CHAPTER 1

Supporting Motivation and Achievement with Informational Text

Today's primary-grade teachers need to know how to engage their students with informational text. As we will explain, current curricular expectations in the United States demand that they do so. Thus, instead of featuring only stories that have predominated in young children's reading instruction, teachers need to integrate a wide range of both print and electronic informational text into their classrooms.

Some teachers may view this undertaking as a chore to be carried out because they are required to do so. But even if current curricular expectations were to disappear, we would argue that primary-grade teachers should integrate informational text into their instruction anyway, because informational text offers exciting opportunities for motivating children to achieve. As we show in this chapter, increasing evidence documents that young children benefit when teachers include informational text in reading instruction, and therefore knowledge acquisition through reading should be an integral part of learning to read from an early age. There are several reasons that this is true:

- Recent advances in technology place additional literacy demands on all readers.
- Most of what children read in school, except during reading instruction, and most of what they will need to read as adults, is informational text.
- Standards call for even young children to be capable readers of information.
- Standardized tests measuring young children's literacy achievement typically include informational text.
- Reading informational text can pay off in higher reading achievement.

- Informational text has motivational potential.
- Children *like* informational text.
- For some children, informational text provides a way into literacy that stories cannot.

In this chapter, we elaborate on these reasons and explain why it is crucial for teachers to use informational text with children in K–3 classrooms. In doing so, we draw on research and our own extensive experience, which includes a combined 27 years of teaching preschool through 12th grade. As teacher educators and researchers, we have an additional 53 years of working alongside teachers and children in classrooms exploring the use of informational text. We also have supervised university reading centers in which teachers and children have been actively engaged with both informational text and stories. Our experiences have led us to value the educational possibilities of informational text for teaching reading as well as for extending content-area knowledge.

We are not suggesting, however, that teachers add to an already full curriculum or that they discontinue using stories with young children. Rather, we propose that they examine their reading selections and replace some of the stories that they use with informational text. Much of their reading instruction, including word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension, can be accomplished through informational text just as well as through stories. A balanced mix of informational text and stories would provide a good introduction to the variety of genres that children will be expected to read and enjoy.

What Is Informational Text?

When we refer to informational text, we include a wide range of nonfiction material, just as we did in our earlier work (Kletzien & Dreher, 2004). Our use of this term matches the way the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) use it. Specifically, the CCSS define informational text as "Literary Nonfiction and Historical, Scientific, and Technical Text," which "includes biographies and autobiographies; books about history, social studies, science, and the arts; technical texts, including directions, forms, and information displayed in graphs, charts, or maps; and digital sources on a range of topics" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010a, p. 31).

Although the term *informational text* seems clear, the distinctions among the various types of informational texts make a difference in children's classroom experience. In Chapter 2, we describe in detail the various kinds of informational text written for young children and explain why teachers need to carefully consider the types of informational text they use.

Stories and Informational Text in K–3 Classrooms

Despite long-standing efforts to highlight the importance of using informational text (Hiebert & Fisher, 1990; Pappas, 1991), ample evidence exists that most of what teachers use to teach reading and writing in the early grades involves stories. For example, when Duke (2000) studied first-grade classrooms, she found few information books in the classroom libraries, little informational text displayed in the classroom, and almost no instruction involving informational text. Indeed, Duke found that teachers spent an average of only 3.6 minutes a day using informational text.

Although Duke's research took place some 15 years ago, more recent research indicates that stories are still predominant in many classrooms. Jeong, Gaffney, and Choi (2010) found results similar to Duke's in second-, third-, and fourth-grade classrooms, with second-grade teachers averaging 1 minute of instructional time daily on informational text. In addition, research on read-alouds in primary grades indicates that most teachers chose to read few information books (Yopp & Yopp, 2006). Moreover, while Moss (2008) found an increase in the amount of informational text in recent basal readers as compared to basals in the past (e.g., Flood & Lapp, 1986; Moss & Newton, 2002), she concluded that there is still a need for more informational text in basal readers to match the expectations that we describe next.

Expectations about Children's Reading and Writing

Even though most literacy instruction involves stories, expectations for children to be able to read, write, and learn from informational text are increasing as society has more access to a greater amount of information. To be able to find, understand, evaluate, and synthesize information across a variety of sources requires more sophisticated reading and writing strategies for informational text than has been required in the past (Dreher, 2002; Karchmer, Mallette, & Leu, 2002; Kletzien & DeRenzi, 2001). In order to develop these strategies, it is important that teachers provide children experience with informational text early in their developing literacy.

Today's K–3 children are expected to be able to read and understand informational text. These expectations are very clear in the CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a) that are now being implemented across the United States. As we write, 43 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories have adopted the CCSS (*www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state*). These standards aim to help all children finish high school ready for college and careers, and because workplace reading is overwhelmingly informational (Smith, Mikulecky, Kibby, Dreher, & Dole, 2000; White, Chen, & Forsyth, 2010), balanced attention to informational

text in school makes sense from the start. Some years ago, Venezky (1982) noted that literacy instruction in schools involves a steady diet of fiction and literary interpretation, resulting in a "chasm between adult literacy needs and school literacy instruction" (p. 112). As we have noted, this chasm has persisted. Hence, although literature remains important, the CCSS call for "students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 4).

For K–5 students, the CCSS lay out Reading Standards for Informational Text (downloadable at *www.corestandards.org/the-standards*; see pp. 13–14). These standards are organized into four categories—key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and ideas, range of reading and text complexity—and specify what students should be able to do grade by grade. By the end of third grade, students are expected to have developed the ability to "read and comprehend informational text, including history/social studies, science, and technical text, at the high end of the grade 2–3 text complexity band independently and proficiently" (p. 14). Consequently, much attention must be directed to informational text in primary-grade classrooms to enable students to reach that level of performance.

It is important to note that the emphasis on informational text in the CCSS follows in the footsteps of earlier efforts to give children the opportunity to experience informational text from the beginning. For example, in their influential report, the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) concluded that a successful learner in kindergarten "demonstrates familiarity with a number of types or genres of text (e.g., storybooks, expository texts, poems, newspapers, and everyday print)" (p. 80) and that a successful learner in first grade "reads and comprehends both fiction and nonfiction that is appropriately designed for grade level" (p. 81), with the same expectation repeated for second and third grades. The committee also noted that a successful second grader "interprets information from diagrams, charts, and graphs"; "reads nonfiction materials for answers to specific questions or for specific purposes"; "connects and compares information across nonfiction selections"; [and] "given organizational help, writes informative well-structured reports" (p. 82). By third grade, a successful student "summarizes major points from fiction and nonfiction texts"; "asks how, why, and what-if questions in interpreting nonfiction texts"; "in interpreting nonfiction, distinguishes cause and effect, fact and opinion, main idea and supporting details"; [and] "combines information from multiple sources in writing reports" (p. 83).

Similarly, the CCSS initiative builds on the work of national educational organizations and the states. In their joint position statement about developmentally appropriate practices for young children, The International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) argued that children in kindergarten should "enjoy being read to and themselves retell simple narrative stories or informational text" (1998, p. 200)

and that, by the time children are in the third grade, they should be able to "recognize and discuss elements of different text structures" (1998, p. 201). Additionally, well before the CCSS initiative, many U.S. states had established standards specifying that children should feel comfortable dealing with nonfiction by the time they are in the third grade (e.g., Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2003; Virginia Department of Education, 2003) and had included substantial informational texts on state assessments (e.g., Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003).

The CCSS emphasis on informational text also matches trends in reading assessment. Estimates some years ago already indicated that 50–85% of the reading passages in standardized tests were informational (Calkins, Montgomery, Santman, & Falk, 1998). Moreover, since 2009 the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has used informational text for 50% of the passages on its fourth-grade reading assessment (American Institutes for Research, 2005). The NAEP, known as the Nation's Report Card, uses even higher percentages of informational text for older students (55% in 8th grade and 70% in 12th grade). The CCSS aim is to match the NAEP's percentages in the amount of informational text students encounter in instruction.

Assessments developed as part of the CCSS effort were field-tested in the spring of 2014 and were implemented in the spring of 2015, with third graders as the youngest students to be assessed. As with the NAEP, these assessments require students to do well with informational text. Two groups prepared the assessments—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium—and both groups have released sample items (see *www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes* and *www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks*). The specifications for these assessments, as well as the sample items, make clear that students will not only need to read and comprehend informational text but will also need to engage in performance tasks in which they must deal with multiple diverse texts.

Finally, for any teachers who are not already convinced, we note that the United States is not alone in stressing the importance of young children learning to understand informational text. Informational text has long been an important part of literacy instruction in other countries, including the United Kingdom (Littlefair, 1991; Mallett, 1999; Wray & Lewis, 1998) and Ireland (Shiel, 2001/2002). In Canada, British Columbia's reading standards also require that young children become proficient with nonfiction (British Columbia Department of Education, 2002). Although these are just examples, they help illustrate worldwide awareness of the importance of informational text for young children. The importance of informational text is also reflected in an international assessment of fourth graders across 49 countries—the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). As with the NAEP in the United States, the PIRLS assessment is evenly split between reading for literary experience and reading to acquire and use information (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012).

Improving Reading Achievement by Using Informational Text

Providing a balance of genres for children to read helps improve their reading ability. Considerable research supports this claim. For example, in a special study, the NAEP interviewed fourth graders about their reading habits and examined those responses in relation to reading achievement. Students were asked about whether they read stories, magazines, and information books. The results showed that those who reported reading all three types had higher reading achievement than those who read only one or two (Campbell, Kapinus, & Beatty, 1995).

Although the NAEP study was correlational, intervention studies have documented the benefit to achievement of expanding primary grade children's range of reading experiences to include reading and learning about informational text. For example, Guthrie et al. (2004) found that integrating science text into reading instruction enhanced third graders' reading comprehension and was also highly motivating. O'Hara and Dreher (2008) found similar results with struggling third-grade readers. Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, and Pollini (2009) improved second graders' comprehension by teaching them compare–contrast text structure in science texts, while Halvorsen et al. (2012) facilitated comprehension of second graders of low socioeconomic status (SES) using social studies content. Moreover, in later chapters we will describe additional work with young readers that illustrates the benefits of increased instructional focus on informational text.

Children who have had experience with informational text in the earlier years will be better able to read and understand these texts as they progress through school. Indeed, there are reading skills and strategies that are appropriate for informational text (and not for stories) that need to be taught. Rather than wait until the intermediate grades, when children are expected to be able to read informational text and learn from it, teachers need to introduce these skills and strategies while children are learning to read.

Beginning Reading Instruction and the Information Reader

Some children, who might be referred to as "information readers," have difficulty learning to read using stories. For these children, informational texts can form the basis for teaching them to read and make the difference between success and failure in their learning to read.

Information readers find informational text much more compelling than stories. Hynes (2000) described a student who thought of himself as a nonreader because he liked to "read for facts" rather than for stories. But when reading and writing facts became an accepted part of classroom instruction, the student's attitude changed, and his self-concept as a reader and writer grew.

Similarly, Caswell and Duke (1998) described two children who struggled with reading and writing until their teachers recognized that they were much more

successful with informational text than with stories. Once the children began working with informational text, they were able to progress much more quickly.

We also have seen children with whom we have worked come alive with interest when given the opportunity to read and write informational text. For these children, stories are not as compelling. The chance to read and write about a subject of great interest gives them the motivation to develop literacy skills. This has proven true even for children who have been identified as struggling readers and writers.

Informational text has motivating potential for children who are curious about their world. Curiosity is a powerful motivator for reading (Baker & Wigfield, 1999), and children who are interested in a particular topic are motivated to read about it in informational texts (Dreher, 2003). In addition, Alexander (1997) has argued that knowledge seeking through informational text is motivating because it contributes to readers' sense of self as well as giving them an opportunity to learn about the world around them. They can become "experts" in areas of interest, giving them confidence in their ability to read as well as in their ability to learn and share their knowledge. For example, our experiences working with Jeremy, a struggling reader, showed that when he was given the chance to read and write about trucks his interest and motivation soared. He read and studied the pictures in several books and created a brochure describing his plans for a truck sales and leasing company. When he presented this brochure to the other children in his class, his excitement and sense of accomplishment were evident. As the other students asked questions, Jeremy's confidence in himself and in his ability to read and write was strengthened.

Sometimes children who are struggling with reading and writing find informational text more appealing because the content seems more mature. Second or third graders who are reading on a primer level may feel more comfortable reading a book about insects on their level than reading a storybook at that level. There are many accurate, colorful information books written at lower levels that may appeal to these young readers.

Reading Preferences and Informational Text

In classroom visits and informal discussions, we have heard teachers comment that children do not like information books—that they are boring and too hard to read. Some teachers are concerned that information books are "anti-fun" (Warren & Fitzgerald, 1997, p. 356). Others think like Correia (2011), who "was convinced that kindergartners preferred fiction" (p. 101). In contrast, we have encountered many instances of a preference for information books, like the kindergartner who complained that she did not like reading at school because everything was stories. As she said, "I don't just want to read, I want to *learn* something."

In fact, there is research evidence that young children presented with both options are just as likely to choose information books as they are storybooks

(Cervetti, Bravo, Hiebert, Pearson, & Jaynes, 2009; Kletzien & DeRenzi, 2001; Kletzien & Szabo, 1998; Mohr, 2006). In a study of children's preferences in the United Kingdom, Coles and Hall (2002) found that outside of school both boys and girls read books but also read magazines and newspapers, most of which are informational. Pappas (1993; Pappas & Barry, 1997) established that children enjoy information books and learn from them, and ongoing research continues to prove her point (e.g., Maloch & Horsey, 2013; Varelas & Pappas, 2006).

Therefore, children *do* like informational text, often choosing it over stories. Summarizing their research on first graders' book selections in science, Donovan and Smolkin (2001) captured the situation well: "Not only do they freely choose science texts, but . . . [c]learly enjoying themselves, . . . children share their own experiences, knowledge, and feelings ('yucky spiders!') during these interactions with texts from the world of facts" (p. 435). As Dreher (2003) pointed out, a powerful way for teachers to motivate children to read is to provide them with diverse materials, making information books an important part of balanced reading.

Summary

Primary-grade literacy instruction should include the use of informational text for both reading and writing. State standards, standardized tests, and national organizations recognize the importance of young children being able to read and understand information. In addition, children enjoy information books, often finding them more motivating than storybooks. For some children, informational text provides an entry to literacy that stories do not.

The emphasis on using stories for instruction persists, however, in spite of the many voices that have been raised urging teachers to use more informational text in their classrooms. One reason that teachers may be reluctant to use more information books in their classrooms is that they are less confident in their ability to design appropriate lessons. In the remaining chapters of this book, we suggest ways that teachers can develop their classroom libraries, choose good quality informational texts, and incorporate informational text into their literacy and content area instruction.

Throughout this book, we provide suggestions for using informational text with all children in the primary grades. The teaching and learning techniques that we recommend work with struggling readers and writers as well as with average or advanced readers and writers. Examples throughout are drawn from diverse classrooms that include children reading above and below grade level, children who have learning disabilities, children who are gifted in literacy, and children who are English language learners. Examples reflect urban and suburban districts and inclusion classrooms as well as self-contained special education classrooms.

QUESTIONS AND REFLECTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

1. This chapter notes, "One reason that teachers may be reluctant to use more information books in their classrooms is that they are less confident in their ability to design appropriate lessons." Discuss this point with the teachers in your professional learning community, sharing your thoughts on this issue. Some teachers are likely to be more confident when using informational text than others. Discuss how you might support one another in raising the confidence of the entire group as its members seek to make informational text an integral part of class instruction.
2. Review the section on "Expectations about Children's Reading and Writing." Carefully consider just what students are supposed to be able to do by the time they leave the primary grades. As a group, consider where your students are in terms of the sophisticated skills they need to develop. What kinds of initiatives might your group undertake to increase the likelihood that students at your school will reach the appropriate level?
3. You may have heard the view that children first learn to read and then read to learn, starting at about the fourth grade. In this chapter, we disagree: "Rather than wait until the intermediate grades, when children are expected to be able to read informational text and learn from it, teachers need to introduce these skills and strategies while children are learning to read." Consider the evidence that we have presented, and come to a consensus on your professional learning community's view on this issue.

CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Look around your classroom and reflect on your instruction. Do you see the pattern researchers have found in many primary-grade classrooms of a lack of informational text in classroom libraries, little informational text displayed in the classroom, and almost no instruction involving informational text? If so, are there changes you could make? If not, how far have you progressed in making changes, and what else could you try?
2. Consider Jeremy, the struggling reader, who blossomed when he was given the chance to read and write about trucks, and the kindergartner who proclaimed, "I don't just want to read, I want to *learn* something." Are there struggling or unmotivated students in your class who might be "information readers" like these students? What actions might you undertake to find out?
3. Review the assessments required at your school. What kinds of text must children read or listen to in order to do well? In particular, determine whether these assessments include informational text, and, if so, reflect on whether your instruction provides opportunities for students to learn to handle similar informational text.

Guilford Publications
370 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
212-431-9800
800-365-7006
www.guilford.com