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## Not enough non-fiction literacy material in early childhood

Melani L. Piscitelli

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## Not enough non-fiction literacy material in early childhood

### Abstract

In the body of this paper, educators will find answers to some questions that they have concerning non-fiction literature. These questions include: What does research say about incorporating non-fiction material into the classroom: how much non-fiction material should I have in my classroom; and how do I pick out quality non-fiction material?

Educators will also be able to look at three different non-fiction lesson plans. Each lesson plan will use a different type of non-fiction literature to give educators a well rounded view of non-fiction literature. There will also be a section about locating nonfiction books, to give educators a head start in their own quest to develop good nonfiction literacy skills for themselves and their students. This will help educators develop a more complete library for their classroom, and it will tell how to incorporate non-fiction literature in lesson plans.

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Not Enough Non-fiction Literacy Material in Early Childhood.

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Division of Early Childhood Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Melani L. Piscitelli

August, 2009

This Project by: Melani L. Piscitelli

Titled: Not Enough Non-fiction Literacy Material in Early Childhood

Has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Education

7-15-09  
Date Approved

**Charles R. May**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Faculty Reader

7-15-09  
Date Approved

**Jill M. Uhlenberg**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Faculty Reader

7-15-09  
Date Approved

**Jill M. Uhlenberg**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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### Acknowledgement

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Early care and educational professionals long have been aware of the myriad questions young children ask in order to construct understanding of the world in which they live. Also, these professionals are aware that one question and one answer are rarely satisfactory; one answer to one question almost always leads to another question that needs another answer. This process repeats itself again and again and again. (McMath, King, & Smith, 1998, p. 20)

The above quote described a typical classroom where students constantly want to know more information. Teachers frequently ask themselves: Am I teaching what I need to in order to have my students become lifelong learners? Am I using the correct developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) with my students? Am I meeting all the needs of all my students at all times? Incorporating non-fiction material or informational text in the classroom is one of the easiest ways teachers can alleviate the stress of having the sole responsibility of being *the all knowing*. (Informational and non-fiction text are terms that were be used interchangeably throughout this paper.) Non-fiction or informational text is "... written with the primary purpose of conveying information about the natural and social world ... and having particular text features to accomplish this purpose" (Duke, 2003, p. 14).

Nell Duke's article, "The Case for Informational Text," helped explain why it is important that educators and students have a better understanding of non-fiction material, and also why it is important to introduce it at an early age. Duke (2004) said the following:

We are surrounded by text whose primary purpose is to convey information about the natural or social world. Success in schooling, the workplace, and society depends on our ability to comprehend this material. Yet many children and adults struggle to comprehend informational text. We should not wait to address this problem until students reach late elementary, middle, and high school, when learning from text is a cornerstone of the curriculum. (p. 40)

### *Rationale*

The use of non-fiction literacy materials in early childhood classrooms sparked my interest while I was taking a class for the master's program. I read a research study entitled, "*Informational Texts as Read-Alouds at School and Home*," by Ruth H. Yopp and Hallie K. Yopp. This research consisted of two studies. "The studies described here expand the research base to include preschool [Study 1] and home [Study 2] exposures to informational text as read-alouds" (Yopp & Yopp, 2006, p. 37). The first study consisted of researchers gathering book titles that teachers had graded, preschool through third grade, and had read to their students during one day previously (Yopp & Yopp, 2006). Yopp and Yopp (2006) found the following:

These data reveal that narrative texts were by far the literature of choice for preschool through third-grade teachers who read aloud to their students, representing 77% [1, 123] of identifiable books. Eight percent [120 books] of the read-alouds were informational texts. (p. 41)

The second study tracked a kindergarten class of twenty students over the course of seven months by monitoring the genres parents read aloud at home. The researchers also wanted to find out if there was a difference of what genres parents read to boys

versus girls. Out of the 1, 847 texts that were read, only seven percent were informational. “No main effect for gender was found, although there was a trend in favor of boys being read more books than girls” (Yopp & Yopp, 2006, p. 44).

After reading the study I found myself asking, do I incorporate enough non-fiction material in the classroom? I started thinking about my Head Start classroom and how I had it set up. I also remembered other teachers with whom I worked in a classroom, or in the master’s program, stating they wanted to know when and how often they should use non-fiction texts in the classroom. I thought this project would be a good way to pursue my own curiosity and help other teachers with their questions.

#### *Purpose of Project*

The purpose of the project was to help early childhood educators become aware of how they were using non-fiction material, if they were using it at all. While conducting research for this project one of the common themes I found was that educators “... have not been shown how to construct effective lessons for conveying text structure knowledge to young children” (Read, Reutzel, & Fawson, 2008, p. 214).

To achieve a solution to these problems, teachers were given many examples of how to accomplish this task throughout this project. The main point of the project was to give educators three examples of lesson plans using non-fiction books in an early childhood setting. Each lesson plan will consist of a different type of non-fiction book at a different grade level. These examples provide teachers and educators specific ideas about how they could start introducing non-fiction literature in the classroom.

Through this project, I want to educate early childhood teachers concerning the topic of non-fiction literature; it is also known as informational text by those teachers

who to use it appropriately in the classroom. With the tools provided in this project, educators will potentially be more confident about helping their students to know more about non-fiction material. This project could also help teachers incorporate more quality non-fiction books and materials in the classroom. In addition, it could help teachers to educate themselves and other teachers on why it is important to have these kinds of materials in their classrooms.

The questions this project will address include the following: (a) What is the historical background of using non-fiction text, (b) what does research say about incorporating non-fiction material into the classroom, (c) what are the benefits of using informational text in the classroom, (d) what guidelines should teachers follow to pick out quality non-fiction material, (e) what should teachers' classroom environment look like to promote the use of non-fiction literature, and (f) what are some examples of lesson plans teachers can use in the early childhood setting to promote informational text?

### *Importance of Project*

According to Kletzien and Dreher (2004), "The International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in their joint position statement about developmentally appropriate practices for young children stated that kindergarten children should enjoy informational text" (p. 4). By the time students reach third grade they are supposed to already be able to "... recognize and discuss elements of different text structures" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 4). When students are in the fourth grade, they are expected to read, write, and comprehend informational material. As you will read in the next section, Duke (2000/2003) found in a study of 20 first grade classrooms that students, on average, are only receiving

instruction on informational material "... 3.6 minutes per day, even less for children in low socioeconomic-status settings" (p. 17). This is why it is imperative that educators begin at an early age to introduce informational material to their students.

### *Terminology*

Throughout this project there may be terms that are unfamiliar to readers, or some terms that are used interchangeably. Selected terms will be defined throughout the paper, but all of the terms will be found in Appendix A.

## CHAPTER II

### Methodology

This next chapter will explain how I organized this project to educate the reader on how to utilize informational text in the classroom, and why it is important. It is followed by a literature review that includes a history of non-fiction literature, different studies that support the use of non-fiction with materials and instructional practices teachers use, as well as defining the benefits of informational text in their classrooms.

#### *Procedures followed to develop project*

My interest was sparked when I read research regarding non-fiction literature, and how many times it was the selected genre for reading aloud in the classroom. After reading the research I had many questions of my own that I wanted answered. Some questions I had were the following: (a) how much should I use non-fiction material in the classroom, (b) how much of the classroom library should be made up of trade books, and, (c) has there been research conducted in a preschool setting with non-fiction literature being the subject? I spent many hours using the University of Northern Iowa library website to find literature that would supply answers to my questions. Once I started identifying prominent names in the field of non-fiction literature, studies that cited their research were examined to determine whether I should use them in my paper as sources. Also, I noticed other studies that were cited many times, and I was able to locate many of these studies to use as a resource for this project. I also had multiple meetings with my readers reviewing my progress in developing this project. They both gave me advice on what direction to take the paper and helped me to clarify questions that I had along the

way. My first step in developing this project was to analyze the literature that I had located.

### *Literature Review*

First, a history of non-fiction literature will be discussed. The second section identifies research supporting the importance of non-fiction literature use in the classroom. The third section discusses the impact that non-fiction literature had on children's development when using the instructional practice of a read aloud, and other instructional practices educators may use to teach non-fiction material. The final section concludes the review by identifying the benefits children gain by learning about non-fiction literature.

### *History*

Introducing non-fiction material into the classroom is not a new concept. The first non-fiction book for children was distributed and printed more than 350 years ago. In 1750, a milestone was reached by John Newbery. According to McMath, King, and Smith (1998), "Not only was he [John Newbery] the first to publish books expressly for children, he dared to open the Juvenile Library at number 65 Saint Paul's Churchyard at the sign of the Bible and Sun" (p. 19).

Since then, there have been award committees developed to honor non-fiction books created for children. Wilson (2006) stated the following:

The Obris Pictus Award, established in 1989 by the National Council of Teachers of English to honor the best nonfiction children's literature published in the United States, is named after a book written by Johannes Amos Cornenius entitled



*Orbis Sensualium Pictus [The Visible Word]* and published in 1657. It has been recognized as the first nonfiction book published specifically for children. (p. 56)

As the non-fiction literature has grown over the last few centuries, so has the recognized importance of non-fiction materials in the development of children's literacy. A study co-conducted by Duke and Kays (1998), advocated the use of informational text in instructional practice. They suggested the issue of children's poor expository text achievements can be resolved by significantly increasing the amount of expository text in early childhood curricula. This recommendation was supported by multiple scholars' proposals that children learn about print through their experiences. (Duke & Kays, 1998) Because of studies similar to Duke and Kays', informational text for children can be found in nearly all classrooms, bookstores, and libraries.

#### *Importance of non-fiction use in the classroom*

In this section, I review many studies that defined why non-fiction material is important in classrooms. The first study I will review is Duke's (2000) seminal work *3.6 minutes per day: the Scarcity of Informational texts in First Grade*, which identified the need for American educators to include non-fiction literature in the classroom. This was an important study because all students need to comprehend informational text, in school and throughout their lives. Findings from this study identified the limited exposure to informational text children were receiving in the first grade. Duke conducted a descriptive, observational study of 20 first-grade classrooms across 10 school districts; the study compared the print environments and experiences offered to students in very low- and very high- socioeconomic status (SES) school districts.

Duke "... divided informational text into three types: informational, narrative-informational, and informational-poetic" (2000, p. 205). As a researcher, Duke did not want to interfere with the daily happenings of the classroom and wanted to be there strictly as an observer. Instead of interacting with students, she spent her time "...recording information about the following: (a) print on classroom walls and other surfaces, (b) print materials in the classroom library, and (c) any classroom activities that involved print in any way" (2000, p. 209). Over the course of the study, Duke observed, "... 27, 671 minutes of school time. ... Of this, 19,046 minutes were spent in class ... and of the time spent in class 12, 790 minutes ... were spent with written language" (2000, p. 211). This amounted to a total of four school days in each classroom that participated in the study (Duke, 2000).

After the study was completed and the data were analyzed, "Results of this study revealed an overall scarcity of informational text in these first-grade classrooms" (Duke, 2000, p. 212). "In all 79 days of observation combined, the total time spent with informational texts during whole-class written language activities was 282 minutes or an average 3.6 minutes per day" (Duke, 2000, p. 215-216). Duke concluded, "Learners must have experience with the particular genres in question [non-fiction literature] in order to fully develop the ability to read and write (in) those genres" (p. 206).

Additional ways of using informational text as instructional practices in an educational setting were suggested by Granowsky (2004), who used them in a guided reading program. He suggested that this would help provide students support to get past the *fourth grade slump*. Other ways that teachers used informational text is in writing, independent reading, and content-area instruction (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004). Nancy Livingston, Catherine Kurkjian, Terrell Young, and Laurence Pringle stated the following:

We suggest[ed] using Readers Theatre with non-fiction as a way to promote aesthetic response, fluency, and comprehension. ... We find current informational trade books to be so descriptive in text, so supportive in the illustrations and photographs, and so motivating to read that fluency occurs almost naturally. The fascinating facts seem to invite a *rereading* and lend themselves well to Readers Theatre. (2004, p. 583)

#### *Benefits of utilizing non-fiction material in the classroom*

While conducting research for this project, I have learned that there are many benefits when using informational text or material in the classroom. Kletzien and Dreher (2004) agreed with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), when they stated it has been "...documented that children who read a variety of genres generally have higher reading achievement than those who read only stories" (p. 5).

Teachers might also benefit using non-fiction literature as "there is evidence that for some children informational texts can even act as a catalyst for overall literacy development [Caswell & Duke, 1998; Duthie, 1996]" (Duke, 2000, p. 208). Besides

reading a variety of genres, one of the main benefits for using informational material in the classroom was stated by Duke in the following statement:

For children at risk for or struggling with learning to read, there is particular reason to pay attention to research on reading interests and preferences. Interest has an important influence on children's enthusiasm for reading and can even support children's reading development. [Schiefele Krapp & Winterler, 1992] (2003, p. 15)

Kletzien and Dreher (2004) also agree with Duke, for they believed that informational text can be motivating because children are naturally curious. They believed this to be true because "...children who are interested in a particular topic are motivated to read about it in informational text" (p. 6).

Another benefit that McMath, King, and Smith thought to be true was, by using high quality informational books, they could promote the following thinking:

- (a)...will answer young children's questions about the world in which they live.
- (b)...can act as springboards for young children to engage in critical thinking.
- (c)... encourage your children to engage in research.
- (d) ...increase and extend young children's concept development, and
- (e) ...provide practice for content area reading in the intermediate grades. (1998, p. 20)

Bamford and Kristo believed that when teachers select and evaluate high quality non-fiction books for the purpose of using them in instruction, they will contribute to better learning outcomes. They also believe that after the selection of non-fiction books, it should be followed with plenty of *hands-on experiences* that corresponded with the

content of the books (1998). This experience gave students the ability to use more critical thinking skills, after they experienced hands on activities and had been exposed to quality non-fiction books.

## CHAPTER III

### The Project: How to Incorporate the Use of Non-fiction Material in a Classroom

In this chapter, I provide guidelines for selecting high quality non-fiction books. These books will serve as the beginning for setting up a classroom library and reading environment. This will encourage the use of non-fiction literature in the classroom. Three lesson plans will be provided: one for preschool, one for first grade, and one for second grade. I conclude with a bibliographical listing of quality non-fiction books that can be used with these lesson plans.

#### Guidelines for Choosing Quality Non-fiction Books

Many of the same criteria will be used to choose a fiction or story book when picking out a non-fiction book. Some differences that will be discussed throughout the next sections are specific to non-fiction literature.

Guideline #1. The content of non-fiction books must be accurate.

#### *Content*

One of the first and most important factors to look at when selecting a trade book is the content. It is always important to check the accuracy of the content. "Accuracy is not simply getting the facts right but also involves perspective- what is included or left out, the approach to the topic, the depth and breadth of information presented, and the means an author uses to establish authority" (Saul & Dieckman, 2005, p. 505). Because authors know they can't cover every fact about the subject, they must choose the main points to include. "Authors not only have the responsibility to gather facts but also to present them in a balanced, responsible way so that truth is not compromised" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 27). Educators share this responsibility too. One way to make sure

what the author is presenting is accurate is to find out if he or she is the expert on the subject. If not, "...subject experts are often listed as having assisted the author or having reviewed the manuscript. Sometimes an author will list print sources as well" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 29). Other ways to assess accuracy is to look "...on the book jacket, at the end of the book, or on the verso of the title page" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 28).

Guideline #2. The design and format in which the content of non-fiction books is presented must be appropriate to the needs of readers.

### *Design and Format*

Second is the design and format of the book. "No matter how accurate books are, if they are not visually appealing to children, the books are not likely to be read" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 30). "Books for primary readers, especially, should have text and illustrations placed in such a way that children are not confused about which part to read first if sequence is important" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 30). Most non-fiction books do not follow normal format of other books that are written in English. Instead of reading left to right and top to bottom, some non-fiction books such as, The Magic School Bus series, follow the format of having words spread all over the page in any given order (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004).

There are many elements to think about when looking at design and format of a book, in particular the illustrations in the book. "Illustrations in informational books may be photographs, diagrams, maps, drawings, charts, or figures. Illustrations can represent and clarify information and can extend the information in text" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 31). Illustrations should be easy to interpret and enhance the book so it is appealing to the students. If captions are used, they should be close to the illustration and supply

enlightenment about the photo. One thing to remember, if the book contains photos, teachers need to find the source for the photos for accuracy purposes. Also, if the photos are enlarged, the students need to know the difference between the blown up picture and the real thing. The use of a scale will help the student understand the difference. Some non-fiction books already have the scale comparing the two objects in the book (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004).

One more important element to the design and format is the overall layout. Moss (2003) considered the definition of layout as “Print size, text arrangement, and placement of information on the page....clearly organized text, much white space, and interesting and varied placement of objects on the page to entice young readers” (p. 41). “Layouts clearly influence children’s responses to nonfiction” (Moss, 2003, p. 41). According to Moss (2003) non-fiction books should have *kid appeal*, which she also calls attractiveness.

Guideline #3. The authors of non-fiction must keep in mind the audience of their book.

### *Writing Style*

The third factor to review when picking out a non-fiction text is the appropriateness of the writing style. Bamford, Kristo, and Lyon stated the following concerning writing style used with non-fiction books:

The author’s language should be reader considerate. The language the author uses should support understanding. This might include the use of metaphors or analogies, definitions within the text, explanations, or observational writing that helps readers to visualize or look closely at the illustrative materials. (2002, p. 12)



“The best informational books do not present only collections of facts; they also develop concepts and generalizations about topics” (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 36). Moss also agreed with the statement above, stating that the main job of non-fiction text is to convey information. Not only should non-fiction literature develop concepts and generalizations, the author should use, “... a range of literacy devices that help make information come alive” (Moss, 2003, p. 38). Today there is a wider variety of categories that include non-fiction than in the past. Three of those categories will be shared in the lessons below, for example, expository-informational text, mixed text, and narrative-informational text.

Guideline #4. Organization of non-fiction books must be appropriate to the needs of readers.

### *Organization*

The final factor to examine is organization. It is important to choose a book with good organization if you want students to have good experiences with expository text. This section will also help clarify specific types of organization to look for when picking out an informational book. Kletzien and Dreher explained that expository text has patterns such as, “...*cause-effect, comparison-contrast, sequence, question-answer, description, and generalization*” (2004, p. 37). Stephens (2008) suggested these organizational questions to ask when picking out informational books: “When appropriate, does the book include a table of contents, index, and glossary? Are clearly divided sections, headings, and subheadings provided” (p. 489)? Readers should be able to float from page to page, illustration to illustration, effortlessly while reading expository text.

## How to Set Up the Classroom Library and Environment

Now that I have explained how to pick out quality non-fiction books I will discuss how to set up the classroom environment so students will feel comfortable to embrace the genre that may be new for them. Moss stated that, "Nonfiction books should be a part of even the smallest classroom libraries" (2003, p. 63). "Teachers who do not have a classroom library need to start one, and those who do have a library can most likely improve it" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 11). Kletzien and Dreher (2004) suggested that the classroom library should be stocked with 50% fiction and 50% non-fiction books. They use fiction and non-fiction literature as broad terms to cover many genres. One good way to decide the percentage of non-fiction and fiction books is to create an inventory by genre of all the books in your classroom. This is not an easy task and will take time, but it can result in a much more inclusive classroom library when there is an understanding of what genres are available in the library. Kletzien and Dreher (2004) also suggested that of the 50% non-fiction literature "... that narrative-informational or mixed texts make up no more than a third of those informational books" (p. 15). (Narrative-Informational Text is defined in the following way: "The purpose of authors who write narrative-informational text is to convey factual information, but they use a story format because they believe this will make the information more appealing or easy to approach" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004 p. 13). Mixed Text is defined as: "Many informational books combine narrative and expository writings" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004 p. 15). The reason they say only to have a third of the classroom library be comprised of narrative-informational and mixed text is because "... the story takes precedence over the factual information" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 15). Kletzien and Dreher (2004) also

recommended that an acceptable library will have a book for each child, a better library will have four books per child, and an excellent library will have eight books per child.

It is important with any genre to rotate the books. Teachers often do this by using the local library, or swapping books with a fellow colleague. This is also a good way to expand your library if funds are limited. Another good way to expand your library is by inserting student made books.

One thing to remember when rotating new books is to make a book display to look like a display at a department store; this will increase interest of the students. In this regard, Moss (2003) observed the following:

Just as department stores use attractive displays to sell merchandise, teachers can use displays to sell children on books and reading. Packing crates, easels, chairs, and cardboard boxes can be used to showcase books of all kinds. Bent coat hangers can hold pages open to an interesting photograph or section. Displays can focus on nonfiction holiday books, units of study, or works of a particular author.

(p. 64)

Kletzien and Dreher (2004) stressed the need for moving beyond books by having the following resources, "Classroom libraries benefit from resources other than books to promote children's engagement with print. These resources include listening stations with earphones; flannel boards, puppet theaters, and related props; magazines and newspapers; and Internet resources" (p. 21).

When taking time to make the books enticing, it is also important to make the classroom environment enticing as well. Once students are enticed with wanting to read books, then a quieter place to read them is necessary. I have seen many teachers use

different things such as: bean bags, couches, foam chairs, lawn chairs, bathtubs, special reading rugs, canopies, and large boxes. The quiet reading corner should also coincide with the listening center. This is an easy way to introduce some new books.

I incorporate non-fiction literature across centers in the classroom, using caddies to hold non-fiction books with writing utensils and paper. For example, in the block area students can use non-fiction books to help them learn about how to build a bridge, road, or building. Besides putting books in different centers, teachers should pay attention to what is on the walls, as this too is valuable space that can be put to good use. Walls provide an opportunity to put up informational text at eye level. These resources can be posters, children's creations, dictation, ongoing experiments, and interactive bulletin boards.

### Three Examples of Lesson Plans Using Non-fiction Books

Now that the classroom environment is to be a cohesive collection of all types of literature, here are some examples of lessons to examine. The first lesson will be set in a preschool classroom focusing on preparing the students' background knowledge of a garden unit by introducing them to the mixed text book, *Growing Vegetable Soup* written and illustrated by Lois Ehlert (1987).

#### *First Lesson*

In selecting the books for the three sample lessons I followed my suggestions at the beginning of this chapter one before deciding on books for all the lessons. This lesson will be a read aloud. The lesson plan format is designed to demonstrate the three phases of read alouds you need to prepare before the read aloud, during the reading, and after

reading the book. Depending upon how well the preschool students sit for a period of time, the lesson might have to be split into sections.

*Before reading.*

Before the unit starts I would prepare the room for the gardening unit. Each center would have something to do with a gardening aspect and books are needed to help support each center. This helps spark the students' interest. The activities that are listed below in the *before* section could be done before ever showing the book to the children, or you could show them the front cover to pique their interests.

Before the book is read, I will show the students some gardening tools, letting them look and touch those that are safe. (This gives students *hands-on* experience before reading the book.) While I am showing them the tools, I will ask the students what they think the tools are called, and what they are used for. (I will help the students to predict what the author might have written about in the book, depending on their age.) This will be written down as a K in a K W L chart. The K stands for what the students already know, the W stands for what they want to know, and the L stands for what the students learned during the lesson. "K-W-L [Ogle, 1986] is an excellent prereading strategy that not only helps students activate their prior knowledge about a topic but also helps them actively and purposefully search for information as they read" (Moss, 2003, p. 94).

I will also pass around a variety of seeds and ask the students what they are and how they think the seeds grow. Before reading the book, I will also ask the students what they would like to learn from the gardening unit. This would be the W of the K W L chart. During the course of this lesson, we will be planting and growing a garden, so the students will have a real experience with the book.

*During reading.*

While reading the book, I will be using the questioning technique. "Questioning is a powerful strategy to use with informational text either before or during reading" (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 61). I will model for the students the questions I have, and I will tell them what I was thinking when I came up with the questions. If they have more questions to add to the K W L chart, we will write them down as well. We will also be looking at the K W L chart to see what questions we can answer from the W section. We might need to read the book more than once.

I listed some specific questions I would ask during the reading: (a) what type of vegetables do you think dad and child are going to plant? (p. 1), (b) why are they putting the seeds in the dirt? (p. 3), (c) how tall are the plants going to get? (p. 6), (d) why do you think the dad and child will need to watch the plants and pull weeds? (p. 9), (e) why would they want to wash the vegetables? (p. 12), (f) what are they going to do with the cut up vegetables? (p. 13)

*After reading.*

After reading the book, we will go over the K W L chart from beginning to end, referring to the book when needed, for fact checking. We will also refer to the book when we do plant the garden. This will help the student learn that you can refer back to previous books that the teacher read aloud and information gleaned from these books.

For lesson extensions, we might compare and contrast what the characters did differently when planting the garden, or we might add to the classroom garden. This can also lead to a field trip, to either someone who already has a garden, or a farm.

Furthermore, there can be an extension at home to see if the students could retell the story

to their parents. The teacher could send seeds home, and the students could plant something to compare and contrast the same plant in the classroom. If the plant doesn't grow the same way, students and parents together could find out solutions to get the plants to grow. Another possibility is to do classroom experiments on different growing patterns for the same type of plant and document them. Pictures can be posted of students working in the garden, so that students can see a picture of themselves on the wall. For a transition activity, you could also work on sequencing, such as how does a plant grow?

Dictation is also another activity that is easy to do, and the students enjoy seeing their names on the poster with their words. The students usually ask you again and again to read what they said to you. Non-fiction is congruent with anything that you put up on the wall that is true and usually this can be through dictation by what the student tells you and the teacher writes it down.

### *Second Lesson*

The second lesson plan will be based in a first grade classroom towards the end of the year. It will be assumed that students will have been exposed to non-fiction books from the beginning of the year. This lesson will entail an anticipation guide with a read aloud, and discussion. I got the idea for the anticipation guide from Moss (2003). Moss (2003) defined an anticipation guide as a way to "... activate students' knowledge about a topic before reading, and they also serve as guides for subsequent reading. They ask students to react to statements that focus their attention on the topic to be learned" (p. 96). "Anticipation guides can help children confront and later reflect upon their misconceptions" (p. 96). The anticipation guide is in Appendix B. The book that will be

used is, *A Day with Firefighters* by Jan Kottke (2004). It is a narrative-informational text. Again, I will follow the before, during, and after lesson plan.

*Before reading.*

To get the students excited about reading this book, we will be completing an anticipation guide before the reading. The students will be paired up or work in small groups. With their partners, the students will be completing the anticipation guide for a pre-reading activity that will to activate their prior knowledge. After the students have completed the guide, the whole class will come together as a group and discuss their answers. At this point, we will not discuss which answers are correct or not. Then I will make a graph to see how many groups answered yes or no to each question.

*During reading.*

During the reading of the book, I will want students to think about the questions they just answered with their partners or group members. I want them to think about what answers they might change. During a second reading of the book I want the students to sit in their pairs or groups and have their anticipation guide in front of them. After reading the part related to each question, we will stop and have a group tell us what they answered and why they answered that way. We will continue this until the questions have all been answered. If the students would like to change their answers they may do so.

*After reading.*

Since we have already discussed the questions, we can use the anticipation guide to discuss why they changed the answers. (What proof in the book leads them to change their answers?) We can also make a new graph, depicting the changed answers.



For lesson extensions, the students could use the same anticipation guide and read different books about firefighters, then see if the answers would be the same. The students could also write their own predictions (yes or no questions) to a non-fiction book, ask a partner to answer the questions, and find the answers after reading the book together, taking turns.

### *Third Lesson*

The third lesson will be based in a second grade classroom. The book I would choose to use is, *Beans to Chocolate* by Inez Snyder (2003). Children are always curious about how things are made; this book will help answer one of those questions. This lesson will entail the same lesson plan outline as the first two lessons, a sequencing skill activity, and an expository-informational text to be read aloud. The definition of expository-informational states:

Books do not include story elements such as characters, goals, and resolutions.

Instead, these books might be characterized as reports, using expository text structures such as cause-effect, comparison-contrast, sequence, description, and problem-solution. Expository-informational books explain the natural and social world, including animals, places, and cultural groups.” (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 13-14)

“Many informational books are written in sequence. Most how-to books that give directions have this structure” (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 65). Moss (2003) wrote that the sequence:

... involves putting facts, events or concepts in their order of occurrence. It is most like time order in narrative, and for this reason it is the easiest expository

structure to teach. Sequence is used to provide directions for making or doing something. Signal words like, *first, second, third, then, next, last, before, after,* and *finally* indicate the order of events. (p. 101)

*Before reading.*

Sequencing will be an activity we will work on, for example, how does a plant grow? To obtain the students' attention, I will bring in some cacao beans and chocolate. Before I show the students the cacao beans, I will show the chocolate and ask them if they know how it is made. I will then pair the students and have them come up with explanations of how chocolate is made. After they share their thoughts, I will show them the cacao beans and ask how they would change their answer. (I also want them to understand that information can build upon itself.) They can work on this with their same partners again. After they have completed this part of the lesson, I will introduce the sequencing words, *first, then, and now*. I will tell them that the book will tell us how chocolate is made. It will also use some of the sequencing words to give us the order of steps for making chocolate.

*During reading.*

During the reading of the book, I want students to listen to the sequencing words the book uses. We will also read the book several times to understand the sequence it takes to make chocolate. Some questions I might ask would be: (a) On what page do we find the first sequencing word?, (b) where do we find the next sequencing word?, (c) how do we know these are the first steps?, (d) could we list all the steps in order?

### *After reading.*

After reading the book several times, I want to know if the students thought the book had enough sequencing words. Did the students think the book made sense, or would they have put in more sequencing words. We will also do some simple sequencing *how to*'s verbally and in writing, to continue practicing the skill. The last page of the book will indicate where to find more information about chocolate; it also will give a website for children about chocolate.

The next section will help in finding more quality non-fiction books like the ones listed in the lessons. These lists will help other teachers in their own journey to create their own lesson plans using non-fiction.

### Where to Find Quality Non-fiction Books

There are many quality non-fiction books that have been published, but where do you go to find them? "Many publishers now have series of nonfiction little books intended for young children. These are usually for grades K-2, but in some cases they are appropriate for preschoolers" (Duke, 2003, p. 20). Duke also shared websites where educators may go to explore more non-fiction books such as: (a) "National Geographic-Windows of Literacy [www.NationalGeographic.com](http://www.NationalGeographic.com), (b) Newbridge-Discovery Links Science and Discovery Links Social Studies [www.newbridgeonline.com](http://www.newbridgeonline.com), (c) Sadlier-Oxford-Content Area Readers [www.sadlier-oxford.com](http://www.sadlier-oxford.com), (c) Scholastic-Science Emergent Readers and Social Studies Emergent Readers [www.Scholastic.com](http://www.Scholastic.com)" (2003, p. 20). Some other websites that Kletzien and Dreher (2004) have found to be helpful when trying to obtain non-fiction books are the following: "...(a) [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org), (b) [www.cbbooks.org](http://www.cbbooks.org), (c) [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org), (d) [www.nsta.org](http://www.nsta.org), (e) [www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org), (f)

www.ala.org, (g) www.appraisal.neu.edu, (h) www.Searchit.heinemann.com, (i) www.umbc.edu/esip” (p. 122- 123).

These websites list some of the prestigious awards given to non-fiction books. Such awards are the following: Children’s Choice, Teacher’s Choice, Orbis Pictus Award, Robert F. Sibert Information Book Award, Caldecott Medal, and the Newberry Medal. Kletzien and Dreher (2004) also felt that *The Horn Book* and *Connecting Books, Libraries and Classrooms* are excellent resources for identifying quality non-fiction books. These magazines are published up to eight times a year; they also “...include annotations of books and suggestions for how to use them in classroom” (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 43).

Moss also has a list of resources to support finding informational text. “Online resources like the Children’s Literature Web Guide ([www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown](http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown)) list annual winners of various awards...” (Moss, 2003, p. 44). In addition, Moss (2003) wrote about two places where you could find reviews of informational text:

The American Library Association website includes nonfiction book reviews from *Booklist*, a journal that reviews adults, young-adults, and children’s books. A second source for reviews and lists of award-winning books is the *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books* (available online at [www.lis.uiuc.edu/puboff/bccb](http://www.lis.uiuc.edu/puboff/bccb)). (p. 44)

## CHAPTER IV

### Conclusion

After reviewing the research about non-fiction material, I have come to the conclusion that non-fiction material can be used more in the classroom as a teaching medium. Non-fiction text can be used in many different ways, such as literacy lesson plans that entice new readers to read, or hanging informational text on the walls of the classroom. Also non-fiction material offers many benefits when we introduce non-fiction literature early, and when we do not wait until fourth, fifth and sixth grades.

#### Identify and synthesize insights gained from the process

There are many new insights that I have gained from this experience after reviewing the material. Some new insights include learning what types of non-fiction texts to have in the classroom library, how to pick a quality non-fiction book, how to know different types of non-fiction literature, and what are benefits of using non-fiction books in the classroom.

It was satisfying to learn about how many non-fiction books to have in the classroom and learn the four different types of non-fiction books to include. This is the first step to take for anyone wanting to incorporate more non-fiction books in their classroom. Knowing what to include gives an interested person the base knowledge about non-fiction books. It gave me a better understanding about non-fiction text and the different ways I can incorporate these books into the curriculum.

Another insight I gained was how to select a quality non-fiction book. There were times when I haphazardly picked out a book for a lesson, not thinking of the effect it could have on a pre-reading student. Learning more about the benefits for picking out a

more appropriate book and the things that I should be looking for also gave me more background knowledge of the care that I should give to it. I learned this helps my students to get the best possible introduction to non-fiction literature they can get.

### Recommendations

#### *Teachers*

For some professionals, this may be a review of what non-fiction literature has to offer. If this is new, you may have found some information that you can use in a new way, or it can be a resource you can use to help educate colleagues.

For others, there may have been some new ideas that you can use. If it is a new idea that you would like to start using in the classroom, take baby steps; don't try to do everything at once. You would not want to rush this project; otherwise, it could become another incomplete project. Take time to incorporate informational text into the curriculum. Set goals for yourself to get done each month or semester; for example, one month you could start utilizing the public library and checking out their non-fiction books to help increase your classroom library. Another month you could study an author who has published many non-fiction books. Over time you will have a cohesive classroom that will benefit your students for years to come.

Another recommendation that I have is that you pick out non-fiction material for instruction very carefully, just as you would fiction, or any other genre. The books that are for instruction can set the tone for other books that students will choose to read. It may also open up a whole new world for students for they might not have thought that they could be good readers. The way the teacher views non-fiction books will have an impact on students.

### *Programs/Curricula*

I think every program and curriculum should have trainings about how to incorporate non-fiction books into the classroom. The program should allocate some of its training monies to develop the literacy component of the program, including non-fiction literature. The curriculum should have some examples of lesson plans. The biggest complaint I read about from educators was that they didn't know how to develop and use lesson plans with their students.

### *Future Project and Research*

There is still much to be done with this genre inside the classroom. Many of the studies that were read were conducted in the first or second grade. I also realized that more studies need to be done with preschool, infant, and toddler children. This will help the preschool, toddler, and infant teachers know how to help their students better with this genre. I also believe that if more studies were done with these age groups it would add valuable information to what is already known.

One study that I could see being replicated easily in preschool classrooms would be Nell Duke's *3.6 minutes per day: The scarcity of informational texts in first grade*. This study would open up other avenues to explore in this age range. This study could also be done in infant and toddler rooms because it not only deals with what teachers are doing, but it also includes a good environment for using non-fiction literature in the classroom.

### *Educational Policies*

There is only one policy and that is for teachers to start introducing non-fiction literature to younger children. This way, students will not face a new genre and a new

way of reading all at once when they enter fourth grade. There should be a policy that requires teachers to be educated in how to teach non-fiction literature early in children's education. This policy would also help to prepare teachers and students better for future use of informational text.

### *Teacher Practices of self and others*

There are many teacher practices that can be implemented and it can be overwhelming when taking on such a big project. A place to start is by first doing a read aloud, retellings, or guided reading. Start out small so you can feel empowered to learn more about non-fiction in small steps. This will help benefit your students in the long run. Each year you will be able to add or do a little more than the year before.



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## Appendix A

## GLOSSARY: Definition of Terms

*Anticipatory Guide:* Moss (2003) defined an “Anticipatory guide activate students’ knowledge about a topic before reading, and they also serve as guides for subsequent reading. They ask students to react to statements that focus their attention on the topic to be learned” (p. 96).

*Expository-Informational Text:*

Expository-informational books do not include story elements such as characters, goals, and resolutions. Instead, these books might be characterized as reports, using expository text structures such as cause-effect, comparison-contrast, sequence, description, and problem-solution. Expository-informational books explain the natural and social world, including animals, places, and cultural groups. (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 13-14)

*Informational Text:* Text written with the primary purpose of conveying information about the natural and social world ... and having particular text features to accomplish this purpose.” (Duke, 2003, p. 14) Informational, non-fiction, expository text, and trade books are terms that can be used interchangeably.

*Layout:* Moss (2003) considered the definition of layout as “ ... print size, text arrangement, and placement of information on the page.... clearly organized text, much white space, and interesting and varied placement of objects on the page to entice young readers” (p. 41).

*Mixed Text:* “Many informational books combine narrative and expository writings” (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 15).

*Narrative-Informational Text:* “The purpose of authors who write narrative-informational text is to convey factual information, but they use a story format because they believe this will make the information more appealing or easy to approach” (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004, p. 13).

*Non-fiction text:* See Informational text

*Teacher Read Alouds:* Read alouds are defined by Duke and Kays (1998) as the practice of reading to students aloud. Kletzien and Dreher (2004) agreed with them and add to the definition when they stated read alouds enable students to “... learn the distinctive linguistic features of informational books and to expand their vocabulary and word knowledge” (p. 113).

*Writing Cycle:* According to Donovan (1994), the writing cycle consist of the “... process of planning [to use] a graphic organizer, writing, (rough draft), conferencing, revising/editing, and publishing” (p. 185).

## Appendix B

### Anticipation Guide

We are going to be reading the book, "A Day with Firefighters" by Jan Kottke. It is about a day in a life of a firefighter. It talks about how the firefighters put out a fire and what kind of equipment they use and wear.

"Directions: With your partner, read the list below. If you think the sentence is true, circle *Yes*. If it is not true, circle *No*. Be ready to explain why you marked your answer the way you did." (Moss, 2003, p. 96)

YES NO 1. Firefighters live at the fire station. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

YES NO 2. Firefighters just know when there is a fire. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

YES NO 3. Firefighters wear protective clothing when fighting fires. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

YES NO 4. A siren is used to warn people that a fire truck is coming. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

YES NO 5. Some firefighters use a special ladder to fight fire. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

YES NO 6. Anyone may become a firefighter. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_