	2	0	3
Social Studies	2	2	0	4
Science	0	3	1	4
Math	0	0	0	0
2 Content Areas	0	5	2	7
3 Content Areas	0	0	2	2
All 4 Content Areas	0	0	1	1

Note. The values represent the number of teachers indicating frequency of use for informational text within these ranges.

When teachers were asked to look at a larger time frame of eight weeks, which is exactly how long each track had been in school, they were given a constrained list to provide information on how frequently they use informational texts in the five content areas of mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, and healthy lifestyles. Teachers were asked to look back in their plan books and tally informational text use for the previous eight weeks in each of those five content areas. Since teachers were only giving a tallied frequency response for each of the five content areas, the eight-week time period was used to establish patterns of use.

A sixth area, language arts, was added to the list of content areas previously surveyed. In an open-ended question teachers were asked to report how often they had used informational texts in the teaching of the language arts core. Some teachers reported a numerical value but most of the teachers made comments or statements of their use of informational text used during language arts because of the open-ended format of the question (See Table 5).

Table 5

Frequency Counts of Use of Informational Text Used in Six Content Areas in Eight Weeks (N=25)

Content Areas	0 Use	1 Use	2 to 10 Uses	11 or more Uses	Number of teachers responding
Mathematics	7	3	10	5	25
Science	2	1	18	4	25
Social Studies	2	1	14	7	24
Arts	16	5	4	0	25
Healthy Lifestyles	15	4	5	1	25
[a]Language Arts	4	1	8	8	21

Note. The values represent the number of teachers indicating frequency of use of informational text within these ranges. Frequency counts for the first five content areas came from a constrained list. One teacher did not respond to the item about social studies.
[a]Frequency counts for language arts instruction were taken from open-ended responses. Four teachers did not respond.

Mathematics. As reported by teachers, informational texts were used in teaching math a total of 164 times. Ranges for individual teachers varied anywhere from zero uses to 35 times that informational text was used in the teaching of math in an eight-week time period. Of the 25 teachers responding, seven reported zero uses in eight weeks. Three teachers reported using informational text only once in eight weeks to teach math. Ten teachers reported frequencies of

two uses to 10 uses for the teaching of math in eight weeks. Five teachers reported a use of 11 or more.

Science. Teachers reported using informational texts to teach science 168 times in eight weeks. The ranges for science were anywhere from zero use to 16 uses by an individual teacher. Only one of the 25 teachers had used informational texts once in eight weeks. Two teachers reported zero uses of informational text. Eighteen teachers had used informational texts two to ten times and four teachers reported eleven or more uses of informational text to teach science in eight weeks.

Social studies. Teachers reported 232 instances of the use of informational texts in teaching the social studies core over an eight-week period of time. The use of informational texts to teach social studies concepts for an individual teacher ranged from zero use to 32 uses. Of the 25 teachers who responded to this question, one teacher reported "lots" instead of a numerical answer. Since there was no numerical way to record that answer it was counted as no response. Therefore, the number of teachers responding was 24 instead of 25. There were two teachers that reported no use and one teacher reported one use for informational texts in teaching social studies. Fourteen teachers reported using informational texts to teach social studies two times to 10 times in eight weeks. Seven teachers reported 11 or more uses of informational text use in teaching social studies in eight weeks.

Arts. There were 19 reported instances that informational texts were used to teach the art core during an eight-week time period. The range in using informational texts to teach the art content area was 0 uses to 8 uses. Sixteen teachers reported no use of informational text in teaching the art content. Five teachers responded with using informational texts once in the 8

weeks for the arts core and four teachers responded with two uses to 10 uses of informational texts.

Healthy lifestyles. Informational texts were used in teaching healthy lifestyles 43 times in eight weeks as reported by teachers. Ranges for the use of informational text to teach from the healthy lifestyle curriculum were zero uses to 16 uses. Of the 25 teachers who responded, there were fourteen teachers reporting no uses. Four teachers reported using informational texts one time in teaching healthy lifestyles. Five teachers reported two uses to 10 uses and one teacher reported 11 or more uses of informational texts to teach healthy lifestyles in eight-weeks. One teacher responded with "not teaching now" instead of a numerical value. That answer was tallied as a zero (See Table 5).

Language arts. Informational texts were used in the language arts core 308 times. The range for teaching the language arts core by an individual teacher was between zero uses to 56 uses. Because of the open-ended format, two of the teachers explained the frequency of their use of informational text in generalities, so their responses could not be included in the frequency counts. Their responses included, "kind of often," "used in guided reading groups, used extensively in social studies, and used extensively for writing." In addition, there were two teachers who did not to respond at all to how often they used informational texts in language arts instruction. Therefore, only 21 of the 25 teachers provided numerical data about the frequency of use of informational text over an 8-week period of time. Four teachers responded with "none." One teacher reported one use. Eight teachers responded with a use of two to eight times they used informational text in teaching language arts. Five teachers responded with 11 or more uses.

The number of times informational texts were used in the six content areas for eight-weeks totaled 934. There were 145 responses of use from participants. This averaged 6.4 uses

per participant during the eight weeks. Alternative analysis indicates informational text was only used 23.4 times per day across all participants or 0.16 times per day per participant in all content areas. When informational text usage was identified by each of the six content areas, the average eight-week use per participant for mathematics was 6.6, science 6.7, social studies 9.7, arts 0.8, healthy lifestyles 1.7, and language arts 14.7 times. In other words, one informational text was used approximately every sixth day per participant in each of the six content areas.

Purposes for Use

The kind of information teachers provided about their purposes for using informational text varied considerably, depending on the content area where teachers were using them. For instance, most of the teachers' responses about their use of informational text in language arts was anchored in instructional routines such as guided or shared reading, centers, or read alouds. On the other hand, when teachers talked about their use of informational texts in science or social studies, they often cited specific topics (e.g., Greek myths, penguins, weather). It seems their talk about the use of informational text in math was anchored to the place it would occupy in a given lesson (i.e., introduction).

When asked to respond in an open-ended format to again look back for eight weeks in their plan books and identify any time that informational text had been used for any purpose, only seven teachers responded. Their written responses included purposes such as, "sequencing events in writing practice," "prepare students for a field trip," "used informational texts in teaching safety and healthy eating in healthy lifestyles curriculum," "to teach math vocabulary," "teach patterning and different ways you can get to a certain number," "listening to informational texts while doing cursive," and "to teach students to read timelines." When coding their

responses it became apparent that teachers were still using the content areas of language arts, healthy lifestyles, math, and social studies as their reasons for informational text use.

There were three teachers who provided additional information about their purpose for using informational text, along with a number of times such texts had been used. Their responses were, "used mostly in guided reading and to teach comprehension strategies;" "I use it regularly – using the Houghton Mifflin reading book, along with other texts I find to teach skills and concepts;" and "I used it to help teach similes."

Teachers were presented with a constrained list to help them focus on their purposes for using informational texts. This was followed by an open-ended question that would give them the opportunity to identify any other purposes not included on the list (See Appendix A). Again, teachers were asked to place an *M* by the three most important purposes for informational text use and to place an *L* beside the three least important purposes for using the text. Not all responses included three M's and three L's but all teachers' responses were accounted for regardless of how many purposes they marked (See Table 6).

Given the opportunity to respond in open-ended format to what other purposes informational texts were used for, 12 teachers offered no response. Three teachers responded with answers that had already been established in the constrained list. They included, "guided reading," "read aloud," and "social studies or science." Ten teachers responded with the following purposes: "prepare for a lesson," "improve teaching skills," "student reading logs—a requirement in my class of three informational books per term," "show where books are located in library and discuss internet sites," "fun facts to learn and to spark interest," "to get boys interested in reading," "listening center," "writer's workshop," "to introduce research" and "take home readers."

Table 6

Purposes for Use of Informational Texts That Are Most and Least Important to Teachers (N=25)

Uses	Most Important		Least Important	
	f	*%*	*f*	*%*
Specific teaching of a social studies or science concept	23	92	0	0
Guided reading	18	72	3	12
Read aloud	10	40	6	24
Introduce topic	7	28	3	12
Choral or shared reading	6	24	11	44
Assigned group work	5	20	10	40
Self-directed work	5	20	12	48
Independent reading	2	8	12	44
Centers	2	8	11	44

Note. The values represent the number of teachers selecting each purpose for informational text (most and least). Percentages represent the proportion of the total number of teachers selecting each purpose. Multiple purposes in each category (most and least important) were reported by each teacher.

During the two-week time period, teachers reported using informational text with the core curriculum areas of language arts (f= 7), social studies (f=13), science (f=12), and math (f=3). Included in the language arts core were guided reading groups, shared reading, reading aloud, take home reading books, listening center, and writer's workshop instruction. Social studies instruction included history, current events, and holidays. Topics for science instruction included seasons, force and motion, animals, and study of the moon. Use of informational text during math instruction was also reported but no specific topic was given. Instead teachers indicated using informational texts to introduce lessons.

When teachers' responses were examined for the eight-week time period, they did not identify the content areas because they were given a constrained list from which to choose, with the exception of the language arts core. Teachers had the opportunity to write in which area of language arts informational texts were used the most often. Their responses show that using informational texts for guided reading and to teach comprehension skills were the two most frequently given by teachers.

In summary, how frequently teachers' reported using informational texts varied in the two-week and eight-week responses. For what purpose informational texts were used also varied in the responses teachers gave. Some teachers responded with defined purposes, such as the specific lesson being taught. Other teachers were more general in their responses to purpose and stated a content area as the purpose. When examining open-ended responses to content areas in which teachers use informational texts, data shows ties to its use in the core curriculum areas of language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics. When examining closed responses to the constrained list of contents given, there is even some reported use of informational text in the content areas of healthy lifestyles and art.

Influences of Teaching Experience and Grade Level Taught on Use of Informational Text

In order to answer research question four about how teaching experience and grade level taught influence the use of informational text, teachers were grouped by years of teaching experience and also by grade level. The influence of experience and grade level taught will be examined in the following sections: the influence of teaching experience and grade level on teachers' use of sources for informational text, the influence of teaching experience and grade level on the criteria used for selection of informational text, and the influence of teaching experience and grade level on frequency, content, and purposes of informational text use.

Use of Sources

There were differences between teachers within varying levels of experience (See Table 7) and between teachers of different grade levels (See Table 8). However, the findings of this study were inconclusive when comparisons were made across years of experience. It was important to note that the experienced group of teachers was so small (N=4), so it became almost impossible to substantiate and show differences between the three groups. It was easier to see the differences between the grade level groups because the numbers in each group were large enough to substantiate and show their differences.

When looking at the influence of grade level on teachers' choice of personal/classroom library as a source, a difference between grade levels was seen. All of the grade K – 2 teachers' chose personal/classroom libraries, whereas, teachers in grade 3 – 6 chose to use it as a source less often, with slightly over half of them listing it as a source.

Another difference in the groups of grade level teachers can be found in their use of textbooks as sources of informational text (See Table 8). Less than half of the grade K – 2 teachers chose textbooks as a source of informational text, while almost all of the grades 3 – 6 teachers chose textbooks as a source. As teachers reported on content and purposes for the use of informational texts, they often stated that they used a part or chapter of the science or social studies textbooks. An example of this was one grade 3 – 6 teacher's statement that, "chapters or sections of the textbook are so specific that the information is easy to locate." Another grade 3 – 6 teacher even mentioned, "we use it [informational text] regularly, using the Houghton Mifflin book, along with other texts we find to teach skills and concepts."

When considering the grade level groups, K – 2 grade teachers chose the Internet only about a third of the time. On the other hand, grade 3 – 6 teachers chose it as a source to use

almost two-thirds of the time. Even though the county library had not been chosen as a source by any groups very often, when examining the grade level groups, there is a slight increase of it being chosen as a source by grade 3 – 6 teachers over grade K – 2 teachers. About one-third of the grade 3 – 6 teachers chose the county library as a source. Less than one-fourth of the grades K – 2 teachers chose it as a source.

Table 7

Influence of Teaching Experience on Sources Used (N=25)

Sources	Novice N=10	Experienced N=4	Seasoned N=11
School library	8/80%	4/100%	9/82%
School leveled library	7/70%	3/75%	9/82%
Classroom/personal library	6/60%	4/100%	10/91%
Textbooks	7/70%	2/50%	9/82%
Another teacher	6/60%	4/100%	6/55%
School professional library	5/50%	3/75%	7/64%
Internet/web site	5/50%	3/75%	7/64%
Professional development	3/30%	3/75%	6/55%
County library	4/40%	2/50%	2/18%
Literacy facilitator	2/20%	1/25%	2/18%
Principal	0/0%	0/0%	1/9%

Note. Values represent number of teachers identifying each source in the teaching experience groups. The percentages represent the proportion of participants who chose the source. More than one source may be reported by each teacher.

Table 8

Influence of Grade Level on Sources Used (N=25)

Source	Grades K-2 N=11	Grades 3-6 N=14
School library	10/91%	11/79%
School leveled library	8/73%	11/79%
Classroom/personal library	11/100%	9/64%
Textbooks	5/45%	13/93%
Another teacher	6/55%	10/71%
School professional library	7/64%	8/57%
Internet/web site	4/36%	9/64%
Professional development	4/36%	8/57%
County library	3/27%	5/36%
Literacy facilitator	1/9%	4/29%
Principal	0/0%	1/7%

Note. Values represent number of teachers identifying each source in the grade level groups. The percentages represent the proportion of participants who chose each source. More than one source may be reported by each teacher.

When examining the data concerning other sources for informational texts chosen by teachers n the grade level groups, two sources, (i.e., another teacher, professional development), grade K – 2 teachers chose another teacher as a source a little more than half of the time, while almost three-fourths of the grade 3 – 6 teachers chose another teacher as a source they would go to for informational texts. About one third of grade K – 2 teachers chose professional development as a source, whereas, more than half of the 3 – 6 grade teachers chose it as a source they would use for informational text.

In summary, teachers in all groupings reported the sources for informational text (i.e., school library, leveled library, professional books, literacy facilitator and principal) were similar. More differences were shown between the groups when teachers chose personal/classroom library, textbooks, Internet or web sites, county library, another teacher, and professional development as sources.

Especially evident in Table 8 is the influence of the use of textbooks as a source. Thirteen out of the 14 teachers in grades 3 – 6 chose textbooks as a source for informational texts, whereas, 5 out of the eleven grade K – 2 teachers reported choosing textbooks as a source. These data show that grade level does influence the use of personal or classroom library, the use of textbooks as a source, as well as the use of the Internet or web sites as sources for informational text.

Criteria for Selection

All of the teaching experience groups reported that the most important criterion for selecting informational text was relevancy to the classroom. The least important criteria to all of the teaching experience groups were reported as being realistic photographs and accuracy of illustrations. This was also true when looking at all teachers' responses as a whole (See Table 9).

When teachers were divided into grades K – 2 and grades 3 – 6 , reported differences were few (See Table 10). The most important criteria for both groups were classroom relevancy and readable texts. The least important criteria to both groups were realistic photographs and freedom from bias. One difference between the grade level groups was teachers' responses to the importance of informational text that was current and up to date. There were five more teachers in the grade 3 – 6 group than in the grade K – 2 group who chose this criterion as the most important.

Table 9

Influence of Teaching Experience on Most and Least Important Criteria for Selecting Informational
(N=25)

Source	Novice N=10		Experienced N=4		Seasoned N=11	
	Most	Least	Most	Least	Most	Least
Classroom relevance	9/90%	0/0%	4/100%	0/0%	10/91%	0/0%
Readability for grade level	7/70%	1/10%	1/25%	3/75%	4/36%	0/0%
Currency of information	4/40%	0/0%	3/75%	0/0%	4/36%	1/9%
Appropriateness of text structures/ features	2/20%	1/10%	1/25%	1/25%	7/64%	0/0%
Availability	3/30%	1/10%	1/25%	2/50%	5/45%	3/27%
Understandability of facts and theories	1/10%	0/0%	1/25%	0/0%	5/45%	1/9%
Not oversimplified or above grade level facts	2/20%	2 /20%	1/25%	3/75%	2/8%	2/18%
Freedom from bias	2/20%	7/70%	0/0%	1/25	1/9%	9/82%
Accuracy of illustrations	0/0%	5/50%	0/0%	0/0%	1/9%	4/36%
Realism of photos	0/0%	8/80%	0/0%	2/50%	1/9%	8/73%

Note. Values represent number of teachers selecting each criterion as either most or least important in the teaching experience groups. The percentages represent the proportion of participants selecting each criteria. Multiple criteria in each category were reported by each teacher.

When teachers identified the most important text feature of informational text, the two grade level groups responded differently. Grades K – 2 teachers were more concerned with readability of the text than the 3 – 6 grade teachers. Even when these K – 2 teachers generated other important text features in an open-ended format, all their responses included readability. The opposite was true for the 3 – 6 teachers' responses. Most text features they generated included elements such as, table of contents, index, bold print, headings, captions, and labels. Only four out of the fourteen responses had to do with readability.

Table 10

Influence of Grade Level on Most and Least Important Criteria for Selecting Informational (N=2)

Selection Criterion	Grades K-2 N = 11		Grades 3-6 N = 14	
	Most	Least	Most	Least
Classroom relevance	9/82%	0/0%	14/100%	0/0%
Readability for grade level	7/64%	2/18%	5/36%	2/14%
Currency of information	3/27%	1/9%	7/50%	0/0%
Appropriateness of text structures/features	4/36%	2/18%	6/43%	0/0%
Availability	4/36%	4/36%	5/36%	2/14%
Understandability of facts and theories	3/27%	1/9%	4/29%	0/0%
Not oversimplified or above grade level facts	3/27%	2/18%	2/4%	5/36%
Freedom from bias	0/0%	7/64%	3/21%	10/71%
Accuracy of illustrations	0/0%	3/27%	1/7%	6/43%
Realism of photos	0/0%	7/64%	1/7%	11/79%

Note. Values represent number of teachers selecting each criterion as either most or least important in the selection of informational text for grade level groups. The percentages represent the proportion of participants selecting each criterion. Multiple criteria in each category (most important and least important) were reported by each teacher.

When teaching experience groups identified what encouraged the use of informational text in their classrooms, novice teachers used phrases such as, "excitement of students," "interest of students (especially boys)," and "if students are engaged by the text and pictures." The experienced teachers also mentioned interest of students, but more of their statements included, "important for students," "has a purpose for reading," and "is an extension to core curriculum." Seasoned teachers' responses included, "extensions to core curriculum," "used for research," "student friendly so they can work independently," and "discussions on current events." Only one seasoned teacher responded with "interest of students."

When teachers in the grade level groups responded to what encouraged the use of informational text, the influences between grade level groups became very apparent. Even though some of the grade K – 2 teachers use informational text in relationship to the core curriculum, they were very focused on the students. Statements such as, "intrigues students," "excitement of students," "interest level of students (especially boys)," "student engagement in the text," and "purpose for reading informational text is to engage students," were all make by K – 2 teachers. Only two grade 3 – 6 teachers made any kind of comment that included students. One was encouraged when the text was "interesting to students." The other stated that informational texts were good to use with the "lower students because they can use it to pull background knowledge from to understand a topic." All other responses from the grade 3 – 6 teachers had to do with class assignments and integration into the core curriculum. Third through sixth grade teachers also mentioned the importance of informational texts in teaching language arts, whereas, grades K – 2 teachers did not mention any language arts purposes aside from guided reading.

When teachers were asked to respond to what impedes the use of informational texts, the teaching experience groups had one commonality and several differences. The one thing common among the three groups was that vocabulary was too hard for students or there were too many words on a page. Novice teachers used statements such as, "too many words per page," "hard words," and "vocabulary that is too hard to understand." Experienced teachers responses included, "too hard of vocabulary," "the length is too long with too many hard words" and "vocabulary is too hard." Seasoned teachers responded with "too wordy" and "too many words on a page." One experienced teacher stated, "vocabulary is difficult for young students."

Differences between the teaching experience groups as to what impedes the use of informational texts were availability of text, time restraints, and boring to students. Only novice and seasoned teachers addressed availability of text, experienced teachers did not address availability. Novice teachers' responses included, "availability of text," "hard to find text that applies to curriculum," and "hard to find text that is interesting." Seasoned teachers' responses included, "limited number of books on topic," "lack of texts on different reading levels," "not enough copies of the text for student's to use" and "not enough copies of the text for all students." Another difference as to what impedes the use of informational text among the teaching experience groups was time restraints. Only experienced and seasoned teachers expressed that time was an impeding factor, novice teachers did not. Their responses included, "lack of time to fit everything in," "time, not enough time to cover every interest," "time - time to find the books and time to fit it all in," and "time curriculum restraints." The last difference when considering what teachers recognized as an impeding influence on informational text use was that the text is boring. Only novice and seasoned teachers thought that boring text was an impeding factor, experienced teachers did not. Novice and seasoned teachers' responses included, "text that is dry and hard to understand," "boring text," "the kids think it's boring," and "lack of student interest."

When considering how grade level groups responded to what impedes the use of informational texts, six out of the eight responses by the K – 2 teachers reported that hard words or hard vocabulary were factors in impeding the use of informational texts. Responses from the grade 3 – 6 teachers included, "too wordy," "hard vocabulary for my students," "length of text is too long," "comprehension level is too hard," "doesn't apply to my grade level," and "isn't at an appropriate reading level for my students." Only two grade 3 – 6 teachers responded with

availability as a factor that impeded their use. The rest of the responses about availability came from grade K – 2 teachers. Time restraints as an impeding factor, were mentioned more in the lower grades than in the upper grades. "Lack of time to fit everything in," "time, not enough to cover every interest," and "time to find the books and time to fit it in" were all grades K – 2 responses. Only one grade 3 – 6 teacher mentioned time as a restraint. All of the responses that included the word "boring" in their statements came from grades 3 – 6 teachers. Not one grade K – 2 teacher responded with the word "boring" in their responses as to what impedes the use of informational text. Other responses from grades 3 – 6 teachers on what impedes their use of informational text included, "poorly written or poorly presented facts," "hard to find texts to match the core," "texts are not current and up-to-date," "not enough copies of the texts," "lack of student interest," and "hard vocabulary and low comprehension of text."

Frequency and Purpose for Informational Text Use

Frequency. When asked to look back in their plan books for the last two weeks to identify any use of informational text, regardless of the content area it had been used in or for what purpose, the teaching experience groups showed seasoned teachers having a higher frequency of use than the novice or experienced groups. Novice teachers had an average of 5.5 frequency of use and experienced teachers showed a frequency average of 5 uses each. However, seasoned teachers showed an average frequency of 13.5 uses per teacher in that group.

Similarly, the grade level groups also showed a difference in the frequency of use over two-weeks and in any content area or purpose of use. Interestingly, the K – 2 grade teachers reported an average frequency of 12 uses per teacher in that group. The 3 – 6 grade teachers reported an average frequency of 6 uses per teacher in that group. Thus, the findings suggested that grades K – 2 teachers are using informational texts twice as often as the grades 3 – 6

teachers when looking back for only two weeks. This information is in direct opposition to what was reported for eight-weeks from these two groups.

When asked to look back in their plan books for the past eight weeks and identify the frequency of use for six content areas, differences in the teaching experience groups were minimal. Novice teachers had an average of 39 times per teacher. Experienced teachers had an average of 43 times per teacher and seasoned teachers had an average of 38 times per teacher. What is important to remember is that this is an average frequency count over all the teachers in the teaching experience groups. Many individual teachers responded with less than ten frequency counts, while a few had many more. Individuals with the highest number of frequency counts were evenly divided across the three groups. The novice group had one teacher that reported a frequency count of 32 times informational text had been used in an eight-week time period. The experienced group had one teacher reporting 40 uses and the seasoned group had two different teachers reporting uses of 56 each.

When looking at the grade level groups, grade 3 – 6 teachers had a higher frequency of use in all six content areas given as a choice to teachers over an eight-week time frame. Third through sixth grade teachers responded with an average of 39 uses, K – 2 teachers' responded with an average of 20.5 uses. Again, this is an average frequency count per teacher in each grade level group. Individual teachers varied, but overall, the highest frequency of use came from the 3 – 6 grade teachers.

Purposes. There were few apparent differences between groups regarding how informational texts were used during content area instruction. All three teaching experience groups stated the main purpose for the use of informational text was to help teach the science and social studies core curriculum. However, novice and seasoned groups also included in their

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responses using informational texts to teach mathematics and language arts, including guided reading and shared reading

When considering how the two grade level groups used informational texts in content area instruction, there were few differences. Almost all teacher responses, regardless of grade level, included informational text to teach science and social studies. There were five or six teachers from each of the two grade level groups that referred to using informational texts in teaching mathematics or language arts. Included in the language arts were guided reading groups, read-alouds, and shared readings. One grade K – 2 teacher also stated that informational texts were used in "take home books" and "during writer's workshop." One grade 3 – 6 teacher responded with "self-directed reading and writing activities."

When the teaching experience groups were asked to identify the most and least important purposes for informational text use, all three groups reported that introducing a social studies or science concept was very important. The most notable differences were seen in their responses about purposes that were least important. Novice teachers reported that use of informational text in a literacy center was not very important. Experienced teachers identified use in assigned group work and independent reading as some of their least important purposes for using informational text. Seasoned teachers reported that self-directed reading or writing using informational text was not important.

Teachers' reported purposes for using informational texts also showed only a few differences when looking at grade level groups. Kindergarten through second grade teachers reported using informational texts as a read-aloud more often than their counterparts. Self-directed reading and writing activities were chosen by the upper grades at a higher frequency

than the lower grades. Frequency of use of informational text in guided reading, social studies, and science was about the same for both groups of teachers.

Teachers' statements about other purposes they may have used informational texts showed that K – 2 teachers were using them as "take home readers" and "to get boys more interested in reading." Three through sixth grade teachers used informational texts for "seat-work assignments," "reading logs," and "research" purposes. However, one upper grade teacher stated, "I use informational texts for fun facts and to spark interest in my students."

In summary, the results show variability in the sources, criteria, frequency of use, and purposes for informational text in K – 6 classrooms. The results also show some influences across factors of teaching experience, however, they were harder to identify because of the unevenness of the group sizes and the limited total number of participants of the study. The influences seen between the grade level groups were easier to identify.

Teachers' responses further suggest that the main purpose for the use of informational texts was teaching the core content areas of social studies and science. However, responses show that teachers also realized the value of using informational texts in teaching from the language arts core and integrating language arts into the other core areas.

Influences reported in grade level groups show that upper grade elementary teachers used informational text more than the lower grade teachers. Upper grade teachers' responses show more of a concern for curriculum-centered uses rather than lower grade teachers' responses that suggest more student-centered uses.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of informational text in kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms in one elementary school. This action research study was conducted in my elementary school to inform my own practice. Furthermore, this study connects to the literature that supports the use of informational texts in classroom instruction (e.g., Duke & Kays, 1998; Hirsch, 2003; Yopp & Yopp, 2006). It was informed by literature that emphasizes the lack of informational text use in the elementary classroom (e.g., Duke, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2000); studies that highlight the importance of using good informational text in the teaching of the content areas and as a tool for literacy instruction ((e.g., Coonrad & Hughes, 1992; Ford, 2002; Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000; Hall & Sabey, 2007; Morrow, Pressley, Smith, & Smith, 1997; Pearson, 1994; Saul & Dieckman, 2005; Whitin and Wilde, 1992, 1995); as well as professional literature that calls attention to teachers' responsibility in regard to informational text use in the classroom (e. g., Duke, 2004; Pappas, 1991; Smolkin & Donovan, 2002, 2005).

Overall, teachers' responses in this elementary school, show that they knew the sources for informational text, understood the importance of criteria for selecting informational texts at their grade level, and they knew the content and purpose for informational text use. Teachers' responses also show that there were influences seen across grade levels to the sources teachers draw from, the criteria teachers use for selection, and frequency and purpose of informational texts used in content area instruction.

The discussion section of this study will be organized around the four research questions. The discussion will be followed by recommendations for further research. It is important to

remember that the findings from this research were not intended to be generalizable to a larger population and serve to inform faculty of William Elementary.

Teachers' Sources for Informational Texts

The sources of informational texts that teachers drew on most frequently were the sources that were within the school and therefore provided teachers easy access. Teachers' schedules in an elementary school are full as teachers plan and implement the curriculum standards for their grades. Many teachers do not have the time in their day to hunt for the resources that would enhance or be an addition to a given subject. Some of the teachers reported that time, time to find the informational texts and time to fit it in, were impediments for them in using informational texts.

However, there was one source that is within the school that teachers reported they did not use very frequently was that of the literacy facilitator. As the literacy facilitator at William Elementary, I was surprised to find that many teachers did not consider me to be a source that could be used for informational texts. The role of the literacy facilitator is to be a resource and support to classroom teachers. As a result of this action research study, I realized that I needed to find ways to help teachers view me as a source for not only informational texts, but as someone who could facilitate their literacy needs.

Teachers' Criteria for Selecting Informational Texts

When teachers responded to what selection criteria were most and least important to them when selecting informational texts, there were several criteria selections that were notable. Findings of the study indicate that when teachers were given the directive to choose the three most important criteria and the three least important criteria from a constrained list, less than half of teachers indicated that current up-to-date information was one of their three most important

criteria. Further, the majority indicated that realistic photographs and texts that were free of bias were part of their three least important criteria. This is in direct contrast to what researchers and professional organizations have recommended. Ford (2006) stated,

> Through a mixture of quality writing, excellent photography, engaging graphics and layouts, and topic selection, the books directly address children's interests. To the extent to which these conceptions, portrayed through text and image, appropriately represent science to children is important in ultimately determining their utility in classroom settings. (pp. 214-215)

Ford (2002) also stated, "Children's science books should be error-free in text and illustration" (p. 267). Others have echoed Ford's recommendations (Madrazo, 1997; NSTA, 2008a, 2008b; Saul & Dieckman, 2005).

These findings may have been influenced by the task provided in the survey, that of choosing the three most and the three least important criteria out of a list of all-important criteria. If they had been asked individually to state why they felt those criteria were least important, teachers may have responded that they did so because of their forced choice. For example, one teacher ignored the directive and chose all of them as most important, suggesting that most and least criteria on a list were all still important. I felt a need to share with the teachers what I had learned in the literature and from NSTA standards about the criteria that was recognized as making informational texts high-quality texts.

Further, it was interesting to note that when teachers talked about what impeded their use of informational text in their classrooms, they were concerned about texts that were too wordy, vocabulary that was too difficult, or texts that were uninteresting or poorly written. In this context, they were also concerned about outdated texts. If these factors impede the use of

informational texts in the classroom, understanding the criteria that relate to high-quality

informational texts would be beneficial to classroom teachers that use those texts. An

understanding of informational texts that include; quality writing, excellent photography,

engaging graphics and layouts, topic selection, and address children's interests; could encourage

teachers instead of impede them, to use more informational texts in classroom instruction.

Frequency of Use of Informational Texts

The participants of this research study were asked to report how frequently informational

text were used in their classrooms over a two-week time period and an eight-week time period.

The frequency reports for both time periods varied greatly from teacher to teacher. Some

teachers reported no use of informational texts, while others reported 32 or more uses of such

texts.

The findings of this study were not conclusive in how many times informational texts

were actually used, but the findings did show that there is a wide range in the frequency of use.

Similar to Duke (2000) and Yopp and Yopp (2000), the findings in this study indicate that

enough teachers use informational texts very little or not at all, supporting researchers concern

that the call to increase the classroom use of informational text is not being heeded by all

teachers, despite the research supporting its use. Hall and Sabey (2007) posited that young

students need multiple experiences with informational texts and through quality instruction can

develop critical skills to navigate their way through the information age. Saul and Dieckman

(2005) stated that students should be in classrooms that permit access to a wide variety of high-

quality informational books and the variety of such texts are essential in terms of subject matter

and readability level. There is a growing body of evidence that young children have limited

exposure to texts with informational features in schools (Yopp & Yopp, 2006). In their research

of informational text use in the elementary years, both Duke, (2000) and Yopp and Yopp (2000) found that informational text use was scarce in the schools they studied. Based on the self-report use of informational texts, there is a need for at least some of the teachers who participated in this study, to better understand the important role of frequent use of informational texts in their classroom instruction.

Purposes for Using Informational Text

When examining the purposes for which the informational text had been used, teachers responded with a wide variety of answers from very specific purposes (e.g., "current events in the Middle East involving countries where ancient civilizations lived") to very broad content areas (e.g., "used to teach math and science"). What was not clear was if teachers knew how to use the texts in instructionally appropriate ways. Some of the practices that these teachers might be unaware of included active engagement of students with informational text, providing experiences with informational text structures and features, and providing opportunities to model, practice, and reflect (e.g., Ogle & Blachowicz, 2002; Palinscar & Duke, 2004; Smolkin & Donovan, 2002).

Also, findings from this study were not clear on the use of informational texts to instruct students in using comprehension strategies that are unique to such texts. Using informational texts to teach comprehension strategies and skills is a recurring theme throughout the literature on informational texts (e.g., Duke, 2004; Hall & Sabey, 2007; Hall, Sabey, & McClellan, 2005). Drawing on this rich base of literature, other practices that could be included were vocabulary instruction, text structure instruction and text feature instruction. Many of these practices could be done during whole or small group instruction. Such practices would help teachers understand how to use informational texts to integrate content-area and reading instruction to promote

general literacy knowledge and skill, as well as subject-matter knowledge. The need for students to be able to ask questions, use resources, and organize ideas becomes critical at the middle and secondary levels (Ogle & Blachowicz, 2002).

Influence of Teaching Experience and Grade Level

Analysis of the data on the influence of the teachers' years of teaching experience and the grade levels they taught showed that most teachers claimed to use informational texts. It also showed that not all teachers in the school selected and used informational texts in the same way. However, the findings of the study were inconclusive when comparisons were made across years of experience. One reason for this was that the experienced group of teachers was so small (N=4), so it became almost impossible to substantiate and show differences between the three groups. It was easier to see the differences between the grade level groups because the numbers in each group were large enough to substantiate and show their differences. For this reason, this discussion of the findings related to the fourth research question will focus on differences between grade level groupings of teachers.

Findings of the study show a definite pattern between the grade K – 2 teachers and the grade 3 – 6 teachers. While some grade K – 2 teachers were inclined to use informational texts for core instruction, their major concerns, even when content area instruction was mentioned, were focused on students. Their decision to use informational texts centered on children's interest, excitement, and engagement with the texts.

In contrast grade 3 – 6 teachers' concerns were more curriculum-based. Teachers of grades 3 – 6 considered the content area (e.g., history, science, or social studies) or whether it would allow students to work on self-directed activities. There was only one grade 3 – 6 teacher who stated that student interest was a factor that encouraged the use of informational texts.

The literature supports both purposes (i.e., focus on students and focus on curriculum goals) for using informational text. Informational texts often serve as a reading catalyst for some children who are not motivated to read narrative text. It prepares students for overall literacy achievement and progress, and prepares children to understand their present interests and background knowledge. It also connects them to future and home literacy experiences (e.g., Caswell & Duke, 1998; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Duke & Kays, 1998). Not only are children capable of interacting with informational texts but they also enjoy doing so. Pappas (1991) states that it is not the case that children do not like or would not want to read nonfiction materials. In fact, the opposite is true; children like and want to read informational texts.

The literature that supports the use of informational texts to teach content area curricula includes literature in mathematics, science and social studies (e.g., Laughlin & Kardaleff, 1991; Morrow, Presley, Smith & Smith, 1997; Shatzer, 2008). Informational texts used within the content areas provides a meaningful context for learning, encourages individual exploration, provides problem-solving situations, and provides visualization of concepts in the illustrations and photographs. Morrow, Presley, Smith, and Smith (1997) stated, "The integration of language arts and science can have an effect on the development of scientific understanding and inquiry" (p. 73). This statement holds true for other content areas as well. The literature shows that both interest in students and interest in curriculum goals are important when selecting instructional texts. Neither is more or less important than the other.

Another interesting difference between teachers in the two grade-level groups had to do with their use of textbooks as a source for informational texts. Less than half of the grade K – 2 teachers chose to use textbooks as a source of informational text, while almost all grade 3 – 6 teachers did so. These teachers often reported using parts or chapters of the science or social

studies textbooks for teaching those content areas. When, grade K – 2 teachers did cite textbooks as a kind of informational texts they used, they made more general statements, including their use to introduce the core or lesson, instead of using the textbook as the only informational text to teach the content.

Morrow, Presley, Smith and Smith (1997) suggest that textbook instruction in the science curriculum can become "boring and frustrating and that this type of teaching results in factual knowledge at the expense of stimulating process skills for learning" (p. 72). Similarly, Laughlin and Kardaleff (1991) state that if a textbook is used in teaching elementary social studies, it is still necessary that children have access to other materials in order to encourage individual exploration and to provide problem-solving situations.

Implications

Findings of this action research study have informed my work as the literacy facilitator in my school. I decided to use informational text as the topic for our professional development opportunities during the school year and the year following the study. To focus on this topic, I undertook several projects. The first was a professional development class for the teachers on choosing good informational texts. In that class, I reviewed the criteria proposed by NSTA, (2008b) and others. The teachers were given the opportunity to look through many informational texts found in the school and choose the ones they felt matched the criteria for selection. The teachers that participated in this professional development opportunity were encouraged to see the amount of informational texts that are available in the school and were grateful for the opportunity of knowing what criteria for selection is advocated by those in the field of science, social studies, and literacy.

The second project was a compilation of the titles of all the informational texts found in the guided reading leveled library and the professional library within the school. After the first professional development class, I realized that teachers did not have the same knowledge of the titles of available informational texts that I had. It was easy to create a database for all teachers to use that would make it easier for them to find and incorporate informational texts into their daily instruction.

The third project was to rearrange the books shelved in the guided reading leveled library. Previously, the books had been shelved in a random fashion with narrative and informational texts of the same guided reading level mixed together. It was my goal to shelf the books according to guided reading level but to also get the narrative texts shelved together and informational texts shelved together within that level. This project is currently ongoing.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study are limited to the context in which the study was conducted. While this study provided an interesting look into teachers' sources for informational text, their criteria for selecting those texts, and the frequency and purposes for the use of such texts, the application of the findings should be restricted to the school in which the research was conducted. Further, research using a larger population, multiple settings and different types of classrooms would be valuable in determining if the findings presented in this paper could be generalized to other schools in other districts.

Second, the findings in this study were based upon self-report data. Sometimes when self-report data is used, informants tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear or inaccurately report their views. Inaccurately reporting the data may not be done on purpose, but happens because informants may not remember accurately or

may not record their responses accurately. Self-report data is always subject to bias, and different individuals have different response styles that can influence the way the data are reported (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Third, this study was conducted with only one data source, survey data in questionnaire format (See Appendix A). This survey included both open and closed responses, but often the written responses were forced-choice items. In order to increase the reliability and validity of these findings, there needs to be research using other data sources used to triangulate the findings. In further research, other data sources, such as observational data or interview data, could be used.

This study opens up many ideas for further research into the use of informational texts. Such studies could include research involving content area and literacy integration, research on informational texts that are recommended by such organizations as the National Science Teacher Association and National Council of Social Studies and their instructional use, and continuing research on the use of informational texts to teach reading comprehension.

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Appendix A

Survey of Informational Text in Classroom Instruction (SITCI)

Demographics

1. How many total years of experience as an educator do you have? _____

2. Mark the grade level you are currently teaching.

   K_____   1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____   6_____

3. How many years of teaching experience do you have in your current grade? _____

4. What type of certification do you hold?

Early Childhood Education_____   Elementary Education_____

Dual (Early Childhood and Elementary Education) _____

5. How do you define the term "informational text"?

Sources   **Please circle all that apply:**

6. When choosing informational text for use in your classroom, what sources do you generally use?

School library	Books available for use that are stored in literacy room or school's professional library
Classroom/Personal library	Another Teacher
County library	Principal
Internet/Web Site	Literacy Facilitator
Leveled Library	Professional Development Class
Textbooks	

7. *How often do you use the source?*

<u>School Library</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Classroom Library</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>County Library</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Internet/Web Site</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Leveled Library</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Textbooks</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Books in literacy room or professional library</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Another Teacher</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Principal</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Literacy Facilitator</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

<u>Professional Development Class</u>

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

8. Please list any other sources that are important to you when picking out informational text. How often do you use those sources?

- _____

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

- _____

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

- _____

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

Criteria for Selecting Informational Texts

9. Look at the list below. *Place an "M" in the blank beside the three (3) __most__ important things you look for when selecting informational texts to use in your classroom. Place an "L" beside the three (3) __least__ important things you look for when selecting informational texts to use in your classroom.*

_____The topic is relevant for my classroom.

_____The information is clear and up-to-date.

_____The theories and facts are clear and easily understood.

_____The facts presented are not oversimplified or above grade level.

_____The text is readable for your grade level.

_____The photographs are realistic.

_____The illustrations are accurate and easy to follow.

_____The books are free of gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic bias.

_____The text structures are appropriate for grade level.

_____The text is readily available.

10. What other criteria are important to you when picking out informational text for use in your classroom?

11. Generally, what are the most important text features (e.g. captions, labels, headings, readability, large print) that you look for when selecting an informational text for your classroom?

12. What encourages the use of informational text in your classroom?

13. What impedes the use of informational text in your classroom?

Informational Text as a tool for Instruction

14. Looking back in your plan book, when, how often, and for what purpose have you used informational text in the last two weeks?

15. How often do you use informational texts in your classroom?

Never   Fewer than 6 times a year   A few times a month   Weekly   Daily

16. Look at the list below. In the blank provided, place an "***M***" by the three ***most important*** *ways you use informational texts in your classroom. Place an "**L**" beside the three **least** ***important*** *ways you use informational texts.*

_____Used as a read-aloud.

_____Used as a choral reading.

_____Used as a leveled book for guided reading.

_____Used for independent reading such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR).

_____Used in a literacy center or a content area center.

_____Used to look at pictures to explain or introduce a topic.

_____Used for assigned group work on a topic.

_____Used for self-directed periods of reading and writing (Ex. Assigning a child a report to do on a science or social studies topic).

_____Used for specific teaching of a social studies or science concept.

17. In what other ways do you use informational texts?

18. Looking back in your plan book, over the last eight (8) weeks, how often have you used informational texts (excluding textbooks) in the teaching of:

Mathematics   _____number of times in 8 weeks

Science   _____number of times in 8 weeks

Social Studies   _____number of times in 8 weeks

 The Arts   _____number of times in 8 weeks

Healthy Lifestyles   _____number of times in 8 weeks

19. Looking back in your plan book, how often have you used informational text in teaching the language arts core in the last eight (8) weeks?

20. For what other purposes have you used informational text in your classroom in the past eight (8) weeks?

21. What is the role of informational text instruction in elementary school? Explain.

Appendix B

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction
Marjean Sorensen is conducting this research study at William Elementary under the direction of Dr. Janet Young, thesis chair, at Brigham Young University. This research will examine how teachers use informational text in their elementary classrooms. Teachers' sources for informational texts, criteria teachers use in selecting informational texts, and in what context and for what purposes teachers use informational text for tools of instruction will be examined. You were selected to participate because you are a teacher at William Elementary.

Procedure
As part of a regularly scheduled faculty meeting, all teachers will complete the survey to inform the professional development opportunities that will be offered at William Elementary throughout the school year. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes. While all teachers will take the survey, your responses will be used in the research study only if you sign this consent form.

Risks/Discomforts
There are minimal risks for participation in this study. You may feel emotional discomfort when answering the questions about your personal use of informational texts in your classroom.

Benefits
There are some possible direct benefits for participating in this study, including higher quality professional development because of the information you provide. Additional benefits may be seen as the information from the study is shared with other interested educators.

Confidentiality
All information provided will remain confidential and will be reported by groups or with the use of pseudonyms. Only my thesis chair and I will have access to the original surveys. After the research is completed, the surveys will be destroyed.

Compensation
There is no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to have your data used without jeopardy.

Questions about the Research
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Marjean Sorensen at 801-652-4899, marjean.sorensen@jordan.k12.ut.us or Dr. Janet Young at 801-422-4979, janet_young@byu.edu

Questions about your Rights as Research Participants
If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher or her thesis chairperson, you may contact Dr. Christopher Dromey, IRB Chair, 801-422-6461, 133 TLRB, dromey@byu.edu

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Signature:_____

Date:_____