CHALLENGES, BENEFITS, AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING INFORMATIONAL TEXTS IN THE PRIMARY GRADES: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

by

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CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled *Challenges, Benefits, and Effective Strategies for Teaching Informational Texts in the Primary Grades: A Professional Development Workshop* by Amanda Westling, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Literacy, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.

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Abstract

The Common Core State Standard (CCSS) Initiative (2011) for English Language Arts places an increased emphasis on teaching informational texts in the primary grades. However, many primary grade teachers may not have the knowledge to teach the informational text genre effectively. In order to address this challenge, the master's project focuses on the challenges associated with teaching informational texts in the primary grades, the benefits it may present for primary grade students, as well as, effective instructional strategies for teaching informational texts in primary grade classrooms. The findings are presented through a professional development workshop that intends to increase teacher knowledge and enhance informational text instruction in the primary grades.

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Chapter One Introduction

Statement of Problem or Issue

The purpose of this project is to find out what research says about teaching informational texts in the primary grades. This project focuses on the challenges associated with teaching informational texts in the primary grades, the benefits it may present for primary grade students, as well as, effective instructional strategies for teaching informational texts in primary grade classrooms.

The Common Core State Standard (CCSS) Initiative (2011) for English Language Arts places an increased emphasis on teaching informational texts in the primary grades. In 2011, the CCSS adopted the *Reading Framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress*, which equally balances the reading of narrative and informational texts in the elementary grades. In the past, narrative texts have been the dominant reading material used in primary grade classrooms (Duke, 2000; Palmer & Stewart, 2003; Yopp & Yopp, 2006). With the adoption of the CCSS (2011) however, primary grade teachers are expected to include narrative texts 50% of the time and informational texts 50% of the time. The Engage NY organization, which aims to help New York State Teachers adapt to the CCSS, explains that implementing a "truly balanced" reading curriculum is one of the six "shifts" in ELA/Literacy required by the CCSS (www.engageNY.org). As a direct result, the mandatory increased use of informational texts in the primary grades presents a number of critical questions:

- How much knowledge do primary grade teachers have on informational texts?

- What types of informational resources are available for the primary grades?
- How will the inclusion of informational texts affect primary grade students?
- How can teachers use informational texts to effectively teach reading in the primary grades?

In order to address the concerns that arise from the mandatory increased use of informational texts in the primary grades, this project focuses specifically on the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges and benefits associated with using informational texts in the primary grades?
2. What are effective instructional strategies for using informational texts to teach reading in the primary grades?

To answer these questions, this project intends to synthesize theories and studies related to the research questions and the issue of incorporating informational texts into primary grade reading instruction. With the relatively new CCSS placing an increased emphasis on informational texts in the primary grades, it is important that primary grade teachers become better educated on how to teach this genre. It is also critical to recognize the many educational benefits students may receive from the early introduction of informational texts, and identify the reasons why they have not been included in the past. The purpose of the project is to find what research says are the challenges and benefits associated with teaching informational texts in the primary grades, as well as effective instructional strategies for teaching informational texts to primary grade students. The findings from the literature review are to be presented

through a professional development workshop that will increase teacher knowledge and enhance informational text instruction in the primary grades.

Background

What is the most effective way to teach reading? This question is constantly debated among teachers and researchers. Within this debate, there is support for the whole language approach (Kucer, 2005; Smith, 2006) and the phonics approach (Ehri, 2005). What teachers and researchers perceive as the most effective way to teach reading has changed dramatically over the years, as it is based on the most current research. As research emerges, new ideas about how reading develops and should be taught may also develop. Chall (1999) takes a closer look at the different models of reading that have been used in the past. These models illustrate the way in which researchers perceive reading development, and therefore determine how reading can be taught most effectively. Historically, Chall explains, that teachers and researchers have gone back and forth between models of reading that emphasis one process, which has come to be known as the whole language approach, versus a model that emphasizes multiple processes such as the alphabetic principle.

The whole language approach focuses on the text as a whole (Smith, 2006). Students who are taught using this approach look at the big picture and focus on comprehension or making meaning (Kucer, 2005; Smith, 2006). The phonics approach emphasizes letter-sound relationships and decoding individual words (Ehri, 2005). Students who are taught using the phonics approach are taught using the alphabetic principle. Students provided this type of instruction learn letter names,

letter sounds, and eventually blend letter sounds into words (Ehri, 2005). Literature explains however, that combining these two approaches, and creating a balanced literacy instructional program may be a more effective approach (Pearson, 2004). This type of instructional approach, termed balanced literacy instruction, emphasizes both comprehension and decoding, providing teachers a way to incorporate reading instruction that can reach students with different strengths and learning styles (Pearson, 2004). As a future literacy specialist, I believe it is important to provide balanced literacy instruction, which blends these two approaches and also includes a variety of genres.

Pearson (2004) explains that one aspect of balanced literacy instruction incorporates a range of text genres, as well as strategy instruction for working with each text genre. In the past however, primary grade teachers have not included a variety of texts during reading instruction. Instead, emphasis has been placed on narrative texts. The primary purpose of a narrative text is to entertain, or tell a story. Narrative texts typically illustrate events, actions, emotions, and situations. These types of texts also usually contain story grammar such as setting, characters, a problem, and a solution (Hall, Sabey, & McClellan, 2005). These characteristics become predictable to primary grade students, as they know what to expect when reading a narrative text. The purpose and components of narrative texts suggests that these texts may be entertaining and familiar to primary grade students. These ideas may have led to the assumption that narrative texts are more developmentally appropriate for primary grade students (Pappas, 1993).This assumption and a number

of challenges associated with teaching informational texts in the primary grades may have led to the lack of informational text instruction in the primary grades. Yet, in order to provide truly balanced instruction, it is important to include a variety of texts in the primary grades, specifically during reading instruction.

A growing body of research suggests that the introduction of informational texts to primary grade students may benefit students by increasing student interest and motivation in reading (Caswell & Duke, 1998). The early introduction of informational texts may also lessen the phenomena known as the fourth grade slump. The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) explains that historically low reading achievement of fourth grade students in the United States of America, which has come to be known as the fourth grade slump. The NAEP states that, two thirds of American fourth graders read at or below a basic reading level (NAEP, 2009). Teaching informational texts in the primary grades however, may smooth the transition from the primary grades, which traditionally focus on narrative texts, to the upper elementary grades, where informational texts become more dominant (Duke, 2000). It is also important for all teachers to be aware of the relatively new CCSS. With the mandatory increased use of informational texts in the CCSS, primary grade teachers must be aware of effective instructional strategies for using informational texts in primary grade classrooms.

For the purpose of this project, it is important to define a number of terms related to the research questions, which deal specifically with informational texts. In this project, the term “informational text” refers to a text in which the primary

purpose is to present factual information. These texts often contain new content and content related vocabulary (Hall, Sabey, & McClellan, 2005). Unlike narrative texts, informational texts do not usually contain story grammar. Instead, informational texts are composed of a variety of text structures. Various text structures include: Description, sequence, compare-contrast, problem-solution, and causation (Freedle& Meyer, 1984). The elements of informational texts also differ from narrative texts. Elements of informational texts include: The author's purpose (providing information), major ideas, supporting details, reader's aids (captions, headings, diagrams), and vocabulary (Marinak, 2008). In addition to a variety of text structures and elements, there are a number of different types of informational texts. Specific examples of informational texts that are appropriate for use in primary grade classrooms may include: Textbooks, trade books, fiction with content information, newspapers, and magazines.

One of the goals of this project is to identify what research says are effective instructional literacy strategies for teaching informational texts in the primary grades. For the purpose of this project, the term "effective instructional strategies" refers to instructional literacy strategies that have been proven effective by teachers and research through a number of peer-reviewed, empirical studies. These effective instructional strategies deal specifically with teaching informational texts in the primary grades.

Rationale and Theoretical Stance

The topic of incorporating informational texts into primary grade reading instruction is extremely important to the field of literacy and education in general, as it is a current issue facing many literacy specialists and classroom teachers. The CCSS (2011) require the teaching of informational texts at the primary level, but many primary grade teachers may be unsure how to do this. With the increased use of informational texts in the primary grades and a growing body of research that illustrates the benefits of teaching informational texts to primary grade students, it is important that literacy specialists and classroom teachers are capable of teaching this genre effectively. This project analyzes the current body of research related to using informational texts in the primary grades. Findings from empirical studies will be used to create a professional development workshop, which will educate teachers on the challenges and benefits associated with the informational text genre and improve informational text instruction by providing research-based strategies for teaching informational texts in the primary grades.

This project is framed around the theory of Constructivism (Dewey, 1916) which supports the idea that individuals actively construct knowledge. According to this theory, learning occurs when an individual combines existing knowledge with new knowledge (Dewey, 1916). The Schema Theory (Bartlett, 1932), Transactional Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), and Engagement Theory (Tracey & Morrow, 2006) are three Constructivist theories that support the current research related to using informational texts in the primary grades.

The Schema Theory explains the way that learners group information into knowledge constructs, which Bartlett (1932) termed schemas. This theory states that the more schemas students have on a topic, the easier they will be able to learn new information on the same topic. In contrast, if a student has little or no schema on a topic, it will be very difficult to learn new information on that topic (Bartlett, 1932). This theory may help to explain why students fall into the fourth grade slump. When students reach the upper elementary grades, they are expected to use and learn from informational texts, which may however be unfamiliar to many students. The Transactional Reader Response Theory builds off of the Schema Theory and explains that each student has individualized reading experiences due to unique schemas (Rosenblatt, 1978). This theory again suggests that it may be beneficial for all students to have numerous experiences with informational texts in the primary grades.

The Engagement Theory suggests that students who are interested in what they are reading are more active readers (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Research shows that some students may be more motivated by informational texts, and therefore, more engaged (Caswell & Duke, 1998). These three theories suggest that students would benefit from the early introduction of informational texts in the primary grades. Using informational texts in the primary grades may build students' schemas and background knowledge related to informational texts, support content learning, increase student motivation, and expose students to diverse informational text structures and features, in the hopes of preventing the fourth grade slump.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter contains an extensive review of research related to the topic of teaching informational texts in the primary grades. Theories, classic and seminal studies, and up-to-date empirical studies that are relevant to informational texts in primary grades are reviewed in detail in order to address the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges and benefits associated with using informational texts in the primary grades?
2. What are effective instructional strategies for using informational texts to teach reading in the primary grades?

While synthesizing theories and empirical studies related to these questions, a number of categories emerge including: Challenges associated with teaching informational texts in the primary grades, benefits for students to learn informational texts in the primary grades, and effective instructional strategies for teaching informational texts in the primary grades.

Current research on this topic addresses a number of challenges associated with teaching informational texts in the primary grade such as the lack of informational texts at the primary grade level (Duke, 2000; Yopp &Yopp, 2012), the lack of teacher knowledge related to informational texts (Olsen & Gee, 1991; Palmer & Stewart, 2003), and the assumption that narrative texts are more developmentally appropriate for primary grade students (Pappas, 1993).While research addresses these

challenges, it also presents evidence that these challenges may be overcome. A number of studies describe the capability of primary grade students to learn from informational texts and the benefits it may present to primary grade students (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Palmer & Stewart, 2003). Research also identifies effective strategies for teaching informational texts in the primary grades.

Challenges for Teaching Informational Texts

The current body of research related to informational texts highlights the lack of informational text instruction in the primary grades (Duke, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2006; Yopp &Yopp, 2012). A number of studies that analyze informational text usage in the primary grades find similar results. Duke (2010) cautions that first graders receive, on average only 3.6 minutes of informational text instruction a day. Similarly, Yopp and Yopp (2006) examine primary grade students' exposure to informational texts in multiple contexts. After comparing the titles of over 3,000 texts read to primary grade students both at school and at home, results indicate that young children have very limited exposure to informational texts in both settings. A more recent study published by Ness (2011) concludes that elementary teachers spend, on average 31.55 minutes a day on informational text instruction. While the amount of time spent teaching informational texts seems to be increasing, it appears that narrative texts are still the dominant genre used in the primary grades (Yopp &Yopp, 2012). Primary grade teachers use narrative texts 77% of the time and informational texts only 8% of the time, according to Yopp and Yopp (2012). A number of studies suggest that this may be partially due to the limited number of informational

selections in primary grade Basal Readers (Moss & Newton, 2002; Stephens, 2007). A close examination of second and third grade, popular Basal Readers (e.g., Harcourt and McGraw Hill) shows that they contain a limited number of informational selections (Moss & Newton, 2002; Stephens, 2007). These findings indicate that while the amount of informational text instruction may be slowly increasing, students continue to have limited experiences with informational texts in the primary grades.

A number of challenges may have prevented primary grade teachers from using informational texts in the past. Research points out that the lack of primary grade teacher knowledge regarding informational texts may be an issue. Olson and Gee (1991) investigate primary grade teachers' knowledge of the informational text genre and the availability of informational texts for primary grade students. Results indicate that teachers are unsure how to teach the informational text genre effectively, and that there were not enough informational texts to meet primary grade teachers' needs. Palmer and Stewart (2003) revisit this issue in a more recent study. Despite the passing of twelve years, findings show similar results. Primary grade teachers continue to feel unprepared to teach informational texts, and find it difficult to locate appropriate informational texts for primary grade readers. This may be attributed to the fact that until the recent adaptation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (2011), primary grade teachers were not required to teach informational texts as often as narrative texts.

Another challenge for teaching informational texts includes the perception that primary grade students are not capable of learning from informational texts. Pappas

(1993) examines the validity of the assumption that story texts may be more developmentally appropriate for primary grade students than informational texts. Pappas analyzes kindergarteners' pretend readings of story and informational texts. The results suggest that kindergarteners can successfully reenact both text genres. Findings from this study question the misconception and provide evidence to support the idea that students as young as Kindergarten are capable of comprehending and learning from informational texts.

Benefits for Primary Grade Students

While research illustrates the lack of informational text instruction in the primary grades and the challenges associated with teaching this genre, it also highlights the benefits it may present for primary grade students. A number of studies suggest that informational texts may be motivating and engaging to primary grade students (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Mantzicopoulos & Patrick, 2010; Palmer & Stewart, 2003). Literature shows evidence that students as young as Kindergarten enjoy, and are capable of understanding informational books (Mantzicopoulos & Patrick, 2010). Palmer and Stewart (2003) find that an overwhelming number of primary grade students actually prefer informational texts over narrative texts. More recently, Correia (2011) conducts a comparable study with similar results, noting that boys in particular found informational texts interesting and chose informational texts at least 50% of the time. Literature extends this idea in order to show how students increased interest can positively affect reading ability. Caswell and Duke (1998) follow two students' journey from struggling reader to motivated reader, and illustrate that it was

made possible through the implementation of informational texts. Similarly, Reynolds and Symons (2001) suggest that allowing students to choose informational texts and informational topics may be a motivational tool that impacts reading ability in a positive way. Both of these studies further indicate that reading ability is positively affected when students are engaged by the texts they are reading.

Not only are informational texts motivating and enjoyable for primary grade students, they may provide further educational benefits. Research shows that the teaching informational texts to students as young as Kindergarten may positively affect their language development by improving speaking and listening skills (Sivropoulo & Sakellariou, 2008). The Reading, Engaging, and Learning project (REAL) also illustrates the benefits teaching informational texts may present to primary grade students (Baker, Dreher, Shiplet, Beall, Voelker, Garret, & Finger-Elam, 2011). This study investigates a classroom intervention program that enhances elementary students' experiences with informational texts and how this relates to reading achievement (Baker et al., 2011). It follows the same student participants for three years (from second to fourth grade). Results suggest that increasing students' exposure to informational text in second grade may improve reading comprehension and achievement in fourth grade (Baker et al., 2011).

A number of studies suggest that informational texts may be effective tools for helping primary grade students better comprehend contents areas such as science and diversity (Maloch, 2008; Pappas, Varelas, Barry, & Rife, 2003). Pappas, Varelas, Barry and Rife (2003) take a closer look at an integrated science-literacy unit within

urban primary grade classrooms. The researchers compare students' responses to informational text read alouds and explain how read alouds are made more meaningful by including classroom discussions that consider multiple social and ethnic contexts (Pappas et al., 2003). Students who participate in these types of discussions make gains in both science content area knowledge and reading comprehension. Dreher and Gray (2009) also identify the effectiveness of using science based informational texts for improving English Language Learners' (ELLs) reading, writing, and understanding of science related content. Similarly, Maloch (2008) follows a second grade classroom that attempts to use informational texts to highlight diversity, specifically students' unique ethnic backgrounds. In this case study, the integration of informational texts encourages positive classroom discussion about diversity while improving students' comprehension of abstract concepts and complex vocabulary. In these studies, students benefit from the inclusion of diversity during informational text instruction. These students are able to tackle complex issues related to science content area knowledge and diversity while making improvements in literacy and content area comprehension.

Effective Strategies for Teaching Informational Texts

The lack of informational text instruction in the primary grades is no longer acceptable. The CCSS (2011) require informational text instruction in the primary grades, and the current body of research highlights the educational benefits it presents to primary grade students. As research identifies the ability of primary grade students to learn from informational texts and the benefits it may presents for these students, it

becomes evident that primary grade teachers need to become better educated on how to teach this genre. Research presents a number of strategies that have shown effectiveness for teaching informational texts to primary grade students. Strategies include: Explicit instruction on informational text structure (Hall, Sabey, McClellan, 2005; Williams, Hall, & Lauer 2004; Williams, Hall, Lauer, Stafford, DeSisto, & deCani, 2005; Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, & Pollini, 2009) and pre, during, and post reading strategies using interactive read aloud approaches.(Cummins & Stallmeyer-Gerard, 2011; Duke & Kays, 1998; Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Moss, 2007; Terrell, 1992).

Text structure. In order to consider using explicit instruction on text structure to teach primary grade students informational texts, William, Hall, and Lauer (2002) investigate whether primary grade students are sensitive to text structure. Participants in this study include second grade students deemed "at risk" (90% free reduced lunch, 99% minority students). Results show that second grade readers, with both low and high reading comprehension ability, are sensitive to text structure (William, Hall, & Lauer, 2002). This suggests that teaching informational texts using explicit instruction on text structure may benefit primary grade students.

In order to assess the effectiveness of using text structure to teach informational texts to primary grade students, a number of empirical studies create instructional reading programs, specifically designed for teaching informational texts. These programs focus on teaching text structure for the purpose of improving primary grade students' comprehension of informational texts (Hall, Sabey, & McClellan

2005; Williams et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2009). While the numbers of participants vary, each study randomly assigns students to three conditions: Text Structure, Content, and No Instruction. Students in the Text Structure group receive explicit instruction on informational text structure and demonstrate higher performance than both the Content and No Instruction groups on a number of measures. The findings from these studies suggest that explicit instruction in text structure is an effective strategy for teaching informational texts to primary grade students.

Research shows that providing explicit instruction related to text structure, while teaching informational texts is an effective strategy, but how can teachers implement this into primary grade classrooms? Marinak (2008) explains that effective instruction provides students with information related to the five text elements of informational texts. Informational text elements include: The author's purpose, major ideas, supporting details, reader's aids (diagraphs, captions, headings), and vocabulary (Marinak, 2008). Marinak also places emphasis on teaching primary grade students to identify the different ways informational texts can be organized, or structured. This requires explicit instruction on the various structures of informational text which the author identifies as: Enumeration, time order, compare and contrast, cause and effect and, question and answer. The previously mentioned literature utilize instructional reading programs that are specifically designed to teach the text structure of informational texts to primary grade students (Hall, Sabey, & McClellan 2005; Williams, et. al., 2005; Williams, et. al., 2009). However, Marinak illustrates that

given the knowledge teachers can implement explicit instruction on text structure into primary grade classrooms and curriculum without such programs.

Similarly, Symons, MacLatchy-Gaudet, Stone, and Reynolds (2001) investigate instruction related to informational text structure, but focus on the effectiveness of strategy instruction for students' independent reading including self-monitoring strategies. Similarly, the researchers randomly assign the participants, third, fourth, and fifth grade students, to three conditions: Strategy instruction with monitoring, strategy instruction, and no instruction. In this case, third grade participants who are taught strategy instruction for reading informational texts are more successful than the control group (Symans et al., 2001). It appears that the third grade participants are not affected by the inclusion of self-monitoring strategies. However, it is important to note the fourth and fifth grade participants are positively affected by the inclusion of self-monitoring strategies and this may be an effective strategy for upper elementary teachers to utilize (Symans et al., 2001).

While investigating effective ways to teach informational texts, research not only investigates the quality of informational texts used to teach text structure to primary grades students, but also examines the specific needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) (Dreher & Gray, 2009; Reutzel, Read, & Fawson, 2009; Stephens, 2010). Multiple studies describe features of well-structured informational texts that can be used in primary grade classrooms (Dreher & Gray, 2009; Reutzel, Read, & Fawson, 2009). Reutzel, Read and Fawson (2009) find that using well-structured trade books in the primary grades to teach text structure, may improve students'

comprehension of informational texts. Dreher and Gray (2009) find similar results and illustrate the effectiveness of using informational texts with compare-contrast text structure for improving ELLs' comprehension of informational texts. While looking at the specific needs of ELLs, Stephens (2010) also examines the positive impact of using well-structured informational texts within an instructional program that combines science related informational texts with reading and writing. When considering teaching text structure to primary grade students, findings from these studies indicate that it is essential to choose quality, well-structured informational text in order to maximize comprehension and understanding of this genre.

Before, during, and after reading. Research also presents evidence that read alouds may be an effective approach for teaching informational texts to primary grade students. Duke and Kays (1998) examine preliterate kindergartners and their knowledge of informational texts. After three months of informational text read alouds, kindergarteners successfully demonstrate increased knowledge of informational text language through pretend readings of informational texts (Duke & Kays, 1998). Results indicate that students at the Kindergarten level are capable of learning from informational texts and that using read alouds is an effective instructional approach. Moss (1997) also presents evidence to support the effectiveness of informational text read alouds for increasing primary grade students' comprehension. Moss investigates the effects of reading informational texts out loud to first grade students. First grade participants in this study demonstrate comprehension and recall through retellings of information texts. Results show that

read alouds may be an effective strategy for increasing first graders ability to comprehend, summarize, and express personal opinions related to informational texts. Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard (2011) show how reading out loud can assist primary grade students to better understand informational texts. Results indicate that the inclusion of informational text read alouds, on a regular basis, improves primary grade students' ability to synthesize, better comprehend, and maximizes content area learning (Cummins & Stallmeyer-Gerard, 2011). Findings from these studies support the idea that using read alouds to teach informational texts to primary grade students is an effective approach, and improves students' ability to perform a number of skills such as summarizing and synthesizing (Cummins & Stallmeyer-Gerard, 2011; Duke & Kays, 1998; Moss, 1997).

In order to increase the effectiveness of the read aloud approach, research investigates the benefits of providing instruction before, during, and after informational text read alouds. Terrel (1992) collects data from teachers and students (K-5) regarding students' inferences before and during reading, and teachers' pre-questions, during informational text read alouds. Analysis of the data suggests that teachers' pre-questions may help students set a purpose for reading and students' inferences may help activate prior knowledge (Terrel, 1992). Heisey and Kucan (2010) also investigate the effectiveness of teacher instruction before and during informational text read alouds but include an after reading instructional component. The after reading component includes summarizing activities and both informal and formal comprehension checks at the end of the read aloud. Findings show that

students, who received strategies instruction before, during, and after reading, demonstrate higher levels of comprehension. Findings from Terrel (1992), Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard (2011), Duke and Kays (1998) and Moss (1997) support the idea that including strategy instruction before, during, and after reading may increase the effectiveness of the read aloud approach.

A number of studies provide specific strategies that may be used before, during, and after informational text read alouds. Kelly and Clausen-Grace (2008) demonstrate the effectiveness of using a text-feature walk before reading informational texts to primary grade students. Results show that the text-feature walk increased students' metacognition during reading and positively affected their ability to make quality predictions and comprehend the texts main idea (Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2008). Ermis (2008) examines the benefits of using graphic organizers before, during, and after reading to increase primary grade students' comprehension of informational texts. Results show that students who receive instruction that include graphic organizers, perform significantly higher on a number of measures (Ermis, 2008). Bradley (2010) investigates the effectiveness of using read alouds to model informational text structure to second grade students. The researcher explains that "focused" read alouds where teachers can "think out loud" are an effect strategy for teaching primary grade students the genre of informational texts. Second graders in this study indicate their comprehension by successfully writing their own informational texts. These studies show that a number of strategies may be used before, during, and after informational text read alouds in order to improve students'

comprehension including: Using text feature walks, graphic organizers, and "pause and ponder."

The current body of literature related to the issue of incorporating informational texts in the primary grades presents a number of effective strategies for primary grade teachers to use. Teaching informational texts in the primary grades is no longer a choice. The CCSS require that informational text instruction takes place in the primary classrooms. As primary grade teachers are expected to increase the amount of informational text instruction in their classrooms, it is important that they are made aware of strategies that are the most effective. Teaching informational texts in the primary grades provides students with a number of educational benefits, when it is taught effectively.

Professional Development

As the goal of this master's project is to create a professional development workshop that focuses on enhancing primary grade teachers' knowledge and instruction of informational texts, it is important to analyze research related to adult learning theories and best practices for professional development. This section of the literature review will be used in order to plan an effective professional development workshop that improves teachers' knowledge and instruction of informational texts. While reviewing the current body of literature related to professional development, a number of "best practices" emerge in terms of characteristics and formats. Based on this research, characteristics of effective professional development include: Providing opportunities for active learning and self-reflection, and creates a professional

learning community through collaboration. Research also explains that successful professional development is conducted in a variety of formats utilizing technology and allowing for continuous education.

Professional development characteristics. While searching for characteristics of highly effective professional development, research highlights the effectiveness of incorporating active learning into professional development workshops for educators. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) conduct a national sample of 1,027 teachers in order to determine what characteristics of professional development maximize teachers' learning. Garet et al. (2001) compare different types of professional development with the effect it has on teachers' learning. Findings show that implementing active learning in professional development workshops may increase teacher learning. Active learning activities highlighted in the study include: Participating in meaningful discussions, giving teachers time to plan and practice classroom implementation of skill/strategies learned, as well as observing fellow teachers and being observed (Garet et al., 2001).

Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002) examine how professional development impacts teachers' instruction. Findings from Desimone et al. (2002) produce similar results and a similar list of active learning activities such as giving teachers opportunities to observe and reflect on demonstration lessons. Results show that teachers who participate in professional development that includes opportunities for active learning may learn more (Desimone et al., 2002). Desimone et al. (2002) extend these results by explaining that teachers who participate in active learning

activities are also more likely to change classroom instruction and implement strategies/skills presented during professional development.

Another active learning activity not specifically addressed by Garet et al. (2001) or Desimone et al. (2002) includes opportunities for teachers to self-reflect, or evaluate themselves. Thornton (2006) identifies self-reflection as an important characteristic for effective professional development. Thornton asserts that using self-reflections or self-assessments as pre- and post- measures during professional development helps teachers assess personal growth. Khan and Begum (2012) suggest creating professional portfolios during professional development to give teachers the opportunity to reflect on their own classroom instruction and practices. These reflections or assessments can also serve as a tool to identify what teachers learn from professional development workshops.

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (2011) confirms that providing teachers opportunities to participate in active learning activities such as performing observations, being observed, and conducting self-reflections are effective strategies for increasing learning and improving instruction (Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, & Gee, 2011). The professional development guide, organized by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, provides a collection of research based "best practices" for professional development and lists active learning as an effective component (Archibald et al., 2011).

In addition to active learning, Archibald et al. (2011) identifies a number of characteristics related to high quality professional development such as establishing a

common goal, relating professional development to core content, and providing opportunities for teacher collaboration. According to research, successful professional development encourages teacher collaboration and creates a community of teachers (Archibald et al., 2011). The idea of teachers learning and working together through professional development is what Honawar (2008) terms a "professional learning community." Borko (2004) also advocates for "strong professional communities that foster teaching, learning, and instructional improvement" (p. 6). Both authors explain that teacher collaboration and the creation of a supportive community of teachers allow for a more successful professional development and improve classroom instruction.

Professional development format. Pritchard and Marshall (2002) analyze 18 school districts in attempts to find commonalities in the implementation of professional development among well performing school districts. Pritchard and Marshall find similarities in the way professional development is formatted. Well performing school districts often format professional development so that it is built into the school day. Some ways well performing schools use weekly scheduled staff meetings for professional development, build time into the school day for teachers of the same grade level to meet, and use emails and electronic means to communicate and conduct professional development (Prichard & Marshall, 2002).

Sawchuck (2008) takes Prichard and Marshall's (2002) idea of emailing and using electronic means for professional development one step further. Sawchuck investigates the effectiveness of using web based training, on-line learning modules,

and chat rooms to assist in implementing or supplementing professional development workshops. Sawchuck (2009) also looks at using sites that are similar to social networks. In order to accommodate the busy lifestyles of adult learners, the author explains, that using online or electronic formatting may be an effective and convenient way to provide professional development. Torrey (2012) provides examples of social networks or professional learning networks (PLNs) that have been designed specifically for teachers such as Edmodo, Classroom 2.0, and the Educator's PLN. Pan and Franklin (2011) take a closer look the PLN, Web 2.0 and describe the technological components these sites make available for teachers. For example, Web 2.0 provides teachers access to blogs, wikis, podcasts, image/photo sharing sites, and course management systems. Similar to the PLNs described above, Gray and Symth (2012) examine online professional learning communities. The creation of both online professional learning networks (PLNs) and professional learning communities, provide teachers with opportunities to share classroom experiences and resources, offer advice and support, and opportunities to collaborate with other teachers.

As online professional learning networks become more popular, it is important to examine how effective they are for implementing professional development. Dash (2012) examines popular online professional development (OPD) programs to see how they affect both teachers' and students' performance. Results show that teacher participants who received 70 hours of OPD demonstrated increased knowledge in pedagogical content and practices compared to teachers who did not participate, or

were in the control group (Dash, 2012). These findings suggest that OPD programs may be an effective means to conduct professional development for teachers.

Another research based effective characteristic that may be supported by electronic formatting is that professional development should be continuous and on-going. Archibald et al. (2011) explain that on-going or continuous learning is necessary for teachers to become skilled in using effective instructional strategies. Creating online professional development (OPD) programs, online professional learning networks (PLNs), and online professional development communities allows teachers the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals over extended periods of time. Features such as blogs allow for continuous feedback and support. Features such as podcasts allow teachers access to information on a variety of topics from a variety of sources. Based on the current body of research related to professional development, it appears that utilizing technology to provide professional development is an effective strategy.

Chapter Three Methodology

Data Collection

In order to answer the proposed research questions concerning the issue of teaching informational texts in the primary grades, extensive research was conducted. During the research process, multiple on-line data bases were used to search for literature related to teaching informational texts in the primary grades. Extensive research was also conducted in order to find literature related to adult learning theories and effective professional development. The on-line data bases that were used include: ERIC, EBSCO, Education Research Complete, Education Full Text, PsycARTICLES and PsycINFO. For literature unavailable through the SUNY Fredonia library services, Google Scholar and Inter-Library Loan (ILL) were also consulted.

In order to find the most relevant studies related to teaching informational texts in the primary grades, the following search terms were used within the data bases: “expository texts,” “informational texts,” “non-narrative texts,” “trade books,” “primary grade,” “lower elementary,” “kindergarten,” “first grade,” and “second grade.” While multiple terms were used to search for literature related to informational texts (e.g., expository texts, non-narrative texts, and trade books), informational text is the only term used throughout the research project to refer to this type of text because it is the language used by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2011). In order to find studies related to effective professional development the following search terms were used within the data bases: “high quality professional

development," "effective professional development," "successful professional development," "elementary teachers," "collaboration," "professional learning network," "professional learning community," and "active learning."

The last names of seminal authors related to teaching informational texts in the primary grades were also used to search for relevant articles. Similar to search terms, the last names of these authors were also typed into a number of on-line data bases. Seminal authors last names that were specifically researched included: Pappas, Williams, and Yopp and Yopp.

The search in the data base using the above mentioned search terms and authors' last names produced numerous results. Literature was first narrowed down based on the type of study. Only first hand, peer-reviewed sources such as theories, classic and seminal studies, and up-to-date empirical studies that address the research questions, were considered for this literature review. Secondary sources and research synthesis were not used. However, the reference lists from literature reviews that were located during the research process were used to find first hand empirical studies.

The source of the literature was also evaluated to ensure that all research was from peer-reviewed journals such as *The Reading Teacher, Reading Research Quarterly, Reading Research and Instruction, Reading Psychology, Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Early Childhood Education Journal, Journal of Content Area Reading, Scientific Studies of Reading, Research in the Teaching of English,* and *Early Education and Development.* Research was further narrowed down based on the participants. Only research that addressed primary grade students and primary grade

teachers was included. This is due to the fact that the problem statement and proposed research questions deal specifically with the primary grade student population and their teachers.

Data Analysis

When literature related to teaching informational texts in the primary grades was located, it was read, analyzed, and evaluated. These studies were then placed into file folders which were initially labeled: Background Information, General Information, Challenges, Benefits, Informational Texts, and Strategies. Categories emerged from these studies were then posted on the folders. Some examples of categories include "lack of informational texts available at the primary grade level," "Kindergarten and Grade One are capable," and "Motivation." Categories were used to further synthesize research and find additional connections within each folder. Categories were then consolidated into larger themes. The three main themes that emerged include: Challenges associated with teaching informational texts in the primary grades, benefits primary grade students may receive from the early introduction of informational texts, and effective strategies for teaching informational texts to primary grade students. When literature related to adult learning theories and effective professional development was located, it was also read, analyzed, and evaluated. This literature was used to find the characteristics, content, and formatting of effective professional development for educators.

Chapter Four Professional Development

Workshop: Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades

The goal of this master's project is to create a professional development workshop, for primary grade teachers and reading specialists, that enhances teachers' knowledge and instruction of informational texts. The professional development workshop titled, "Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades," will achieve these goals through the implementation of a three-day workshop accompanied by participation in an on-line professional learning network (PLN) that allows for continuous education.

In order to conduct a successful professional development workshop, research is used to support the most effective formats and content for maximizing teachers' learning. Day 1-3 of the professional development workshop "Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades" will be constructed using a number of characteristics that research finds effective such as providing teachers opportunities for: Self-reflection, teacher collaboration, meaningful discussions, and active learning (Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, & Gee, 2011; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Thornton, 2006). Day 1-3 of the workshop will also utilize specific formats that research indicates are effective for implementing professional development which include: Building time into the school day, utilizing technology, creating online PLNs, and allowing for continuous education and feedback (Borko, 2004; Dash, 2012; Pan & Franklin, 2001; Prichard & Marshall, 2002, Sawchuck, 2008; Sawchuck, 2009).

Format

Day 1 through Day 3 of the professional development workshop will be formatted in ways that research identifies as effective. Research explains that building time into teachers' workday for professional development can increase motivation and ultimately increase teachers' learning (Prichard & Marshall, 2002). Based on these findings, Day 1-3 of the professional development will be conducted in place of the schools required, weekly staff meetings that take place in the school's library/computer lab. The professional development workshop will take place over the course of three weeks instead of Friday's staff meeting. Scheduling the professional development during required staff meetings is beneficial for the teachers/staff attending because this time is already set aside. This accommodates the busy life styles of adult learners as teachers will not have to leave their classrooms, or commit extra time after school or on the weekends.

Emails and electronic communication will be an essential part of the format for the professional development workshop. Before Day 1, 2, and 3 of the professional development workshop begins, the workshop's agenda will be emailed to all teachers/staff attending the workshop. Pritchard and Marshall (2002) explain that using emails and electronic means to communicate information related to the professional development workshop can maximize teachers' learning and accommodate adult learners. The electronic agenda provides a brief introduction to the workshop that is related to the importance of providing quality informational text instruction in the primary grades, and a brief overview of the activities that will be

completed during each day of the workshop. All teachers/staff attending will be emailed an electronic copy of the agenda one week prior to the workshop. The electronic agenda will eliminate the need for a lengthy introduction at the workshop and also reduce the amount of time spent lecturing at attendees. This will allow the presenter to act as more of a coach than a facilitator. Technology will also be used to create an online professional learning network (PLN). The online PLN will be used to create a community of primary grade teachers that provides both continuous education and feedback. For the purpose of this professional development workshop, the PLN will take the form of a website that includes a blog with various sections. Teachers will begin contributing to the PLN during Day 2 and 3 of the professional development workshop, but will continue using the website and blog for the remainder of the school year. The goal of the PLN is to create an online library of "quality" well-structured informational texts that primary grade teachers can refer to at any time. The PLN will also create a forum for primary grade teachers to share additional resources and experiences while providing support to their colleagues.

Content

In order to enhance primary grade teachers' knowledge and instruction of informational texts, the professional development workshop will be based on effective professional development workshops that have been identified by research. Specifically, research identifies providing opportunities for: Self-reflection, active learning, meaningful discussions, teacher collaboration, and continuing education as effective means to maximize teachers' learning during professional development

(Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, & Gee, 2011; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Thornton, 2006). Day 1, 2, and 3 will consist of a number of activities that incorporate these characteristics including: A teacher survey, active learning activities that encourage teacher collaboration, meaningful discussions related to informational texts and informational text instruction, and the creation of an online Professional Learning Network (PLN) that encourages continuous education.

Day 1. In order to increase primary grade teachers' knowledge of informational texts and improve their instruction, Day 1 addresses two goals. The first goal is to help primary grade teachers reflect on their personal knowledge and experiences with informational texts and informational text instruction. The second goal aims to assist teachers in identifying features of informational texts so that teachers can successfully differentiate between narrative and informational texts. This is primary grade teachers' first step towards enhancing informational text instruction. In order to achieve these goals, Day 1 will include three major events: A brief oral presentation related to the issue of using informational texts in the primary grades, a teacher survey accompanied by a meaningful group discussion, and an active learning activity that supports teacher collaboration.

To provide teachers with the necessary background knowledge and the rationale for the professional development workshop, the presenter will begin by briefly discussing various aspects regarding the incorporation of informational texts in the primary grades. The presenter will specifically address the challenges that have

prevented informational texts from being used in the primary grades and the benefits informational text instruction may present to primary grade students. This introduction will allow primary grade teachers to activate their prior knowledge of informational texts and reflect on the personal challenges they may have faced while teaching this genre. It also aims to motivate primary grade teachers to improve their informational text instruction as they become aware of the many educational benefits primary grade students may receive from the early introduction of this genre.

As an opening activity, the professional development workshop will begin by surveying primary grade teachers' knowledge and opinions related to informational texts with the "Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades Teacher Survey" (see Appendix A). This activity will be used to help teachers reflect on their knowledge and experiences with informational texts. Thornton (2006) explains that self-reflection is an important characteristic of effective professional development. During the survey, teachers will independently rate: Personal knowledge of informational texts, the availability of informational text resources at their grade level, the quality of informational texts in their classroom, their perception of primary grade students' attitudes towards informational texts, and their ability to provide effective informational text instruction. Teachers will then participate in meaningful group discussions, based on the survey. During this activity teachers/staff will break into grade level groups where they will use the survey to help facilitate discussions. The goal of these discussions is to further reflect on teachers' knowledge and opinions related to using informational texts in the primary grades. Grade level groups will be

encouraged to explore their thoughts and opinions concerning the survey, share personal responses, and share classroom experiences.

Day 1 will continue by having teachers participate in an active learning activity. As the ultimate goal of this professional development workshop is to enhance primary grade teachers' instruction of informational texts, it is essential that teachers have the ability to accurately identify informational texts. For this reason, the second goal of Day 1 is to assist teachers in creating a list of criteria for identifying both narrative and informational texts. In order to accomplish this, the professional development presenter will provide a short demonstration that highlights the specific themes and text features that attendees should be looking for. Teachers will then work collaboratively in grade level groups where they will brainstorm and compare the specific structures and elements of both narrative and informational texts. Groups will work together to make a reference chart, using markers and poster board, that clearly identifies the genre specific text structures and text elements of narrative and informational texts. Teacher created charts will be typed and handed out at Day 2 of the professional development workshop to provide teachers a reference to assist them in successfully differentiating between informational and narrative texts. An example of the teacher created chart is provided in Appendix B.

Day 2. Day 1 of the professional development workshop intends to help primary grade teachers differentiate between narrative and informational texts. However, not all informational texts are "quality" texts that are appropriate to use in primary grade classrooms. In order to provide effective informational text instruction

in the primary grades, research explains that it is important to use “quality” well-structured texts (Dreher & Gray, 2009; Reutzel, Read, & Fawson, 2009). For this reasons, the goal of Day 2 of the professional development workshop is to help teachers identify which informational texts are "quality" well-structured texts. In order to achieve this goal, teachers will participate in three active learning activities that encourage teacher collaboration. Activities include: Adapting a checklist for identifying quality informational texts, using the adapted checklist to evaluate informational texts, and using technology to create an online professional learning network (PLN) that will be used to build an informational text library.

Day 2 of the professional development workshop will begin with a brief oral presentation related to the importance of using “quality” well-structured informational texts with primary grade students. In order to help teachers evaluate the characteristics of and identify “quality” well-structure informational texts, teachers will be given a "Check-list for Choosing Informational Books for Young Children” created by Stephens (2008) (see Appendix C). In grade level groups, teachers will discuss and analyze the checklist in order to determine if any important criterion is missing. Teacher groups will adapt the check list by adding or deleting criterion. To help teachers apply this knowledge and practice using the adapted checklist, originally created by Stephens (2008), each group will be given the same three informational texts that could be appropriate to use in primary grade classrooms. Grade level groups will discuss, review, and analyze each informational text using the adapted checklist. When finished, groups will share their findings and discuss how they rated each text,

focusing on what criterion the text had/was missing, if they would use the text in their classroom, and why?

In the past, the scarcity of informational texts at the primary grade level has presented a challenge for primary grade teachers (Duke, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2006; Yopp &Yopp, 2012). For this reason, Day 2 of the professional development workshop will introduce teachers to the online professional learning network (PLN). The PLN includes a website that is created specifically to supplement the professional development workshop (see a screenshot in Appendix D). The goal of the website is to give primary grade teachers a forum to share informational text resources and experiences through a blog, and assist them in finding additional resources that may be used during informational text instruction. During Day 2, teachers will create blog log-in if they do not already have one, practice logging on to the website, and practice navigating the different features, pages, and sections within the blog. Different sections of the blog include: "Quality Texts" (see a screen shot in Appendix E) and "Classroom Experiences" (see a screen shot in Appendix F). The "Quality Text" section of the blog is the beginnings of an informational text library for primary grade teachers. The "Classroom Experience" section of the blog gives primary teachers a place to review, discuss, and support colleagues' informational text instruction. The blog will contain a number of posts in each section to provide examples of what the posts should look like, and also to provide valuable resources for primary grade teachers. The website also includes a page dedicated to providing primary teachers

direct links to additional resources including associations and agencies that identify award winning informational texts (see Appendix G).

Over the next week teachers will be asked to use the adapted checklist, originally created by Stephens (2008), in order to find and post one "quality" well-structured informational text to the "Quality Texts" section of the blog under “Comments” (see a screen shot in Appendix H). The end result will be an informational text library that primary grade teachers will be able to refer back to. Blog posts must include: The title, year, and author of the text, the topic of the text (for example, Civil Rights Movement, Life Cycles, Rocks and Minerals), as well as, a brief synopsis of the text's content. Detailed posts will allow primary grade teachers to find “quality” well-structured informational texts that fit their needs quickly. Teachers will also be encouraged to share their opinions of informational texts and how they may use them in the classroom, in more of a discussion format.

Day 3. The goal of Day 3 of the professional development workshop is to provide teachers with research based effective strategies for teaching informational texts in the primary grades. Utilizing research based instructional strategies will assist primary grade teachers in enhancing their instruction. In order to achieve this goal, Day 3 will include three major activities that incorporate active learning, teacher collaboration, and through the professional learning network (PLN), continuous feedback and support. Activities include: Reviewing effective strategies for teaching informational texts to primary grade students, as well as planning and practicing a group constructed lesson that utilizes these strategies. The PLN, in the form of the

"Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades" website will then be used to share classroom experiences, ask questions, and provide support after conducting the lesson in primary grade classrooms.

To begin Day 3, the presenter will start with a short oral presentation that reviews the benefits primary grade students may receive from informational text instruction and highlights the importance of using research based strategies that have been proven effective. As an opening activity, grade level groups will review instructional strategies that research identifies as effective for incorporating informational texts in the primary grades. Teachers will be given a "Research Based Effective Strategies for Teaching Informational Texts" handout (see Appendix I). In grade level groups, teachers will review the handout, discuss strategies, and reflect on their use of these strategies and how they may be used in primary grade classrooms. During this time, the presenter will visit with each group and act as a literacy coach, by encouraging each group to explore how they could use each strategy in their classroom. Grade level groups will then create an informational text lesson plan using the research based strategies provided. Each group will then choose one of the "quality" well-structured informational texts that are used during Day 2 of the professional development workshop. Teachers will be given time to plan and practice their lessons. Before Day 3 is over, teachers will choose a day and time to teach this lesson in the following week. The list of teachers, days, and times, will be posted in the main office and electronically sent to all teachers attending the workshop.

Teachers are encouraged to stop by their colleagues' classrooms and observe their informational text lesson during these times.

After conducting their lesson, teachers will be required to post on the website: "Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades" onto the section of the blog titled, "Classroom Experience" (see a screen shot in Appendix F). Teachers will be asked to 1. List the informational text resources used; 2. Briefly describe the lesson, including the strategies used in 2-3 sentences; 3. Share personal reactions, thoughts, or the effectiveness of the lesson; and 4. Share students' reactions or response to the lesson. Teachers who conduct observations will be encouraged to comment on the lessons they observe. All teachers will be encouraged to review the "Classroom Experiences" blog, where they can ask for or offer advice, ask and answer questions, and leave feedback or comments on their colleagues' experiences. After reviewing the procedure for conducting the informational text lesson and posting to the blog, Day 3 will conclude with a "Professional Development Reflection" activity (see handout in Appendix J). The activity will ask teachers to complete short answer questions related to what they have learned during Day 1-3 of the professional development workshop. It will also ask teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of the presenter and the professional development workshop as a whole. The presenter will use the activity to collect information related to what teachers have learned and to also identify which aspects of the workshop go well and which do not.

Continuous Support

After Day 3 of the professional development workshop, professional development will become purely electronic and conducted through the "Using Informational Texts in Primary Grade Classrooms" website. Teachers will be asked to post "quality" well-structured informational texts to the "Quality Texts" section of the blog as they use them in their classroom. However, each primary grade teacher is responsible for adding at least one informational text title per month. The motivation for teachers to post to this section of the blog is the creation of the on-line library of informational texts. This will give primary grade teacher access to numerous titles of quality informational texts. They will be able to find titles related to themes they are teaching in their classroom and also explore how other primary grade teachers are using these texts. Primary grade teachers will also be asked to post to the "Classroom Experience" section of the blog as they have both positive and negative experiences teaching informational texts. The goal is to create an online professional learning network (PLN) for teachers, where they can quickly locate informational text resources and to provide continuous feedback and support to fellow primary grade teachers.

International Reading Association (IRA) Standards

This research project addresses a number of IRA standards, specifically, Standard 1 Foundational Knowledge: Elements 1.1 and 1.2, Standard 2 Curriculum and Instruction: Elements 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 and Standard 6 Professional Learning and

Leadership: Elements 6.1 and 6.2. The following matrix describes the specific components of this project that address each IRA standards elements.

Table 1

IRA Standard Elements with Project Components

IRA Standard	Project Components
Standard 1 Foundational Knowledge 1.1*Candidates understand major theories and empirical research that describe the cognitive, linguistic, motivational, and sociocultural foundations of reading and writing development, processes, and components, including word recognition, language comprehension, strategic knowledge, and reading–writing connections.*	This is addressed in this Master's Project in Chapter 1 a brief history describing different approaches to teaching reading and writing is presented. It is also addressed in Chapter 2. Theories and current literature related to the topic are analyzed and used to create a professional development workshop for primary grade teachers based on these theories and research.
Standard 1 Foundational Knowledge 1.2 *Candidates understand the historically shared knowledge of the profession and changes over time in the perceptions of reading and writing development, processes, and components.*	This is included in Chapter 1 Introduction, specifically in the discussion of different approaches used to teach reading. This Standard is also addressed in Chapter 2 where research is reviewed that presents evidence against the historically presumed notion that informational texts are too difficult for primary grade students.
Standard 2 Curriculum and Instruction 2.1 *Candidates use foundational knowledge to design or implement an integrated, comprehensive, and balanced curriculum*	This is included in Chapter 1 which explains a balanced approach to teaching reading, and the recent changes to the CCSS, which require that informational texts be taught 50% of the time. This standard is also included in the professional development workshop
Standard 2 Curriculum and Instruction 2.2 *Candidates use appropriate and varied instructional approaches, including those that develop word recognition, language comprehension, strategic knowledge, and reading–writing connections.*	This is addressed in detail in Chapter 2 which explains and reviews literature that presents a variety of strategies that are effective for teaching informational texts to primary grade students. The professional development workshop directly provides teachers with information regarding a variety of instructional strategies by reviewing and analyzing the current body of research.
Standard 2 Curriculum and Instruction 2.3 *Candidates use a wide range of texts (e.g., narrative, expository, and poetry) from traditional print, digital, and online resources.*	This is addressed throughout the mater's project as the goal of this project is to increase informational text instruction in primary grade classrooms.
Standard 6 Professional Learning and Leadership 6.1*Candidates demonstrate foundational knowledge of adult learning theories and related research about organizational change, professional development, and school culture.*	The professional development workshop located in Chapter 4 consulted adult learning theories that are reviewed in detail in Chapter 2, in order to optimize the effectiveness of the professional development workshop.

IRA Standard	Project Components
Standard 6 Professional Learning and Leadership 6.2 *Candidates display positive dispositions related to their own reading and writing and the teaching of reading and writing, and pursue the development of individual professional knowledge and behaviors.*	This reflects the candidates desire to pursue professional knowledge, and allows other teachers the chance to gain professional knowledge through the creation of a professional development workshop which can be found in Chapter 4.

Chapter Five Discussion and Conclusion

Overview of the Study and Findings

Findings from this master's project address the issue of teaching informational texts in the primary grades by exploring the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges and benefits associated with using informational texts in the primary grades?
2. What are effective instructional strategies for using informational texts to teach reading in the primary grades?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher conducted an extensive literature review. A close analysis of these studies show a number of challenges that have prevented informational texts from being used in the primary grades including: The lack of informational texts at the primary grade level (Duke, 2000; Yopp &Yopp, 2012), the lack of teacher knowledge related to informational texts (Olsen & Gee, 1991; Palmer & Stewart, 2003), and the assumption that narrative texts are more developmentally appropriate for primary grade students (Pappas, 1993). While research addresses these challenges, it also presents a number of educational benefits primary grade students may receive from the early introduction of informational texts. Research explains that informational texts may be motivating and engaging to primary grade students (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Mantzicopoulos & Patrick, 2010; Palmer & Stewart, 2003). Findings also indicate that informational text instruction can positively affect language development (Sivropoulo & Sakellariou, 2008), improve reading comprehension (Baker, Dreher, Shiplet, Beall, Voelker, Garret, &

Finger-Elam, 2011), and content area comprehension (Maloch, 2008; Pappas, Varelas, Barry, & Rife, 2003).

Considering these benefits and the requirements placed in the CCSS to teach informational texts more frequently, it becomes important that primary grade teachers can teach this genre effectively. Findings identify effective strategies for teaching informational texts to primary grade students. Strategies include: Explicit instruction on informational text structure (Hall, Sabey, McClellan, 2005; Williams, Hall, & Lauer 2004; Williams, Hall, Lauer, Stafford, DeSisto, & deCani, 2005; Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, & Pollini, 2009) and pre, during, and post reading strategies using interactive read aloud approaches (Cummins & Stallmeyer-Gerard, 2011; Duke & Kays, 1998; Heisey & Kucan, 2010; Moss, 2007; Terrell, 1992).

The answers to the research questions support a professional development workshop that looks to educate primary grade teachers on informational texts and informational text instruction. The workshop focuses on helping primary grade teachers locate and identify quality informational text resources. It also provides instruction on strategies that have been found effective for teaching informational texts. The goal of the professional development workshop and master's project is to better educate teachers on the genre of informational texts and to improve informational text instruction in the primary grades.

Significance of the Findings

Incorporating informational texts into primary grade reading instruction is significant to the field of literacy and education in general, as it is a current issue facing many literacy specialists, primary grade classroom teachers, school administrators, and policy makers. The Common Core State Standards (2011) created by national policy makers, require the teaching of informational texts at the primary grade level. However, many teachers may be unsure how to do this. As primary grade teachers are required to use informational texts, it is important that teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide this type of instruction effectively. As this project identifies the ability of primary grade students to learn from informational texts and the benefits it may present for these students, it becomes evident that primary grade teachers need to become better educated on how to teach this genre. In order to accomplish this, school districts and building administrators may need to: Recognize the importance of informational text instruction, ensure they are selecting literacy curriculum that addresses this genre, and provide teachers with professional development similar to the workshop included in this master's project.

The project also identifies a number of strategies that have been proven effective for using informational texts in the primary grades. Teachers and literacy specialists can directly utilize these instructional strategies in their classrooms. The project also educates teachers and literacy specialists on how to differentiate between narrative and informational texts, as well as how to identify "quality" well-structured informational texts. While this project and its findings are significant to educators,

findings are also significant to parents/guardians. With the knowledge that informational texts may help prevent the fourth grade slump, parents/guardians may encourage their children to read more of this genre. Parents may also find that informational texts are motivating to primary grade students and provide a number of educational benefits. By providing their children access to the informational text genre, they may find that their child is more motivated to read.

Limitations

In order to ensure reliability during the data collection process, the master's project covers a wide range of data bases, consults multiple journals, and utilizes a variety of key words. In order to ensure the validity of the project, the literature review considers multiple perspectives and covers many different aspects of the issue related to informational text instruction. While these specific steps were taken to maximize validity and reliability, there are limitations to the master's project. The data collection process was limited by the number of data bases available through the SUNY Fredonia library and the journals that these data bases cover. The key words used to search for literature related to using informational texts in the primary grades were limited to the researcher's knowledge of the topic and the specific questions posed by the master's project. Due to the time frame, not every study related to using informational texts in the primary texts was reviewed. For this reason, the literature review may not include every perspective or every strategy that has been found effective for using informational texts in the primary grades.

Conclusion

This master's project answers the proposed research questions related to using informational texts in the primary grades. Findings include the challenges, benefits, and effective instructional strategies associated with teaching informational texts in the primary grades. In the past, informational texts have not been widely used in the primary grades (Duke, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2012). This master's project attributes the limited exposure to informational text in the primary grades to a lack of teacher knowledge and the scarcity of informational resources at the primary level (Duke, 2000; Yopp & Yopp, 2012). However, findings also identify a number of educational benefits primary grade students may receive from the early introduction of informational texts. In order for primary grade students to enjoy these educational benefits, teachers must have the knowledge and tools necessary to use informational texts effectively. Therefore, findings from this master's project present a number of research-based instructional strategies that have been shown effective for using informational texts with primary grade students.

In order to share the knowledge gained from this master's project, a professional development workshop is appropriate. To maximize the effectiveness of the professional development workshop, literature related to effective professional development formats, content and adult learning theories was consulted. The three-day workshop accompanied by an online Professional Learning Network (PLN) presents the findings from the master's project in order to increase teachers' knowledge of informational texts and improve informational text instruction.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the amount of literature related to using informational texts in the primary grades is increasing, there are gaps in the current body of research. Current literature highlights the immediate benefits primary grade students may receive from informational text instruction, but it provides little information related to the long term benefits students may receive. In order to clearly identify the long term benefits, there is a need for longitudinal studies that follow primary grade students who receive informational text instruction into the upper elementary grades. These types of studies will provide evidence related to the early introduction of informational texts and how this may or may not impact the fourth grade slump.

Further research is also needed to identify additional strategies that may be effective for using informational texts. During the data collection process, it was somewhat difficult to find empirical studies and action research projects related to effective strategies for using informational texts with the primary grade student population. Peer-reviewed literature from distinguished journals provided numerous instructional strategies suggested by teachers and authors but the strategies were not supported by research. While many of these articles presented strategies that sound engaging, it is important that research provides evidence of their effectiveness.

Another gap on this topic includes the lack of research related to specific populations of students including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with special needs. During the data collection process, very few studies were found that address these specific populations. Considering the diverse make up of

elementary schools, it is important to identify effective instructional strategies for teaching these groups of students.

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Appendices

Professional Development Overview

"Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades"

Day 1-3/PLN

Week 1 Day 1 (In School Library)
Email Day 1 Agenda
Welcome/Brief Introduction
Activity 1: Teacher survey
Meaningful Group Discussion: Discuss survey in grade-level groups
Activity 2: Teacher groups create general criteria for identifying informational and narrative texts
Homework: Read electronic copy of the agenda for Day 2

Week 2 Day 2 (In the School Library/Computer Lab)
Email Day 2 Agenda
Meaningful Group Discussion: Using "quality" well-structured informational texts
Group Activity 1 (A): Analyze, discuss, and adapt the "Checklist" for choosing informational texts (Stephens, 2008)
Group Activity 1 (B): Evaluate texts using the adapted "Checklist"
Meaningful Group Discussion: Discuss evaluated texts
Activity 2: Online professional learning network- Introduce/practice using blog
Homework: Teachers add one "quality" informational text to the "Informational Text Library" section of the blog. Read electronic copy of the agenda for Day 3

Week 3 Day 3 (In the School Library/Computer Lab)
Email Day 3 Agenda
Group Activity 1: Evaluate model informational text lesson plan (Guillaume, 1998)
Meaningful Group Discussion: Review model lesson format and instructional strategies
Group Activity 2: Plan and practice teaching group constructed lesson plan
Activity 3: Review "Classroom Experience" blog
Concluding Activity: Teacher Reflection on Day 1-3 of workshop
Homework: Sign up date/time to teach lesson plan, teachers post experience/reactions related to group constructed informational text lesson

PLN/Continuous Education
http://informationaltextsk-3.doodlekit.com
Teachers post "quality" informational texts to the "Quality Texts" section of the blog as they use them in their classroom (at least one informational text title per month).

Teachers post to the "Classroom Experience" section of the blog as they have both positive and negative experiences teaching informational texts. Allows teacher to provide and receive continuous feedback and support.

Appendix A
Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades Teacher Survey

Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades Teacher Survey

Circle your response to questions 1-6.

1. Did the recent changes to the CCSS affect the amount of informational text instruction you provide in your primary grade classroom?
   No Somewhat Yes

2. Do you feel that informational text resources at the primary grade level are readily available?
   No Somewhat Yes

3. Do you feel that primary grade students enjoy informational texts?
   No Somewhat Yes

4. Do you feel comfortable teaching informational texts to primary grade students?
   No Somewhat Yes

5. Do you feel that you have the knowledge to identify texts as narrative or informational?
   No Somewhat Yes

6. Do you feel that you have the knowledge to identify quality, well-structured informational texts?
   No Somewhat Yes

Additional Questions to Facilitate Discussion

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

8. What specific strategies do you use to teach informational texts?

9. How do primary grade students in your class respond to informational texts?

10. How might you increase the amount and variety of informational text instruction in your classroom?

Appendix B

Criteria for Identifying Narrative vs. Informational Texts

Narrative Texts	**Informational Texts**
Primary purpose: To entertain, share experiences, or tell a story Predictable "story structure" • Characters • Setting • Plot • Resolution • Theme Typically illustrate • Events • actions • emotions • situations	Primary purpose: To convey information about the natural or social world Multiple text structures • Question/answer • Main idea/detail • Cause and effect • Order/Sequence Technical vocabulary Unique text features • Headings • Captions • Diagrams/charts

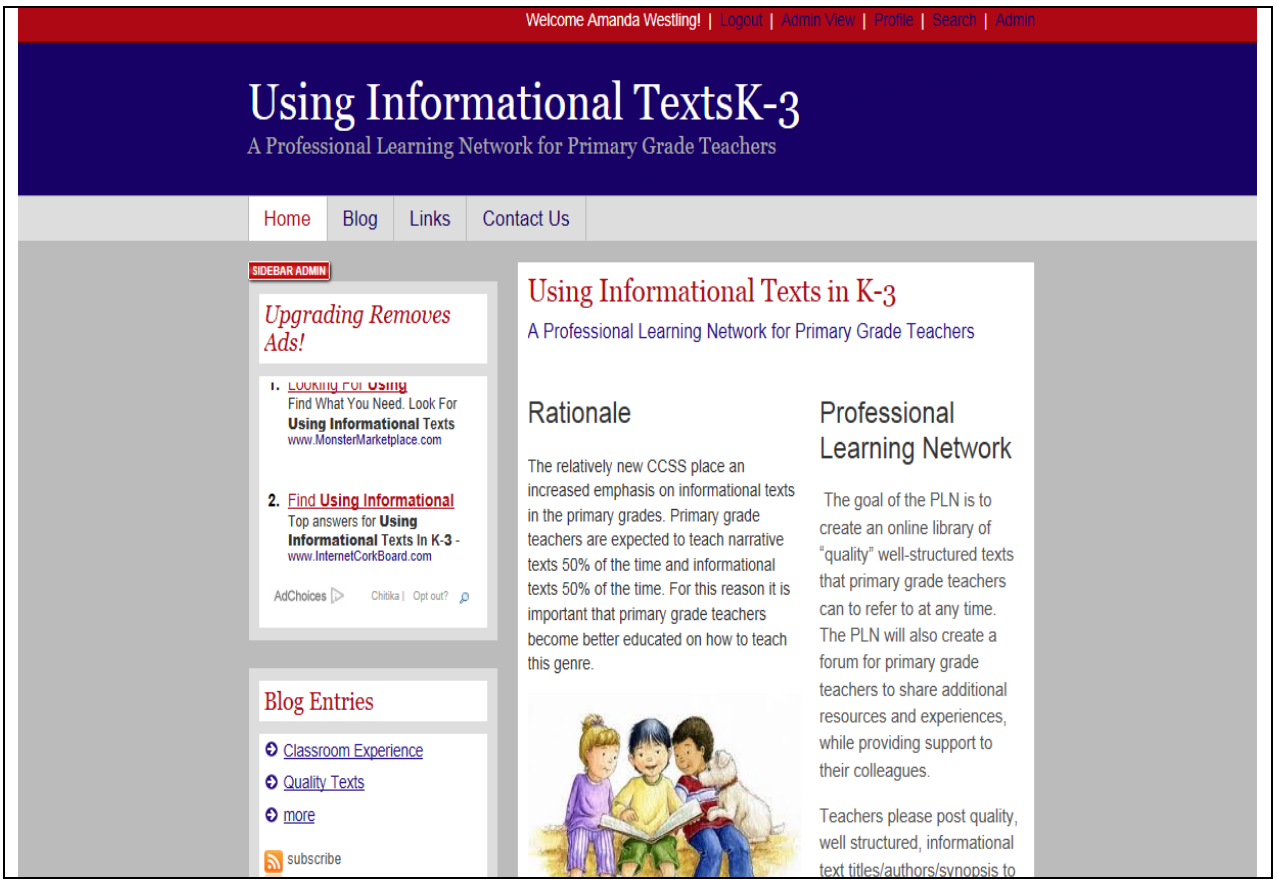
Appendix C

Checklist for Choosing Informational Books for Young Children (Stephens, 2008)

1. Cover
_____Is the cover attractive? Is it colorful but not too busy?
_____Is the title short enough to entice interest?
_____Are the words understandable and in a large enough font?
2. Content/topic
_____Does the writer share intriguing facts?
_____Is the topic interesting to young students?
_____Is the content current and age appropriate?
_____Is the content accurate and reliable? Does the writer provide references or evidence of reputable research sources?
3. Illustrations
_____Are the illustrations large, clear, and bright but not overly crowded or busy?
_____Do the photographs invite the reader to explore the text?
_____Do the illustrations explain and enhance the content?
_____Are the labels and captions simple yet sufficient?
4. Organization
_____When appropriate, does the book include a table of contents, index, and glossary?
_____Are clearly divided sections, headings, and subheadings provided?
5. Font size and type
_____Do the spacing and placement of the words make the passages easy to read?
_____Can a young reader follow the text along each page easily?

Appendix D

Using Informational Texts K-3 (Website Homepage)

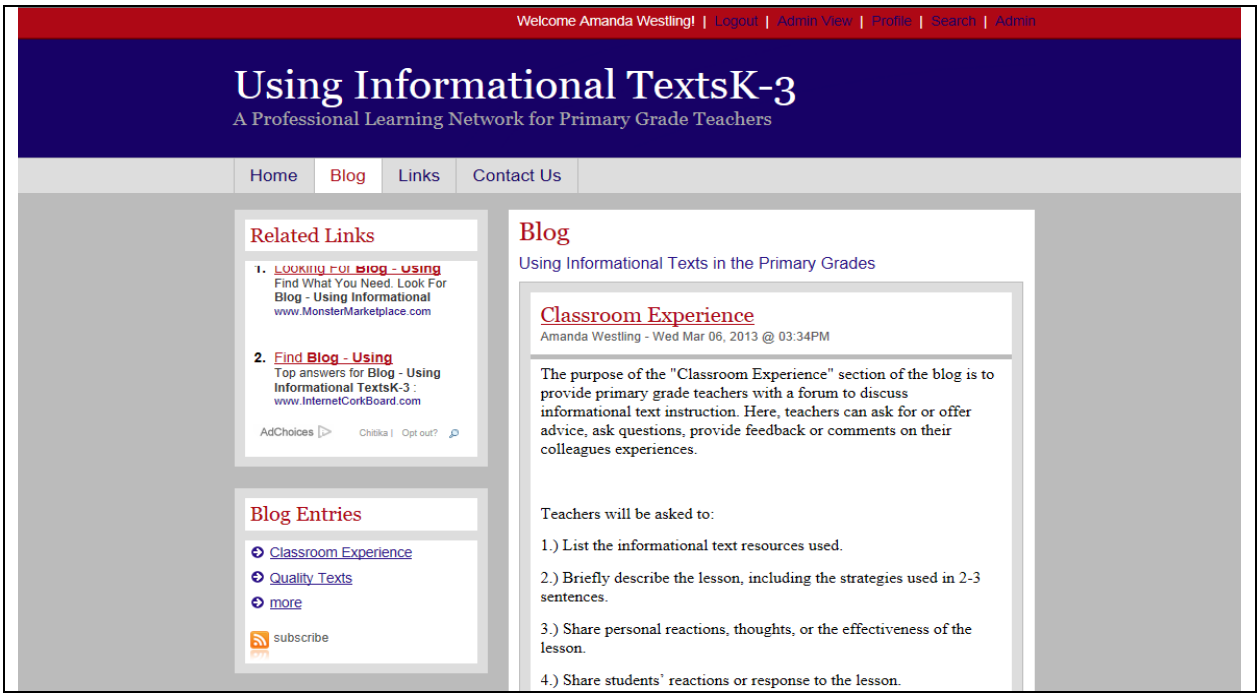


Appendix E

Quality Texts Blog

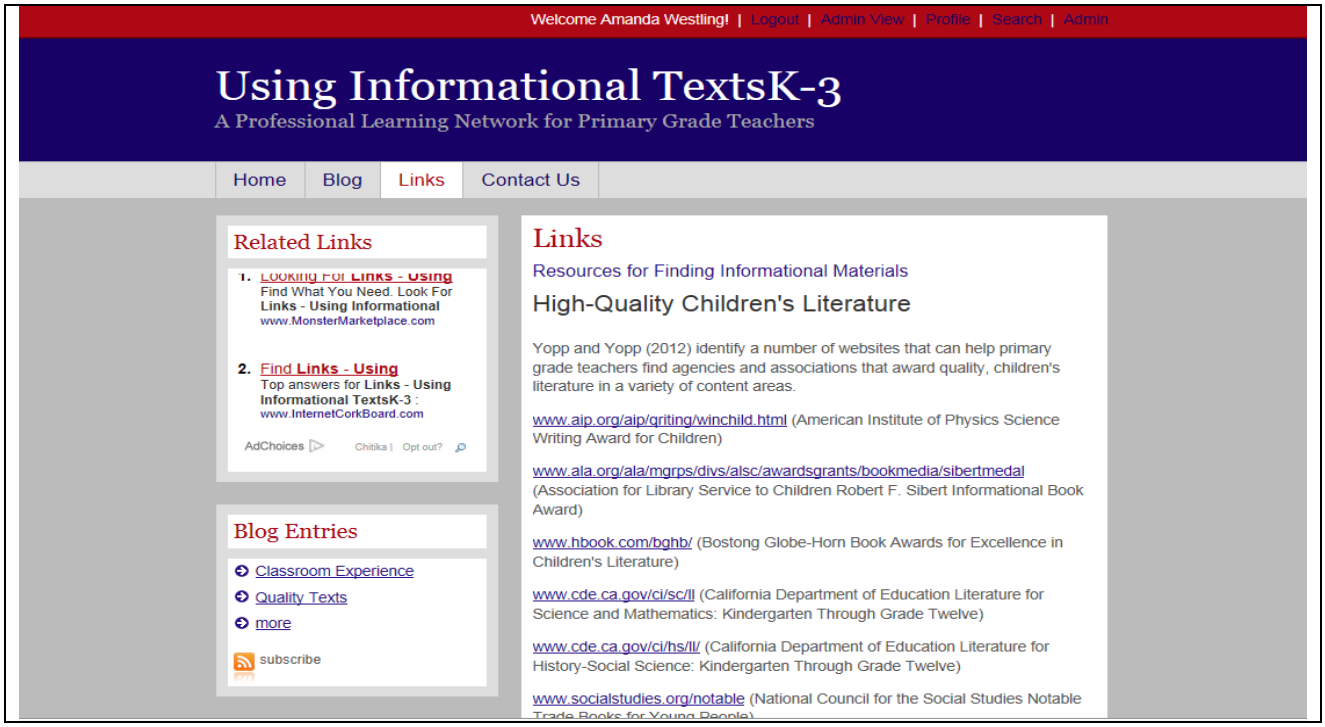
Appendix F

Classroom Experience Blog



Appendix G

Links-Resources for Finding Informational Text Materials



Appendix H

"Comments" Examples of Teachers Posts to the Quality Texts Section of the Blog

Appendix I Effective Strategies for Teaching Informational Texts-Handout

Effective Strategies for Teaching Informational Texts

Explicit Instruction on Informational Text Structure

- Provides students with information related to the five text elements of informational texts. Informational text elements include: The author's purpose, major ideas, supporting details, reader's aids (diagraphs, captions, headings), and vocabulary.
- Emphasize teaching primary grade students to identify the different ways informational texts can be organized, or structured. This requires explicit instruction on the various structures of informational text which include: Enumeration, time order, compare and contrast, cause and effect and, question and answer.
- Use "quality" well-structured informational texts or informational trade books with primary grade students to maximize students' comprehension of informational texts.

(Dreher & Gray, 2009; Hall, Sabey, McClellan, 2005; Marinak, 2008; Reutzel, Read & Fawson, 2009; Williams, Hall, & Lauer 2004; Williams, Hall, Lauer, Stafford, DeSisto, & deCani, 2005; Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, & Pollini, 2009)

Pre, During, and Post reading strategies to use with Interactive Read Alouds

Informational text read-alouds help primary grade students synthesize, summarize, better comprehend, and maximizes content area learning (Moss, 2007)

- Set a purpose for reading with teacher posed pre-questions.
- Activate students' prior knowledge by having them make inferences and predictions about the text's content/theme before and during the read aloud.
- Include summarizing activities during and after the read aloud.
- Implement both informal and formal comprehension checks during and after the read aloud.
- Use a text-feature walk to increase students' metacognition.
- Use graphic organizers before, during, and after reading.
- "Think out Loud" and model metacognitive processes before, during, and after reading.

(Cummins & Stallmeyer-Gerard, 2011; Duke & Kays, 1998; Heisey & Kucan, 2002; Moss, 2007; Terrell, 1992)

Appendix J

Professional Development Participant Survey

1. Reflect on Day 1-3 of the Professional Development Workshop. Which activities did you enjoy and find productive? Which activities did you not enjoy?

2. What did you learn from this workshop?

3. Is there anything you learned during the course of the workshop that you will be bringing back to your classroom? How will you implement it?