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**NONFICTION INTERESTS AND READING HABITS  
OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS**

by

Kimberly Astacio

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Reading Education  
At  
Rowan University  
December 18, 2015

Thesis Chair: Susan Browne, Ed.D

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## **Dedications**

This thesis is dedicated to my family; Bert, Maya and Zachary. Thank you for your continued support and caring about my research within reading education.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge my class of students as well as my colleagues for listening to me share new ideas. I would also like to acknowledge my classmates in the Reading Specialist program, as well as professors that have seen me through. You all have been so supportive in helping me with my study.

## **Abstract**

Kimberly Astacio  
NONFICTION INTERESTS AND READING HABITS  
OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS  
2015-2016  
Dr. Susan Browne  
Master of Arts in Reading Education

In recent years there has been a push for informational text use in the areas of reading and writing. The Common Core State Standards was introduced in 2009 as an initiative to have all students, no matter where they live, be prepared for college and careers. The NAEP (2007) developed a framework to look at the distribution of literary and informational passages. By fourth grade the literary and informational passages are evenly split for state testing. By eighth grade, state tests suggest a slight increase with informational texts at 55% and literary passages at 45%. Thus, it is important that these types of texts are introduced and apparent in the classroom. This is based on what students will need to live a successful life. “Informational literacy is central to success, and even survival, in advanced schooling, the workplace, and the community” (Duke, 2013). As a result of this increase in demand of non-fiction, this thesis looks at how students are currently viewing and using nonfiction when they have a choice in their literature. It further examines what teaching practices can be used to shape students view of informational texts. The goal of this study is to understand if students choose nonfiction when their interests are considered in the nonfiction selection.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Scope of Study**

It all began when I was wondering how to bring nonfiction into my classroom. I thought I was already doing it being an up-to-date best practicing teacher. I have heard through district grade level meetings, the common core, and professional development courses that there has been a need to increase nonfiction reading. I can't say that I knew why exactly, but there was no doubt that things were changing. So many questions that I had didn't seem to get answered and I continued to teach the same way as before. There was not a neat and tidy package that got dropped off telling me how to fit nonfiction into the curriculum perfectly. Therefore it mainly showed up during cycles of guided reading. But that had its issues as well. Where do I get the materials from? How do I know if it is on the child's instructional level? Are they interested in this topic, really? That being set in place, I still didn't see students reading nonfiction. I tried to incorporate Nonfiction Friday a few years ago. That meant on Fridays, the students had to read a nonfiction magazine that I had in my classroom. They complied and possibly even enjoyed it. It was a break from their regularly scheduled fiction reading. My grade level partners and I even switched up magazines each month so we had new offerings. As the next year or two passed, it seemed to lose its luster. I wasn't actively engaged and neither were the students. I found that more was needed and that I needed to reflect on my own teacher practices as well as what the students would want.

## **Story of the Question**

Nonfiction. I don't prefer it. When I was in elementary school, the only students who were interested in it were of higher intelligence or boys. It did not seem appealing or interesting in the least. I read it when I had to, but then usually didn't understand it. I remember the silver social studies textbook and the dread of having to answer questions from the book. I didn't understand the content which further led me to believe that I wasn't smart. It led me away from content area understanding altogether. I did not have the strategies to read a textbook. However I never minded reading a Babysitter's Club or R.L. Stine mystery. I liked to read, but I certainly preferred fiction.

This followed me through high school where I do not remember reading for pleasure at all. This occurred again in college. I was not prepared and had to take remedial courses to get ready for college. What? How can this be? I was always an A/B student with the occasional C. How did I successfully pass high school and then need remedial support for county college. This was frustrating, made me feel like I was not smart, and led me to believe that I just needed to get through the system. And I did. I barely cracked textbooks and studied when I needed to. But I did not enjoy learning. Then I became a teacher.

In the first years everything was great. My students loved to read! Reader's workshop was their favorite time of day to slip away into a fantasy, a mystery or a humorous tale. The kids would groan when the time was over. I had a plethora of books and the students loved fiction read aloud. Enter the Common Core Standards. At first glance nothing changed during reader's workshop. Students still read their pleasure book of choice. The district strongly encouraged the use of nonfiction during guided reading.

So I was to instruct students how to read a nonfiction text. Easy enough. I learned a few strategies, emphasized text features and tried to engage them in an interesting text on their level. The students usually really enjoyed the articles or texts and liked guided reading. However they weren't choosing these texts on their own free reading time.

In the meantime I became a mother of two beautiful children. Both love to read of course! My daughter is in 3rd grade and reads well above grade level. That being said, she does not choose to read nonfiction. My son is in preschool and he seems to like fiction stories as well, but also like trucks and machines. However both of my kids watch TV programs that are educational (mostly). The programs they enjoy include nonfiction elements. *Wild Kratts* teaches about different animal species and habitats through a cartoon as well as *The Magic School Bus* series that explores so many science topics. They love these types of shows and really obtain background knowledge through them. However, will they be college and career ready? So much of their adult life will need to revolve around nonfiction texts and it is not being supported at home. Am I not preparing them for success?

This brings me back to my classroom. How much nonfiction am I exposing to my students? I have some nonfiction in my room. There are magazines that they can choose. That is enough, right? Well when I observed their choice preferences at reader's workshop it does not show that they are even aware of the nonfiction sections. I had to check my own biases. The only nonfiction I read is for graduate studies, information about common core, professional development texts and articles, files on students, information from the internet about every area of life. Wait...the only thing I really read is nonfiction? This is where my shift began. I actually consume nonfiction all day long.

Now I buy into it. I really do want to help my students and kids love nonfiction. There is so much to offer but they are being underexposed. I just have to find the authentic purpose for my students.

### **Statement of Research Problem and Question**

The problem that I am pondering is the lack of exposure and use of nonfiction texts in elementary school. Further it is important to take into consideration what students are interested in reading. When students' interests are met, they are more likely to be motivated to read. Therefore, I am looking to find out what happens when students are exposed to nonfiction regularly and within their interest areas. Will the regular promotion of nonfiction texts through a few teaching strategies affect students reading choice?

### **Purpose Statement**

Nonfiction was once just a boring, heavy textbook. It was straightforward with information and less than captivating with its pictures. These types of texts were primarily used in the content areas. It would be rare to see a student reading one for pleasure. Long over are the days in which students are told what to read. Students indulge in pleasure reading in the classroom for sustained reading time. They are allowed choice and are exposed to a variety of genres. Guthrie (2010) found five motivation practices that can be used daily within the classroom. They include success, thematic units, choice, relevance, and collaboration. SSR (silent-sustained reading) or Reader's Workshop have been a place to encourage students to read on their success levels with choice and relevance to their own life. Students choose a book on their independent reading level and sink into a good book. Teachers have full libraries and

work to separate the library by genre. Students choose nonfiction as well as fiction. Teachers often read aloud an interesting fantasy that the whole class will enjoy. They buy Scholastic books that are new and fresh and keep their students updated and interested with a plethora to choose from. The names may differ, but students love Reader's Workshop for the uninterrupted time to read their own book. There are arguments for and against Silent Sustained Reading. The research seems to show that "it could be that if you read more, you are a better reader; but it also seems possible that better readers choose to read more" (NICHD, 2000, p. 3-21). This leads to wondering how effective the SSR program is. Teachers must be mindful of the literature their students are reading. Chall, Jacobs and Baldwin (1990) found students to hit a fourth grade slump; particularly those in a lower income. The students in their study had the greatest difficulty with word meaning. Nonfiction text may pose a way to expand vocabulary at this age, when more common vocabulary needs to be improved upon. Students need exposure to words multiple times and within context to expand their vocabularies. Teachers also need to provide direct instruction on word meanings. They may confer with students about their reading to ensure comprehension and help make further book choices. More currently teachers have applied The Daily Five and Cafe as approaches to enhance the Reader's Workshop Model. These systems help manage students reading and suggest strategies for becoming better readers. While the goal for students to love reading has been met, all students are not being exposed to a variety of text; particularly those that fall under non-fiction. Chall (1983) notes that in traditional practice primary grade levels have almost exclusively used fiction as a way to teach mechanics of reading, while nonfiction texts have been used to teach content to upper-

elementary readers. Duke and Kays (1998) found that experience is a large determining factor in what students will read in their future. In their study, kindergarten students were exposed to a large number of information books for 3 months. The students were able to reflect informational text features and language after this exposure. Students benefit from exposure in class and will quickly gain the tools that they need if given the opportunity. The young age of the students is less of a factor than that of exposure. The implications were to have students exposed to nonfiction regularly and given lots of practice to gain this experience. This research supports the notion that paying attention to the specific interests students have when choosing informational texts may increase students' choice in reading nonfiction.

Teachers feel that students are uninterested in nonfiction reading material. This is exactly the concern I am looking at when I am looking at my teacher research question.

Through an interest inventory survey, researchers Vent & Ray (2007) collected data and found that 85% of fourth graders like non-fiction books. When compared against the actual amount of books selected in the library, only 35% of these books were nonfiction.

This leads to further questions including; why don't students choose non-fiction?, and how can teachers support students to like nonfiction? Of the reasons explored, they found that students felt that nonfiction is too hard to read and follows a different text format.

There is also lack of exposure by parents and teachers. Duke (2004) found the students are only exposed to 3.6 minutes of non-fiction per day and that number is even less in lower socio-economic schools. The study further looks at strategies to promote nonfiction reading. They include books on display, book talks, specific interests, authentic purpose, comprehension strategies, and book pass. The researchers used 4 of

these strategies and found that students were more interested in nonfiction, more nonfiction books were checked out and students developed a wider understanding of nonfiction topics.

Duke (2009) discusses that informational text is for young children. The reasons to give young students opportunities to read informational text include that it is an important learning tool, gives students a bigger idea in other content areas, and state testing is comprised of it. It is also important to keep in mind that some students prefer this type of reading material. She further looks at the types of books grouped under informational texts and highlights their purposes and features. This includes:

Expository, Persuasive, Procedural and Nonfiction Narrative. This helped me redefine my research question to nonfiction rather than informational, though it seems the two words are used interchangeably. Duke suggests that students may be interested in nonfiction features including topics, languages and graphics that are engaging. She further makes suggestions of where to incorporate nonfiction into your classroom including classroom libraries, displays, classroom walls, and teacher read aloud. This directly correlated with my own thinking with my teacher research. I do not read aloud nonfiction! It is always fiction. This is an easy way to open up the genre and interest to my students. Duke then discusses five ways to incorporate teaching informational texts to students. She includes using books with rich content that builds on their background knowledge but also offers them something to learn. Vocabulary is important to informational text and should be taught to all students in a content area regardless of reading level. Duke discusses strategy instruction that should be paired with informational text as well as the importance of discussion opportunities.



In conducting teacher research, teachers have the accessibility into their own current practices through a reflective lens. A goal of all teachers is help their students succeed and improve their academic learning. Therefore to enhance the students desire for the nonfiction genre will allow students to improve their learning into their adult life. Book floods, read aloud, and book displays are three effective strategies for incorporating nonfiction text in the classroom library. These strategies will help promote nonfiction texts for students to choose during their independent reading time.

It is hoped that this particular study will further explore the ways in which nonfiction texts can be used and sought after within the classroom library. It is further a goal to find effective teacher strategies. The next section of the thesis will examine the research study design, methodologies and context.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter two provides a review of the literature surrounding the issues of nonfiction use in the elementary classroom. Chapter three describes the design and context of the study, including my plan for implementing strategies that encourage nonfiction. Chapter four reviews and analyzes the data and research and discussed the findings of the study. Chapter five presents the conclusions of this study and implications for teaching and learning. It also includes suggestions for further research regarding the use of nonfiction texts in the elementary classroom.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

“Frankly, most teachers still don’t quite know what to do with nonfiction...There is a general feeling among teachers that they ought to be doing something about nonfiction, but they don’t know where to begin, how to begin, or how to carry on” (Trussell-Cullen 1999, p. iv).

#### CCSS and the Shift

The Common Core State Standards, introduced in 2009, is an initiative to have all students, no matter where they live, prepared for college and careers. The standards were developed by the best state standards already in existence, the experience of teachers, content experts, states, leading thinkers, and feedback from the public (CCSS 2010). The Common Core therefore called for an action plan to include literacy achievement that would support students with skill they would need to live in the 21st century. The standards (CCSS 2010) called for the following approach;

“Part of the motivation behind the interdisciplinary approach to literacy promulgated by the Standards is extensive research establishing the need for college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas. Most of the required reading in college and workforce training programs is informational in structure and challenging in content; postsecondary education programs typically provide students with both a higher volume of such reading than is generally required in K-12 schools and comparatively little scaffolding.”

Further the reading panel of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) requires a high proportion of informational text on its assessments particularly as children advance through the grades. The NAEP (2007) developed a framework to look at the distribution of literary and informational passages. By fourth grade the literary and informational passages are evenly split for state testing. By eighth grade, state tests

suggest a slight increase with informational texts at 55% and literary passages at 45%.

However the passages really show a shift with testing in the twelfth grade as the passages are 70% informational and 30% literary. Thus, it is important that these types of texts are introduced and apparent in the classroom. Explicit instruction is also necessary when dealing with different text structures and differing comprehension strategies. The CCSS (2010) further explains,

“To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students must read widely and deeply from among a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literary and informational texts. Through extensive reading of stories, dramas, poems, and myths from diverse cultures and different time periods, students gain literary and cultural knowledge as well as familiarity with various text structures and elements. By reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas. Students can only gain this foundation when the curriculum is intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades. Students also acquire the habits of reading independently and closely, which are essential to their future success.”

The standards and state testing mandates call for informational text to move out of the background and step into the limelight. For this to occur, teachers need to reflect on current practices and their effectiveness.

Teachers have been aware of the CCSS for 5 years and have strived to meet the standards within their grade level. Informational text, however, is only making a slight increase into the literature that teachers teach from. Possibly found in guided reading, nonfiction is still stigmatized as for those who only want to read to learn something specific. It may even only be read by a student if it is teacher led. Teachers have the quest to find topics to meet students' interests at their reading level and use explicit instruction to engage the students in using comprehension strategies. However during

SSR, students are exposed largely to fiction. Duke (2000) found first grade students were only exposed to 3.6 minutes per day to non-fiction. Duke's study observed 10 first-grade classrooms of the highest socioeconomic status and 10 first grade classrooms of the lowest socioeconomic status to compare print environments and text experiences. Duke observed displayed print, the classroom library, and written language activities. "Results of this study reveal an overall scarcity of informational text in these first grade classrooms" (Duke 2000, p. 212). It also showed that there was even a smaller percentage of this type of text in the lower SES classrooms. There was little informational text displayed on walls or in classroom libraries and in written activities. This study leads to the idea that many teachers are unaware and underprepared to meet the needs that research and standards are suggesting. Several studies have shown students are greatly interested in nonfiction even in the primary grades. Smolkin and Donovan (2001) found that both students and teacher appeared more excited about nonfiction topics and were more engaged in meaning making. This could improve overall reading performances. The possibility is that if a child is reading in their interest area their overall reading performance can improve.

### **Current Practices and Student Choice**

Teachers must cover many standards in a short amount of time. This combination is a lost opportunity for students to engage in authentic reading and learning on their own terms (Gallagher, 2009). Students are therefore reading a mile wide and an inch deep. This type of reading does not promote deep understanding or the enjoyment of reading. Gallo and Ness (2013) found that students are underexposed to informational text in elementary school. They looked at third-grade students' attitudes and perceptions of

informational text. They used student surveys about text preference, interviewed individual students and had the students keep logs of what they read. They found that students preferred fiction to nonfiction text. The students also read nonfiction less frequently than what had been suggested on their reading survey. Another study in Canada (Dorion 2003) found that classroom libraries offered majority of fiction texts. Though when checked with the types of books that students check out from their school library; they chose nonfiction twice as much as they chose fiction. This study suggests that students are identifying their preference for nonfiction but that they do not have daily accessibility to it. These are the types of texts that will make up most of their needs in college and in their adult life. Classroom libraries have the potential to fulfill students needs for the future. Williams (2009) found students should be offered new literacies as well as traditional text. She found that over 80% of adults read informational genre in their adult life and it is usually digital. Teachers can also consider how using technology can benefit their readers with nonfiction.

When considering students preferences, it is important to highlight student choice in reading. In several studies it has been found that students would prefer to read nonfiction (Moss, 2005). Student's attitudes have an impact on their motivation to read certain texts. Students chose to read informational texts for a variety of reasons. Motivation stems from a desire to learn, connections to personal interests, and preferred text structures (Gallo & Ness, 2013). Student choice allows for the feelings of control, purpose and competence (Perks, 2010). Gambrell (2010) found several suggestions that improve reading motivation. The research conducted in the Literacy Motivation Project "suggests that classroom cultures that foster reading motivation are characterized by a

teacher who is a reading model, a book-rich classroom environment, opportunities for choice, familiarity with books, social interactions about books, and literacy-related incentives that reflect the value of reading” (Gambrell, 1996, pg. 20). Informational texts explored through this culture can enhance student motivation and choice in reading.

### **Significance of Nonfiction Texts in the Elementary Classroom**

To increase the amount of non-fiction text in the classroom is just a small step in the right direction. Many nonfiction books in the classroom are at inappropriate reading levels for elementary students (Palmer & Stewart 2005). Teachers have to carefully select quality nonfiction literature that would appeal to that grade level. Teachers will need to highlight and display non-fiction texts in an exciting way. In Duke’s (2000) findings, calling for more informational text in the early grades may help lessen difficulties of students in later grades. Teachers need to find kid-friendly topics that inform and entertain their audience. Hot topics that are relevant to students’ lives need to be considered. Students need to have a purpose for reading nonfiction. Moreover teachers need to expand students understanding of nonfiction that includes a larger umbrella of categories. Kelsey (2011) suggests that “the school librarian should be actively involved in curriculum development, serving on related committees, and proactively seeking out teachers to discover what units they teach and when” (Kelsey 2011 p. 37). Kelsey (2011) further discusses that teachers need to demonstrate that nonfiction texts are worthy of reading and should engage in nonfiction read aloud. When teachers show enthusiasm for a certain type of book, it can be contagious and compel students to want to read the same. Nonfiction book talks may be a helpful strategy for teachers to draw attention to nonfiction.

Another idea to consider is that some students actually prefer the informational genre. “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). They found that informational texts can capitalize on children’s curiosities and provide opportunities for children to apply and develop areas of expertise. Students that are encouraged to pursue their interests are plausibly more engaged in their learning and can have a strong impact on their academic development. Other students to consider are reluctant readers and those considered ELL. Reluctant readers may be drawn to nonfiction and can be engaged by the assortment of topics. Students who are ELL can benefit from reading nonfiction due to the photos highlighting major points in the text. This also includes other text features that are found in nonfiction. This can help the reader make better sense of the information being explained. “Reading nonfiction is a chance to experience something real and highly unusual from the safety of home” (Kelsey 2011, p. 39).

Topping (2015) conducted a study in text preference and gender with Accelerated Reader software. In similar studies, he found that readability increased when the students were interested in the text and their actual reading level did not impact their understanding of more challenging texts. These similar studies also found that boys had a preference for nonfiction. Nonfiction could also be an avenue to support the reading achievement of boys. In Topping’s (2015) study, he found that in the lower grades (K-5) students were able to read at a difficulty level above the actual age of the pupils. Once beyond fifth grade, the nonfiction books read were not as challenging and were not read or understood as carefully as the fiction books. Males began to show more preferences

for nonfiction once in sixth grade and students began to develop preferences for particular nonfiction authors. The study also found that the students showed a preference for short stories, magazines and digital sources. This is an area to consider when offering students more nonfiction text in the classroom library.

### **The Goal of Engagement**

“Children will be processing information for the rest of their lives, so it is essential that their minds be engaged with nonfiction at an early age. “They need to know how to effectively read it and even enjoy it” (Kelsey 2011, p. 36). The goal is to compel students to want to read appealing nonfiction. Children are naturally curious and a teacher’s job is to find a way to deliver the information to do it. In the text genre preference study (Gallo and Ness 2013), it was found that third grade students found a preference for fictional text. It matches the information that Duke (2000) made apparent in her seminal text. There is a gross underrepresentation of nonfiction text in the classrooms. The implications are that students are not being exposed to nonfiction text at home or in school. It is suggested that the students are preferring texts that are familiar to them. Further Gallo and Ness (2013) found that students’ expressed an interest in reading nonfiction texts. Therefore it is a goal to begin exposing students to an increased amount of nonfiction text within the classroom. Though much of the research points in favor of adding nonfiction into the classroom, improvement is needed with the way in which it is introduced. Guthrie’s (2010) principles of choice, success and relevance are motivators to consider when selecting nonfiction texts for students. The texts need to be on their independent reading level, relevant to third grade lives and have plenty of choices in their area of interest. Palmer and Stewart (2005) found three models to use for nonfiction in



the primary grades. They include teacher-directed instruction, scaffolding student investigation, and encourage student investigation. Each step of the model includes a gradual release of responsibility and includes explicit instruction, guided practice and the freedom to pursue a meaningful assignment that is relevant to the student. This suggested model is similar to the goal of enhancing students' choice with nonfiction text. Teachers need to know students particular interests and then create a place for students to view those texts in which they deem interesting. Young, Moss, and Cornwell (2007) found several reasons for including nonfiction books in the classroom. These include; book browse to spark curiosity; provide students with authentic reading experiences that connect to their lives; motivate reluctant readers with attractive formats; expand background knowledge needed to understand content area concepts; build vocabulary; expose readers to a variety of text features and structures; develop critical reading skills; combine reading for pleasure with reading for information; and expose students to text types found on standardized tests. (Young, Moss & Cornwell 2007, p. 2). The assumption here is that nonfiction belongs in the classroom library. With similar thinking to Guthrie in the beginning of this section, Routman (2003) finds that students reading interests must be considered when selecting books for the classroom library. Routman also found that when students have a higher motivation to read, they are engaged. "Reading comprehension scores are more influenced by students' amount of engaged reading than any other single factor" (Routman 2003, p. 69).

Another area to improve upon is how the books are arranged within the classroom. Teachers need to do more than just have nonfiction in the classroom library. According to Routman (2003), teachers can make it easier for students to find nonfiction

by involving them in organizing and maintaining the classroom library even when existing systems work well. Texts can be organized in baskets and grouped by various topics. Students can be a part of this process and by doing so will learn that all nonfiction texts are not the same.

Teachers play a huge role in promoting reading. Teachers need to make careful decisions when thinking about the types of books they introduce. Kelsey (2003) suggests several ways to create enthusiasm for nonfiction. One way to encourage this type of text is by reading aloud nonfiction. Another suggestion is through Reader's theatre scripts. Students can be involved in the reading, hold their interest and build fluency. Kelsey (2003) also states teachers should give book talks to spark student interest. Teachers can read a portion of the book, summarize it or discuss an opinion about it in two minutes time. She further suggests playing a game such as two truths and a lie that would stem into student interest. Another important consideration is the placement of the books. The books full cover should be seen and the display should be enticing and accessible. A final suggestion includes the idea of a book pass where students sample a book for 3 minutes and then write a comment about it. Then the students pass it to the right and begin again. Classroom libraries and teachers surely play a big role in promoting nonfiction.

According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching practices connect students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles to their academic knowledge. This allows classroom cultures in which students have the opportunity to learn and grow. This includes how teachers and students make their decisions on the texts

they will use. Students must be active participators in their selection of texts that they read and their interests should matter.

This study intends on looking deeply at third grade students interests when it comes to the nonfiction genre. The students will continue to choose texts that are available to them through reader's workshop, while they are being exposed to more interest-specific nonfiction text. Students will be exposed to a wider variety of nonfiction as well as different strategies that support the reading of nonfiction. The results will look at if interest persuades nonfiction frequency that is read by choice.

## Chapter III

### Context and Research Design

#### Research Design

“Research is a process of discovering essential questions, gathering data, and analyzing it to answer those questions” (Shagoury and Power, 2012, pg. 2). The qualitative research paradigm is the framework of this study. “The notion of “scientifically based research” and its complement, “evidenced-based education,” reflect renewed confidence in the power of science to solve social and educational problems” (Cochran- Smith & Lytle, 2009, pg. 10). The use of qualitative data brings change to the classroom, increase achievement in students and help to solve larger problems within education. Whereas quantitative data is looking to quantify the data, qualitative research is helpful in gaining an understanding for reasons and motivations. The use of qualitative research is best used by a teacher researcher to explore insights into a problem and possibly generate ideas for later research. Qualitative data relies on open ended responses, while quantitative data is limited to pre-made questions. In considering this study it is important to note that the population sample is children. The sample is diverse in ability and attitudes. To remain objective in teacher research is not plausible and subjectivity must be considered. The teacher practitioner must consider their role as the researcher, collaboration within the learning community, and be regarded as a knowledge base. (Cochran- Smith & Lytle, 2009). The knowledge created by teacher practitioner qualitative research can “enhance conceptual frameworks, alter practices, and /or reconstruct curricula” (Cochran- Smith & Lytle, 2009, pg. 42) at the local level. The qualitative research framework is also best used when the teacher is the researcher as they

will be in the professional context at all times and may have to think, make decisions, and interpret ideas that unfold. “Teacher research is a natural extension of good teaching in which the teacher observes students closely, analyzes their needs and makes adjustments to meet those needs” (Shagoury & Power, 2012, pg. 3). This study aligns with the qualitative research design because the goal is to increase the use of nonfiction through teacher promotion within the classroom setting.

This study analyzes the results of using nonfiction text within the classroom library. The teacher research method was used as the framework of this study in order to gather, interpret and analyze data. The teacher research method is used for the purpose of this study because my research will be based on my students’ choices and interests for book preferences. Qualitative inquiry strategies used to conduct this study include pre and post survey questions of a reading interest inventory, informal notes on conversations with students, a log of their reading during choice time, and my teacher-research journal.

### **Procedure of Study**

Before I began collecting data, I observed the literature displayed in my classroom. I looked out the amounts of each genre, their locations and how they were labeled. I also collected reading logs of the students in order to compare their choices in reading before and after I began promoting the reading of nonfiction. I observed the students during reader’s workshop and noticed student’s individual behaviors during this time. This includes frequency of students changing books, sustained amount reading (time on task), and students choice of fiction and nonfiction. I decided the most appropriate time for this study would during the reader’s workshop block of the day as it is a time when all students are able to choose what they would like to read and is an

uninterrupted time to read. Through the survey I was able to familiarize myself with students' interests which would further help me plan for nonfiction books to bring into the classroom. I was also able to observe the classroom library and plan on how to make changes to it that would enhance nonfiction.

After observing the classroom during reader's workshop time I was able to plan several strategies that promote the use of nonfiction. I first began to choose nonfiction that the students would be interested in to flood the classroom with those books. The students would be exposed to different types of nonfiction and where they may find it in the classroom and school library. The students would be exposed to nonfiction at a higher frequency than previously. They would hear read alouds and have more exposure to interesting nonfiction through displays in the classroom. Additionally, time was going to need to be managed so that students had a full 20 minutes of reader's workshop each day. Another area that needed to be considered was that all students were completing their weekly reading log.

### **Timeline**

The first week of the study was used to collect parent consent forms and observe the current classroom situation. I collected their regular reading logs to note habits of reading of fiction and nonfiction. The classroom library was observed to notice how it was currently functioning and what changes could be implemented. I observed students during this week and took note of behaviors and choices during reader's workshop.

During week two, students took an interest survey. I used this information to decide the types of nonfiction interests that students might have. Students were reintroduced to their reading logs and emphasis was put on filling them in as well as

noting the genre. This material will be used to chart students interests Students continued reading and logging in their books. By the end of the week, I read aloud a small passage from a few different nonfiction texts. I made them available to the students if they wished to read them. Discussions took place on why we read nonfiction books, genres under the nonfiction umbrella, and authentic purpose for third graders.

I was able to plan for extra library periods and model where students could find books based on their interests in their survey. Time was spent in the school library to point out where nonfiction informational text could be found. Students were reminded of the surveys they took and were encouraged to choose books that they had suggested an interest in. Students were allowed to choose three nonfiction books in addition to their regular library books. I created a book bin for our classroom for students to return books once they were done reading them. This allowed them to borrow books that their peers recently read and added to the options of nonfiction text within the classroom. It also created a space for students to return the books that they were not reading, rather than have six library books in their desk. When they were finished with their book they could place it in the book bin and also have a chance to peruse through it to see what some of their peers had already read.

In week three, I flooded nonfiction books into the classroom based on students' interest survey. The nonfiction books were highlighted in easy access displays that were labeled. Each day I highlighted an area of the room that stored nonfiction. I created new labels and sorted the nonfiction in the classroom under more specific categories. For example, I showed the students where they might find a book on a specific animal and which bin it would be in. On a different day I introduced the class to the magazines and

showed them a variety of the selections we have. We also discussed that you did not have to read a magazine in its entirety and to look for specific articles they may be interested in by using the table of contents. I also cleared out two spaces of fiction picture books and created nonfiction book displays that feature new books I checked out from the library. Students continued to read daily a free choice book (Reader's Workshop). Students kept a log of their weekly readings. I began teacher observations and asked informal questions on book choice. I kept anecdotal notes (teacher researcher journal) and began looking for patterns in text choice. Students were introduced to Google classroom and created posts about the text in which they were reading. The students could also see what their peers were posting about their reading.

Throughout week four, students continued their independent reading daily and completed their reading logs. New books were introduced into the classroom displays and daily read alouds of nonfiction occurred. I collected all reading logs for analysis.

Students took a post-survey to accumulate information in nonfiction interests. The survey will be compared to the results of the pre-survey. Through the use of individual reading logs and pre surveys, comparisons were made to understand if students choose the nonfiction that they suggest they are interested in. They are looked at to see if nonfiction readings increase when nonfiction is being promoted. The amount of nonfiction read was noted and compared to the first week's reading log.

### **Data Sources**

To begin the study I gathered data about students reading interests by using a reading interest inventory that included options to choose from as well as open-ended responses. I used this knowledge to plan for book choices within the nonfiction area to



promote and expose students to in the classroom library. I began to collect students reading logs before and during the study to compare their reading preferences.

Additionally, I kept a teacher research journal which allowed me to record something that I changed or implemented and my own thoughts or feelings about it. Through the journal I could reflect on my own behavior and that of the students throughout the course of the study. I further collected a record of students' responses to books they read to gain further insights into their reading habits and preferences. This was recorded on Google Classroom and students could see each other's posts. All of these sources were collected to compare what happens when student's interests are considered with nonfiction text preferences.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected throughout the study was used to help draw conclusions regarding the impact of preference of nonfiction literature in the classroom library. I used the student reading interest inventory to gauge what students might prefer to read about. Using this information, I was able to carefully choose which nonfiction to present in the classroom displays. By charting this data I was able to find I was able to find interests that students had in common and learn what they may like to read about. My teacher research journal allowed me to find trends in my thinking each day. It also allowed me to highlight informal conversations with students and get to know their interests better. It allowed me a place to plan and implement changes with the classroom.

It is also documentation to the things that took place over the course of the study. This tool allowed me to reflect on teacher practices and strategies that would promote third

grade students to read nonfiction. It allowed current thinking and emerging new ideas to be present in the study.

## **Context**

**Community.** Dormount Elementary School is one of the seven elementary schools in the Lorbern Township public school district. There are a total of 42, 275 people living in Lorbern Township which is located in Burlington County, New Jersey.

According to the 2000 Census, these 42, 275 people reside in 16, 436 housing units. Of these 16, 436, 72.2 are family households and 38.2% are families with children under the age of 18. Among these family households, 61.2% are led by married couples, and 8.5% are female led households with no husband present. Out of this 8.5% of female-led households, 4.6% have children under the age of 18.

The racial makeup of this township as taken by the 2000 Census was 91.3% white or Caucasian, 3.1 % black or African American, 4.1% Asian, 1.3% Asian Indian, and 2.0% Hispanic or Latino. The population by age consists of 72.8% over the age of 18 including 8.9% age 65 and over. The percentage of the population under the age of 18 is 27.2%, and the median age for residents of Lorbern Township is 36.

Lorbern Township median income as of the 2000 Census was \$67,010 per household and the median family income was \$77,245. The per capita income in dollars was \$29, 494. At this time 1.7% of families in Dormount were considered to be living in poverty and of these 2.6% were families with children under the age of 18.

**District.** Lorbern Township School District is public school district made up of seven elementary schools and two middle schools. There are over 4, 500 students'

enrolled and approximately 370 teachers. The average student to teacher ratio is 13:1. It is in District Factor Group I, the second-highest of eight groupings.

**School.** Dormount Elementary School currently serves over 475 students ranging in grade from kindergarten to fifth grade with a staff of about 70 individuals. The ratio of teachers to students is 1 to 13. The ethnic makeup of the student population is 86.3% white or Caucasian, 2.1% black or African American, 2.7% Hispanic or Latino and 7.2% Asian. 3.1% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. As per testing results, 77% of the students school wide at Dormount Elementary School are considered proficient in Language Arts and 88% are considered proficient in Math.

**Classroom.** The third grade classroom is consisting of 18 students. Of the students, 10 students are males and 8 are females. The makeup of the class is very homogenous with 17 white/Caucasian students and 1 black/African American student.

There are 7 students with IEP's. Five of those students have behavioral issues.

Academically, they are lower in general than their average peers. The rest are average or below average. There are a few students who are above average and complete most academic work at an independent level. There is a one-on-one aide present during the entire day for two of the students. Her main job is redirecting, keeping those two students on task, and managing their behaviors. She is also there to help support their academics.

Three of the students receive occupational therapy and five students receive speech services. The students with IEP's receive additional support from the in-class support teacher for reading, writing, and math. These seven students are accommodated and have varying academic and behavioral needs. Students demonstrate kindness toward each other but tend to socialize exclusively with the groups that they are familiar with, such as

neighbors or friends from extra-curricular activities. There is a sense of learning community. Students often work in small groups and partnerships to create work and are comfortable with a collaborative dynamic. The classroom is decorated with various examples of student work and colorful posters and pictures that cover the walls. Some serve as motivation and reminders to students of classroom rules and routines and others are anchor charts that remind students of current learning. The majority of information is presented using an ACTIVboard and the children are often involved in using this educational tool throughout the day. Students also rotate through centers on a daily basis and work together on skills such as word study, math, reading, and writing.

**Participants.** All students in the class will be participating in this study. This includes a variety of learners, reading levels and includes different sexes.

Chapter Four of this thesis discusses the results of the student surveys, daily discussions of student responses and class discussions, my personal teacher research journal, and student preferences and work samples. Chapter Five then presents the conclusions and implications of the study as well as recommendations for further topics of the study.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 discusses the findings of my study, focusing on answering the question, “What happens when the interests of third grade students is considered when reading nonfiction?” As I sorted and categorized my data sources I identified key data to report. The main sources include student interest reading inventory, reading logs, and teacher-research journal. Further there are library checkout logs and informal student conversations that were documented. A look across all data sources seems to suggest the interest areas and habits of third grade readers. These areas include findings on their interests, their reading habits, and overall their preferences with reading.

#### **Revisiting the Study**

As chapter 3 explained, I collected data over a 4 week time period during which children were exposed to an increase in nonfiction text. I began the study by giving the class a Reading Interest Inventory survey to learn about the interests of the third graders and also to help me decide which texts to flood into the classroom. This information was charted on a bar graph to decide which books should be added into the classroom library. I also collected their reading log in the first week before the push of nonfiction so that I could see what genre they were reading. This information was charted in a pie graph to see how much fiction and nonfiction was being read. Over the next three weeks of the study, students were introduced to nonfiction. Students were exposed to what nonfiction is and is not. The students were shown where to find nonfiction in the classroom. New labels were created and the nonfiction section of the classroom library was cleaned up. I

went through the texts and got rid of ones that were too old for third graders and reorganized the genre into more specific categories. I further made a section to display nonfiction magazines in a hanging pocket organizer and let the students know where to locate them and that they were allowed to access these texts whenever they wanted to during reader's workshop. Another display included new nonfiction that I added into the classroom weekly. From the students' interest survey; I selected books that were grade level appropriate as well as interesting to third graders from our school library. To determine interest I used the students' previous library checkout logs and discovered what topics they chose. I also gleaned their interests from information from their surveys. This allowed me to see quite a variety in things they like that were not necessarily about reading. I further took the class to the library and showed them where they could find nonfiction genre specific books. The class was allowed to take out additional books to add to our classroom library for the week. Students were able to read these books as well as put them back on the shelf in our classroom for others to share. I further created a bin of where to return extra books that I also began to read aloud nonfiction to the class. Most class periods of reader's workshop, I would read aloud a passage of a nonfiction text or a magazine article.

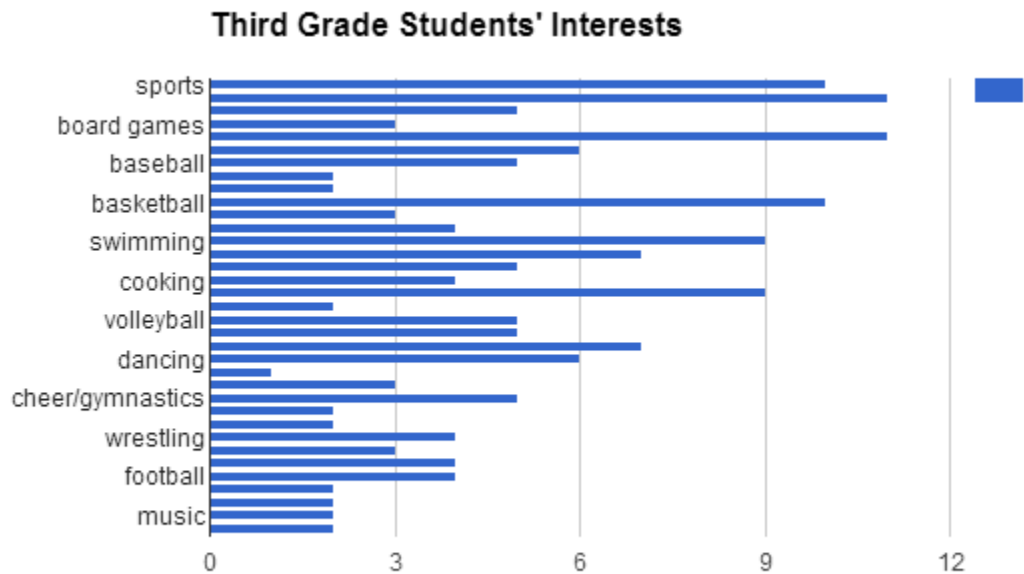
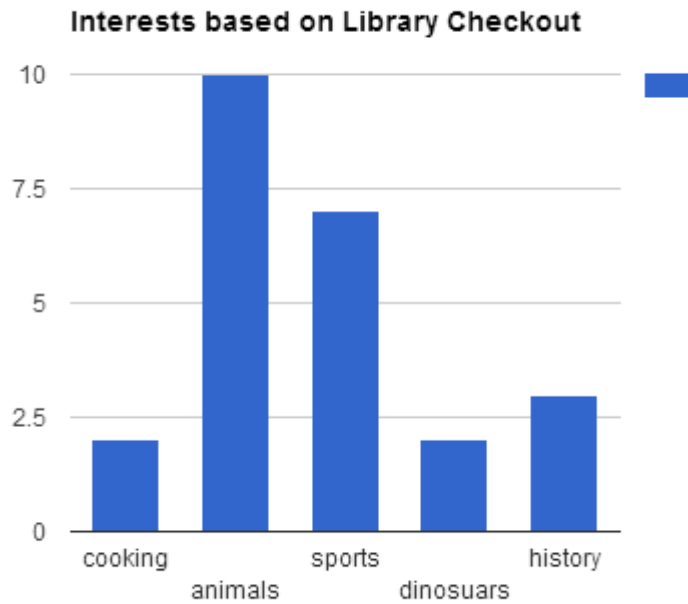


Figure 1. Third grade student's interests.

### Finding Commonalities Among Third Graders

The results on the Student Interest Inventory shows what students in my third grade class are suggesting they are interested in. While this was a reading survey, it did not specifically ask if you like to read about these topics. There were open ended responses that told about the child as well as a wide variety of pre-selected topics that students could choose from. This survey felt more as a get to know you survey rather than a reading inventory. Only one section (see appendix A) of this inventory asked specific questions about reading. It listed multiple genres of reading and asked them to rate the genre. While looking over the results of the students interests I have found that many students suggest the same areas of interest. Some of these areas include; sports, bicycling, video games, basketball, swimming, and soccer. There were other areas that

showed up in common as well. This information was used in order to understand third grade students' interests when selecting nonfiction texts to add to our classroom library.

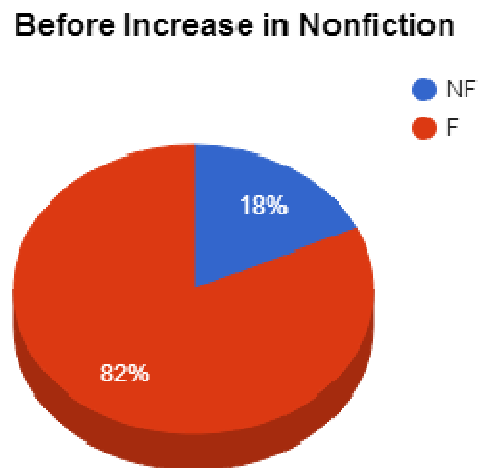


*Figure 2.* Interests based on library checkout.

To further understand students' preferences when reading nonfiction I took the class on a mini field trip to the school library. After a mini lesson about nonfiction, I modeled how to find books in the nonfiction sections of the library. I reminded the students of their recent survey that they completed about their interests. Students were then allowed to peruse these sections and choose three additional texts than that of their regular library book checkout. Afterwards, I collected the data by getting a print out of their recent selections. From there I could glean their interests by what they selected.



The bar graph represents the most common findings in their interests. Sports and animals were the most commonly selected texts.

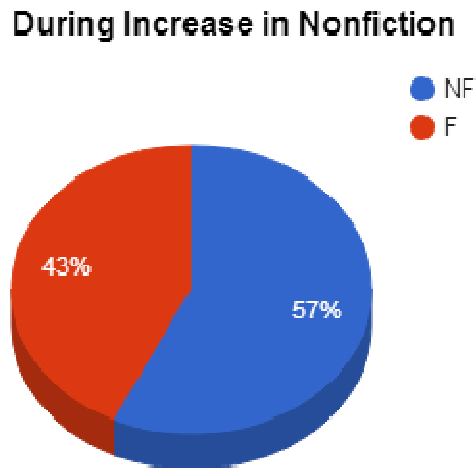


*Figure 3.* Before increasing nonfiction in the classroom.

### **Gaining Insights into the Preferences of Reading Genre**

During the first week of the study, the students recorded their reading into their reader's workshop log. This is a regular habit that students have when they read independently. Students write down the title of the book, the author's name, how many pages they read, and the genre (fiction or nonfiction). Students were also asked to write down a specific genre if they knew what it was. This would help the students be aware of

their choices and interests. The results show that 82% of what the students were reading was fiction. 18% was nonfiction. These results were based on their independent choice reading time and were before they were introduced to nonfiction on a daily basis.



*Figure 4.* During the increase of nonfiction in the classroom.

During the following three weeks, the students were exposed to nonfiction in a higher volume than they were previously. Students engaged in book talks, read alouds and book displays of nonfiction texts. They visited the library, learned about nonfiction genres, and had a flood of interesting books enter into the classroom. The students continued to log their reading into their reading logs. At the end of the three weeks, I collected their reading logs and coded the amount of fiction and nonfiction books they read. The results in the graph above show that the students were reading 57% nonfiction texts and 43% fiction texts. This was their reading during their independent free choice reading time.

During the study I had a chance through using Google Classroom to ask the students a question. I posed, “Why did you choose the book you are currently reading.” Students had a variety of responses and you can see them at the data in the line graph below. A majority of students said that they thought the book was going to be funny, that they like the cover of the book, that it was fun or that it was part of a series. This helped me to select future nonfiction texts to bring into the classroom display. I knew they had to be fun, funny, and have good covers that would attract the young reader’s attention.

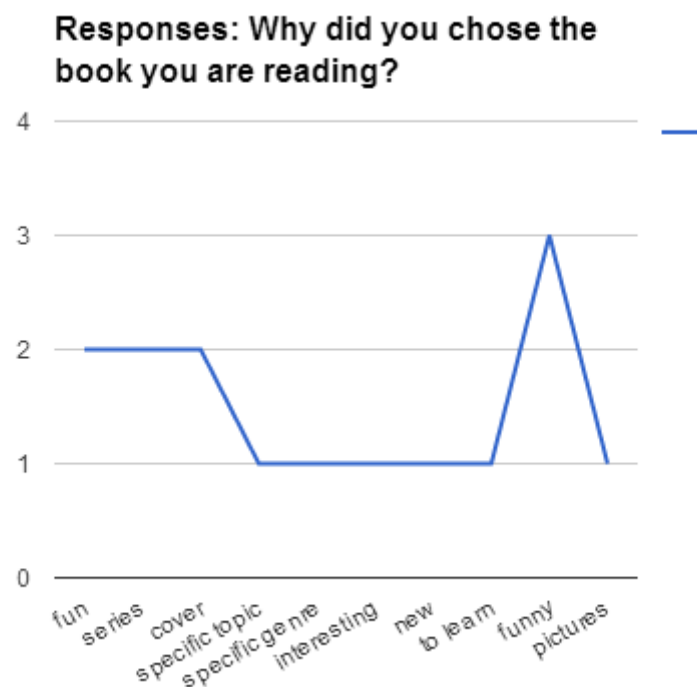


Figure 5. Student responses to reading nonfiction.

## **Judging a Book by its Cover**

Through much of the study I kept a journal of what I did that day to increase nonfiction and to keep track of what I saw happening. I thought about different ideas and wondered how I could reach more students. I noticed that students often mimicked what I showed them. If I read from a nonfiction magazine, several students were sure to check out those magazines as well. Over and over again students would choose a text because the cover looked appealing. That could mean a great picture or a catchy title. I also saw many students take a book walk. If the book seemed easier they would typically choose it. If the text had too many words and not enough pictures and other interesting text features, they would put it back. I noticed the students who were not choosing nonfiction even after I would make it so appealing. I saw that many students would read an increase in nonfiction after I modeled or read aloud an interesting passage. But a few days later, the nonfiction trickled away unless I introduced something else. I realized that I had emotions attached to the study. I wanted a certain outcome, but I reminded myself of the purpose of the study before I got to ahead of myself.

I decided to note several conversations with students that I observed pick nonfiction on a regular basis. The conversations below discuss why these students believe they prefer nonfiction over fiction. I identified the students by a number and included their gender. Also included is a snapshot about the student and what their response means through analysis.

Mrs. Astacio: “I noticed that you like to read nonfiction. Why do you prefer it?”

Student #18-B: “I like reading nonfiction. I like it because I can learn more about stuff that I like to learn about.”

Student 18 is a boy that only reads nonfiction. He reads below grade level and primarily chooses books on animals; particularly dinosaurs. He has difficulty reading for a sustained amount of time and often just looks at pictures. He does not pick books that are appropriate for his reading level, mostly just books that he is interested in. He will persevere on a certain topic for a long time. Student 18 is part of a social and behavioral support classroom. He is now spending greater than 70% of his day in the mainstream general education setting. He is in the classroom during independent reading time, but during reading instruction. His response is telling about the books he chooses.

Student #4-B: “It gives me information and I like to read football because I know a lot about football and it gives me more advice. It tells me older things about things that happened before with a team. I like to read about all the different teams.”

Student 4 is a boy that has an IEP. He reads above grade level. He needs support to stay on task and with task completion. He requires redirection often and prompting to stay on task. Though he does read for sustained amounts of reading time, he also will sit and stare at times. He seems to choose nonfiction and states that he prefers it, but also reads a lot of fiction. He does choose a lot of football texts like he states.

Student #11-G: “There are a lot of interesting topics that tell you more facts than fake books. I like cooking and dogs.”

Student 11 is a girl with an IEP for academic support. She reads below grade level and often does not self correct when she is reading, thus impacting her comprehension. She does choose to read cook books and books about dogs. She also reads a lot of fiction books as well. She prefers nonfiction, but her reading log shows an equal amount of reading fiction and nonfiction genres.

Student #3-B: “I like to read stuff that is true. I can learn about something I don’t know too much about, like football. I like to read biographies so I can learn about their life. I can have a little background information about a topic if I have a test.”

Student 3 is a boy in the general education population. His response informs me that students like to learn about facts and things that they do not know about. His response was insightful when he said he likes to have background information about different topics. A new category that is emerging is introducing students to informational texts that are not within their topics of interest, rather that exposes them to new topics.

Student #1-B: “I like to learn about real stuff that really happened and I like biographies. I like to learn about people’s life. I write it down on post-its on home and look up the questions I still have.”

Student 1 is a boy in the general education population that reads right at the grade level benchmark. Though he reads both genres, he tends to prefer nonfiction. I am seeing that many students like to learn about real information. I also see that he relies on new literacies to find out more information.

Student #2-G: “I like to read it at home. I like to read about cooking and animals because I like to learn new things about them. I like to see what they eat and stuff and I like to check for more information on the computer.”

Student 2 is a girl in the general education population. She often reads fiction. She reads slightly above level and reads quickly. She prefers to read more nonfiction at home which is another category that could be emerging. She also likes to learn new ideas and find out more about them on the internet. This furthers the idea that students like to use digital literacies.

Student #7-B: I prefer nonfiction because it is information and I can learn new stuff that I haven’t learned before. I like to read sports books and biographies. I want to know what their life is like and how they became famous.”

Student 7 is a boy in the general education population and reads well above level. Though he reads a great deal of nonfiction, he also states that he prefers to read nonfiction. He reads to learn new information about people's lives. He also falls under the category of enjoying learning new topics.

Student #9-G: "I prefer to learn about the solar system because it has cool stuff...meteors, asteroids, black holes, I just think it is cool."

Student 9 is a girl in the general education setting. She chooses different topics than her peers. She is an above level reader. She chooses topics that can be difficult to understand, but due to her interest she is able to read them. She also reads a lot of easy fiction books.

Student #17-G: "I like to learn about new things. I like to see how many animal species are left. I like facts that are interesting. I also learn new words."

Student 17 is a girl that is within the general education population. She reads below the grade level benchmark, requires a lot of support and has a lot of anxiety when she comes to tasks that she feels she doesn't understand. I see her that she reads a lot of fiction but she states that she prefers nonfiction. The opportunity for her to read an increased amount of nonfiction will benefit her since it is her preference. She seems to find nonfiction interesting.

Student #8-G: "So I can learn about stuff that I did not know about. If I am interested in Anne Frank, I can learn more about her by reading a book about her. I can write down any questions and search them online.

Student 8 is a girl who is ELL. She reads at grade level and has been in the country for just under two years. She also shows that she uses digital literacies as a way to consume information. She chooses more in depth topics than most of her third grade

peers. It seems that she likes topics that go deeper than just a few neat facts. She reminds me of the need to learn about other cultures. It can help open minds for those who have not had different experiences, make her feel comfortable with her culture and bring interesting topics that offer worldly insights. I am noticing that nonfiction can expose us to critical literacy in third grade.

Student #6-B: “It looks good. It has crazy (big or new) words. It’s teaching me something. It tells you something that already happened. I like to learn about Indians. So I can learn about something that I want to learn about.”

Student 6 has an IEP and has cochlear implants. He was delayed with language and is making progress, but behind his peers. At times, he can be inattentive and emotional when he becomes frustrated. He reads very easy fiction and nonfiction texts. He has an enthusiasm for learning new things and shows his excitement when he understands ideas.

### **Learning, Choice, and New Literacies**

From these conversations, I found a few common ideas emerging. One is that students seek information from the internet. They are not limited to text just found in physical books. Digital literacy is playing a role in students’ daily lives. This is an area to explore with increasing nonfiction text use. If students are more apt to look online for information, then this is an area teachers of even young students can explore.

A second category is choice. Students are stating over and over that they like to learn about topics that they find interesting. They want to choose. The options are endless. The students wanted to read nonfiction that they found an interest in. It was a



topic that they wanted to learn more about. Nonfiction allows them to explore topics that they prefer more in depth. When given academic choice, we put the learning in the students' hands. The students are able to have more choice when it comes to the variety of nonfiction topics.

A third category is synthesis. Students used the words "to learn" and "it teaches me." The students want to learn new information. They want to be taught and find out new and interesting information. Nonfiction text does not necessarily have to be an exact match to something they are interested in. Rather it needs to be interesting and provide them an opportunity to learn and grow. It is a chance to expose students to new topics that they don't already know about.

### **Summary of Data Analysis**

In order to answer my teacher researcher question, "What is the outcome of third grade students' attitudes toward nonfiction texts compared to their actual reading habits?" I used a variety of data sources. By looking at their text genre preferences in Figures 3 and 4, I could see that the outcome was an increase in the amount of nonfiction being read. According to the NAEP (2007), a framework was developed to look at the distribution of literary and informational passages. By fourth grade the literary and informational passages are evenly split for state testing. The results of the classroom study showed similar results to what is necessary for state testing. Therefore when given the opportunity and availability of nonfiction, the students will choose it.

I have found that students have many interests that should be considered when creating a classroom library. Smolkin and Donovan (2001) found that both students and teacher appeared more excited about nonfiction topics and were more engaged in

meaning making. This could improve overall reading performances. The possibility is that if a child is reading in their interest area their overall reading performance can improve. Students do choose books that they say they are interested in but are not committed to just those books. The students' interests did match when it came to the area of sports in both Figures 1 and 2. However they did not match up when it came to the content of animals. Very few students had this as an area of interest, however many students chose to read about animals according to their library checkout log. I am noticing a connection in Figure 5 that the students chose particular books based on a judgments; the cover, and if it looks fun or funny. The students want nonfiction that is easier to read than that of their instructional level. They want to literally judge the book by its cover. If it is enticing they will try it. If there are good pictures and not a large volume of words they will sustain it. The data shows that students will read nonfiction when their interests are considered and when there are effective strategies used by the teacher to promote nonfiction. When the teacher showed an interest, the students tended to follow. When the students were presented with topics that they were interested in, they were more likely to read nonfiction. When the teacher expressed a like for nonfiction, the students showed a preference for it also. Therefore the data suggests that the teacher and strategies used play a large role in students reading of nonfiction. Another idea to consider is that some students actually prefer the informational genre. "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).

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusions**

#### **Summary**

In concluding my research, I found that students showed a higher rate of reading nonfiction texts when there was promotion of such texts. Reading of nonfiction text also seemed to increase when students' interests were considered. After spending four weeks exploring nonfiction closely with third graders, I found that they were eager to examine nonfiction more closely than before. Awareness was created about nonfiction within the classroom. Students were made aware of the locations and genres within nonfiction. I found that students generally do show preferences towards nonfiction and they prefer the topics that nonfiction texts offer.

Four weeks were dedicated to finding out more about third grade students and their use of nonfiction texts. Students were given a reading interest inventory so information could be gathered about things they are interested in. With this and a view of their library checkout logs, I was able to find common interest areas of the class as well as individual interests. With this information I provided the class with many nonfiction texts within these interest areas. Students also had the opportunity to take a visit into our school library. There they were given a mini lesson about what nonfiction text is and where they can locate various topics. Students were asked to think about the areas they might be interested in and were allowed to select an additional three nonfiction texts (in addition to their regular library books).

Multiple strategies were employed. I began many sessions with nonfiction read aloud in which I would sell a particular new book that I discovered. Every week I would add books to a wire rack display. I also created a new sign that said new nonfiction books. These books were covered with exciting topics and covers in areas of interest that the class surveys suggested. Book floods of a particular interest area were also occurring every few days. Here I would select new library books based on the students' interests to highlight in our classroom. The students were able to use them and return them or switch with a friend when they were finished. With such a multitude of books in the classroom, I found a need for a book bin. The amount of books that the students had in their desks was overwhelming at times. They were able to return books early that were our school library books. They were also able to peruse these library books if they wished to read something a friend may have returned. I also decided to take an inventory on the nonfiction texts that I had. I looked into separating them by topics as well as weeded out books that were not grade level appropriate or lacking visual interest. I reorganized these texts and put them in bins. I also created new label for each category. From there I made sure that the nonfiction magazines were organized and available. I also used these as a read aloud to demonstrate how to find an article that I might want to read. Ultimately there was an overall understanding and enthusiasm for nonfiction text.

Students were able to choose any text that they wished to read during their independent reader's workshop time of day. Students logged in their reading and also noted if they were reading fiction or nonfiction. Each day a strategy was used prior to beginning reader's workshop. From there I recorded what I did each day in my teacher journal. I noted the strategy employed as well as peculiar and interesting findings. I also

took this time to informally ask students about the book they read. I was able to record their responses in my teacher journal. The students seemed to benefit in an understanding of nonfiction text and were given opportunities to explore them right in their own classroom.

## **Conclusions**

After several weeks of being exposed to nonfiction texts, I found that my study was beneficial to students in my classroom. The students became far more aware of the nonfiction texts as a reading choice and increased their reading of nonfiction text. This is important because Williams (2009) found that over 80% of adults read informational genre in their adult life. This places a large importance on teaching students how to make meaning with nonfiction text as well as encouraging them to prefer the genre. This will benefit students for their adult life. Further when preferences are considered, it has been found in several studies that students would prefer to read nonfiction (Moss, 2005).

Student's attitudes have an impact on their motivation to read certain texts. Students choose to read informational texts for a variety of reasons. Motivation stems from a desire to learn, connections to personal interests, and preferred text structures (Gallo & Ness, 2013). Student choice allows for the feelings of control, purpose and competence (Perks, 2010). Therefore the study aimed at choosing texts that were specific to what the students were interested in. Due to the fact that student had choice in what they read and their interests were highlighted throughout their selections, there was an increase in the amount of reading within the nonfiction genre.

At the time of the study, several conclusions could be made. Many students prefer nonfiction texts to read. This was found by understanding student's interests'

survey and allowing more of the nonfiction genre to flood the classroom. Students are readily available with topics that they would like to know more about or have an interest in. It is our job then as teachers to find ways to harvest this information and allot the students a time and place to choose these texts. Students read more when their interests are considered.

In conclusion, students show an increase with reading nonfiction when it is being promoted by the teacher. There are many effective strategies that help increase nonfiction within the classroom that will get students intrigued and looking for a new piece of nonfiction to sink their teeth into. The strategy that was found to be most successful was just having an overall enthusiasm for the genre.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations when conducting this research. Students were limited to the texts that were brought into the classroom. Therefore, their particular interest area may not have been met. This could impact the results of the study as it was looking at what happens when students' interests were considered. Students who were already engaged in reading a series were also not likely to shift what they were reading. More time and a larger population would consider outcomes through a larger lens.

Students reading levels were not considered. Rather texts were chosen that appeared to be around the third grade level. They were chosen based on interests, visual appeal and content. Peer influence was another factor to consider. Some students chose to read a book that a friend had just read. This can have a positive outcome on reading nonfiction as well. It may also lead students to read a topic that did not state they had previous interest in. To suggest that I could exactly match readers to their interests would

be false. It was easier to consider the interests of the mass and therefore are more general.

About 3 out of 18 students were not consistent with logging in their reading logs, and I was rather diligent about the students logging in their reading. This means that not all of the reading that occurred in the classroom may be accounted for. This study also did not account for any other reading that occurred in the classroom and any at home reading. Further, some students had an extensive amount of reading on their logs while others had only a few texts. Multiple suggestions to this causation can be explained. This includes; some students read faster or slower than their peers, the texts chosen varied in size, it was a magazine article, and the lack of remembering to log in everything they read. I also had to decide if the same text was being read or is a multiple read of same text was occurring. There were places in which a student would read a book on Monday and then again on a Thursday. Those texts that were considered multiple reads counted as individual texts while the texts that were listed on multiple (not necessarily sequential) days were only counted as one text.

### **Implications for the Field**

As the needs for education continue to shift toward a demand for reading and understanding nonfiction, so does the need to keep teachers educated and informed. This study has created awareness that what may have been thought of engaging students with nonfiction texts, was rather grossly lacking. Though assumptive, many teachers have some nonfiction available and are trying to meet students' interests. Teachers need support to understand the impact and need for nonfiction in the elementary school classrooms. They need to understand the deeper implications to what it means for their

students. Teachers need to look closely at this topic and have a chance to reflect on the opportunities that are currently in their classroom. From there, they should be made aware of easy to use classroom strategies to enhance nonfiction in their classroom.

Effective teaching strategies that encourage the reading of nonfiction should be promoted in the classrooms.

Further, I want to explore other strategies that are effective for teachers to involve in their classroom. Though I found several to be effective, I would be curious to look more closely at the strategy and the reaction of the students. For example, if a teacher read aloud a particular magazine article, what would the students choose to read during that session?

I also found that students seemed to be greatly influenced by their peers. I feel that more research on peer influence with nonfiction would be beneficial. I am wondering if students are able to engage socially during this time how their choices in reading will be affected.

Another area to look at deeper is the instructional level and independent reading levels of the nonfiction texts. What are the outcomes of students reading choices if they are able to read more nonfiction books at their reading level? If the texts are easier, the students may be inclined to sustain reading about a particular topic. Or does interest outweigh reading level? Many students are able to read texts with greater difficulty when the topic is of specific interest. In conjunction with reading levels, I am wondering if students have strategies with how to read nonfiction. Do they have an awareness of how to navigate through a nonfiction text? Students need a variety of strategies to use when reading nonfiction and are aware when to use them.



Finally, the big idea for reading any text: authentic purpose. When students have a real reason to read, what are the outcomes? Do they explore more and read more about a topic if they have a reason to learn about it. Does it have to connect to their personal life to make it interesting and sustainable? Must their reading have to be for a real audience, all of the time? These are areas that I would be interested in observing more closely as a teacher researcher.

In conclusion, the use of nonfiction texts benefits all elementary school students. It is important to include a plethora of teaching strategies to engage students in such reading and create an awareness of the genre as a preference. Several suggested strategies that were found effective include; read aloud, book displays, book bins, organization, and flooding the room with nonfiction texts. The overall most effective strategy was teacher enthusiasm. Further students will be more likely to read the texts when the choices are considering the areas of interest that a child may have.

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Appendix A

Student Interest Inventory

# Your favorites list

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Favorite</b> movie of all time: <i>Annie</i>	<b>Favorite</b> band or type of music: <i>Pop</i>	<b>Mark</b> <input checked="" type="radio"/> you love: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Animals <input type="radio"/> Sports <input type="radio"/> Nature <input checked="" type="radio"/> Dancing <input checked="" type="radio"/> Art/Drawing <input type="radio"/> Writing <input checked="" type="radio"/> Singing <input type="radio"/> Acting/Theatre <input type="radio"/> Bike riding <input type="radio"/> Computers <input checked="" type="radio"/> Cooking <input type="radio"/> Board games <input type="radio"/> Video games <input type="radio"/> Photography <input type="radio"/> Science <input type="radio"/> Mechanics <input type="radio"/> Construction <input type="radio"/> Church <input type="radio"/> Watching TV/movie <input type="radio"/> Travel <input type="radio"/> School <input type="radio"/> Swimming <input type="radio"/> Music <input type="radio"/> Other: _____
<b>Favorite</b> TV show: <i>Liv and Maddie</i>		

List **3** things you like to do when you're not in school:

<b>1</b> <i>Dance and Sing</i>	<b>2</b> <i>Playing with my puppy</i>
	<b>3</b> <i>Playing outside</i>

**Favorite** video games include:  
*Just Dance*

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## Your favorites list

5 important **people** in your life:

1. Mom
2. Dad
3. Sister
4. Friends/cara
5. Teachers

5 important **things** in your life:

1. Dogs
2. A.V.
3. My baby blackit
4. Stuf animatie
5. iPad

Who are your **heroes** (real people or fantasy Characters)?  
 Mom

Mark your favorite activities:

- Basketball
- Football
- Soccer
- Fishing
- Baseball
- Softball
- Skiing
- Motor racing
- Hockey
- Skateboarding
- Bicycling
- Wrestling
- Volleyball
- Tennis
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Cheerleading
- Gymnastics
- Ice skating
- Musical instruments
- Mini golf
- Others: golf

Circle a number for each type of reading:

	1 Hate it!	2 Not my fav.	3 It's OK.	4 Like it.	5 Love it!
Mystery/Suspense	1	2	3	4	5
Fantasy	1	2	3	4	5
Action/Adventure	1	2	3	4	5
How-to books	1	2	3	4	5
Biography	1	2	3	4	5
Poetry	1	2	3	4	5
Science fiction	1	2	3	4	5
Historical fiction	1	2	3	4	5
Realistic fiction	1	2	3	4	5
Nonfiction/Informational	1	2	3	4	5

# Appendix B

## Library Checkout Log

Only my patrons    Only search Barcode  
 Patrons   Due Dates

---

Checked Out Library: 5      Grade Level 3  
 Overdue Library: 2      Homeroom 21  
 Holds Ready 0

**Fines**      Library: \$0.00  
                  Patron: \$0.00

Only today's check outs

### Items Out

Due Date	Title	Call Number	Price	Checked
10/12/2015	<b>Junie B., first grader : toothless wonder</b> (Copy: T 12006)	EF Par	\$11.95	10/5/
10/12/2015	<b>Miss Mary is scary!</b> (Copy: T 89884)	F GUT	\$15.89	10/5,
10/23/2015	<b>Chocolate</b> (Copy: T 85608)	641.3 JON	\$13.95	10/16
10/23/2015	<b>Cool cuisine for super sleepovers : easy recipes for kids to cook</b> (Copy: T 88847)	E 641.5 WAG	\$16.95	10/16
10/23/2015	<b>My Pet: Dog</b> (Copy: T 85376)	636.7 BER	\$16.95	10/16

Renew

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# Appendix C

## Reading Log

F III III I  
NF III III III II

27

During Study

# Reading Log

Name: [REDACTED] (11) Month: Oct, Nov,

Name of book	Author	Date	Number of pages	Genre
Surfs up Geronimo	Geronimo Stilton	wed	1-2	(F) (NF) funny
The $\downarrow$ titles	$\downarrow$	$\downarrow$	2-5	(F) (NF) funny
monster Goose	Judy <del>Sierra</del>	thurs	1-4	(F) (NF) Rims
Princess cook Book	Sular L. Schwette	wed	4-8	(F) (NF) Cooking
$\downarrow$	$\downarrow$	$\downarrow$	8-9	(F) (NF) $\downarrow$
N. Patricia's manium	NG Kids	$\downarrow$	4-8	(F) (NF) relly
Special H.	$\downarrow$	$\downarrow$	4-25	(F) (NF) $\downarrow$
Princess cook book	Sular L. Schwette	mon	6-17	(F) (NF) Cooking
$\downarrow$	$\downarrow$	$\downarrow$	17-4	(F) (NF) Cooking
Special Halloween Issue	NG Kids	$\downarrow$	6-	(F) (NF) relly

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