INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI®
INTERMEDIATE GRADE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES, UNDERSTANDINGS, AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT INFORMATIONAL BOOKS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Denise Noelani Morgan, B.S., M.Ed.

*****

The Ohio State University
2001

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Diane E. DeFord, Advisor
Professor Evelyn B. Freeman
Professor Carol A. Lyons

Approved by

Professor Diane E. DeFord
Advisor
College of Education Graduate School
ABSTRACT

In order for students to become critical thinkers, readers, and writers of information, they must work with informational texts on a regular basis. Students need explicit instruction with this genre in order to become literate individuals who are comfortable and familiar with the structure and format of informational literature. Teachers, therefore, must be willing and able to include this genre in their literacy instruction. Unfortunately, students appear to have limited experiences with informational literature. I chose to work with intermediate grade teachers to explore reasons why this genre was being underused in many intermediate grade classrooms.

The purpose of this study was to explore intermediate grade teachers’ attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about informational literature. This study was carried out within the context of book group meetings, similar to adult book groups. I hypothesized that teachers were not using informational literature because they were unfamiliar with and lacked experience with this genre. In addition, I believed teachers would feel more comfortable with this genre if provided with opportunities to read and discuss these books in a supportive environment such as one with fellow teachers.

The participants met five times to discuss seven different books over a three-month period. During each two-hour session, the group discussed one or two children’s informational books appropriate for intermediate age students. These conversations were
audiotaped. In addition, each teacher was interviewed twice, responded in writing after each meeting, and completed one survey.

A major finding of the research was that intermediate teachers’ attitudes towards this genre became more favorable as they participated in the book group sessions. Many teachers were unaware of the multiple ways informational literature could be used in literacy instruction and credit the role of the discussion for helping them begin using more informational literature in their classroom instruction.

These findings demonstrate that intermediate grade teachers need numerous experiences with informational literature. While teachers believed it was beneficial to read informational books, the ability to discuss these books with fellow teachers was invaluable in their understanding and use of this genre.
This work is dedicated to my sister

Natalie W. Morgan

who kindly informed me that my first book should be dedicated to her

and

to my parents

Graham and Barbara F. Morgan

who taught me:

What the mind can conceive
The mind can achieve.

iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must thank my advisor, Dr. Diane DeFord for her patience and guidance from my very first day of graduate school. I have been fortunate to work with her both as her student and as a colleague and have grown personally and professionally under her guidance. She truly understands what it means to guide a student but also knows when a “told” is necessary.

Dr. Carol Lyons provided invaluable feedback about my research. I appreciated her ability to help me set a straight path amongst winding roads of data. Carol offered insights and guidance in critical areas of my data analysis.

I was fortunate enough to have Dr. Evie Freeman on my committee. Her energy and enthusiasm touched my heart. It is one of my greatest hopes that I may provide the same level of encouragement and support to my future students as she was kind enough to share with me throughout this process.

To my 901 friends, fellow wearers of the crown, my life as a graduate student has been enriched by your presence. I cannot (and thank goodness, did not have to) imagine this process without your support, laughter, and love for every step in this journey was made sweeter by your encouragement.

I am eternally grateful to Enrique Puig who provided around-the-clock encouragement whenever (he might say daily, but I will deny it) the cloud of doubt
descended. My appreciation of his friendship and support go beyond mere words. I am quite sure he feels he has just completed a dissertation as well.

I have been fortunate to encounter many wonderful friends who have supported me throughout different stages of this process. Your presence in my life is a gift and one for which I am deeply thankful. The support, never ending pep talks, and kind words of encouragement sustained me throughout this process.

To the teachers who participated in my research, Beth, Deena, DJ, Katie, Holly, and Lindsey, thank you for sharing your knowledge and new insights with me. I will always be appreciative of your willingness to participate in this study.

To my family, I simply would not be at this point in my life if not for you. I am a better person having benefited from your wisdom, guidance, and love. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your gifts that will last a lifetime.
VITA

1990  B.S. Early Childhood/Elementary Education
      The University of Alabama
      Tuscaloosa, Alabama

1992  M.Ed Elementary and Early Childhood Education
      The University of Illinois,
      Urbana-Champaign, Illinois

1992-1997  Classroom Teacher
           Long Grove, Illinois

1997-2000  Graduate Research Assistant
           The Literacy Collaborative
           Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture
           The Ohio State University

2000-2001  Graduate Research Assistant
           The Literacy Specialist Project
           Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture
           The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education
Reading
Writing
Teaching and Learning
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Profile of Intermediate Teachers Participating in the Study</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Evaluation Criteria set forth by the National Council of Teachers of English for the Orbis Pictus Award</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Book Titles and Author Recognition</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Content Topic Book List</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Summary of books read for each session</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Data Collection</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Data Collection Timeline</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Core categories and subcategories related to teachers’ attitudes towards informational books</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Teachers’ personal experiences with informational books in school</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Teachers’ level of comfort in selecting informational books</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 How teachers select informational books to use in their classroom</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 How teachers select books</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Teachers report their frequency of use of informational books for each subject area</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 How teachers are using informational books in the classroom</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 Teachers’ perceptions about children’s interactions with informational books</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 Difficulties students may have with informational texts</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.10 Teachers' perceptions of students' difficulty with informational books ..........107

4.11 Benefits of using informational texts with students.............................................108

4.12 Teachers' perceptions about the role of informational books in helping students become critical thinkers .................................................................109

4.13 Estimated number of fiction and nonfiction books in each teacher's classroom library ..................................................................................................................110

4.14 Informational books in the classroom library ..........................................................111

4.15 Issues raised about informational books during the book group conversation .........................................................................................................................114

4.16 Subcategories related to teachers' personal reactions to informational books .........................................................................................................................116

4.17 Subcategories related to using informational books in the classroom .................124

4.18 Subcategories related teachers' noticing and critiquing behaviors while reading information books .............................................................................................................126

4.19 Subcategory related to teachers' comments about their own reading process ........................................................................................................................135

4.20 Core ideas and subcategories related to the use or lack of use of informational books in the classroom ................................................................................................138

4.21 Categories and subcategories related to the overall impact of teachers' participation in the book discussion group .................................................................150

4.22 Benefits of participating in a group discussion ......................................................... 163-165

4.23 Survey of teachers' recognition of informational authors and titles ......................168

4.24 Classroom changes ..................................................................................................174
CHAPTER 1

DEFINING THE STUDY

Introduction

Most of the professional literature for elementary teachers consistently recommends that teachers create rich, literate environments for their students. Luckily, with the recent boom in the publishing of children’s literature, it is possible for teachers to supply their classrooms with vast amounts of books. With greater emphasis on the use of literature and a greater selection of books available, the question that arises is, what types of books do teachers most often select? Teachers, it seems, use fiction literature with their students almost to the exclusion of nonfiction literature. This lack of exposure to nonfiction literature is seen as detrimental to many students (New Standards Primary Literacy Committee, 1999).

Research conducted in classrooms document that teachers prefer fiction for literacy instruction with students. For example, fiction stories dominate the read aloud selections of teachers (Hoffman, Roser, & Battle, 1993; Scharer, Peters & Lehman, 1995) as well as the selections found in basals (Flood & Lapp, 1986; Moss & Newton, 1998). This research shows that even for those teachers who favor a more literature based approach to teaching reading, the use of nonfiction “lags behind” the use of fiction
(Strickland, 1995, p. 295). This limited use of informational books also spans across grade levels. An examination of 100 hours of literacy instruction in both whole language and skills based classrooms in grades two and six found a complete void of nonfiction materials in these grades, regardless of the theoretical orientation of the classrooms (Hiebert & Fisher, 1990; Fisher & Hiebert, 1990). Trabasso (1994) estimated that "as much as 90% of what is read by elementary school children is narrative in form" (p. 187). These studies suggest that student exposure to nonfiction texts in schools ranges from limited to nonexistent.

Teachers, like all individuals, are influenced by their attitudes and beliefs about the world. According to Kelly (1955), adults form beliefs out of experiences and through interactions with others. As a result, they develop constructs that are constantly refined. An individual’s interpretation and understanding of the world forms as experiences with objects, tools, and people are repeated throughout one’s life. Kelly goes on to say that, over time, these experiences create changes in one’s personal construct system. Consequently, these constructs determine an individual’s behavior. In other words, our actions are a direct result of the experiences and the accumulation of our interpretations of those experiences over time.

If something is to become meaningful to a teacher, like informational books and their attributes, then it is necessary for the teacher to encounter informational books in a personal way. According to Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel and Klausner (1985), an individual will decide the meaning and significance of experiences, and these beliefs shape and alter the meaning previously given to these experiences by the individual in
past interactions. Since people can construe the same event differently based on the meanings and past experiences they have assigned to that event, there can be great variability in the beliefs that are formed.

This brief description of how attitudes, beliefs, and personal constructs are formed provides a framework to examine why teachers may or may not select informational literature to use in their classrooms. It may be that teachers have little direct experience with informational books. Therefore, they may not place value on the use of informational books in the classroom. Teachers’ beliefs influence the choices they make in their teaching (Grossman, Wilson & Schulman, 1989). If we hold this to be true, teachers’ practices in the classroom grow out of experiences that have personal meaning to them. The absence or limited use of nonfiction may be a result of lack of personal experiences and knowledge about informational books. Clandinin (1986) suggests that personal experiences affect practice. Understanding the formation of beliefs and attitudes has implications for preservice training and the professional development of teachers since teachers must be comfortable and knowledgeable about informational books in order to help students successfully read and write in this genre.

A person’s behavior gives clues to his/her personal beliefs or constructs (Kelly, 1955). The complex network of beliefs guide an individual’s thought and actions, but are often not visible. “A construct is someone’s abstraction of reality that itself is real but not visible” (Bussis et al., 1985, p. 17). In addition to constructs not being visible to others, teachers are sometimes unaware of the constructs they hold and how these constructs influence their own decision-making process (Bussis, et al., 1985). Since teachers’
attitudes and beliefs drive classroom practice (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1994), it becomes necessary to create situations to help teachers engage in reflection in order to examine their personal beliefs.

As DeFord (1991) states, “Changes in beliefs are not easy to achieve” (p. 34). It becomes necessary to bring these beliefs up to the surface, to encourage “reflection-in-action” (Schon, 1987) by having teachers think about what they are doing while they are doing it. Talking with colleagues plays a vital role in this reflection (DeFord, 1991; Duckworth, 1987; Schon, 1987) thus making collaboration an important part in the change process. Duckworth (1987) feels that helping teachers learn involves giving them an appreciation of their own ways of understanding. In addition, teachers should face these unfolding understandings in settings where they can work with and appreciate other people’s perspectives and understandings. She believes that one important aspect of teacher development includes having teachers learn in the way their students learn in class, thus allowing teachers to experience what it is like to learn in this manner. It is important, she feels, to have teachers watch themselves learn. In this manner of learning, there is often confusion, risk-taking, and vulnerability as teachers tackle new things or explore a personally uncharted territory (Duckworth, 1987; Schon, 1987).

By conducting professional development with an eye to the needs of adults, it is possible to create a setting for teachers where they begin to explore their own literacy practices. According to Bussis, et al. (1976), significant change can only occur only when teachers engage in “personal exploration, experimentation, and reflection” (p. 17). The creation of a book group experience, where teachers join to become readers with other teachers, might be one way to help teachers reflect on their own actions in the company
of other teachers. Research on this arrangement for professional development has shown that teachers observe the meaning making process of other literate individuals first hand in this type of setting (Zaleski, 1997). In a book group, the teachers simply come together as readers to discuss literature. Teachers, in this situation, demonstrate their meaning making process publicly through the conversations that evolve from the book discussions. By doing so, they begin to reflect on their own literacy processes as well as those from other members of the group. Teachers become active participants in this setting and are “talking to learn” (Smith-Burke, Jones, Baird, Decou-Johnson, et al., as quoted in DeFord, 1991, p. 31). As DeFord (1991) states, “Talking openly about your teaching with your colleagues helps you to understand more about what you do and think” (p. 32).

Teachers who engage in book group meetings are placed in a realistic learning situation, quite similar to something that could occur in their own classrooms. Professional development that is crafted in this manner meets two of Duckworth’s (1987) conditions to facilitate teacher learning and impact change in teaching practices: 1) teachers must learn in the way that children in their classes will be learning; and 2) teachers need to learn in the company of others with whom they can share notes.

Statement and Significance of the Problem

There is a focus nationally on student achievement in literacy, including many calls for improvement in student performance in reading (New Standards Primary Literacy Committee, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This research focuses on three key areas that may have an impact on literacy achievement in today’s schools: 1) the amount of nonfiction students may be introduced to in intermediate classrooms; 2) the
nature of personal preferences and attitudes exhibited by teachers towards the nonfiction genre; and 3) the type of professional development that may help to improve instructional practice by changing teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about informational books.

There is a variation in the amount of experiences children are having with different genres in classrooms today (Duke, 1998; Hiebert & Fischer, 1990; Ivey & Broaddus, in press; Scharer, Peters, & Lehman, 1995). Teachers are overwhelmingly choosing fiction literature as the genre for read alouds, reading instruction, and other related literacy activities. Thus, an imbalance is created in the types of experiences students have with nonfiction text. As students progress through the grades, there is a dramatic increase in the amount of nonfiction material they read. Intermediate age students often experience difficulty when expected to read and to learn from informational texts (Alverman & Boothby, 1982). This difficulty may be due to the limited exposure they have received with this genre in schools (Langer, 1985).

Such limited exposure may result from the personal preference and attitude of the classroom teacher (Trussel-Cullen, 1999). Informational books may not be used in the classroom due to teachers’ lack of understanding and/or knowledge about this genre. Teachers may be unaware of the high quality, visually appealing informational books readily available. They may have little professional knowledge about key characteristics of informational books or the range of formats that exist within the genre (Korbin, 1995). It is possible that a teacher’s past negative associations with nonfiction material unknowingly influence their teaching decisions (Pavonetti, 1999).

Despite increased interest in informational books by many scholars and increased research about children’s interaction with this genre, there is little research on teachers’
personal or professional attitudes towards informational books. This study focuses on teachers' attitudes about and their reactions to informational books. I chose to focus my research on teachers because I believe that teachers act as gatekeepers concerning the literature they choose to read aloud to their students or to showcase in their classrooms. While instruction about nonfiction books should begin early in a child's school career, it is critical that intermediate grade teachers increase the amount of time they spend with this genre. Students in the intermediate grades are expected to deal with a higher volume of content area reading and writing. The lack of instruction about informational text may account, in part, for what Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) refer to as the "4th grade slump" in literacy achievement. Many students who were academically successful in previous years experience difficulty in fourth grade when the demands placed on them as readers often change. Students are often expected to infer, judge, evaluate, and synthesize content area material which can be difficult if they have had limited prior experiences in applying these strategies to informational texts.

The purpose of the study is to describe intermediate teachers' interactions with informational books. The teachers' comments and questions will provide evidence of their thinking towards this genre. By reading and responding to informational books, the teachers engage in new, personal experiences that allow them to reflect upon their beliefs, attitudes, and personal constructs towards this genre. Through these new experiences, teachers can modify or reconsider their previous beliefs or constructs about informational books. Teachers may begin to think about these books in new ways.

The book group setting was chosen as a means for providing professional development in a more relaxed environment than alternatives such as a university class
setting. In addition, the book group format allows teachers to explore their own constructs about this genre in the supportive company of fellow teachers. Reflection and learning occur as teachers share their interpretations, experiences, and thoughts. By improving teachers’ understandings about informational books, it is expected that students will receive increased instruction about this genre.

The Role of Nonfiction in Our Everyday Lives

Carter and Abrahamson (1990) suggest that, for adults, “book buying and book borrowing statistics confirm that nonfiction makes up the bulk of our reading selections. From magazines to newspapers, cookbooks to textbooks, personal accounts to essays, we are a nation of nonfiction readers” (p. ix). In this so-called “Information Age,” students must work within a world that relies heavily on their ability to critically read nonfiction materials and to make decisions based upon what they have read (Duke, 2000; Freeman & Person, 1998; Johnson, 1970; Moss, Leone, & Dipillo, 1997; Wells, 1990). In order to accomplish these goals, students will need ample experiences with informational texts.

The New Standards Primary Literacy Committee (1999) put forth a statement saying that it is important for students to be able to read and write within multiple genres from Kindergarten to grade three. They state, “Students who learn about (a variety of) genres enjoy a tremendous advantage over students who do not . . . Not to make students aware of their (genre) structures is to deny them academic success” (p. 32). Although the committee commented on the inclusion of multiple genres in the primary grades, it is apparent that the same holds true for students in the intermediate grades. For children to
be able to function in the 21st century, they:

will need to know, to evaluate, to discern, to infer, and especially, to marvel and to wonder at the world so that they can act more intelligently. If our curriculum and our practices are ready to lead them in that direction, excellent children's books stand ready to assist, as well. (Helper, 1998, p. 15)

Nonfiction books are available. Over 7,000 children’s books were catalogued by the Library of Congress in 1996, and of that group approximately 3,500 of the books were classified as nonfiction (Helper, 1998). The use of nonfiction materials with students is considered a way to foster “full access to literacy,” (Pappas, 1991) as nonfiction books represent a different way of saying and a different way of knowing about a topic (Bruner, 1986; Crook & Lehman, 1991). Failure to capitalize on this “literature of fact” with students in today’s classrooms may leave students ill prepared for their eventual entry into society.

Students’ Difficulty with Reading and Writing Nonfiction Texts

Many students fail to develop the reading and writing skills particular to informational texts (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham, & Gentile, 1994; Daniels, 1990; Langer, 1985). This may be attributed to the fact that students have limited exposure to these kinds of texts. The demands for reading and writing expository texts increase in the upper elementary grades leaving many students ill prepared to handle challenges such as inferring, summarizing, synthesizing, and analyzing factual information.

Intermediate students lack awareness of common informational text structures (Englert & Hiebert, 1984) and identify informational materials as more difficult to read than narratives (Alvermann & Boothby, 1982). Dreher and Sammons (1994) reported that
students found it difficult to independently locate information from a single textbook. This may be due to the fact that informational texts utilize a different style and organizational format than books written in a narrative style. Students read narrative text in a linear format gaining momentum throughout the text as they follow the storyline. Nonfiction texts often follow a less linear format allowing the students to flip through the text and stop and read at points of interest. Students must also be able to access nontextual devices (i.e. diagrams, maps, photos) used by authors to help convey additional information to the reader (Kerper, 1998; Moline, 1995; Trussell-Cullen, 1999). Students are faced with the dilemma of finding their “way through and around a nonfiction text” and must navigate through sidebars, glossaries, forewords, introductions, afterwards, and footnotes while interacting with the text and learning about the content (Trussell-Cullen, 1999). Students need specific strategy instruction pertaining to this informational genre. Therefore, teachers must explicitly teach strategies related to the reading and comprehending of this genre.

Students also seem to experience difficulty with many aspects of expository or informational writing (Daniels, 1990; Englert & Hiebert, 1984; Hidi & Hidyard, 1983; Langer, 1985). Daniels (1990) characterizes children’s difficulty in writing expository text partially due to the following: The writing curriculum experienced by many American students as they go up through the grades is essentially: story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, story, term paper. This collision with the dreaded term paper assignments is the most dramatic, most worried over and perhaps most emblematic demonstration of the “expository gap” in the curriculum. A predictable outcome of this unbalanced curriculum is that today’s students write much better stories than they write reports, arguments, or essays. The average American school child, from the primary grades upward, can churn out remarkably fluent, elaborated, and engaging chronological narratives of fiction or
personal experience. When it comes to tasks of persuasion, information, explanation, description, or analysis, however, the same child is far less fluent or experienced. (p. 107)

Whether for a proficiency test, a school assignment, or a real world need, students must be prepared to write informational or expository essays. In order to understand the format and structure of different types of writing, students must hear, read, study, and write in these particular formats. Students do not gain specific knowledge about writing informational texts from exposure to fiction materials. Limited contact with the informational genre makes writing difficult for students. The same holds true for reading. Students seem to need specific exposure to and teaching of nonfiction in both reading and writing. This suggests that the role of the teacher is of critical importance to students developing the strategies they need to read and write nonfiction material.

On a national level, the findings by various scholars examining large-scale assessment scores have indicated that students demonstrate a low level of achievement in both writing (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham, & Gentile, 1994) and reading expository text (Langer, Applebee, Mullins, & Foertsch, 1990). Findings indicated that schools which performed in the top third of the reading assessment scores throughout the nation had a higher number of students who self-reported reading informational books compared to schools that scored at the bottom third (Campbell, Kapinus, & Beatty, 1995). It becomes necessary to examine why students are having such difficulty with this genre.
The Role of the Teacher

At this point, an interesting dilemma emerges. Teachers have the autonomy to select the literature they will use or the basal stories they will read with their students in the classroom. They usually have complete control over the read aloud titles they select and often purchase books with their own money to add to the classroom library. Teachers are many times the sole decision-makers about the books which are introduced, used, and housed in the classroom. Thus, they are the gatekeepers, so to speak, of the literature used in the classroom. The apparent neglect of nonfiction books in today’s classroom may be due to teachers’ lack of understanding or knowledge about this genre or how to effectively use the genre to support and extend students’ capacities to read and write more complex texts. Trussel-Cullen (1999) states, “Frankly, most teachers still don’t quite know what to do with nonfiction” (p. iv). Labeling nonfiction the Cinderella of the reading/writing program, Trussel-Cullen describes a common occurrence of teachers leaving nonfiction out of the language program altogether or relegating it second class status. While Trussel-Cullen (1999) acknowledges that teachers often feel the need to do something with this genre, they “don’t know where to begin, how to begin or carry on” (p. iv). It could be that teachers are unaware of what books are available for selection. They may not understand the needs that students have related to strategy development when reading this genre. Teachers may have had very little professional knowledge about key characteristics of informational books, or the range of forms that exist within the genre, or how to match informational books to students’ reading abilities and needs.

The need for teachers to begin examining their role in the selection and the use of literature in the classroom has been suggested by many scholars (Hynes 2000; Lehman &
In choosing books to use in the classroom, teachers in one study appeared to be influenced when making selections by their knowledge of the students and the possible appeal or interest children would have for certain books (Scharer, Freeman, Lehman, & Allen, 1993). It is highly likely that a teacher's own personal preference is also influencing her decisions when evaluating a book's appeal for students. From their study of fourth and fifth grade teachers and their self-reported use of literature in the classroom, Scharer, Peters, & Lehman (1995) found, “The books and materials teachers use reflect personal values, and are an important influence on student's reading in and out of schools” (p. 33). They suggest teachers may begin to use a wider variety of texts if they develop a knowledge base about children's literature. They also recommend a book club as one possible vehicle for providing teachers with the necessary support for this endeavor.

Despite many scholars' increased interest in informational books, there is little research on teachers' personal or professional attitudes towards this genre. This study focuses on teachers' attitudes about and their reactions to informational books. The purpose of the study is to describe teachers' interactions with informational books in a professional book group setting. This study focuses on teachers because of their perceived ability as gatekeepers of the literature shared in the classroom. Findings from this study may begin to broaden the knowledge base about teachers’ understanding of the informational book genre and the value of employing a book club format as a vehicle for professional development of teachers in grades 3-5. In addition, findings from this study may also provide insights on how to help teachers learn to effectively use informational books to develop students’ reading and writing strategies.
Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

- What attitudes do teachers hold about the genre of informational books both personally and for classroom use?

- What understandings, issues, or concerns are raised about informational books within the book group conversations?

- What criteria or factors do teachers feel influence the use, or lack of use, of informational books within the classroom?

- What impact did book group discussions as a means of professional development have on teachers' attitudes, understandings, selection and use of informational books?

Assumptions

The following assumptions were utilized to focus this study:

- Teachers are the primary decision-makers for the books made available and shared in class.

- Teachers embrace those things that they know and hold dear. These areas receive greater attention and excitement on the part of the teacher.

- Teachers are more familiar with biographies and have a higher level of comfort with this kind of nonfiction book. For that reason, I chose not to include any biographies in the selection of books.

- While instruction with informational books should begin as early as possible, intermediate grade teachers are often faced with the challenging task of helping students learn from these kinds of texts in order to master the content area material for that particular grade.
Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research, these are the definitions of terms used throughout this investigation.

**Attitudes:** “a subset of a group of constructs that name, define, and describe the structure and content of mental states that are thought to drive a person’s actions.” (Richardson, 1996, p. 102)

**Nonfiction Literature:** nonfiction literature is text that draws on fact which has a primary purpose of informing the reader about these facts. This is a larger umbrella term that encompasses the different types of nonfiction text written, such as biography and informational books. This division between biography and informational books is also used in Children’s Literature in the Elementary School (6th ed.).

**Informational Books:** these books fall under the genre of nonfiction. Informational books are defined as books with the primary purpose of providing information about a subject or topic of interest.

**Biographies:** these books also fall under the genre of nonfiction and are books written specifically about the life of a person. For the purpose of this study, biographies will not be included in the texts selected for the book club meetings.

**Constructs:** “A construct is someone’s abstraction of reality that itself is real but not visible.” (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klauseer, 1985, p. 17)

The following four terms refer to evaluative criteria used in selecting the books for the meetings.

**Accuracy:** assess the book for authenticity of detail, adequate author qualifications, current and complete facts, and the balance of fact and speculation.

**Organization:** examines the logical development of the book including the sequence and patterns provided for the reader to follow.

**Design:** views the visual layout of the book to include use of font, illustrations, and illustration placement in conjunction with the text.
**Style:** critiques the writing for its use of rich language, use of appropriate terminology, and use of interesting, stimulating tone.

**Limitations**

As with much of qualitative research, the findings cannot be generalized. This study focused on a small group of intermediate grade teachers who self-selected participation in the study. The six participants volunteered for the study, which may suggest that they were more inclined or comfortable with nonfiction materials than other intermediate teachers. Therefore, findings can only be generalized to teachers of intermediate age students who are similar in background and opinion to the teachers who participated in the study.

Teachers’ roles in the classroom should continue to be examined. In particular, teachers’ facility with informational books should be studied across multiple contexts. However, this study was limited to teachers’ self-reported use and knowledge of informational books through a survey, interviews, and small group discussions. Further, I did not cross check teachers’ self-reported use of informational books with observations in their classroom.

The goal of the study was to characterize teachers’ attitudes and understandings about the genre of informational books. Therefore, the findings are important because they extend research about the attitudes and self-reported use of informational books by intermediate grade teachers in the classrooms. These findings may lend support to teacher education programs and those individuals conducting professional development to teachers since little is known about teachers’ interactions with the genre of informational books.
Summary

Preparing students to become familiar and comfortable with nonfiction text is a challenging job. To do so requires that the teacher be comfortable with this genre and willing to use these books with students on a regular basis. Yet, from the research previously cited, students are rarely interacting with these types of texts in school. The purpose of this study is to investigate intermediate teachers' attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about this genre in hopes of exploring teachers' interactions with informational books. It will shed some light on a plausible explanation for limited use of informational books by teachers. The book group format was employed as a means for allowing teachers to begin to examine their own personal experiences with this genre in a setting which requires teachers to become active participants in their own learning. This active engagement might allow teachers to reexamine or reconsider their personal constructs towards informational books. This is important since teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and constructions influence their instructional decisions. Students need instruction about informational books so they can successfully read and write in this genre.

Summary of Chapters

The second chapter provides a review of the literature related to learning from a sociocultural perspective, teacher reflection, teacher book clubs, and informational book use in the classroom. The third chapter explains the research design used in this study. In the fourth chapter, I present the data as it relates to my four questions. The fifth chapter offers conclusions and implications for the study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this review of related literature, I will discuss research that relates to learning and teaching both adults and children. The areas that most particularly relate to a study of teachers' beliefs and practices with informational materials in the intermediate grades are the following: 1) learning as a social process; 2) how teachers' constructs and their beliefs influence their teaching practices; 3) research related to teacher formed book groups as a means for professional development; and finally, 4) the role of nonfiction literature in today's classroom and its perceived benefits for elementary age students. This research review will provide a backdrop for reporting the results of this study and the discussion of the results in subsequent chapters.

Learning From a Sociocultural Perspective

I consider learning to be a social activity. The development of an individual's thinking and reasoning is a result of social interactions with others, and is a central tenant in the sociocultural theory of teaching and learning. This theory moves the spotlight beyond the sole individual to encompass the context in which this learning occurs. This
perspective takes into account past and present experiences that have influenced and shaped the individual to date. According to sociocultural theory, this coming-to-know can be, and often is, as important as the end product of learning.

Sociocultural theory acknowledges that learning is a complex process and cannot happen in a vacuum. Individuals are shaped and conditioned by the culture in which they are raised. What they know about the world comes, much in part, from their interactions with others as they think and act in their world. Therefore, in applying this lens to human learning, one “cannot interpret what the individual is doing without understanding how it fits with ongoing events” (Rogoff, 1998, p. 688). Not only does it become critical to realize the individual within the contextual setting, but also how the past and present experiences of the individual shape and influence the learning taking place.

Learners are not passive, but rather active beings in their own cognitive development. Humans are born with lower mental functions such as basic memory, attention and perception, which, according to Vygotsky (1978), is very much similar to primates. These biological behaviors are instinctive to us as humans. What distinguishes us from primates is the human ability to transform our lower mental functions into higher mental functions. For example, we engage in activities such as selective attention as a result of our participation in social activities (Wertsch, 1989). We also have the ability to use signs and tools to aid in this transformation. Signs are important elements in nonfiction literature. The visual text guides and acts as signposts for students to enhance their understanding of the information. The illustrations, cross-sections, map scales, and arrows in diagrams are examples of signs available to the reader in informational books.
Language is often the primary tool through which learning occurs. "Language provides humans with a powerful tool for thinking and communicating" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 16). Speech is first social as individuals communicate with each other and thoughts are shared. Language mediates the social interactions between individuals. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs on two planes. First learning appears in the interpsychological (social) plane before moving to the intrapsychological (inner) plane. In other words, prior to being internalized by an individual, learning occurs first with others through social interaction.

The ability to participate in a group allows each member to contribute his or her own expertise on the topic. In many cases, not all group members will share the same expertise. Vygotsky used the term "Zone of Proximal Development" to mean "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86). Individuals can serve in the role of "expert others" or "more capable peers" to further the understanding of the group. While Vygotsky advocated the power of a "more capable peer" to enable other learners, Wells (1996) believes a group with no proclaimed expert is still a beneficial group arrangement, for the expertise of members may shift from task to task. The more expert other can "step up" when his or her particular skill or knowledge is needed by the group.

Vygotsky acknowledged the social origins of cognition in individuals and valued dialogue as a means for humans to develop and create knowledge together before new
learning is internalized within the individual. Examining learning from a sociocultural perspective requires that the individual, the context, and social interactions be taken into account when the formation of knowledge is the focus of research.

The Reflective Teacher

DeFord (1979) examined how teachers' theoretical orientation towards reading knowingly or unknowingly influenced their instruction in the classroom. How teachers taught reading reflected two core areas of belief: 1) their beliefs about what they considered important in teaching reading; and 2) their beliefs about how children learn to read. Teachers' actions and judgments, dictated by their beliefs, in turn, influence their students. Children interpret what is important about reading based, in part, on how they were taught. One's beliefs are constructed through social experiences, and act "as a filter" in their perceptions of the world (DeFord, p. 142). Individuals filter new ideas and knowledge through their previous knowledge from past experiences. Those ideas that are in agreement are often accepted and added to the teacher's knowledge base. This knowledge base continues to shape and lead teachers' instructional decisions.

Since teachers' personal views and attitudes are an essential indicator of what gets taught (Duckworth, 1987; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992), and teachers' views shape how they teach (DeFord, 1979; Duckworth, 1987; Richardson, 1994, 1996), it is necessary for them to become aware of new theories and instructional practices. These different ways of teaching and learning must extend beyond their own experiences, so they might offer students a wider range of teaching and learning opportunities. As teachers, it becomes important to think about teaching beyond our own personal experiences and familiar
patterns. So, professional development must help teachers move beyond their own professional experiences, or familiar patterns, to integrate new information into their practices.

One means of extending teachers’ experiences is to place them in learning situations with colleagues. This can be difficult to accomplish because, in traditional school settings, educators are often denied the ability to develop “collective meaning together” due to hurried interactions at faculty meetings as well as in the lunchroom (Lambert, 1995, p. 29). Unfortunately, these rushed encounters “tend to draw on the sameness of teaching, reaffirming and reiterating similar educational practices” (p. 29). Something outside this norm is needed for teachers to tap their own potential.

Creating environments where teachers are able to move beyond “the sameness of teaching” requires teachers to step into the role of learner and work within activities that allow them to gain access to their experiences, knowledge, and beliefs (Walker & Lambert, 1995). This new learning situation may provide “cognitive dissonance” within learners as they experience something that does not fit with earlier beliefs. This new situation may prompt learners to reflect on that aspect of their own learning and the learning of others when their beliefs are challenged in a new situation. Reflection occurs when teachers consider and evaluate their own teaching practices. It is important for teachers to watch themselves learn and consider this process (Duckworth, 1987). Schon (1983) considers this self-reflection to be vital for fostering understanding and meaning making within the individual. Walker and Lambert (1995) state that “in the process of encountering new experiences and applying reflective interpretation within social
contexts, the individual learns and comes to know" (p. 2). In *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Schon (1987) demonstrates that professional conversations help teachers clarify their thinking and take on new practices more easily.

Teacher reflection plays a significant role in improving and refining classroom practices (DeFord, 1991; Lambert, 1995; Lyons, 1993; Schon, 1983). Teachers adapt their behaviors based on this reflection and develop or refine their understandings based on their experiences. As teachers begin to observe their own learning process and the processes of others, they are engaging in reflection-in-action, thinking about what they are doing while they are doing it. Reflection-in-action is vital to improved performance and leads to continued growth over time (Schon, 1983).

In order to bring about real change in schools, it becomes necessary to create opportunities for teachers to learn in new ways. In taking on reflective practices, it is important for teachers to: 1) experience learning in a manner very similar to that of their students; and 2) experience the support of others engaged in this same type of learning experience (Duckworth, 1987). This learning, Duckworth (1987) warns, is "messy" and it is important for teachers to understand and begin to feel comfortable in learning situations and believe that "knowing the right answer is overrated" (p. 64). She continues that teachers, while engaged in this learning process, need to come into contact with other people's ideas and ways of learning. By paying attention to their own confusion and by taking risks, teachers should consider their own knowledge construction seriously while making an effort to understand each other's perspectives on educational issues.

Examining a multi-dimensional model of professional development, Rodgers, Fullerton, and DeFord (in press) created learning opportunities for teachers to engage in
multiple conversations around shared teaching experiences. They proposed that new understandings would develop as the teachers conversed with peers about instruction. The teachers in this study had multiple opportunities to observe demonstration lessons (where someone modeled a whole lesson or a portion of a teaching procedure) and those lessons provided the catalyst for talk about instructional practices and teacher decision making. In fact, the teachers considered demonstrations to be the most powerful experience when taking on something new or reshaping their own practice. The teachers also valued the conversations that surrounded the demonstrations. Teacher reflection occurred as the observations and conversations helped the teachers to examine their own practice. These demonstrations could be considered as providing a common experience from which the teachers could begin their discussion. In light of what each person observed, the conversation that took place while the lesson occurred encouraged comments, questions, and interpretations to be put forth as the teachers confirmed, challenged, or questioned statements being made. The findings of this study indicate that opportunities to see and talk about real life examples were an important catalyst in the teachers’ learning.

These live demonstrations were of great importance to teacher change and they served the purpose of creating a common focal point for the conversation to begin. In some cases, it may be possible for a shared experience to become the common experience from which conversation emerges. While in the Rodgers, Fullerton, and DeFord study, the common experience was live demonstrations, there are a variety of educational tools, observations, or models of teaching procedures that could provide a common experience
that sparks conversation among teachers. The authors report that:

> the reciprocity of conversation and demonstration served as mutually influential tools that enabled the teachers to construct further understandings through reflection, problem solving, and reasoning. Together, these tools provided the impetus that encouraged participants to constantly weigh personal rationales and knowledge against those of others. (p. 14)

The role of a shared text may also provide that impetus for teachers to consider and evaluate their personal reactions and practices with a specific genre as a result of their reading of and discussion around a common text.

### Teacher Book Clubs

There has been recent growth in the popularity and formation of book groups in both the general public and in educational circles. People are reading and meeting with fellow readers to discuss books. Book discussion groups are even being televised as seen monthly on the Oprah show. Regardless of the name used, be it book groups, literature discussion groups, or Teachers As Readers (TAR), the members of these discussion groups meet for the same purpose: to talk about literature with friends or colleagues. In today’s society, many individuals choose to belong to a book group that reads adult novels, but teachers, it seems, are joining book groups for the purposes of reading and discussing children’s literature and educational issues with fellow teachers. These professional groups allow teachers to engage in the reading of children’s and or professional literature for pleasure. However, the research also suggests these groups go beyond teachers’ personal enjoyment and extend and influence teachers’ classroom practice (Goldberg & Pesko, 2000; Flood, Lapp, & Ranck-Buhr, 1995; Zaleski, 1997; Zaleski, Duval, & Weil, 1999).
The TAR project was developed in 1992 and funded in part by the Association of American Publishers (AAP) in collaboration with the Virginia State Reading Association. The AAP represents many of the book publishers in the United States. The AAP and Virginia Reading Association joined forces and launched a pilot program for TAR in 36 school districts with nearly 400 participating teachers across the state.

TAR groups consist of interested teachers, and at least one building administrator, who agree to meet and discuss children’s books on a regular basis. The time and location of the meetings may vary depending on the needs of the participants, although an average meeting time appears to be about an hour and a half. The structure of the meeting is flexible according to the agenda of the group. Some groups follow a set schedule (see Flood, Lapp, Ranck-Buhr, 1995), while other groups take a less structured approach (see Daly, 1994 or Smith, 1994). Decisions concerning the logistics and guidelines fluctuate from group to group. This variation also occurs in book selection. In some cases, one individual selected the titles while in other cases the whole group participated in the book selection. Sometimes the books chosen fit a common theme or issue the teachers wanted to explore, while other times, the books selected were just good literature. While the variance in procedures made groups more or less structured, the main goal for all meetings remained the same. Teachers and principals chose to enter and participate in groups to have the opportunity to read and discuss children’s literature with their colleagues.

Since its introduction in the early 1990s, the TAR movement has been endorsed by the International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of English, American Library Association, the ASCD Whole Language Network (Smith, 1994), the
Association for the Supervision of Curriculum Development and The National Association for the Education of Young Children (Donoghue, 1994). The TAR project has been highlighted by the U.S. Department of Education, along with other national programs, as outstanding staff development for teacher training (Vardell & Jacobson, 1997).

TAR intended to help teachers see themselves as readers and to love reading. Participation in the group helps teachers reacquaint themselves with reading for pleasure. The project was designed with the major goal of “helping teachers celebrate their own literacy as they become models for their own students” (What, 1992, p. 3). The emphasis is on providing teachers with opportunities to respond to books personally as readers and not necessarily as teachers with concerns about how to use their books in the classroom. Mary Sue Dillingofski, director of the TAR project for the AAP asked, “How can teachers encourage children to become life-long readers if they aren’t readers themselves?” (1993, p. 31)

Registered TAR groups received a pamphlet from the AAP that provided the following reasons for teachers to form Teachers As Readers group:

- Teachers As Readers groups help teachers explore their own literacy.
- In Teachers As Readers groups, teachers share quality literature with their colleagues.
- Through being members of Teachers As Readers, teachers model lifelong reading pleasure to their students.
- Through being a member of Teachers As Readers, teachers gain experience and confidence with natural book talk.
- Teachers As Readers help teachers reflect upon and learn from personal experience as members of a book group.
- Being a member of Teachers As Readers helps teachers gain tools for helping students become lifelong readers.

(Draft of Teachers As Readers pamphlet n.d as quoted in Zalenski, 1997, p. 80).
These book groups support teachers’ efforts to know and enjoy books and each other (Zaleski, Duval, & Weil, 1999). Shelly Harwayne, director of the Manhattan New School, founded a program of teacher reader groups in 1988. She describes the experience of having reading groups as:

...a painless way to grow professionally. All of a sudden, teachers felt like college students again. Teachers’ lives are so busy that they sometimes don’t have time to read. But book discussion groups remind teachers how rewarding it can be to read and discuss books. After all, a lot of us went into teaching because we love reading. (as quoted in Micklos, 1992, p. 11)

These reading groups help provide the motivation and direction to have teachers begin reading again. Some teachers do not know what they have lost by not reading regularly until they take part in a book club (Goldberg & Pesko, 2000).

As reading groups gain wide acceptance throughout the educational community, they are being tailored to benefit their participants. These book/study groups are used with preservice teachers (Fox & Wilkinson, 1997), with districts in collaboration with university faculty (Martin & Short, 1991), between parents and teachers as a way of opening up lines of communication (Goldberg & Pesko, 2000), and as professional development opportunities within a school or a district (Daly, 1994; Smith, 1994). While at the core of these professional reading groups is the reading and sharing of children’s literature, a group may choose to read children’s literature with a certain theme in mind (see Flood & Lapp, 1994 or Flood, Lapp, & Ranck-Buhr, 1995 for a discussion of a group’s focus on multicultural related issues) during the book group sessions.

Why It is Good for Teachers

There is no time set aside within the school day for teachers to read on a regular basis. One of the most frequent requests from teachers is the need for more time
(Dillingoski, 1993). In order for teachers to reacquaint themselves with literature, they need time to read. Due to the demands of teaching, many teachers place reading for pleasure as a low priority, and the books teachers do read throughout the day are rarely for pleasure. According to Goldberg and Pesko (2000):

Typically, teachers approach reading for practical purposes. For example, they read children’s literature to choose appropriate books for their students, and they read the student textbooks and teachers’ manuals that they use in the classroom. They also read professional literature—books and journals that enhance their practice. We believe, however, that these purposes often detract from the processes of reading and reflecting. Integrating pleasure reading into a teacher’s repertoire fills a gap between teaching and learning. (p.39)

Participation in book clubs allows teachers to engage in reading for pleasure because they know they will discuss the books with their colleagues. By asking teachers to respond to books as readers first, rather than as teachers, they are provided with opportunities to explore their own literacy (Flood & Lapp, 1994; Smith, 1994). TAR can help many teachers find time and motivation for reading while reigniting their love for literature in the process.

The Ultimate Goal is Creating Life-Long Readers

When teachers connect with books, it is the students who ultimately benefit. Teachers serve as powerful role models for the importance of life long literacy (VanLeirsburg & Johns, 1994). In the same way that research on parents and caregivers as role models has demonstrated, the sharing of one’s reading is a crucial activity in any literate environment (Teale, 1986; Wells, 1986). If teachers read children’s books, there is a domino effect; they can read the books to the students, discuss the book with another student who is reading the same book, or share tidbits about the book through informal conversations. When teachers are passionate about reading, they can exert a positive
influence on their students' reading habits (Williamson, 1991; Zaleski, 1997). Teachers who are active readers often share that enthusiasm with their students, causing students to want to read the same book, or books by the same author. When teachers are more excited about their reading, the students also become excited (Daly, 1994; Miklos, 1992; Smith, 1994; Zaleski, 1997). TAR was created for teachers under the assumption that ultimately the project had great potential to encourage the use of more children's literature in the classroom, and at the same time, model book discussion methods that may improve teacher practice (Micklos, 1992).

The Impact of Teachers' Reading on the Classroom

The research on teacher participation in book study groups indicates that there is an impact on classroom practice as well. Teachers reported that membership in the groups had a direct impact on the literature they used in their classroom (Flood & Lapp, 1994; Flood, Lapp, & Ranck-Buhr, 1995; Fox & Wilkinson, 1997; Smith, 1994). The book groups introduced teachers to new books, genres, and authors. From their experiences in book group settings, teachers were able to examine their own growth as readers, experience different perspectives, relate to literature more richly and gain insights into the way they could create a similar experience with their own students (Fox & Wilkinson, 1997).

Many teachers changed their literature instruction with their students to look and feel more like their own book group experiences, where time was allowed for discussion and multiple voices played an important role in the personal meaning making for each reader (Flood, Lapp, & Ranck-Buhr, 1995). In these situations, teachers have the opportunity to examine how their own learning and construction of meaning was shaped.
and altered due to the conversations they had with others. Goldberg and Pesko (2000) describe one teacher's examination of her own off-task talk during the book sessions. She contemplated why she put so much pressure on children to follow rigid rules and answer questions when that did not occur in her own discussion group. She wondered what would happen to children's meaning making if they were allowed to talk without having to follow prescribed roles or set procedures. She then allowed her students more freedom in their discussions.

Going through the book discussion experience first hand was eye opening to many teachers in the discussion groups. After this experience, teachers said they felt better prepared to move student discussion groups past the "I like" or the "my favorite" types of contributions because of their own personal experience in a book group (Zaleski, 1997). Teachers seemed to want to replicate their experience and raise students' level of conversation about books to the same caliber they experienced themselves. Dialogues created a deeper understanding of texts for the teachers; this became a driving force in many teachers' desire to foster this kind of experience for their students (Zaleski, Duvall & Weil, 1999).

A study by Flood, Lapp, and Ranck-Buhr in 1995 focused on teachers' participation in a book group that read multicultural children's literature. During the first week of each month, fifteen participants (twelve teachers, the principal and two researchers) met for one hour to explore multiculturalism in America. Interestingly, a pattern developed in teachers' conversations about books. At first, the conversation was highly personal and not text-based. Gradually, the conversation became more text based as the year progressed. Near the end of the study, the teachers had shared an almost equal
number of personal and text-based comments. The researchers attribute the high amount of personal conversation at the beginning to the need for teachers to build trust with each other before sharing their opinions and thoughts about a book. This sharing of both personal and text-based comments benefited all since participants felt the conversations about personal experiences helped the group understand the text and the text helped the group understand each other and their own personal experiences.

A major finding of the study was the change in classroom practice that all teachers experienced. The group discussed ways of establishing books clubs in their own classrooms. Teachers also began to look at teaching literature from a new perspective, and to expose their students to different kinds of reading materials by various authors. Literature instruction for many teachers changed and began to resemble the book club format they, themselves, experienced. Teachers also provided students with more time for discussion about the books they were reading. The researchers saw book groups as a tool for helping teachers converse about literature, develop a love of literature and to develop strategies for understanding literature that the teachers could pass on to their students.

In her dissertation study of nineteen elementary teachers’ involvement in a Teacher As Readers group over a ten month period, Zaleski (1997) was able to document three areas of change in the professional lives of teachers through their experience in a TAR group. First, there was a change in the classroom practices of teachers. The teachers incorporated the books they read in the group into their own classrooms. One month’s reading choice was a book of fairy tales, causing the teachers to rediscover and question their lack of use of this genre with their students. Thus, the teachers then used more fairy tales with their students. The kinds of talk also changed throughout the study. Teachers
changed the way they interacted with their students about books. They allowed more
dialogue to occur throughout the day and began to trust that this kind of discussion
among children was important. Teachers were more willing to allow students to engage
in authentic conversational exchanges rather to force question-answer frameworks.
Secondly, Zaleski noticed a change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes. Teachers became
more aware of what children do when they read and the unsettling position many children
experience when encountering a new topic, author or genre. They recognized the
importance of children reading for enjoyment as well as for meeting curriculum demands.
They gained a better understanding of the importance of having deeper discussions about
books and finding better ways to facilitate similar discussions in the classroom. The last
change in teachers’ professional lives came as they witnessed positive changes in their
students. Students became more aware of and more enthusiastic about children’s books,
began to pick up on the teachers’ excitement for reading, and grew in their own
appreciation for book discussions in the classroom.

Individual teachers also reported reading books more critically and authors they
would not have ordinarily read. In examining the experience of the teachers in the study,
Zaleski states:

learning about new books, authors, illustrators, in a social collaborative
environment with colleagues was the strength of this experience. Talk functioned
in various ways to present, weave, explore, discover and dialogue. Reading books
together brought more literature into the classrooms to share with children,
modeled enthusiasm for reading and helped develop better methods of
communication and respect among colleagues at different teaching levels. (p. 292)

Teachers benefited both personally and professionally from their participation in the
Teachers As Readers meetings. In the end, Zaleski asserts,

Teachers As Readers has been shown in this study to be a context for the researcher to uncover what teachers know about reading and literature. TAR can also be a forum for teacher reflection, a way for teachers to become aware of their own beliefs and understandings about reading and literature. (p. 298)

Possible Reasons for TARs Popularity

The TAR movement seems successful due, in part, to its face-to-face interactions with others as well as its social nature (Vardell & Jacobson, 1997). Teachers who participated seemed to enjoy numerous benefits. Since no special training is involved, and the only requirement is to be prepared to discuss the book, the teachers felt these meetings were an “antidote to teacher burnout” (teacher quoted in Dillingofski, 1993, p. 33). Teachers felt that the opportunity to read children’s books and respond as individuals led them to experience great satisfaction of engaging in something personally rewarding that also advanced their professional knowledge of children’s literature. In this way, book discussions were “an effective tool for teacher renewal” (Vardell & Jacobson, 1997, p. 23). There appears to be strong support in the research for establishing book groups as professional development opportunities for teachers. In this non-threatening atmosphere, teachers benefit from learning about themselves as readers, along with learning about how other readers engage with books. They learn how meaning is fostered and extended though a social exchange of ideas.

Teachers choose books that reflect their personal interest (Zaleski, Duvall, & Weil, 1999). In both studies, teachers left feeling positively about the books they previously had not used, ignored, or avoided. Their participation in a book group promoted the use of different types of literature in the classroom. As mentioned in the
Zaleski’s (1997) study of the upper elementary teachers using fairy tales with their students or the reading of multicultural literature in the classroom by the teachers in the study by Flood, Lapp, and Ranck-Buhr (1995).

It seems that book study groups provide a forum to allow teachers to explore and learn about children’s literature, to experience firsthand how dialogue expands one’s understanding of literature. Teachers’ positive experiences with literature also have benefits for students in the classroom. Since much of the research about Teachers As Readers groups has documented changes in teachers’ attitudes and understandings about literature, forming a book study group seems an appropriate way to expose teachers to informational books.

**Use of Informational Books in the Classroom**

Several studies that examined literacy instruction and the types of literature used in elementary classrooms show a great neglect of nonfiction literature. An investigation into the literacy practices in grades two and six (Hiebert & Fisher, 1990) showed a complete void of nonfiction materials in over one hundred hours of literacy instruction. A 1995 study of literacy instruction of fourth and fifth grade teachers by Scharer, Peters, and Lehman found teachers overwhelmingly used fiction books in their literacy instruction. Nell Duke (1998) found the use of informational texts to be rare or nonexistent in her study of twenty, first grade classrooms. The scope of this neglect within sixth grade classrooms was demonstrated in a survey of 1,765 sixth graders. Students reported reading large quantities of nonfiction out of school, but almost never
mentioned reading nonfiction during the school day (Ivey & Broaddus, in press). This extensive use of fiction literature is at the expense of other genres, especially nonfiction literature.

In a study of literacy tasks in both whole language and skills-oriented classrooms, Hiebert and Fisher (1990) found a lack of balance between the use of expository and narrative texts in these classrooms. The researchers examined one hundred eighty literacy tasks over a forty-day period of time in eight, grade two and grade six classrooms. In the whole language classrooms, students read and used narrative texts in virtually all lessons. In these classrooms, students were able to self-select their own reading material and topics for writing, but worked exclusively with fictional texts. The same was true for teachers who taught from a more skills-based approach. Hiebert and Fisher advocated a balance between narrative and expository texts as one of three themes needing greater attention in the whole language movement.

In her dissertation study on first grade students’ experiences with informational text, Nell Duke (1998) examined the texts available on the classroom walls and other surfaces, in the classroom library, and in written language activities in twenty, first grade classrooms throughout a one-year period. Each classroom was visited for one full day at four different times throughout the school year. First grade classrooms from very high and very low socio-economic school districts were included in the study. A record of time was kept for all activities to compile the amount of time spent with informational texts during the school day. There was a scarcity of informational texts in classroom environments in all schools, regardless of socio-economic level. In addition to the lack of informational materials found in the classrooms, a mere 3.6 minutes a day on average
were spent with informational books and texts during classroom activities in the high SES schools. An even lower mean of 1.9 minutes of attention was given to informational texts in the low SES schools. In fact, one-half of the low SES schools spent no time at all with informational texts during the four full days of observation. Duke hypothesized that the reason why students perform poorly with informational text may be, in part, because of their insufficient experience with this genre. She suggested teacher training as a possible avenue to help teachers begin to incorporate more informational texts into their classroom teaching.

In a survey of read aloud practices of teachers in grades K-6 in 537 elementary classrooms, none of the frequently read titles at any grade level were nonfiction texts, nor were nonfiction authors mentioned as classroom favorites (Hoffman, Roser, & Battle, 1993). In a 1990 survey of Texas teacher’s reading habits, fiction titles were unanimously cited as favorite choices for sharing with children and young adults (Abrahamson, Carter, & McLaurnin, 1990). In a study by Scharer, Peters, and Lehman (1995), of the fourth and fifth grade teachers surveyed, nearly 70% reported using fiction chapter books for read aloud and reading instruction three or more times each week. Students’ exposure to nonfiction text in schools ranges from limited to nonexistent in most aspects of literacy instruction.

In a dissertation study on the use of nonfiction/informational trade books by a teacher and her students in a third grade classroom, Briggs (1994) found informational books were used, but not formally addressed by the teacher. During a two and one-half week thematic unit about the westward movement, a total of 87 books, including titles of both fiction and nonfiction, were provided to the teacher by the researcher. The
nonfiction books were available and read by the students, but specific features of the book or the genre were not pointed out or discussed with the children. The teacher occasionally made a link from a fiction book to a nonfiction book, but the finer points of nonfiction books were not addressed during the two and a half-week unit. While the students self-selected to read nonfiction trade books, they did not seem to have the knowledge or the language, to clearly distinguish nonfiction from fiction texts. This may be a common problem, Briggs hypothesizes, because teachers may not possess clear understanding, themselves, about the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. In addition to her findings, she believes more research is needed that examines teacher interactions with nonfiction literature in the upper elementary grades.

The Call for Balance

Studies are documenting nonfiction’s missing presence in the primary grades (Duke, 2000; Hiebert & Fischer, 1990; Pappas, 1991, 1993) and this trend seems to continue in the intermediate grades (Briggs, 1994; Daniels, 1990; Ivey & Broaddus, in press; Trussel-Cullen, 1999). Scholars are acknowledging this imbalance towards narrative texts, and are calling for a balance between the uses of fiction and nonfiction genres in the classroom (Dorion, 1994; Dreher, 1999; Duke, 1998; Duke & Kays, 1998; Freeman & Person, 1992; Hiebert & Fisher, 1990; Hynes, 2000; Moss, Leone, & Dipillo, 1997; Pappas, 1991; Sanacore, 1991; Scharer, Peters, & Lehman, 1995; Trussel-Cullen, 1999). In the report from the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) wrote, “the potential value of reading different genres with children extends well beyond any properties of text themselves,”
and that "the kinds of activities and discussion associated with each genre make
distinctive contributions toward developing children's appreciation for the nature,
purposes, and processes of reading" (p. 181).

The Benefits of Using Nonfiction Literature with Students

This call for the increased use of nonfiction literature is strong, due to the genre's
inherent benefits for students. In this "Information Age" where knowledge equals power,
it is imperative that students are comfortable with and are able to read nonfiction texts in
order to make critical decisions about important issues (Duke, 1998). Using nonfiction
literature with students can satisfy children's natural curiosity about the world (Freeman &
Person, 1998), and help them make sense of the world (Freeman & Person, 1998;
Meek, 1995). It can also provide students with opportunities to think critically about the
world and develop their problem solving skills (Freeman & Person, 1998; Meek, 1995;
Trussel-Cullen, 1999). Nonfiction literature can also help prepare students to meet the
high value placed on reading and analyzing nonfiction texts in the workplace (Carter &

Also, the aesthetic pleasure of reading nonfiction should not be overlooked. For
some advocates, informational texts provide students with opportunities to see that
nonfiction reading can offer the same excitement and enjoyment often thought exclusive
to fictional works (Dorion, 1994; Freedman, 1992). The reading of nonfiction texts can
be emotionally satisfying for some students, as it can confirm what they know and
provide them with a sense of validation and excitement about the knowledge they already
possess (Hynes, 2000).
For others, non-narrative texts provide a way into literacy allowing some students to fully engage in reading in a manner that narrative texts do not provide, especially for those students considered “at-risk” of reading failure (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Guth, 1992; Hynes, 2000). These students’ strong background knowledge about a particular topic can aid in their reading of a nonfiction text. With these types of texts, students are in the driver’s seat, so to speak, about how they choose to interact with the book. They can read in fits and starts, jump from topic to topic, or read from cover to cover depending on their mood or interest.

**Negative Influences on Students**

Despite its inherent benefits and student appeal, nonfiction literature appears not to be used to its fullest potential in the classroom. This diet of predominately fiction literature is not without consequences. If students do not have ample experiences with nonfiction texts throughout the grades, then educators should not be surprised at students’ lack of facility with reading and writing nonfiction text. With an almost exclusive emphasis on story in the primary grades, students are often ill-prepared to handle the demands of expository reading and writing in the upper elementary grades.

**Reading Nonfiction Materials**

Expository texts place different demands on the reader than narrative texts do (Brown & Cambourne, 1987). Readers need to be prepared to do a variety of reading tasks such as interpret graphic features, search for specific information, infer from the text or synthesize the information gathered thus far. In addition, students are expected to read and remember much of the content presented in the text. Suddenly, students are challenged by books that are different in structure, organization, layout, graphics,
intention, and content from the fiction books they have read in the past (Trussel-Cullen, 1999). The transition is not smooth for many students and they experience difficulty when expected to adapt and utilize these new features while comprehending the new material.

In fact, much of the knowledge, strategies, and skills developed through the reading of narrative does not directly apply to those needed to read informational texts (Johnson, 1970). For example, knowledge of the underlying text structure common for informational materials aids the student in understanding the content, provides a way to keep the information organized, and facilitates comprehension of the piece. While there are similarities between the reading of the two genres, the use of special devices and features found in nonfiction texts warrants that these particular skills and understandings also be taught as part of a literacy program (Trussell-Cullen, 1999). On state proficiency tests, students may be asked to read informational texts and discern major and supporting ideas, or read and interpret accompanying charts and graphs. Students may also be expected to locate information, infer, or respond to informational texts. Students must work specifically with these types of texts in order to become proficient readers of this genre.

Writing Nonfiction Text

Students’ difficulty with writing expository text is also well documented. Studies that have compared older elementary students’ capabilities in both narrative and expository discourse forms (Hidi & Hildyard, 1983; Langer, 1985) have shown students demonstrated stronger ability in using narrative forms than expository forms of writing.
Could this lesser ability in expository writing be a result of limited exposure to expository or informational texts in the primary grades? Judith Langer (1985) put forth that possibility by suggesting:

> We can conjecture that from an early age, children hear stories that use the same forms as the stories that they are later expected to read and write in school. On the other hand, children rarely hear spoken versions of academic reports, either at home or at school. The function and forms they hear and use in their daily lives serve as their models, and these may be the source of the simple forms they use to structure their reading and writing in the early grades. (p. 163)

Newkirk (1989) elaborates on this idea by saying:

> Not unreasonably, then, we might attribute some of the difficulties that students experience with exposition to the virtual exclusion of this writing from the books that they must read. I suspect that, in some research studies on report or persuasive writing, children are being asked to write a kind of discourse that they have never read. Little wonder they have trouble. (p. 29, emphasis his)

It is possible that students are simply not having enough exposure to or modeling of writing informational texts in school. It has been suggested that nonfiction books can provide a powerful model for writing (Freeman, 1991) thus limited exposure to this type of literature may, in fact, negatively influence children’s attempts to write within this genre. DeFord (1981) found students’ written work is influenced by the books used by the teacher for reading instruction and shared in the classroom. So students who do not hear nonfiction literature may have difficulty writing expository text. Multiple planned experiences with nonfiction literature may be necessary in order for students to become successful writers of this genre.

**Fourth Grade Difficulties**

Many students experience a dip in performance level when they enter the intermediate grades where they are often expected to read informational material on a
regular basis. Fourth grade appears to be the time when the demands of schooling change for students. Students are often expected to recognize and utilize the structure of the argument or presentation of the material to deepen their understanding of the content. Many children struggle and fall behind when the school text demands shift dramatically from fiction to nonfiction reading material. This limited exposure to nonfiction seems to impact students’ performance in school. Students at this age are often faced for the first time with uncontrolled vocabulary and an increased concept load in nonfiction texts (Johnson, 1970). Without planned regular exposure to nonfiction materials, students are ill-prepared to meet these new challenges. Johnson (1970) proposes introducing expository material to students “much sooner and in larger quantities” so that they would be better equipped and would experience a smoother transition into grade four (p. 213).

Influencing Reading Achievement Scores

Limited exposure to nonfiction literature can potentially impede students’ literacy development. The use of nonfiction literature appears to have an impact on students’ reading achievement (Campbell & Ashworth, 1995; Campbell, Kapinus, & Beatty, 1995) with the more widely read in terms of multiple genres students reported, the higher they performed on the reading assessment portion of the proficiency test according to the results of a 1992 National Assessment of National Progress (NAEP) report.

Students were asked to select from three choices the types of materials they read regularly. Those fourth-grade students who reported reading stories, magazines, and informational books scored higher on average than peers with less diverse reading experiences. In addition, as indicated by the data, there was a positive relationship between reading informational books and average proficiency reading scores. Proficiency
scores for students were lower when the students did not read one of the major types of
texts (stories, magazines, informational). Schools were also analyzed for the type of
reading experiences that students reported and their average scores on the reading
assessment measure. The average proficiency score for the nation was 218. The average
performance for the top third schools was 237 and the average for schools performing in
the lower third was 195. After examining the reading by students at each tier, more
informational books were reported as being read by students in the top third achieving
schools than students in the bottom third (Campbell, Kapinus, & Beatty, 1995). A major
implication from the study was the importance of students being exposed to various types
of reading materials throughout their school career.

Nonfiction Literature and Reluctant Readers

As briefly mentioned earlier, nonfiction literature provides a way into literacy for
some at-risk students (Casewell & Duke, 1998; Guth, 1992). As a reading consultant in a
middle school, Guth (1992) found that her at-risk readers, defined as reading two or more
grade levels behind, were motivated and highly engaged in their reading when they self-
selected nonfiction literature. She felt nonfiction literature honored and acknowledged
students' strengths and interests and they became engaged in their reading of these books.
Using nonfiction materials with some students, Guth found, allows them to enjoy and
interact with content in reading that is not necessarily dependent on prior book
experiences. For the child who lacks a rich book background, nonfiction literature can
often tap into the knowledge the students bring with them through other print and visual
media. Motivation and interest were key factors in her students' renewed interests and
enthusiasm for reading.
In the Harvard Literacy Laboratory, Caswell and Duke (1998) found non-narrative texts to be a catalyst for two students' literacy development. The authors noted a shift in behaviors, attitudes, and excitement in both students when the students worked with non-narrative texts. These students tended to gravitate towards non-narrative books in the local library and during tutoring sessions. A fourth grade student, in particular, moved from the lowest reading group in his class (reading at a second grade level) to the middle group (reading at a third grade level) by the end of the fourth grade year. This student did not receive any additional reading help at the beginning of fifth grade, and by the end of that year, he was reading on grade level as the authors reported. These non-narrative texts "built upon the boys' extensive background knowledge and expertise, and better matched their home literacies" which capitalized on these strengths leading the students to become "... more purposeful, perseverant, active and prolific readers" (p. 114).

Children's Facility with Nonfiction Literature

The appeal of this genre extends beyond reluctant readers as young children demonstrate ability with and preference for this genre. Several noteworthy studies (Donovan, 2001; Duke & Kays, 1998; Graves, 1989; Kamil and Lane, 1997; Newkirk, 1989; Pappas, 1991, 1993) provide evidence for students' facility with nonfiction texts. As early as kindergarten, students are aware of the basic differences between fiction and nonfiction books, are able to process nonfiction texts, and many even prefer reading nonfiction to fiction books (Duke & Keys, 1998; Pappas, 1991). Students demonstrate capability in writing this genre from an early age (Donovan, 1996, 2001; Duthie, 1994; Newkirk, 1989). When teachers incorporate nonfiction literature into their reading and
writing instruction from an early age, as indicated by the studies mentioned above, or use it strategically, as mentioned by the research with reluctant readers, the students respond in positive fashions and show ability with this genre. Children are not averse to reading or writing nonfiction, nor are they unable to deal with the complexities inherent in this genre. However, the research on classroom practices provides little evidence children receive adequate, if any, exposure to nonfiction material in the classroom.

A Contradiction

Interestingly enough, this intense focus on fiction materials in the schools runs counter to the reading habits of adults. According to William Zinsser (1990), a professional writer, “The great preponderance of what writers now write and sell, what book and magazine publishers publish, and what readers demand is nonfiction” (p. 54). Approximately 85% of the reading and writing done in middle school, high school and adult daily life is with nonfiction (Snowball, 1995). Many schools, it seems, are not preparing students to enter this nation of nonfiction readers. The treatment of nonfiction texts in the schools clearly lags behind fiction’s position of prominence in the school curriculum.

Students do not seem to have as equal experiences with nonfiction texts as they do with fiction. It cannot be assumed that students will be able to transfer their knowledge of how fiction works to the reading of nonfiction to be able to judge nonfiction for its completeness and quality of text since students seem to have limited opportunities with these kinds of text. With the advance of high-quality informational books on the market today, students must have an understanding of how to navigate through the multiple ways
information is presented to readers. The most direct way to help students become familiar with this genre is to have nonfiction books included in the teaching curriculum on a regular basis.

**Summary**

I used a sociocultural lens to examine how teachers make meaning and share meaning together in the book group setting. From this perspective, the individual is acknowledged with coming to the group with a unique history and set of experiences. These experiences blend and mix with the experiences and knowledge of other individuals to create meaning that goes beyond what the individual would be able to create alone. Since talk is one of the most powerful ways we interact with others, the talk between the teachers was examined throughout the five book sessions. The process by which teachers take on new learning is also highlighted by this study. Examination of meaning making in a supportive group setting may prove to be a viable means for professional development for teachers.

In this study, I am proposing to extend this research in order to understand intermediate teachers' interactions with informational children's literature, currently an underutilized genre in the classroom. I intend to examine how teachers talk about these books along with the concerns and questions they have, while participating in a book group setting. These findings will support and provide insight into the use or lack of use of these types of materials in intermediate classrooms and how teachers might become better acquainted with this neglected genre and, as a result, learn the importance of using informational books to improve and expand students' reading and writing abilities.

47
CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore intermediate grade teachers’ attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about informational books. Through the use of a book group format, teachers conversed about informational books over a period of ten weeks. The patterns of talk that occurred during the book group meetings were examined, along with how those patterns changed over time. This study has the potential to add to the research about teachers’ knowledge about informational books, and how professional development experiences focused on informational books appropriate for intermediate age students may influence their attitudes, understandings, and use of this genre. A qualitative approach was used to characterize the nature of the book group discussions. Quantitative data were also collected to examine a larger population of teachers’ attitudes, classroom practices, and knowledge about informational books.

In this chapter, I will describe my theoretical frame and the research design employed to examine teachers’ talk about informational books. Then, I will discuss selection of the participants and the books, the site of the research, data collection
procedures used, and the process I used to analyze the data. Finally, I will examine the issue of trustworthiness as it relates to the methodological decisions of my study.

Theoretical Frame

This study is situated within a theoretical frame that views learning as an act of social construction. How we come to know something and the accumulation of knowledge are culturally and historically bound (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Graue and Walsh (1998) go on to say that “Knowledge, rather than being generated by individuals as they build cognitive models, is seen as a social activity” (p. 38). It becomes important, then, to examine the meaning making of teachers while interacting with each other in a book group setting. Examining learning from a sociocultural perspective allows for the individual’s learning, the group’s collective learning, and the context under which this learning occurs to be examined and considered integral components in this social construction of knowledge.

The teachers’ interactions with each other and this learning during the book group meetings play a critical role in developing teachers’ attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about informational books. A central tenet of the sociocultural perspective is that “knowledge and truth are created not discovered by the mind” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125) and that coming to know something is an active process of learning. Knowledge is “characterized more as a matter of consensus. . . we agree on what we know rather than uncover a universal reality” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 38). This perspective offers the opportunity to move past a narrow focus on the individual alone and to examine the meaning making process while it occurs in the presence of others.
Wells (1996) writes, "Acts of meaning do not occur in isolation... they occur in
the course of an exchange of meanings between participants in order to perform some
function(s) in a specific situation" (p. 96). An individual's own comprehension is
heightened through the interaction within a social group forming what John-Steiner and
Mahn (1996) termed the "dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes"
(p. 192). Talk becomes the primary mediating tool for the social construction of
knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Individuals bring with them to the group their own
understandings based on past personal experiences. Through the power of dialogue, those
understandings may be uncovered, challenged, stretched or transformed. The ability to
discuss, this talk between individuals, is what enables knowledge to become shared and
conceptualized (Hicks, 1996). In fact, "the social constructionist proposes that language
and knowledge constitute each other: Neither can stand alone" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 39). Language and knowledge are linked and therefore need to be examined
simultaneously.

Using this theoretical frame, this study captures how the teachers come to know
more about informational books during their interactions with these books, in addition to
ascertaining what they know about the genre by the end of the study. The teachers come
with a wide variety of educational backgrounds, years of teaching experience, and
familiarity with informational books. These factors shape what each teacher brings to the
collective table. Vygotsky, according to Wertsch (1981), believed speech acts as a way of
organizing social interaction. The interaction among the teachers during the book group
meetings is shaped by the patterns within their talk, where the comments and questions
posed by the members of the group lead the discussion.
This perspective acknowledges the central role of others in an individual’s learning while valuing and acknowledging each individual’s past experiences. This social construction of meaning and knowledge depends primarily on language as the vehicle through which this learning occurs within a cultural setting. It is the social nature of knowledge construction that makes this theoretical approach so appealing.

**Qualitative Inquiry**

I followed a qualitative method of inquiry throughout my research study. In qualitative research:

one undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of the participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language. (Creswell, 1998, p. 14)

A qualitative method of inquiry was chosen due to several critical factors inherent to the study. First, the nature of my research questions led to a qualitative approach to my study. Second, there existed a need to explore patterns within intermediate teachers’ attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about informational books through the teachers’ professional dialogue. Thirdly, the researcher chose the role of participant observer as a way of examining professional book groups as a form of professional development for teachers. I became an instrument of data collection as I took an active role in the research process in order to portray the point of view and experiences of the participants. Lastly, the research literature was limited in regards to this topic, and so the need to present a detailed descriptive view of the topic was appropriate. The qualitative method of inquiry is one that contains methods which are, “...generally supported by the interpretivist...
paradigm, which portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 6). Qualitative methods were the most appropriate manner to explore and describe the socially constructed reality among the teachers participating in the study. As “meaning making is situated,” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. xvi) I attempted to “grasp the process by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 49) by employing a qualitative research design.

Selection of Participants

A wide search was conducted for interested participants. The pool of potential candidates (N= 120) came from a study group especially designed for intermediate teachers by the researcher and her advisor during the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 school year and during a university class co-taught by the researcher and her advisor during the 1999-2000 school year. The study group was open to all interested parties and met monthly to discuss literacy related issues for intermediate grade students. A university class, offered to intermediate grade teachers in the local area, met monthly during the 1999-2000 school year. Flyers and emails were sent to individuals and schools to determine if any of the teachers would be interested in volunteering for this study. The information provided to the teachers outlined the nature of the tasks, the time commitment, and the required agreement to attend all sessions. In all cases, I obtained permission from the principal to distribute the flier for the study. I went to some schools to speak with the staff and to explain the study. In addition, I also contacted some intermediate teachers directly to see if they might be interested in joining the study.
All participants volunteered for the study. While speaking with interested candidates, I confirmed each participant’s willingness to attend all five sessions and commitment to reading seven books. Immediately two teachers from the same school joined the study. I worked with these two teachers to determine dates and times for possible meetings. Other volunteers were expected to be able to attend on those dates and times before joining the study. After securing the first two volunteers, my future decisions concerning participation took into account the teachers’ grade levels and years of teaching experience, resulting in a purposeful selection (Patton, 1990) of the teachers who participated in the study. The two participants who first joined found two additional teachers in the same school who showed interest when casually discussing the study with them. Both of these teachers taught at different grade levels. One participant contacted me after talking to a fellow acquaintance and expressed interest in joining the study. Several people contacted me from the email I sent out. I selected an individual who was a classroom teacher with many years of experience and who taught a different grade than the people already in the study. I selected teachers from different grade levels in an attempt to represent a range of intermediate grades since students are expected to read increasing amounts of informational text as they progress through school. Table 3.1 provides information on each teacher’s grade level, years of teaching experience, highest degree earned, and the type of school setting in which the teacher worked.

Informed Consent

Following the guiding research principle of informed consent (Punch, 1994; Eichelberger, 1989), I obtained formal permission in writing from participants in the study. The privacy of the participants should be of the utmost concern to the researcher.
(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I consulted the teachers as to whether their names or pseudonyms should be employed in the dissertation. I discussed with the teachers informally and in writing about what this decision entails. All teachers provided in writing, through email, their permission to use their real names in this study. Therefore, the first names of the teachers will be used throughout this study. At times, the teachers’ initials will be used to represent their speaking during the book group meeting.

The procedures and guidelines required by the Office of Research Risks Protection at The Ohio State University were followed and Human Subjects approval for the study was granted. There were no negative consequences for the teachers if they chose not to participate in the study. The data from this study was not used in any formal evaluation of the teachers. This study did not mislead or deceive the participants in any way, or expose them to any psychological, social, physical or legal risks.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>School Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Classes beyond Master’s</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Working on Master’s</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Working on Master’s</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deena</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Working on Master’s</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Profile of Intermediate Teachers Participating in the Study.

Selection of Informational Children’s Literature

Throughout this study, the term nonfiction refers to a larger umbrella label that includes a wide range of texts under which informational books fall. Informational books consist of books whose primary purpose is to provide information about a subject or topic of interest. Biographies fall under the category of nonfiction but are separate from informational books. For this reason, biographies were not considered for possible use with the teachers, as the purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes, understandings, and knowledge teachers have towards informational books. In making
this distinction, I am assuming that many teachers are more familiar with biographies and are more likely to have used them in their classrooms libraries, as opposed to those books considered informational in nature.

The following questions had to be addressed prior to the final selection of books for this study: 1) How many books represent the range within the genre of informational books; and 2) What titles will best represent this range?

The genre of fiction comprises a large variety of books, such as: realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, and fantasy, among others. Sub-categorization occurs for nonfiction books also. Although the primary purpose of nonfiction is to provide information for the reader, authors have the liberty of sharing that information with readers in many different ways. Classifying nonfiction books according to type can be a useful strategy for teachers (Bamford & Kristo, 2000). Examining the types of nonfiction books available with teachers allows them to see and experience the diverse ways information can be presented.

Bamford and Kristo (2000) and Helper (1998) have created a list of the types of nonfiction books currently available. These lists provide a guide as to the most common types of nonfiction books being published for students today. These types include:

- identification/field guide
- concept book
- photographic essay
- life cycle
- experiment, activity, craft, how-to-do, documents, journals, diaries, and albums
- survey
- specialized
- reference
- informational picture storybook
Of the nine types provided in the list, three types (concept, informational picture storybook and reference) were immediately ruled out for various reasons. Although a popular type, concept books are primarily written for a younger audience, and consequently, they were omitted from this study. Controversy and debate surrounds the inclusion of informational picture storybooks under the nonfiction label (for more on this discussion see Leal, 1993; Bamford & Kristo, 2000; Zarnowksi, 1995, 1998) because of its blending of fact and fiction within the story, and the possible confusion this might cause children. For this reason, informational picture storybooks were not considered as a possible type to include in the study. I also omitted reference books due to the rare need for a student to read a reference book from cover to cover. Titles were selected in light of the remaining types: identification, photographic essay, life cycle, experiment/activity/craft/how-to-do/journals/diaries/albums, survey, and specialized books.

Individual Titles

While compiling a list of possible titles, I evaluated all books against the standards set forth by the National Council of the Teachers of English used in their annual evaluation of nonfiction books for the Orbis Pictus award. (See Table 3.2 for a description of the evaluative criteria.) These evaluative criteria have been cited by other researchers (Vardell, 1991) in the field of informational children’s literature as points to consider when selecting books for the classroom. Drawing from these industry standards and using books such as Making Facts Come Alive: Choosing Quality Nonfiction K-8" (Bamford and Kristo, 1998) and Checking Out Nonfiction K-8: Good Choices for Best Learning (Bamford & Kristo, 2000), along with my own personal experience with
informational books, I compiled a list of possible titles for the participants to read. I created a typed list of approximately 45 titles of books appropriate for students in grades 3-5. In addition to my own list, I also photocopied the list of recommended children’s literature informational books from the sixth edition of the textbook *Children’s Literature in the Elementary School* by Huck, Helper, Hickman and Kiefer (1997) and added these pages to the back of my list. This list contained approximately 250 additional titles of high quality informational books.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>facts current and complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>balance of fact and theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>varying point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stereotypes avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>author’s qualifications adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appropriate scope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>authenticity of detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>logical development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clear sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interrelationships indicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>patterns provided (general-to-specific, simple-to-complex, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>readable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>illustrations complement text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>placement of illustrative materials appropriate and complementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appropriate media, format, type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>writing is interesting, stimulating, reveals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>author’s enthusiasm for subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>curiosity and wonder encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appropriate terminology, rich language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3.2: Evaluation Criteria set forth by the National Council of Teachers of English for the Orbis Pictus Award.

This list was then provided to Dr. Evelyn Freeman, a well-known expert in the field of children’s informational literature. She examined the list for the quality of the titles, the variety of types of books included, and the books’ appropriateness for intermediate age students. Dr. Freeman reviewed the list, starring the titles she believed to be of especially high quality and titles that represented a variety of different types of informational books. Dr. Freeman also suggested titles not included on the projected list.
Upon receiving the returned list with the starred and suggested books, I examined the list and selected a total of seven titles I thought would be interesting to the participants and possibly provide rich discussion. Books selected for the study consisted of award winning titles or books written by noted and highly acclaimed nonfiction authors. Table 3.3 shows the titles selected and the recognition bestowed on either the book or the author. I tried to include titles from well-known and prolific authors in case the participants were interested later in reading additional books by these authors.

Unexpectedly, there was a fair division of science (4 books) and social studies (3 books) topics along with a mixture of titles illustrated with real photographs and others with drawings and sketches. Table 3.4 represents the book titles according to their science or social studies subject matter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hurricanes: Earth's Mightest Storms (1996)</td>
<td>Patricia Lauber</td>
<td>• Noted science author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Winner of Orbis Pictus Honor Book award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mummies: Made in Egypt (1979)</td>
<td>Aliki</td>
<td>• Well known author and illustrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscles: Our Muscular System (1998)</td>
<td>Seymour Simon</td>
<td>• Noted author of over 150 science books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Many have been named Outstanding Science Trade Book by the National Science Teachers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Kids (1980)</td>
<td>Russell Freedman</td>
<td>• Winner of Newberry and Newberry Honor Book Awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Orbis Pictus Winner and Honor Book Awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Newberry Honor Book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3  Book Titles and Author Recognition.
Books were first selected for their overall quality. Only after the individual titles were selected did the possible pairing of the books come into play. The order and pairing of books read for each session were determined in part by the length of the book, depth of coverage of the subject, and possible connections among the book topics.

The books ranged in length from 27 pages (Mummies Made in Egypt) to 144 pages (The Great Fire). For the five sessions, I divided the books by topic and by length. The first book read, An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly by Laurence Pringle, was 64 pages and full of technical information. The book contained, in my opinion, such rich material, that I decided to have the group read this book on its own. In addition, the book The Great Fire (144 pages), was another book the participants read alone due to the length and the nature of the topic (the Chicago fire), and the quantity of information present in the text. Hurricanes: Earth’s Mightiest Storms by Patricia Lauber and A Drop of Water by Walter Wick were titles placed together for one session due to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science Topics</th>
<th>Social Studies Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hurricanes: Earth’s Mightiest Storms</td>
<td>Immigrant Kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a</td>
<td>Mummies Made in Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarch Butterfly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscles: Our Muscular System</td>
<td>The Great Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Drop of Water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Content Area Book List.
the connection of the properties of water and combined length. **Muscles: Our Muscular System** and **Mummies Made in Egypt** were placed together because both focused on the body. They contrasted in terms of illustrations and this contrast was expected to stimulate richer discussion. Seymour Simon, author of the Muscles book, tends to use color photographs and this book was illustrated with full-page color photographs of the human body. These scanned photos changed x-ray photographs into colorful computer graphics. On the other hand, **Mummies Made in Egypt**, was illustrated by Aliki, in her signature style of black ink drawings with minimal color. Table 3.5 provides a list of books read for each session and a brief summary of each book.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Summary of Book</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly (1997)</td>
<td>The life cycle and migration patterns of monarch butterflies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hurricanes: Earth's Mightest Storms (1996)</td>
<td>Information about many different aspects of hurricanes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A Drop of Water (1997)</td>
<td>Information about different aspects of water, such as forms, varieties, and properties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mummies: Made in Egypt (1979)</td>
<td>Preparation of bodies for burial and mummification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Muscles: Our Muscular System (1998)</td>
<td>Muscles in our body and how they work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Great Fire (1995)</td>
<td>Documentation of the Chicago fire of 1871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: Summary of books read for each session.
The Setting

I chose an out-of-school setting to closely resemble the book club meetings many adults attend at each other’s homes. I hoped to provide an atmosphere that would take the group away from the distractions commonly found at schools such as phone calls, parents wanting to talk, or a colleague needing to borrow something. Thus, my apartment was selected for the site of the study because of its central location for all the participants coming from their respective schools. We met at my apartment from 4:30-6:30 in the afternoon and light snacks were provided at each meeting.

The meetings were informal with the main goal of each session being to read and discuss children’s informational literature and to allow the teachers to share their personal reactions to the books. Meetings were held every other week to provide enough time for the participants to read each book. A total of five meetings were scheduled. Two meetings were held in January, two in February, and the last one was held in March.

I mailed the first book, An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly to the participants over the winter holiday. They received their remaining books along with a list indicating the order the books were to be read at the first session. No special instructions were given to the teachers except to attend the session with their impressions and thoughts about the book.

Introductions were made at the first meeting with participants sharing some personal information about themselves. I then opened the first discussion and all remaining discussions by asking if anyone would like to begin sharing their comments about the book.
Summary of Data Collection Procedure

Data collected over a period of 16 weeks from November 2000 to March 2001 consisted of:

- a survey administered to numerous intermediate grade teachers in several states
- an initial interview administered prior to the book group meetings to obtain demographic and educational information about participating teachers along with information regarding their initial attitudes and knowledge about the genre of informational books
- an exit interview with participants including some of the same questions from the initial interview following the conclusion of the book group sessions
- audio tapes with selective and full transcriptions of the interviews with teachers
- audio tapes of teacher conversations about informational books during the book group meeting and following the meeting
- 5 minute quick writes by the teachers following the end of each book group discussion.
- selective and full transcriptions of the book group discussions
- field notes on teacher conversations and behaviors
- reflective notes taken by the researcher

Outlined in Table 3.6 is how I used my data to inform my research questions.
Table 3.6: Rationale for Data Collection.

**Research Design**

There were four distinct phases in this study to data collection. The first phase of the study, which occurred in November and December, consisted of multiple events. A 27 item, likert scale survey was administered to a large group of intermediate teachers (see Appendix A). Also during this time frame, a call for participants to join the study
was made through fliers, personal contacts, and email. Once the six teachers were selected, each teacher was interviewed to obtain demographic and educational information. Concurrently, I created the list of possible titles for the group to read throughout the five meetings. Also, during this phase the list was given to an expert for her opinion, the book list was finalized, and the books were ordered.

The second phase, lasting from January until mid-March, consisted of holding five two-hour book group sessions for the participants to discuss the books. For up to two hours, six teachers met to discuss that session’s book. For some meetings, the teachers read and discussed one book, while in other sessions, they discussed two books. The length of the books and nature of the topics influenced whether the teachers read one or two books for that session. Upon the completion of each meeting, the participants engaged in quick writes about their thoughts and feelings concerning that day’s meeting. The teachers wrote immediately following the first session. It was my hope to capture their thinking about the discussion or the books before they left for the evening. The meetings were scheduled in two-week intervals to provide ample time for the participants to read the texts. Teachers read the books for themselves as readers, and were not specifically directed to use them with their students.

The third phase consisted of holding exit interviews with each participant to obtain their impressions and feelings about the book group format and their attitudes about informational books. Exit interviews were held during the first two weeks of March.
While data analysis was ongoing throughout all phases of the study, data was no longer being collected in the final phase. Time was devoted solely to analyzing the data and recording the findings. Table 3.7 provides a timeline of the data collection for the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Data Collection Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Obtain responses from a larger number of intermediate teachers</td>
<td>• Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey to Intermediate</td>
<td>Initial demographic and educational data on participants</td>
<td>• Interview if follow up or clarification is needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Field notes if applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and background information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November-December</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Hold discussions about various informational books</td>
<td>• Audio tapes of group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book group meetings</td>
<td>1 to 2 children’s informational books discussed per session</td>
<td>• Quick writes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 total held every 2 weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Follow up questions if needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January- March</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Evaluate participants and personal reactions to book club group</td>
<td>• Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-administer Survey</td>
<td>Re-administer survey</td>
<td>• Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November-May</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7: Data Collection Timeline.
**Distribution of the Survey**

A survey consisting of 26 questions and using a Likert scale, was created for this research project. Three areas were examined in the survey: classroom practices, teachers' attitudes, and teachers' knowledge. The survey provided a quantitative aspect to the research design.

A snowball sampling method (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998) for distribution of the survey was employed. Multiple surveys were either mailed or delivered to personal and professional colleagues in the local area and in several other states. Surveys distributed totaled approximately 170. Each package included multiple copies of the survey with attached letters explaining the reason for survey and how the results would be utilized. Each point person distributed the survey to known intermediate teachers in his/her building with an additional request to identify and provide a copy of the questionnaire to any other intermediate teachers who might like to participate in the survey. Intermediate teachers in Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin received the survey. Distributors of the surveys were provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the completed surveys by mail. I collected surveys locally on a prearranged date. In all, 138 surveys were returned.

The data from the surveys helped contextualize the data gathered from the smaller group of teachers participating in the dissertation study. The completed surveys provided additional information and broadened my understanding of a larger pool of intermediate teachers' attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about informational books. This allowed for the data obtained from the six teachers participating in the study to be contextualized within this larger band of respondents.
In retrospect, I should have included an opening statement about the distinction between nonfiction and informational books on the survey. I assumed that teachers would not consider biographies when responding to each statement, but I cannot be certain they responded having separated biographies from informational books. In addition, there were some confusing statements. Teachers wrote personal clarifications in addition to their circled, numbered response to those statements that were unclear. I divided the survey into three subsections and planned on representing each section in my findings, but my research questions were revised as data from the book group meetings provided new avenues to explore. Only the section of the survey pertaining to teachers' attitudes was fully analyzed and included in my findings.

**Interviews**

The interview is a primary research tool in qualitative methodology and can be considered a “construction site of knowledge” (Kvale, 1996, p. 2). I attempted to conduct the interviews more as a conversation, but acknowledge Kvale’s (1996) notion that all interviews have a “structure and purpose” and that the researcher “defines and controls the situation” (p. 6). Nonetheless, I attempted for a conversational tone and ease with my participants during our interviews, and I shared my personal experiences with them as we discussed our teaching and educational experiences.

Each participant gave two interviews. The initial interview occurred prior to the beginning of the book group meetings. Each individual was contacted and a date set for an interview. Most often, I met with each teacher in her classroom after school. I asked each participant a common set of interview questions (see Appendix B), but also asked additional and follow up questions based on the nature of the conversation. Each
interview took approximately 30-45 minutes and was audio taped. In addition, I took field notes during the interviews and these observations were amended, edited, and typed for each of the participants. Through the initial interviews, I obtained demographic information about each participant to informally gauge how each teacher self-reported using informational books in the classroom and to determine their level of expertise and experience in this area. The purpose of the exit interview, held in the weeks following the last book club meeting, was to capture and understand the teacher's thoughts, feelings, and points of view about informational books within the classroom. These interviews were also held in the teachers' classrooms after the school day.

I selectively transcribed the interviews, omitting off-topic conversations if it occurred. The interview transcripts were added to the data pool and I also examined them individually and compared the initial and exit interviews. Table 3.8 shares some of the topics addressed in the initial and exit interviews. Through both interviews, I obtained quotes from the participants that allowed me to "enrich and confirm" my analysis of the data (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 381). The interviews supplemented my data pool by providing me with the participants' thoughts and actions about informational books in their classrooms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Interviews</th>
<th>Exit Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use of informational books in the classroom</td>
<td>Impressions of the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher preparation (experience with informational books in children’s literature classes)</td>
<td>Impact of discussion group on their own attitudes about the genre of informational books for themselves and the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom book collections</td>
<td>Current classroom practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic information</td>
<td>Level of comfort with informational books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reading habits</td>
<td>Use of books from the study with students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8: Topics guiding teacher interviews.

**Participant Observation**

"Observation has served as the bedrock source of human knowledge" (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 377) and is considered an essential element of all qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Observation, when employing qualitative measures, can fall along a continuum from mostly participant at one end to mostly observer at the other. However, it is imperative that researchers define their roles along this continuum so that the level of interaction with the participants is known. As Glesne and Peskin (1992) describe, the main outcome of participant observation is to understand the research setting, its participants, and their behavior. In an attempt to understand the nature of teachers' talk during the book group meetings, I acted as a participant observer.

Assuming the participant observer role allowed me the opportunity to interact freely with the teachers in the book group. Throughout the course of the discussion, I shared my own observations and comments about the book. I acted as an active...
participant and interested researcher as I posed questions to the group or requested clarification or elaboration. I intended to interact equally with the group but many times, the conversations were so lively that it was difficult for all members to take turns. When the conversation moved that rapidly, I took a less active role and joined in when clarification or explanation was needed.

When appropriate, I shared my personal knowledge about informational books, such as identifying the type of book we were reading (survey, document, etc.). This sharing of information was casually entered into the conversation when appropriate. When the opportunities arose, I took field notes during the discussions of key points mentioned or questions I wanted to pose.

My presence in the group may have influenced the participants for several reasons. First, they were aware of my personal interest in informational books. They knew I was conducting this study because I felt the use of informational books in the classroom was important. Secondly, they were aware that their conversations would serve as the data for my dissertation. Occasionally, this fact would come up as a participant tried to refocus the group when off-topic conversation occurred. The teachers may have discussed these books in greater detail because of my participation in the group.

A participant observer role often allows the researcher to acquire the status of “trusted person” within the group (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This immersion in the group helps the researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do, because of this first hand involvement (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In order to experience and capture this reality of actively discussing children’s informational books,
it became necessary for me to assume this role. It was for these reasons, along with my desire to talk about the books, which lead to my decision to take on this participant observer role throughout the study.

Transcribing the Tapes

Audio tapes were transcribed for both the interviews and book club meetings. I transcribed the initial interviews prior to the beginning of the first book club meeting. Using a transcription machine, I transcribed the tapes immediately following the book club meetings while the nonverbal actions of the teachers were still fresh in my mind. In addition, I tried to include what book the teachers were referring to or what page they asked the group to turn to when discussing a particular passage. This information was included in brackets in the transcriptions. Periodically, I also recorded the number count on the transcribing machine in case I needed to return to a specific segment of the tape. Off-topic conversation was noted (e.g. talking about a television show) and the numbers recorded for the length of that conversation. Transcripts are often considered “approximations” due to the great difficulty in accurately capturing the rhythms of speech or the conversation in actual time (Graue & Walsh, 1998). I included personal notes as to the inflection of the voice and used the counter to help indicate the length of the passage. The two weeks between each book club meeting provided me with ample time to finish the transcription of each tape prior to the next meeting. Upon completion of the transcription, I listened to all the tapes as I read the transcripts and made the necessary corrections.
Data Analysis

"Data analysis is the process of bringing order... and a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 111). It is also a reflexive activity, one that informs both data collection (Spradley, 1980) and writing. Analysis is not the last stage of the research process, but rather is ongoing and conducted simultaneously with the data collection to focus and shape the story as it proceeds (Glense & Peshkin, 1992). For example, the information I gained from transcribing the book meeting conversations helped inform the questions I posed during the exit interviews with the participants. Also during the course of a meeting, it sometimes became necessary to pose a specific question to an individual to obtain her take on a certain statement or issue discussed if she had not shared her opinion or made a contribution to the discussion.

An inductive approach is taken in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). A researcher enters a situation and observes and studies how people act and react to a phenomenon. Patterns emerge and lead to the formation of a grounded theory. Grounded theory, "a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273) allows for the generation or discovery of a theory "... that relates to a particular situation" (Creswell, 1998, p.56). In developing these theories, it is important that they be "grounded" in the data and the theory be representative of the actions and social processes of the people being studied. These theories should show plausible relationships among concepts and sets of concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The researcher carefully examines the particulars or details from the study in order to make generalizations. The theory takes

77
center stage in that the research is designed either to modify an existing theory or to
generate a new theory because none previously exist for the topic under investigation.

It is an interpretative act to bring meaning to raw data (Erickson, 1986; Marshall
and Rossman, 1999). As there is no truly neutral stance towards data (Erickson, 1992), I
employed some a priori categories concerning the teachers' conversations throughout the
study. The data were analyzed with the following questions in mind:

- Do the teachers show an increase in awareness of the informational genre over the
  length of the study, and if so, how is it shown?
- What questions and explanations are generated within the group as they discuss
  the literature read for that evening?
- What kinds of reactions do the teachers have to books read? Personal? Professional?
- What attitudes do teachers express about informational books throughout the
  study?
- Do teachers refer to using more informational text in their classroom throughout
  the length of the study?
- Will teachers begin to compare and evaluate the books they have read so far? If
  so, on what level will they be making the comparisons?
- Did the teachers share any of the books with their students throughout the study?
  If so, which ones did they share and in what way? Do the teachers plan to use the
  books with their students in the future?
- How do teachers talk about informational books?

I began the analysis of my data by reading through the initial interviews and first
few book meetings' transcripts. Multiple readings of this data allowed me to get a sense
of the data and develop a heightened awareness of the larger picture (Erickson, 1986;
Graue & Walsh, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). From these repeated readings of the
data, themes and categories emerged allowing the data to "speak for itself." After getting
an understanding for the data collected so far, I began my initial coding.

By coding the data, the researcher begins to "[label] themes that are represented
by chunks of data," (Graue & Walsh, 1998) acting as a means of data reduction and
allowing the researcher to see patterns in the data (Glense & Peshkin, 1992). At first, the initial feelings and impressions gathered from the multiple readings generated possible codes, and later, a more refined coding occurred as complex ideas and concepts emerged.

More specifically, following the analysis procedures common for grounded theory, I engaged in both open and axial coding of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As tentative categories of information were being formed in my mind, I began with open coding which allowed me to segment the information and to develop categories and to determine the dimensions and properties of these categories. All transcripts contained ample margins to jot down ideas and my tentative codes. I coded the transcripts in terms of idea units (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Idea units are a way to designate a single idea or topic regardless of the length of spoken or written text. It is possible for one sentence to contain several idea units or several sentences to contain one idea unit. For example, the following sentence was coded into one idea unit. "You could almost compare fiction and nonfiction and talk about how this book is like fiction and how it is different." (BR, #1, p. 4). The first part of the sentence contains the idea of comparing fiction and nonfiction books. The rest of the sentence continues to elaborate upon that idea and specifically suggests using the nonfiction book to judge how it is like a fiction book and how it is different. Since the second part of the sentence only elaborates the first part, it was coded as one idea unit. Since human dialogue can be cyclical, it is important to note that portions of conversations can begin with a new idea and be coded (idea 1), move to another idea and receive a new code (idea 2), but then return back to an idea previously mentioned (idea 1). Therefore, the last part will not be counted as a new idea, but coded in accordance to the code that matches the topic already introduced into the conversation.
Idea units were chosen because the unit of analysis for this study needed to capture the verbal activity that occurred during the interviews and book club meetings. The rationale for this choice of unit is that it represents the teacher's thinking as it emerges throughout conversations with peers. What the teachers say, along with how they choose to express themselves, represents their complex thinking. Idea units allowed me to focus on "what was said" with the purpose of trying to understand the thinking and meaning behind the teachers' language in their communication with each other during the book group meetings. The flexibility behind the size of the idea unit makes it an appropriate choice when dealing with the complexity of the human language and the dynamic of group conversations. Idea units allowed me to capture the essence of a participant's comment regardless of how many or how few words were used by the teacher. The thought behind the words receives attention. The flexible size of the idea unit honors all contributions to the discussion. For example, a simple "yes" by Teacher A to a longer statement made by Teacher B provides support and backing for the idea expressed by another. The "yes" in this instance can be considered as support of that idea.

Engaging in open coding of idea units formed tentative categories of information about the questions being investigated. During that time, the method of constant comparative analysis was employed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using this method, the researcher identifies incidents, events, and activities in the data and constantly compares them to emerging categories to help develop and saturate these categories (Creswell, 1998). This allows the tentative theory generated from the data to be elaborated and modified as the new data supports or distracts from an earlier theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Upon completion of open coding, "axial coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was
undertaken to allow the data to be reassembled in new ways with attempts to determine the interconnections between the categories found previously during open coding.

Analyzing the quantitative survey data, I examined key questions such as *I read a nonfiction book at least once a week to my students* to determine average scores for the smaller group of teachers participating in the book group and the larger group of teachers who also completed the survey. Finding the average scores to the questions allowed me to compare the typical responses of the teachers to a larger group of intermediate grade teachers. These data may also provide additional support to indicate that the participating teachers hold similar beliefs to the larger population of intermediate teachers sampled, thus enhancing the transferability of the study.

**Memo Writing**

While coding the data, I engaged in memo writing (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Huberman & Miles, 1994), jotting notes about my current thoughts, understandings, and insights about the data. Making notes in the margins of the data allowed me to capture my initial feelings and reflections that constantly shaped and influenced the study.

**Audit Trail**

I maintained an audit trail with careful documentation of all data. Pre- and post-surveys, transcripts of interviews and book club meetings, audiotapes, and notes were logged and marked according to a personally devised organizational system so specific data could be easily retrieved.
Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is often not replicable due to the desire of researchers following this paradigm to record the complexity of interactions of a particular situation in a naturalistic way. Qualitative research must be evaluated according to its soundness, thereby providing a way to examine the trustworthiness of the study. The standards by which qualitative research is measured for its "goodness" are the parallel constructs proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) that stand in for the notion of validity and reliability in the quantitative paradigm. Falling under the umbrella label of trustworthiness, these parallel constructs provide a language for qualitative researchers to discuss and assess the soundness of their study. Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed researchers examine their research for the issue of trustworthiness against the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These issues as they relate to my study are discussed below.

Credibility

The focus of credibility is with "establishing a match between the constructed realities of the respondents and those realities as represented by the evaluator and attributed to various stakeholders" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). There are several techniques employed to establish and to evaluate the credibility of a study. Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to the techniques of prolonged and persistent engagement, peer debriefing, member checks, and triangulation as ways to help ensure the issue of credibility of a study.
Prolonged and Persistent Engagement

I collected data from November until mid-March. Five book group meetings were held over the course of ten weeks. Each session lasted for up to two hours. Interviews were held with the participants prior to and following the last book group meeting. I followed the teachers' emerging understandings throughout the course of one meeting and across time from the first to the fifth meetings. Familiarity and trust were established due to the informal nature of the book group meetings, in addition to my having known several of the participants or knowing friends of the participant prior to the beginning of the study. This rapport is necessary to "build the trust necessary to uncover constructions, and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understanding the context’s culture" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 303-304). Data were collected in the form of surveys, initial and exit interviews with the participants, audiotapes of the book discussions, written reflections following each of the book group meetings, and my own field notes kept throughout the course of the study. Persistent observation allows the researcher to identify elements most relevant to the problem being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and adds "depth" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) to the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Peer Debriefing

I engaged in peer debriefing with two doctoral students. Throughout the study, we discussed data gathering methods, possible coding categories, initial interpretations, and findings. In addition, one peer debriefer reviewed all my transcripts of the book club meetings and helped me clarify and modify emerging themes. Peer debriefing can prove to be a valuable tool for the researcher "for the purpose of exploring aspects of inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit with the inquirer’s mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
1985, p. 308). These analytic sessions allowed me to put forth my initial findings and have them considered and debated by a fellow researcher not directly involved in the study, providing me with opportunities to answer questions and note patterns not originally considered.

**Member Checks**

The “single most crucial technique for establishing credibility” is member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Member checks with the teachers occurred formally and informally during all phases of the study to check for the validity of my interpretations. I was able to put forth questions during the book group meetings and have the teachers respond to that idea immediately. I also posed questions informally in conversations prior to and after the book club meetings, as well as on the phone. In addition, I offered teachers the transcripts of their initial and exit interviews so they could check for errors in “fact of intent” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The exit interview, held after the completion of the last book club meeting allowed me to tentatively put forth some of the emerging categories I noticed in my beginning readings of the data. Member checks offered the participants the opportunity to make suggestions, offer interpretations, and ask questions about the data gathered so far. By holding member checks with the participating teachers, I gained additional insights and insider knowledge that helped ground the interpretations in the data and allowed the stakeholders opportunities to verify the findings I put forth.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation involves the use of “multiple data-collection methods” to contribute to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). Several techniques were employed as opposed to a single technique for collecting data, thus allowing for a
wider and more in depth data pool to support my findings. The use of multiple techniques allowed for different facets of the data to be explored and analyzed and provided a way to cross-validate the data while allowing for comparison and rich descriptions of the event under investigation. Triangulation occurred in this study in the form of participant observation during the book group meetings, initial and exit interviews, and document collection (through field notes, quick writes and completed surveys).

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the possible application of these findings to another setting. Transferability is relative, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989) and "depends entirely on the degree to which salient conditions overlap or match" (p. 241). By providing an extensive, careful description of the time and context, the researcher allows the reader to decide if the findings will transfer to another situation. Using the technique of thick description (Geertz, 1973) in the study supports the claim for transferability of the findings. The detailed description and inclusion of this information helps show that an "adequate evidentiary warrant exists for the assertions made" (Erickson, 1992). The inclusion of direct quotes from the teachers builds a foundation for the categories formed and helps provide support for the assertions and interpretations shared in the findings.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability and confirmability are often considered a two-part process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Dependability examines the judgment displayed by the researcher throughout the course of the study, whereas confirmability is concerned with the evidence that the data supports the findings.
Dependability refers to the stability of data over time. Qualitative inquiry is often characterized by an emergent design, one that allows the researcher to follow the data as opposed to be lead solely by overt methodological designs. It becomes necessary to carefully track and document these changes in the research design so outside readers "can explore the process" and "judge the decisions that were made" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 242) to determine the dependability of the data. The research design did not change significantly from the beginning to the ending of the study.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are "grounded in events rather than the inquirer's personal constructions" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 324). The detailed description of the data gathering and analysis methods employed add to the study's confirmability. This information can be examined as to the care that the data has been collected and analysis applied. Findings derived through careful analysis and supported by specific examples help the reader determine if the findings are data based. It becomes important to provide supporting evidence that the findings are "rooted in the data themselves" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243) meaning what the participants said or did can be directly tracked to the raw data. My interpretations of the data must have a strong foothold in the data and constitute the source of my findings.

Summary

The purpose of my study was to explore the attitudes, understandings, and knowledge intermediate teachers held towards informational books. I enlisted the use of a book group format to capture teachers' interactions with informational literature in a supportive context. I hypothesized that by having teachers read quality informational
books and by talking with colleagues about them, they might feel more comfortable or more favorable towards this genre. I proposed to describe these emerging understandings and attitudes through the use of a reading group format.

Six intermediate teachers volunteered for this study and data were collected on them both individually and as a group. Data sources included completed surveys, interviews, book club meeting transcripts, short reflection comments, and field notes. In addition, a larger pool of intermediate teachers were administered a survey to obtain information regarding their classroom practices, knowledge, and attitudes towards informational books. Issues of trustworthiness were described as they related to the design of my study. In the next chapter, I report my findings as they relate to my research questions.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe intermediate teachers’ attitudes towards and interactions with informational books in a book group setting. The following research questions guided my study:

• What attitudes do teachers hold about the genre of informational books both personally and for classroom use?
• What understandings, issues, or concerns are raised about informational books within the book group conversations?
• What criteria or factors do teachers feel influence the use, or lack of use, of informational books within the classroom?
• What impact did book group discussions as a means of professional development have on teachers’ attitudes, understandings, selection and use of informational books?

This chapter will be divided into sections that address each research question. The coding which follows the direct quotes provides a reference to their location in the data pool including the source of the quote (meeting #, interview, or exit note) followed by the page number. The participants chose not to use pseudonyms and are sometimes identified by their name or by their initials. In the transcripts, I identify myself with the letter D.
Analysis of the Following Four Questions

I coded the data from my study using idea units. The data set for the first question included initial interviews with all six participants and the survey data collected from the six teachers and a larger sample of intermediate grade teachers. For the remaining three questions, the data set included five book group transcripts, exit notes, and initial and exit interviews. Since the last three questions relied heavily upon the transcripts from the book group meetings, I worked with other researchers in my analysis of the data. A recent doctoral graduate read all five transcripts. The core categories and interpretations were analyzed and discussed over several phone and face-to-face sessions. In addition, I worked with another doctoral candidate to compare coding of approximately thirty minutes of one transcript. We discussed our differences in opinions and resolved these differences through consensus. For each question, in addition to the major findings, I included the number of idea units related to the major findings. The related subcategories will be presented to help indicate the frequency with which the findings appeared in the data. The number of idea units is presented in the introduction to each question and in the charts highlighting the major findings. The narrative section describes and expands each of the major ideas to provide a broader, more in-depth understanding of the findings.

Research Question #1: What attitudes do teachers hold about the genre of informational books both personally and for classroom use?

For this study, I examined the areas I felt would provide insight into teachers’ personal attitudes towards informational books. Their personal attitudes were revealed in several ways. I asked the teachers about their personal reading habits, their own
experiences with informational books as students, their level of comfort with this genre, and the perceived benefits of using this genre with their students. In addition, I examined the survey questions that spoke directly to teachers’ personal attitudes towards informational books. In order to ascertain teachers’ attitudes towards classroom use, I asked them about how they used these books in the classroom and the criteria used when selecting books for students. I explored their observations about students’ reactions to this genre as well. I also asked about the composition of their classroom libraries. I analyzed the survey questions that pertained to the teachers’ attitudes towards informational books for classroom use. In addition, I sampled a larger population of intermediate grade teachers about their attitudes. I will report these findings immediately following the participating teachers’ results for those particular survey questions.

Two major categories emerged in relation to teachers’ attitudes towards informational books both personally and for classroom use. Personal attitudes (34 idea units) has two subcategories: personal reading habits (12 idea units), and past experiences with informational books (22 idea units). Attitudes towards classroom use (108 idea units) has seven subcategories, including: level of comfort with informational books (12 idea units), selecting informational books of the classroom (12 idea units), use of informational books in the classroom (12 idea units), observations of students reading informational texts (13 idea units), students’ difficulty with informational books (25 idea units), perceived benefits of informational books (16 idea units), and classroom collections (18 idea units). Table 4.1 represents the major findings for this question.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Categories</th>
<th>Level of Comfort with Informational Books</th>
<th>Idea Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Attitudes</td>
<td>Personal Reading Habits</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Past experiences with informational books</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Idea Units 34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards Classroom Use</td>
<td>Level of comfort with informational books</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selecting informational books for the classroom</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of informational books in the classroom</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations of students reading informational books</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students’ difficulty with informational books</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Idea Units 108</td>
<td>Perceived benefits of informational books</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom collections</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Core categories and subcategories related to teachers’ attitudes towards informational books.
**Personal Attitudes**

**Personal Reading Habits**

Initial interviews took place in November and December. All six teachers reported that they participate in adult book clubs with either staff members from their schools or with other friends. They all read adult fiction novels with these book clubs. As for personal reading, five out of the six teachers predominately read adult novels while one teacher mentioned preferring children’s novels to adult books. Three teachers did not read or could not remember the last good informational book they had read for their own enjoyment. One teacher had recently read a child’s biography on Theodore Roosevelt, one teacher read the 2000 Edition of the *Guinness Book of World Records* with her son, and another had read a book about children with Down Syndrome. Beth admitted it was rare for her to read informational books. When asked to name their favorite authors, all teachers mentioned fiction authors. From their collective responses, the teachers’ personal reading habits consisted of reading more fiction than nonfiction.

**Past Experiences with Informational Books**

The teachers shared positive, negative, and neutral memories about their previous experiences with informational books during their interviews. DJ remembered a particularly positive experience with informational books in the fourth grade when she wrote a report on bees. She still remembers the information in great detail and her fascination with the pictures. Deena described her father as a “history buff” who stored informational books throughout the house. She felt she was “taught from a very young age (that) informational books were to be used, so a positive, useful love of reading was instilled at a very young age.” (Initial interview, p. 3) DJ and Deena both specifically
remembered positive experiences with informational books. The other teachers
remembered little to no interactions with informational books. Katie said:

I don’t know if we read lots of informational books that I can remember. If we
did, they were historical books. So if I can even remember it was some kind of
history or social studies type of thing, not a lot of science books or anything about
math. I don’t think we had a lot of experiences with that. (Initial interview, p. 3)

Holly and Beth did not remember any experiences with informational books. Beth read
all the time, but always fiction books, she said. Lindsey said, “Honestly, I don’t
remember reading that many informational books. I do remember, not in class, I read
some on my own. I remember I liked learning facts, but as far as in school, I remember
textbooks.” (Initial interview, p. 3) The teachers either had a strong positive experience
with informational books or else they barely remembered reading them in school.

One question on the survey asked the teachers to reflect on past experiences with
informational books. (See Table 4.2) The statement read: As a student in elementary
school, I had positive experiences with informational books. A five point likert-scale was
used with a continuum of 1, indicating strongly agree, and 5, indicating strongly disagree.
For this question, the participating teachers (n=6) averaged a scored of 2.6. Two of the
teachers indicated that they strongly disagreed with this statement and one teacher
strongly agreed. The average for the larger population of intermediate teachers (n= 138)
surveyed was 2.9. Out of the 138 respondents, 21 strongly disagreed with this statement while 18 teachers strongly agreed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participating Teachers (n=6)</th>
<th>Surveyed Teachers (n=138)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a student in elementary school, I had positive experiences with informational books.</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Teachers’ personal experiences with informational books in school.

**Attitudes Towards Classroom Use**

**Level of Comfort with Informational Books**

When asked about their levels of comfort with these books, the teachers shared more of their thinking. While Deena felt “fairly comfortable” using informational books, she mentioned her comfort level depended on her familiarity with the book. She added that she did not like to present anything she is not familiar with to her students because it is important to her to be knowledgeable about the book and its organization. Katie worried about the time it took to use informational books with her students. When she has the time, she said she would like to use these types of books because they offer her students many ideas to discuss. Holly felt just as comfortable using informational books as she did using fiction books. Both DJ and Beth felt comfortable but acknowledged a feeling that they should use informational books more. DJ shared, “I feel pretty comfortable (using informational books). I know I could improve in that area and I know that I am probably not using them (to) the best (of their ability) with the kids.” (Exit interview, p. 5) Beth shared, “(I feel) pretty comfortable, but I feel I should be using them more than I do, but when I do use them, I am comfortable using them.” (Initial interview,
p. 4). She wants to use them more because "a lot of the kids like to read them and enjoy reading them more than novels so I think they would use them if I would expose them to more (titles)." (p.4). Beth provided the following reason for not using them as much as she would like:

I don’t know a lot of good titles to use other than the ones for content areas and even with those I don’t know specifically but I can go to the library and find them. I always think of using biographies (instead of informational books) and I know there are a lot of good ones (informational books) out there. I am not as familiar with them as I am with fiction. I never read them as a kid. No one ever really talked about them in college. (Initial interview, p. 4)

While Lindsey felt "pretty comfortable" with using informational books, she found it difficult locating good texts for lower readers. While the teachers shared enjoying informational books and feeling fairly comfortable with them, several teachers also expressed a feeling of knowing they needed to use them more with their students.

One question on the survey asked the teachers to rate their level of comfort with selecting informational books. (See Table 4.3). The statement read: I feel confident in selecting informational books to use in the classroom. The book group teachers averaged a score of 1.6, indicating a high level of comfort. The larger response pool of intermediate teachers averaged 1.8, also suggesting that they feel rather confident with selecting informational books to use in the classroom.
I feel confident in selecting informational books to use in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participating Teachers (n=6)</th>
<th>Surveyed Teachers (n=138)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident in selecting informational books to use in the classroom.</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Teachers' level of comfort in selecting informational books.

Selecting Informational Books for the Classroom

In order to explore how teachers select books for their classrooms, three questions were posed. One was an interview question and two were survey questions. The interviews with participating teachers provided a greater depth of understanding how teachers make these decisions. Lindsey selects her books based on students' interest and authors she knows. While Lindsey had an entire shelf of nonfiction books, she admitted:

They are not all good though. Honestly, I keep the really good ones in a basket because it is more accessible for the students. Some of them (the books on the shelf) are very old, and some of the information is not accurate. Some of them are not on their level either. (We have) . . . big chapter books about history, books actually being thrown out from the library. (Initial interview, p. 5)

Beth often chose books based on recommendations from friends and from her own personal knowledge. Recently, she purchased many fiction books recommended in a professional book about writing. Deena selects books that directly tie into her content areas and into the state proficiency goals. What her students read influences the decisions Katie makes when adding books to her classroom library. The teachers in this study reported selecting informational books for classroom use based on their students' reading habits, their personal knowledge, personal recommendations or by professional teacher
resources, and books that specifically match the required school curriculum. Table 4.4 lists the ways the teachers reported selecting informational books.

Table 4.4: How teachers select informational books to use in their classrooms.

- Teacher’s own personal knowledge
- Recommendations from friends or professional resources
- Subject matter connections to curriculum and proficiency standards
- Students’ interests
- Acquired from another location or source

Two questions on the survey were designed to learn about teachers’ decision making process and the relative weight they give to each decision. One question asked the teachers if they selected books they would like to read themselves and the other question asked teachers if they selected books based on what they thought their students would like to read. (See Table 4.5) The first question read: The books I select to use in my classroom represent what I like to read. The average score for the teachers in the study was 2.8. The other intermediate teachers surveyed score average was 2.7. It seems as if the teachers’ selection process is somewhat influenced by their own personal reading preferences. The second question read: I select books to use in my classroom based on what I think my students will like to read. The six teachers in the study agreed with this statement and had an average score of 2.1. Student preferences also influenced the larger band of teachers who responded to the survey. They had an average score of 2.0.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participating Teachers (n=6)</th>
<th>Surveyed Teachers (n=138)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The books I select to use in my classroom represent what I like to read.</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I select books to use in my classroom based on what I think my students will like to read.</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: How teachers select books.

Use of Informational Books in the Classroom

All participating teachers regularly read aloud to their students. They were all reading fiction novels. By December, five out of the six teachers had only read fiction books since the beginning of the school year. DJ reported reading more fiction books than nonfiction to her students, but she has read some nonfiction to her students this year. Her grade level curriculum topics dictate the nonfiction books she uses with her students. DJ works at a school with a well-stocked bookroom and believes an abundance of multiple copies of nonfiction books are at her disposal.

In Lindsey’s classroom, her students read fiction books during their independent reading time. As a way of incorporating informational literature into her reading instruction, Lindsey has her students locate something of interest in their fiction books to research using informational materials. Lindsey wants her students to understand that authors of fiction books research the material that they include in their books. This was
also her attempt at having her students read some nonfiction material as they read their fiction books. Lindsey has not read any informational books aloud to her students, but has used shorter nonfiction pieces with her students in guided reading. Deena’s students have read informational books and biographies this year for research purposes. No one specifically mentioned using informational books in the teaching of writing. Holly, like Deena, chooses books based on the mandated curriculum. Holly used math related informational books with her students, but has only used biographies in reading. Other than biographies, Holly generally does not use informational books with her students.

The participating teachers do not teach all content subjects to their students. Some teachers departmentalize, with one person teaching the same subject to different classes of students each day. The teachers in this study all teach reading and do read alouds with their homeroom class. Five of the teachers teach language arts, five teach math, two teach science, and three teach social studies. I asked the teachers to complete a chart to capture their use of informational books in each of the subject areas. Table 4.6 summarizes how often the teachers reported integrating informational books in their subject-related instruction.
Three questions examined the use of informational books in the classroom. Teachers were asked about their use of informational books weekly, for read alouds, and for their literacy instruction. (See Table 4.7) The first question asked teachers to respond to the following statement: I use informational books at least once a week in my classroom. None of the teachers in this study disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. The teachers' average score was 2.1. Only 12 people out of 138 teachers surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Their average score was 1.8. The second question read: I use informational books regularly for my read alouds. The six teachers averaged 2.0 with two teachers strongly agreeing with this statement, three teachers remaining neutral, and one teacher disagreeing. The average score for the
larger group of intermediate grade teachers surveyed was 2.5. The last question asked teachers to reflect upon their reading instruction. It read: I mainly use fiction literature in my reading instruction with students. The teachers’ scores in the study averaged 3.0 and the larger band of teachers averaged 2.7. For the teachers in the book group, two teachers agreed with this statement, two remained neutral, and two disagreed with this statement with regards to their literacy instruction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participating Teachers</th>
<th>Surveyed Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use informational books at least once a week in my classroom.</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use informational books regularly for my read alouds.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mainly use fiction literature in my reading instruction with students.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: How teachers are using informational books in the classroom.

Observations of Students Reading Informational Books

As mentioned earlier, the teachers reported selecting books based on students’ interests. It then seems appropriate to examine their observations about students’ reactions and interactions with these books since they, too, might influence teachers’ attitudes towards the genre of informational books. The teachers in this study believe students possess a high level of interest towards this genre. The teachers noted their
students’ desire to read informational books, whether they checked these books out from
the public or the classroom library. The teachers put forth various reasons for this high
level of interest and engagement, ranging from the students’ desire to “stump” the teacher
to the empowerment students feel when reading this genre.

Holly and Beth spoke of “stumping” the teacher in their initial interviews. The
students in their classrooms love to ask them specific questions based on the information
they had recently read in an informational book. As they stand by their teacher and wait
for an answer, they often tell them, “Well, when you find that out, come back and tell
me.” (Holly, Initial interview, p. 7) The irony, Holly admits, lies in the fact that the
students repeat something verbatim she has told them. Holly then has “homework” that
night so she can answer, or at least try to answer their questions the very next morning.
Beth agrees that her students enjoy discovering “some little unknown fact to tell you.”
(Initial interview, p. 6)

DJ questioned her role in influencing her students’ level of interest towards
informational books by sharing: “Right now, I think they like them, but they are not
passionate about them. I don’t think they have been exposed to them and part of that is
my fault.” (Initial interview, p. 6) DJ acknowledges her role as a teacher in influencing
her students’ level of interest or excitement towards informational books.

Deena credits the visual appeal of informational books for capturing her students’
interests. Describing her students’ levels of interest as very high, she continues to say:

When I have books out, they (the students) go for the informational books
because of the pictures. There are so many more pictures in them and if it is well
done, it is presented in such a way that they want to really pick it up. Whereas,
with a chapter book they have to read the blurb (to learn about the topic of the
book). It is a quick fix for some kids, to them it almost looks easier (reading the
informational book), but they don’t realize how much information they are actually getting. (Initial interview, p. 6)

Lindsey notices her students react differently to a book with wonderful pictures than a book with all text. Her students like the books with the "good pictures" and the ones that are laid out well.

Informational books are valuable commodities in Deena’s classroom this school year. She tells of her students’ desire to read these books:

I get new books in and I will preview the books. The nonfiction books are the ones that go first and the ones that are most desirable in this particular classroom. Sometimes it has been different in different classrooms, but they are picking them up and looking at them and scanning for information. They are making more connections with informational books. (Initial interview, p. 6)

While Deena feels her students need a great deal of instruction about the organization and the layout of informational books and how to search and scan for information, she acknowledges the importance of teaching her students about reading informational books for pleasure. Her students understand they can read this genre without a specific reason, but rather for enjoyment. Students, in her opinion, do not “fear” these books nor do they consider them boring, but their level of enthusiasm for a book relates to their level of interest. Lindsey feels strongly about allowing her students to select their own subjects when reading.

Holly and Katie specifically mentioned the level of interest their reluctant readers expressed with informational books. Katie said: “Maybe for your struggling readers, people who don’t like to read, I think nonfiction is better for them. For those kids that hate to read or don’t want to read, you know the nonfiction is at least something they can talk about and maybe would think is neat as opposed to just a fiction story.” (Initial
interview, p. 6) She noted this behavior in her reluctant readers from the past two years. Katie noticed her students enjoyed discussing informational books. She feels this genre "gets them talking about things. . . about why things happen and they enjoy it more.”

(Initial interview, p. 5)

Holly believes reading informational books empowers her students. She shared:

I think they are really interested (in informational books). They feel like they are learning more and they are learning it on their own. No one is telling them they have to learn this. I think it empowers them. It makes them feel they are in control of their own learning. They learn something that I did not teach them and they are going to be up at my desk telling me what they learned. (Initial interview, p.5)

The other teachers observed students’ excitement with reading books that made them more knowledgeable and each the class expert about a certain topic.

In the eyes of their teachers, students appeared to enjoy informational books. These books generated discussion, whether it was the pictures, the reality of the topic, or the location of a new fact they could share with their teacher or fellow students. The teachers realized the need to help their students with this genre, whether it is with direct instruction about aspects of the genre, or with fostering the passion students could have for this genre.

On the survey, the teachers were asked two questions about children’s levels of enjoyment with this genre. The teachers were asked specifically if they thought children enjoyed this genre for read alouds and for personal reading. (See Table 4.8). The first questions read: Students would enjoy a read aloud with an informational book. Five of the six teachers strongly agreed with this statement and one teacher agreed. Their scores averaged 1.1. The teachers in the larger pool of respondents felt the same way as almost half of the teachers strongly agreed with this statement. Their average score was 1.8. The
Children enjoy reading informational books. The teachers in the book group strongly agreed with this statement and their score averaged 1.3. The larger band of respondents also believed that students enjoy reading informational books, although not as strongly as the teachers in the book group. Their average score was 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participating Teachers (n=6)</th>
<th>Surveyed Teachers (n=138)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students would enjoy a read aloud with an informational book.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children enjoy reading informational books.</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Teachers’ perceptions about children’s interactions with informational books.

**Students’ Difficulty with Informational Books**

The teachers believed the kinds of difficulties that students encounter with informational texts to be many and varied. Every teacher expressed her beliefs that vocabulary causes difficulty for students when reading informational text. Specifically, the teachers considered the specialized vocabulary used with various topics to be difficult and the students’ inability to pronounce these words as troublesome. The teachers worried their students did not make use of or read the headings or captions accompanying
the illustrations and the visual aids, such as the charts or diagrams. Concerns over possible student confusion in regards to the books’ layouts were also mentioned. The decision over what to read first, such as the sidebars or the text, may also cause their students’ confusion. In addition, when reading informational books, the students are faced with synthesizing and analyzing the material as they read. Some teachers wondered if students merely browsed the book as opposed to engaging in real reading. They felt the amount of actual text on the page may be another reason why students experience difficulty with this genre. These concerns are summarized in Table 4.9.

- Vocabulary
- Students do not read the captions or the headings
- The layout of the book
- Synthesizing and analyzing content materials as they read
- Students may not actually be reading, but merely browsing through the text
- Amount of actual text on the page may be overwhelming

Table 4.9: Difficulties students may have with informational texts.

In order to assess intermediate teachers’ thoughts about the level of difficulty children experience with this genre, the teachers were asked to respond to one question. (See Table 4.10). It read: Many children have difficulty reading informational books. On the average, both sets of respondents did not strongly agree or strongly disagree with this statement. The average score for the members of the book club was 2.8 and the average score for the teachers in the larger group was 2.3.

106
Many children have difficulty reading informational books.

Table 4.10: Teachers’ perceptions of students’ difficulty with informational books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participating Teachers (n=6)</th>
<th>Surveyed Teachers (n=138)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many children have difficulty reading informational books.</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived Benefits of Informational Books

The teachers commented on the perceived benefits of using informational books with students. Their responses ranged from immediately benefiting students in the classroom to helping students with their interactions in the real world. The teachers credited informational books with helping students learn content area material for several reasons. They felt that it brought a topic to life because these books provide more information about a subject, often going beyond what can be found in social studies textbooks. Students develop a broader understanding about a topic this way. Informational books help students complete research assignments, serving as reference books for the inquiring student.

Several teachers acknowledge that informational materials might be all a student reads as an adult. Two teachers specifically mentioned that using informational books helps students enjoy all types of literature and that students need opportunities to read various genres. One teacher thought it was important that her students not always read a “made-up” text. The teachers provided a range of reasons why they thought it was important to use informational books in the classroom. While many focused specifically
on the in school benefits of reading informational books, some teachers acknowledged
the life long benefits this genre might bring to students. Table 4.11 summarizes the
benefits informational books offer students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of using informational texts with students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Brings a topic to life for the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helps the student better learn content area material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Serves as a reference book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helps students conduct research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increases students’ background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepares students for the real world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helps students develop an appreciation for all types of literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promotes nonfiction reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11: Benefits of using informational texts with students.

The teachers were asked to respond to a statement about informational books and
critical thinking. (See Table 4.12). The statement read: Informational books help students
become critical thinkers. Three of the six teachers strongly agreed with this statement and
three teachers agreed resulting in an average score of 1.5. The teachers from the larger
pool of respondents also agreed with this statement and averaged a score of 1.8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participating Teachers (n=6)</th>
<th>Surveyed Teachers (n=138)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informational books help students become critical thinkers.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12: Teachers’ perceptions about the role of informational books in helping students become critical thinkers.

Classroom Collections

The teachers estimated the number of fiction and nonfiction books in their classroom libraries. No formal count occurred and no one had an elaborate system for recording the books available for student use. However, although this estimated count lacks precision, it does indicate the teachers’ awareness of the balance or imbalance between the representation of these two genres within their collections. While it can be difficult to estimate several years’ accumulation of books, it is important to note the clear imbalance in the classroom collections as reported by most of the teachers. Table 4.13 provides a self-reported breakdown of books in each teacher’s classroom library.
Table 4.13: Estimated number of fiction and nonfiction books in each teacher’s classroom library.

Two survey statements asked teachers about their purchasing habits and classroom libraries. The teachers were asked if they had recently purchased an informational book and if their classroom libraries contained an equal representation of fiction and nonfiction books. (See Table 4.14). One statement read: I have purchased an information book for classroom use in the past three months. The six teachers in the study all agreed they each purchased an informational book in the past three months and their score averaged 1.1. The larger group of teachers also agreed with this statement and their average score was 2.0. Both sets of teachers reported purchasing informational books of
some sort to use in their classrooms. The second statement read: My collections of
fiction and informational books are about equal. Four book group participants either
disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. No one strongly agreed but one
person did agree and one person was neutral. The average score for teachers in the study
was 3.8. Out of 138 responses, 68 teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with
this statement. The average score for this group of teachers was 3.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Participating Teachers (n=6)</th>
<th>Surveyed Teachers (n=138)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have purchased an informational book for classroom use in the past three months.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My collections of fiction and informational books are about equal.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.14: Informational books in the classroom library.

Summary

The teachers' attitudes towards this genre were explored by learning about both
their personal experiences with informational books and how they self-reported using this
genre in the classroom. Teachers in this study did not demonstrate an attitude of dislike or
contempt towards informational books, but they also did not champion these books.
Informational books did not receive the same amount of attention in their
classrooms, as did fiction. While the teachers acknowledged that exposure to informational books does benefit students, they were concerned about the difficulty students' experience reading this genre.

**Research Question # 2: What understandings, issues or concerns are raised about informational books within the book group conversations?**

During the book group meetings, the teachers discussed and examined informational books on several levels. They personally responded to the books, discussed how to use them in the classrooms, and examined the books for their overall quality as a written text. As the teachers shared their personal reactions to the books, they highlighted what they liked, and posed questions about the places where they experienced confusion. The teachers expressed concern over procedures in using informational books with their students and various anticipated student-related difficulties that might occur while reading a particular title. Throughout the meetings, teachers identified and commented on specific book features. As they read more information books, teachers began to critique aspects of the books including what they personally wanted or expected from the book as a reader. The teachers asked questions about different authors and about aspects of informational books as they tried to learn more about the informational book genre.

Three major areas emerged in regards to the understandings, issues, and concerns raised by the teachers. (See Table 4.15) The first area related to teachers' personal reactions to informational books (253 idea units) which divides into two subcategories: personal response (237 idea units) and discussion of the social issues raised in the book (16 idea units). The second major category, classroom use (284 idea units) can be
divided into three categories: how to use the book in the classroom (141 idea units),
children’s reactions (88 idea units), and various concerns with using informational books
in the classroom (55 idea units). Noticing and critiquing behaviors (258 idea units), the
third category, can be divided into three subcategories: text features (10 idea units),
critical analysis (164 idea units), and critical reading for self (84 idea units).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSONAL REACTIONS</th>
<th>CLASSROOM USE</th>
<th>NOTICING AND CRITIQUING COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>253 Idea Units</td>
<td>284 Idea Units</td>
<td>258 Idea Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding Personality (237)</td>
<td>How to use the book in the classroom (procedures) (141)</td>
<td>Text Features (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointing out</td>
<td>Read aloud</td>
<td>• I like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions</td>
<td>Guided reading</td>
<td>• I used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What they liked</td>
<td>Independent reading</td>
<td>• This was helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing experiences</td>
<td>Reference for student or teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making connections</td>
<td>Book talks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on own reading process</td>
<td>Journal Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial reactions to reading</td>
<td>Subject area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues (16)</td>
<td>Children's Reactions (88)</td>
<td>Critical Analysis (164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a human being</td>
<td>Perceived reactions</td>
<td>• Author's writing style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues to bring up with class</td>
<td>Actual/observed</td>
<td>• Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kind of child who would like this book</td>
<td>• Reading difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactions, discussions, and journal writing</td>
<td>• Visual and textual aids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Comparing one book to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Awards won</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Speculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Evaluation of book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern (55)</td>
<td>Critical Reading for Self (84)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>• What I expected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject matter</td>
<td>• What I wanted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
<td>• Not meeting personal expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading difficulty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoning a book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not “getting” every thing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15: Issues raised about informational books during the book group conversations.
Personal Response

Responding Personally

The teachers responded personally to the informational books. They shared the parts they especially liked and the parts they did not. Confusions were shared, misinterpretations explored, and conjectures presented. The purpose of the book group was to read children's informational books for pleasure, but many teachers were unable to separate their reader-self from their teacher-self. However on occasion, swept away by the story, the teacher read solely for personal pleasure. This never occurred for all the teachers at the same time. With each book, a few participants read the book with a "teacher lens" discussing ways of incorporating the book into their teaching. The teachers moved freely between the personal reader and the teacher role with each perspective thoroughly discussed at every meeting.

Social Issues

One particular member identified the larger social issues at the core of most of the books. Her attention to these issues generated much discussion at each meeting. Discussion occurred on two levels, usually beginning with how to deal with these concerns as a society, and then how to help students learn about these larger issues. With Hurricanes, for example, the teachers debated about the ethics behind making decisions to alter or adjust the weather to stop the formation of a hurricane. They also discussed the implications if this manipulation prevented a hurricane from occurring in one part of the world, but actually made it worse in another part of the world. The teachers also wondered about how much they should expose their students to where destruction and death were concerned. With issues such as these, answers were rarely generated, but
rather, the discussion and attention given to these topics allowed the teachers to air their concerns with fellow teachers and to hear about the many ways they might introduce a sensitive topic to their students. See Table 4.16 for an overview of teachers' personal and social responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Titles Discussed</th>
<th>Responding Personally</th>
<th>Social Issues</th>
<th>Total Idea Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hurricanes A Drop of Water</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Muscles Mummies</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Immigrant Kids</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Great Fire</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>237</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.16: Subcategories related to teachers' personal reactions to informational books.
Classroom Use

How to Use Informational Books in the Classroom

The teachers constantly asked about and suggested ways the books could be used with their students. Together they navigated through the sticky parts they were unsure how to handle on their own. How to integrate these books into their teaching created a lot of discussion, in addition to the kinds of activities students could engage in with each book. The group considered instructional areas such as independent reading, guided reading, read aloud, science, social studies, and book talks as appropriate venues to utilize these books. The activities they discussed spanned from working solely within a book to using that book as a catalyst or springboard for creating something new. In their interviews and exit notes, the teachers stated that the opportunity to discuss how to use these books and generate teaching ideas with each other was valuable.

The teachers often compared how they read the books with each other. Did they read the text first and then the sidebars? Or did they read the text and the sidebars together as they appeared on each page? The teachers reflected on their own reading experiences with the books and used examples of their own reading behaviors to share with students. The students benefited, many teachers believed, from hearing about their teachers' experiences as readers. The teachers shared with their class that it is possible to possess an understanding of the whole book, but not understand every word. They also let their students know that many times, as with the Monarch book, they understood the definition of the word only through the context. One teacher wanted her students to know that several times she came across words she had never seen before and immediately went to the dictionary to look up those words.
During the sessions, the teachers often discussed how to use the books with their students. The group provided each other with a large pool of possibilities and ideas for using the books since they taught different grade levels and worked at different schools. As they dissected the book for teaching purposes, they spoke of seeing the books as providing "lots of options" and generating "lots of discussion." The teachers compared the flexibility and versatility of one book to another. Deena mentioned that the Hurricanes book, "gives teachers lots of options to do small groups, whole groups, (you can) start it, finish it, however you want to do it. You can pick and choose. Whereas Monarchs, you want to read it from beginning to end." (#2, p. 18) Several teachers also felt A Drop of Water offered the opportunity to pick and choose. Since each experiment presented in the book stood alone and did not depend on reading the experiment from the previous page, teachers had the choice to "do as much as they want to do with it, or just use the photographs to reinforce something that [they] were doing." (#2, p.11)

The teachers spoke of the many possibilities each book offered them as instructional material. Often times they supplied multiple suggestions within a single conversational turn. Holly, for example, shares her thinking about the book Hurricanes:

I think personally, I just think I could see myself using the first (part) up until the making of the hurricane in my reading as a read aloud or in a small group. In guided reading, I could see myself using other parts just like tidbits of it. We have to be able to get them (students) to be able to look at the information, look at the diagram, and be able to go back and forth. But I think it is more for... If I were a geography teacher or science teacher, I (would use this more). Then I would really have this book out all the time and I would use it for different things like report writing. I mean the kids could use this just to look up (Hurricane) Hugo. What information can you get out of here about Hugo? (#2, p. 6)
The teaching ideas put forth by teachers ranged from simple to elaborate. They provided many suggestions for using the books such as: making a list, creating a timeline, making predictions, learning about different weather-related occupations, creating a map of the journey taken, examining primary sources, debating pertinent issues, analyzing the author’s purpose, and writing in a style similar to the author. It was not uncommon for the teachers to share like this and to ask follow up questions about another teacher’s reasoning regarding how she might implement these ideas in her own classroom. These teachers spent a great deal of time listening to and learning from each other about possible ways to incorporate these children’s informational books into their classroom. They admitted to thinking about using a book in one way and then leaving with multiple ways of incorporating the books into their classrooms after the sessions ended.

**Children’s Reactions to Informational Books**

In addition to the teachers’ discussions about how to use informational books, they also speculated and shared their perceived and observed reactions of children reading this genre. When reading, the teachers noted the parts or pieces of information they thought would capture their students’ interest. Lindsey knew her students would want to know if their name had previously been used to name a hurricane, a little tidbit provided in the Hurricanes book.

Their observations of students’ interactions with informational books, especially the books we read, provided teachers with data as to the children’s level of interest and excitement with this genre. Almost every teacher witnessed one child’s fascination with one of the books. Lindsey shared a story about a child who had detention in her room.
She said:

... He was sitting there and the window was cracked (open). The paper was blowing and he wanted to know why it was sticking to window. I handed him *A Drop of Water* because he has that kind of mind. “Oh Miss Jensen, look at this” (child says with excitement). He understood that every page was a different idea because he thinks like that and it was so neat to watch him. (#3, p. 7).

Lindsey admitted that she wanted to give this student informational books “all the time” after he displayed such an interest in the first book. DJ saw the wonder in one child’s eyes about the book she was reading during silent reading time. She described what happened:

I have one little boy who is just fascinated. I was just holding it on my lap and looking at it. He came over and picked it up and wanted to, he was just so enthralled, he wanted to take it home. I told him he could take it home but I told him I needed it. I needed it on Monday. He said, “Oh, I better not take it home.” because he is always leaving his glasses at home. He said, “Oh, I will leave it at home just like I do my glasses.” (#3, p. 6)

Deena has a student who loves scientific books and especially enjoyed *A Drop of Water*. She said he wants to “take it, hoard it, and never return it.” (#4, p. 14). Holly expressed amazement when one of her students, Tara wrote in her journal about the book *Muscles*. She told the group, “She even went so far to say in her journal that she was thinking about when she chewed a piece of gum now, how many muscles she was using in her face.” (#4, p.12)

The teachers agreed that many of their students preferred informational books because of the “real life information they get from it.” (#3, p. 15) Lindsey acknowledged that many of her students are used to nonfiction and like that it tells them about real life. Holly likes how informational books provide readers with a “new way to look at everything” and that her kids might look differently at a drop of water after reading the
book *A Drop of Water*. Sometimes the students learn about an unknown topic and are captivated by the interesting, and sometimes gory details, provided in the book. Katie mentioned how fascinated her students were with the information concerning the removal of the brains through the nose from the book *Mummies*.

Reluctant readers also showed interest in the informational books brought into the classroom. Many teachers witnessed some of their struggling students become highly involved and lose themselves as readers in these books or other informational books at their appropriate reading level. Deena thought it might be because, at first glance, informational books appear to have fewer words and thus attract readers' interest. She also thought it could be that these students often struggle to follow the story line in fiction books. Someone suggested that these books might appeal to struggling readers because the pictures often grab their attention.

**Various Concerns over Particular Aspects of Informational Books**

The teachers expressed various concerns over aspects of the books we read. In these cases, they specifically mentioned student-related issues or anticipated student-related difficulty with regards to many areas. The teachers worried about many issues that they believed stood between their students and a competent level of comprehension. They also worried about the adult like content in two of the books.

One such issue raised at the first book meeting concerned the inclusion of information about the mating habits of butterflies. While all the teachers agreed that some knowledge is necessary, they questioned how much is enough and where they have to draw the line. The drawing of a line stems more from their worry about parental reactions than from personal feelings. Teachers spent a long time talking about this issue and
questioned each other as to how they would handle it in their respective classrooms. Many teachers thought they would read the book aloud and simply skip over those pages. They also thought that their students, if reading it on their own, might not “catch it” while reading.

The Aliki book, Mummies, generated conversation because a teacher noticed that several women in the illustrations were topless. A few teachers wondered about some of the content in The Great Fire. One teacher, in particular, expressed concern about level of specificity about the fire. The book included eyewitness accounts of people on fire, with one story about a girl whose hair was in flames. As she was running past some people, someone, in an attempt to help, threw his glass of alcohol on the child, only intensifying the problem. The book also described the alcohol and drinking that occurred during the fire, making reference to drunk and diseased wretches, which also merited some concern from the teachers.

These concerns were catalysts for important discussions among the teachers. They discussed the information about sexual reproduction that appeared in their health textbooks and the photographs of partially nude individuals in the National Geographic magazines in their classrooms. Lindsey thought the students could handle reading about the Chicago fire and needed to as a way to understand that real people died. It was important to her that students not think, “Oh, well a bunch of people died,” and have no empathy for them. While the teachers admitted that these more adult-like aspects concerned them, no one believed they would not use these books with their students. They did, however, worry about parents complaining and wanted to safeguard themselves against that happening by being prepared.
The teachers discussed the reading level for all the books based on their own judgement and knowledge of their students. They thought of which readers might be able to handle the book and which readers might struggle. They felt it necessary to fully prepare their students prior to reading the books. The third grade teachers often felt the books were too difficult for their students in terms of background information, content, or vocabulary. The teachers kept track of or even circled the vocabulary they thought would cause their students difficulty. They perceived words such as “asunder” and “solicitude” as possibly troublesome for their students. The informational books sometimes contained too much information, in the teachers’ opinion, and they worried if it would be overwhelming. Throughout the book group meetings, the teachers relied on each other to discuss various concerns about using informational books with their students. The discussions helped alleviate some of the teachers’ concerns about incorporating informational books into their classrooms. The role of discussion is further elaborated in question four. See Table 4.17 for an overview of comments made in relation to use of informational books in the classroom.
Table 4.17: Subcategories related to using informational books in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Titles Discussed</th>
<th>How to Use the Book</th>
<th>Children’s Reactions</th>
<th>Various Concerns</th>
<th>Total Idea Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hurricanes A Drop of Water</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Muscles Mummies</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Immigrant Kids</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Great Fire</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>141</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Noticing and Critiquing Behaviors

Critical Analysis of Text Features

The teachers made note of text features from the very first meeting. They identified and commented on features such as the index, sidebars, introductions, author notes, and the organizational structure of the books. Often times the teachers called the group’s attention to these features with statements such as “I liked” or “I loved.” For example, Beth talked about the introduction to the book The Great Fire and said, “I really like the introduction. It gave a very good general opening for someone like me who did
not know anything about it and that made me excited.” (#5, p. 17). DJ like the map included in *The Great Fire* and how it documented the fire’s growth. Holly enjoyed the index from the book *Immigrant Kids* because she found indexes were so helpful when she needed to find something specific.

As the meetings progressed, teachers began to spend more time critiquing different aspects of the books. Table 4.18 reports the number of noticing and critiquing comments the teachers made during each book group session. As the meetings progressed, teachers became more critical of different aspects of the books. They spent time examining and discussing each author’s writing style, the illustrations, and the book’s organization, and layout. The teachers also discussed other aspects of the books including issues relating to the book’s reading level, vocabulary, page numbers, glossary, and sidebars.
Table 4.18: Subcategory related to teachers’ noticing and critiquing behavior while reading informational books.

**Evaluating the Authors’ Writing Style**

The teachers commented on the way authors crafted the text including words that the author selected, poetic language, and overall clarity of the piece. They also commented on the authors’ ability or inability to capture their interest and attention as well as different aspects of the authors’ craft. They sometimes spoke of the “excitement”
or “explicitness” of the writing, and often shared differing opinions about a book.

Lindsey enjoyed The Great Fire, especially how it was written because she felt she could really feel those firemen fighting the fire. However, some teachers thought this book contained “too many voices” and they had difficulty keeping the characters straight.

Holly felt that two authors wrote the book Muscles instead of one as she felt the style and tone changed throughout her reading of the book.

Holly expressed her disappointment with the writing in The Great Fire. For her, she said, “I just couldn’t feel the characters. I couldn’t get them. There wasn’t a big character description for me. I went back and forth. I wanted more.” (#5, p. 10) Holly wanted more information about the infamous O’Leary’s, the family and cow unfairly blamed for starting the Chicago fire. She shared, “I want another book from the O’Leary’s point of view. What happened to them? After the first two pages, they were no longer in the book.” (#5, p. 10) Beth liked the beginning of The Great Fire, but felt the second half could be told in “a lot fewer pages.”

The teachers appreciated an author’s ability to make an abstract concept concrete. Deena appreciated the invitational tone Seymour Simon offered in his book, Muscles, inviting the students to do something physically that would help illustrate a concept presented in the book. She liked when he included concrete invitations for students to try something, but wanted to see more of this technique throughout the book. Holly believed that Muscles did not provide enough concrete examples. She complained, “He (the author) never related it (the idea or concept) to something else. A lot of times they didn’t compare it to (something that the kids could understand). I couldn’t think of something I could compare it to (to share with the students),” (#3, p. 4). Holly appreciated Wick’s
efforts in *A Drop of Water* to provide concrete examples to help readers understand the magnitude of the concept. For example, he informs readers that the smallest droplet on the head of a pin contains more than three hundred million water molecules, or in another case that something is as thin as human hair. Holly thought these kinds of examples made a difficult concept more accessible to her students.

The presence of the author’s voice in the books facilitated discussion. In the case of *A Drop of Water*, several teachers felt the book did not have “any personality to it” and judged the writing as “not inspiring.” Lindsey felt the author was more concerned with the photographs than with writing in an engaging style. While Beth appreciated the amount of information in the book *Muscles*, she found it to be rather dull. The upbeat tone Freedman used with *Immigrant Kids*, factual without a lot of embellishment, appealed to Deena.

Teachers noticed the pace of the story. Deana felt that *Hurricanes* went from minute to minute or hour to hour as the first part of the book described the formation and destruction of a hurricane in 1938. With this book, Katie felt her students would be able to “really get a picture of a disaster” since hurricanes do not occur in Ohio, where she teaches. In *The Great Fire*, Beth felt that as the fire spread throughout Chicago, the tempo of the words also increased. She felt a sense of urgency as she read. Many teachers agreed and also described a feeling of their adrenaline running.

The teachers commented on many aspects of the writing styles in the informational books. They still discussed vocabulary, page numbers, glossary, and sidebars. Vocabulary was discussed, especially with those books where scientific or specialized terms were used. Many times the teachers did not know the words. They
applauded books where the author provided a context for understanding the word and a
glossary or pronunciation guide to help the reader. The lack of page numbers in a few of
the books frustrated some teachers. No page numbers made it difficult to call the groups’
attention to a certain point or illustration. The teachers wondered about the sidebars
included in An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly. They did not know
how they should incorporate reading them while reading the main story. Deena wondered
about the lighter print color of the sidebar. She thought it might have been done so it
would not detract from the darker print of the text. She hypothesized that this might not
distract the readers and would allow them to choose whether or not to focus on the side
information. The sidebars also differed from the main text in both size and font. Deena
thought this was done so as not to detract from the main story. Not only did the teachers
discuss the books’ content, but they also analyzed the writing style and textual features
the authors employed.

Organization and Layout of the Books

Organization of the book refers to the external and internal structure of the book
including the common framing structures (compare/contrast) employed in informational
texts and how the material is organized within this framework. Layout refers to the page
set up that includes the positioning of the verbal and visual elements on the page. The
teachers often discussed the books’ organization and layout, and compared one book’s
layout to another. For example, the teachers liked the layout of Immigrant Kids. They
noticed the author divided the book to reflect the different roles of the children’s lives
such as at work, at school, at play and used these divisions as chapters. Lindsey explained
her reason for liking Immigrant Kids by saying:
Well, it flows, it is not like A Drop of Water where it (each page) is totally different, but it flows in a way that children can, that I can understand. It is about the same thing, but you are seeing them all mixed in there. Well, this is what they (the children) do at work, and this is what they do at school. It is logical to me. It is the chapters of their lives. (#4, p. 8)

The teachers also commented on the flow of this book and the way the author balanced mixing factual and personal information within each section. They felt as students learned information, they also got a flavor of the immigrant children’s memories during that time.

Most teachers disliked the layout of Mummies. Lindsey thought the layout was "bizarre" and while she enjoyed the content the overall layout “turned her off.” (#3, p. 11) In addition, the book contained no page numbers and the second line of each paragraph was indented. Deena was not happy with the tiny, handwritten print underneath many of the illustrations because she felt it was difficult to read.

Hurricanes presented a varied layout to the reader. It began with a story of a hurricane in 1938. The teachers really enjoyed that the book began with a story because it grabbed their attention. The book was divided up into sections that stood alone. This appealed to the teachers since they realized they could pick and choose what they wanted to share with their students. Holly described her reasons for liking the book:

It just seems that the way it (Hurricanes) was set up, it was readable yet you could leave out parts, but I think that . . . . I just think that the stories are so good that the kids would want to read what was next. It was good and it is different than Monarch because with Monarchs the little tidbits of information were set throughout the story. In this one, it gave the history but told it in a good, exciting way and then (told about) the making of a hurricane. (#2, p. 1)
The teachers' possessed strong opinions about the organization and layout of the informational books. They began to notice and comment on how the organization aided or deterred from their enjoyment of the book.

Illustrations

The illustrations created much discussion within the group. The teachers wanted labels for several of the pictures in Muscles, especially when two topics were being discussed and compared. The cover of Immigrant Kids caused a stir when teachers admitted not liking the cover, and paged through the book offering alternative photographs that would more readily grab the readers’ attention. Teachers criticized the placement of pictures in relation to the text in some portions of the Hurricanes book. A Drop of Water earned high marks for its enthralling color photographs.

At the third meeting, a debate broke out over the books Muscles and Mummies. Individual preference for books illustrated with drawings versus photographs emerged. DJ felt that maybe Seymour Simon had an unwritten law for himself that he could not put anything in his book that was not an actual picture, thus limiting what he wrote about in his books. Another member pointed out Simon’s use of diagrams and drawings in the book, but acknowledged that most of his books contained photographs. Holly believed she and her students were drawn to photographs. Holly compared the photographs in the book Immigrant Kids to another book about Ellis Island, illustrated with drawings, that someone brought to the meeting. She said, “They (students) are going to be drawn to this book because they love real pictures. (Pointing to the other book) if I look at those pictures it still isn’t real to me. There is no getting around how real it is (when you look at the photographs).” (#4, p. 9) In The Great Fire, the teachers thought the map could be
improved if author Jim Murphy had used color. Teachers also debated the use of sketches over photographs as they examined the illustrations found in The Great Fire. Holly wanted photographs. She felt the photographs brought the book Immigrant Kids to life. She disliked that over half the illustrations in The Great Fire were drawings and sketches. Her colleagues pointed out that it would have been rather difficult to take photographs while the city burned. The author included actual photographs towards the end of the book as the city underwent reconstruction. These examples illustrate that the teachers actively evaluated the illustrations provided in each book. They noticed and critiqued how the author and/or illustrator brought the text to life through the use of visuals.

Critical Reading for Self

The teachers’ critiques of texts included commentary on whether the books met their own expectations as readers. Often, they anticipated features for various reasons and were disappointed or dismayed when the author did not meet these expectations. This differs from critical analysis where the teachers analyzed the authors’ text without adding personal value statements about their reactions as readers. When discussing The Great Fire, Holly said, “You know why I didn’t like it. I felt tricked. When you look at it, it looks like it is going to be exciting.” (#5, p. 3). Katie shared her disappointment with this book by adding:

I was excited to learn in the beginning when you were finding out all these things. I was excited to hear about these characters, but I didn’t feel when I walked away I thought, okay (as in disappointment) ... I had a hard time remembering what happened. The only significant story that sticks out in my brain was about Claire that she got separated and she was hiding under bricks. It was the only thing that was really significant. (#5, p. 3)
Lindsey agreed and said:

Me too. I wanted to read to find an explanation for this picture. (On page 66 is a picture of arsonists being hanged and there is only the briefest of mentions in the text as to when and why this occurred. They are hanging them? Where are they hanging them? I want to know who did this, when they decided to do this. Did they get in trouble for this? And they never explained this. That was one thing and honestly, it bothered me. I kept reading, “Oh my gosh, they were killing people while this (the fire) was going on.” (#5, p. 3)

Later, in the same conversation, Holly voiced her concern to the group again by telling them she felt “mislead” and that it felt like she was reading a history book. These disappointing feelings occurred to other teachers with different books. Sometimes they wanted the book to provide information about one thing and were disappointed when that expectation was not met. Katie, excited to read Muscles so she could learn about the muscles she uses when she exercises, was disappointed because she “didn’t feel like she got that.” (#3, p.10). Lindsey and Holly expressed confusion when they began *A Drop of Water*. The first page of this book contains a quote by a scientist informing readers that they will follow a drop of water on its travels. They both expected the information to be presented in a narrative format similar to the one used in *An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly*, where the reader follows a butterfly on a migration south. The first page of *A Drop of Water* confused both Holly and Lindsey. Lindsey eventually overcame this disappointment; Holly did not.

In addition to sharing missed expectations, the teachers also shared what they needed from the book to aid in their understanding of the content. DJ wanted the map to be used more in the book *An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly*. While reading she thought there should be a map, but then remembered that the book contained a map near the very beginning of the book. She believed that the map should
have been used again throughout the book because the reader does not realize its importance at the beginning of the book. Many teachers agreed and they discussed putting a map near the back of the book and even enlarging it to include more details.

At times the teachers critiqued the amount of information presented in each book and this appeared to be an important factor in why a teacher did not care for a book. Teachers shared their confusion and sometimes their frustration as they read through the books. After reading Hurricanes, a few of the teachers talked about this very point:

DJ I kind of thought there was a lot (of information). I almost thought it could have been three or four books. It didn’t really feel that way until after I was half way through it. I began to think, ‘Woah.’ I felt like it was going in all these different directions. Maybe it was purposeful.

DM No that was how I felt. I did not read it cover to cover. It took me several (times) to read.

JL I don’t know if it (the book) just does it because I felt the same way. There was a tidbit here and a tidbit there. (#2, p. 19).

One teacher critiqued the order in which the author presented the information. Lindsey described herself as a “consecutive person,” one who likes when authors present information chronologically. Patricia Lauber, the author of Hurricanes, did not follow a chronological format, which caused Lindsey some difficulty when she tried to remember when events occurred. See Table 4.19 for the frequency of these types of comments during the book group sessions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Titles Discussed</th>
<th>Critical Reading for Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hurricanes A Drop of Water</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Muscles Mummies</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Immigrant Kids</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Great Fire</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.19: Subcategory related to teachers' comments about their own reading process.

Additional Information or Questions Posed by the Teachers

With each session, the teachers asked questions about the authors and other titles they have written. Teachers shared their knowledge of other books they read by a particular author. I shared the information I knew about the authors as well. For example, I shared that Seymour Simon was a science teacher and I read a portion of an interview with Jim Murphy in which he talks about his writing *The Great Fire*.
I also informed teachers about the types of informational books we read for each session. This was new information for them. Many teachers never considered that nonfiction could be broken down into types. One teacher admitted that made sense, since fiction books can be broken down into categories such as realistic fiction and science fiction.

Summary

The teachers examined the books in multiple ways throughout the book group conversations. They responded personally to the stories, often sharing their thoughts and feelings about the information they read. They also identified and expressed concern about some of the larger societal issues presented in the books. The teachers devoted a large portion of the book club discussions to determining ways they could use these books with their students. They also shared their past and current observations of their students' reading in this genre and they shared their concerns about several aspects of informational books. The teachers engaged in critical analysis of the books, voicing what they wanted or expected from the book as the meetings progressed. In addition, the teachers sought more information about this genre, often asking questions that would help them broaden their knowledge base with this genre.
Research Question # 3: What criteria or factors do teachers feel influence the use, or lack of use, of informational books within the classroom?

Throughout the meetings, the teachers shared how personal and professional experiences shaped their thinking and use of informational books in the classroom. They presented a wide array of issues and concerns about using this genre, shared experiences that had shaped or influenced their use of informational books, and speculated about the use or nonuse of informational books by other teachers. While factors that influenced their own and other teachers’ practices did not occur in one single conversation, teachers did infuse comments throughout the book group sessions. The accumulation of these comments provides a window into the teachers’ analysis of this problem. During the exit interview, I asked teachers to address what they thought would increase teachers’ knowledge and level of comfort with using this genre in the classroom. Their responses provided a means of checking on what the teachers already shared informally with the group and as a way of determining if they possessed any additional thoughts concerning this matter.

Three major areas emerged regarding the use or lack of use of informational books in the classroom. The first major category relates to curricular demands (12 idea units). The second major category is access to informational books (24 idea units). Access contains two subcategories: borrowing informational books (5 idea units), and difficulty finding informational books and knowing how to use them (21 idea units). Personal experience (44 idea units), the third category, can be divided into three
subcategories: personal preference (18 idea units), limited experiences with informational books (20 idea units), and participating in a book group (16 idea units). See Table 4.20 for an overview of the major findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Category</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Idea units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Demands</td>
<td>Curriculum driven decision</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Idea Units 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Borrowing informational books</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Idea Units 26</td>
<td>Difficulty finding informational books and knowing how to use them</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experiences</td>
<td>Personal preference</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Idea Units 44</td>
<td>Limited experiences with informational books</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participating in a book group</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.20: Core categories and subcategories related to the use or lack of use of informational books in the classroom.
Curriculum Demands

Curriculum Driven

One school, where four of the participants worked, has aligned its curriculum to meet the standards set by the state proficiency test. The principal decided to follow a commercially sold program that strongly influences the school’s curriculum on a quarterly basis. Consequently, this decision directly influenced the use of fiction and nonfiction literature in the teachers’ classrooms. The teachers interpreted the program as requiring that the first and third quarters focus particularly on fiction-related benchmarks, such as analyzing plot, characters, setting, or point of view. The second and fourth quarters focus more on nonfiction benchmarks, such as selecting information from a variety of resources, identifying cause/effect, and fact/opinion. The four teachers who taught at the school felt varying amounts of pressure to follow these guidelines. Since this study began during the end of the second (a nonfiction) quarter, these teachers placed more emphasis on teaching different aspects of nonfiction, such as identifying problem-solution in nonfiction texts. The teachers focused their minilessons on different aspects of nonfiction and tried to use shorter nonfiction pieces, from the magazine Time for Kids for example, as their guided reading texts. Consequently, while these teachers taught students about aspects of nonfiction, and the students read short (article or short-story length) pieces of text during guided reading, students were not exposed to informational books through teacher read-alouds. The students did not read informational books during their independent reading time.

The teachers were mixed in their opinions about following these rigid guidelines. One teacher admitted, “It forces you to focus on it (nonfiction); it forces you to do it.”
At the fourth meeting, another teacher shared, “I think the benchmarks are good because a lot of teachers would never use nonfiction, but now we are forced to, and we are forced to teach aspects of nonfiction.” (emphasis in original, #4, p. 15) Lindsey commented in her exit interview, “I will be honest we HAVE to use nonfiction in the 2nd and 4th quarter.” I asked if she taught at another school would she still be using informational books with her students. She shared:

No, I will be honest. You asked the question about the children’s literature class (she took in college). We didn’t get that much information about nonfiction. It is always, whenever I thought of literature, I thought of fiction books. I know and I would not have known that you could use them to the extent that I did.” (Exit interview, p. 7)

Our conversation continued when I asked her if she now saw different possibilities with nonfiction books because she was forced to use them. She admitted, “This is the only building I’ve been at since graduation. Now I can see no matter where I go, I could use them, but I will be honest, if it wasn’t for the benchmark scores at school, I wouldn’t use them as much.” (p. 7).

It is clear from the data that teachers make choices for book selection, in part, based upon curriculum demands. They may not always feel prepared to implement curricular dictates. In Lindsey’s case, she is able to use informational books because she talks about them with other team members. The teachers feel the intent is to make sure they provide their students with a balance, to make sure they present a mixture of genres to their students, but they admit that the driving force behind this balance is due to the high stakes testing. At the end of every quarter, the students take a proficiency-like test.
This provides teachers with information about their students meeting the stated literacy objectives for that particular quarter. The two other participating teachers did not mention experiencing this specific type of pressure at their schools.

**Access**

**Borrowing Informational Books**

Many teachers borrow numerous books from the library about a particular topic they teach in science or social studies. Deena shared that she obtains many of the books for her classroom that way. She felt that although she has the time to gather them, finding time to read them presents the problem. She thought that teachers "sometimes just pick them (informational books) up and set them out instead of going through and finding what really works best for them." (Exit interview, p. 6) Katie also talked about going to the library to obtain her nonfiction books. Most teachers like to have large quantities of books in their classrooms when they are studying a topic. Lindsey thought that teachers were not carefully selecting the nonfiction books they used in their classrooms. She said, "The nonfiction they are getting is straight from the library, whatever they can come up with." (Exit interview, p. 7) Many times these books are showcased in the classroom, but are unread by the teacher.

The group discussed the benefits of reading informational books that they did not need immediately for a particular topic, with the book study group, but rather ones that can be used at a later time. This arrangement of reading books for the sake of
reading is in direct opposition to the common practice of “realizing you have a unit on muscles coming up and just going to the library and grabbing every book you can find and you haven’t read any of them.” (#3, p.19).

Difficulty Finding Appropriate Books and Knowing How to Use Them

Teachers within this study did not know of or have access to an appropriate resource that would help them easily locate nonfiction books. Several teachers found it difficult to find books at the right reading level for third grade readers. Lindsey said, “We are having a hard time finding books targeted to third grade. I feel like they jump from too easy to too difficult.” (#3, p.11). They felt that primary teachers have access to quality nonfiction, and that many choices exist for readers in the upper elementary grades. These teachers were frustrated in locating grade level material for their third grade students. When the teachers received money to purchase materials for their classroom, they often use this money to increase their classroom libraries and were expected to locate and order these books on their own.

It is also the case that teachers feel unsure of how to use informational books with their students. DJ thought teachers may be afraid of nonfiction or may not know how to use these books in the classroom. She also believed teachers might be challenged or intimidated by informational books that might appear too technical or overwhelming. Lindsey suggested teachers might not understand that informational books are useful outside of the content area subjects and could be used for language arts instruction.

A great proportion of the five discussions centered on how the books we read could be used in the classroom. Teachers also commented that it was helpful to hear teaching ideas from other people. In addition, they walked away from these conversations
with new ways to use these books. Several of the teachers discussed not having access to these books, or not being exposed to nonfiction books as a child or in college. DJ felt she had access to a well-stocked library of informational books. She shared her frustration by saying:

I am sitting here trying to think what is my excuse then? I really can’t say it is because I don’t have the books because we have in our lounge, boxes (of multiple copies of nonfiction books) and they go with our curriculum. So, there are lots of them on the forests, the weather and different things like that. I am sitting here and wondering why (I am not using them more). I think it is because I am not secure yet in how to use them other than to lay them out on the table and let them look at them. I bring a whole bunch of different kinds in (because) we’re going to do a report. It is like I am stuck in using them in (this way). (#2, p. 21)

DJ shared that she met with other teachers at her school at the beginning of the year to examine the nonfiction books in their book room. They tried to plan some guided reading lessons together. She described the experience “like pulling teeth” with everyone wondering why they were having such a hard time. She wondered if the books contained too much information or if they could not make instructional choices, but she felt it was an area where the whole staff really struggled. The teachers in this study welcomed learning about different ways to use information books with their students and often turned to each other for suggestions and support.

**Personal Experience**

**Personal Preference**

Personal preference plays a large part in the books that teachers read to their students. One teacher admitted whenever she reads an informational book she thinks about how she can change it to a fiction book. She then added that she did not necessarily
change it to fiction, but she added more “story” to it. (#5, p. 25) Deena, the teacher in the
group who proclaimed enjoying nonfiction from the very beginning of this study,
described nonfiction as being easier for her to read, that “fiction just takes too much work
with all the characters,” and described herself as having a “nonfiction mind.” (#5, p. 25)
For teachers in this study, the first impressions of a book influenced their decision to use
it the classroom. Lindsey spoke of the multitude of demands that occurred while teaching
and the little time teachers have to make decisions about which books to use in the
classroom. She shared, “If you don’t think a book is going to be good, I’m sorry, you go
like this (motions casting the book aside) and do not look at it again because there is so
much more out there.” (#3, p.18).

Teachers indicated they shied away from unfamiliar topics or ones they do not do
personally enjoy. Katie admitted not being a “very scientific person” and that she needed
especially supportive books on science topics. Otherwise, she said, “I am not going to
touch them because I don’t understand them myself.” (#2, p. 12) Lindsey agreed and
shared, “I get really reluctant about teaching things I don’t know.” (#2, p. 24)

According to Holly, teachers may think informational books will bore their
students, and therefore, may not use them in the classroom. She thought this herself until
a professor captivated her interest by reading an informational book to the class. Katie
made a similar observation and said, “They (teachers) are not interested in it (nonfiction
books) themselves based of the fact that they probably did not have a lot of experiences
with nonfiction in their school (career).” (Exit interview, p. 8)
Limited Experiences with Informational Books

The teachers reflected on their college preparation and felt that their children’s literature classes focused more on fiction books. Beth shared her thinking on this matter by saying, “I think you do what you know. I never saw my teachers use or had books like this. They weren’t in my children’s literature classes in college.” (#2, p. 21) Deena simply said, “We don’t see them.” The teachers in this study felt that informational books were simply not as visible as their fiction counterparts.

The teachers also expressed difficulty in becoming familiar with informational books. At our first meeting, Beth mentioned wanting the group to continue because she was “getting good nonfiction books that I am not familiar with.” (p.15) Holly admitted, “That is why we don’t use them, because we are not familiar with them,” and Deena immediately added, “Yeh, and you tend to use the same things over and over again.” (p. 15)

Holly realized at our first meeting how our personal experiences as students and as teachers influence our actions with our students. When reflecting on how much she really did not know about butterflies prior to reading the book on the monarch butterfly, she realized that she was many times passing on the information she learned herself as a child. She then said, “But that is so awful, this is why our kids don’t pick up the (nonfiction) books because we never did.” (#1, p. 20) Holly also mentioned at the first meeting that she never read a book like Monarchs when she was a child, or when she went through college just a few years ago. Higher quality informational books are more available today than many of the informational books read by the teachers when they
attended school both as a student and in their college courses. Unless teachers actively search for and read these informational books, they are unlikely to be knowledgeable of the titles and authors currently available.

In addition to the limited college experiences teachers felt they had with informational books, they were also unaware of the Orbis Pictus Award. Since no one knew of this award at the first meeting, I shared my knowledge of the annual award and provided them with a list of past winners and honor books since the award was first offered in 1990. At our second meeting, Katie stated when she thinks about the awards given out, she thinks about the Newberry and Caldecott awards which often, but not always, are awarded to fiction literature. In fact, in 1994 Milton Meltzer updated his essay “Where Do All the Prizes Go? The Case for Non-fiction.” It was first published in 1976 and addressed the noticeable absence of nonfiction titles from the list of Newberry Award winning books. In his revised essay, he believed this problem had not improved much since his observation almost twenty years earlier.

While the Orbis Pictus award has been helpful in providing a set of criteria from which to judge and evaluate nonfiction books, this award is not as visible to teachers and many are unaware of its existence. This unfamiliarity with informational books extends beyond the teachers simply not being aware of this award. Beth suggests that overall, teachers are just “not familiar” with informational books and thus, are not incorporating them into their classroom instruction. (Exit interview, p. 8)

Since many of the teachers had not read or used informational books extensively, either personally or with children, they expressed concern about students reading this genre. The teachers were concerned about students “not getting everything” from their
Another concern dealt with teachers not considering informational books as "real reading." The teachers specifically mentioned this as a possible reason why teachers are not using informational books in the classroom. According to the group, teachers wonder if the students are actually reading or just paging through the book. Even from the first discussion, other teachers voiced their concerns about this problem. A teacher wondered if the students would just read the sidebars and not the text. Some wondered if the students could talk about the book from the pictures and captions alone. Beth thought she could talk to her students about a novel they were reading, but felt "they could tell me anything" when they read nonfiction and she would not know because she did not know the content. (Exit interview, p. 8).

How to Help Other Teachers Feel More Comfortable with Informational Books: The Power of Book Groups

I posed the question to each participant during their exit interview: "What do you think would be helpful for teachers to get them more comfortable with using nonfiction books in the classroom?" The teachers had just completed their participation in our book group discussions and this question could be interpreted as "leading" since the most obvious answer would be to claim "participate in a book group." Informally throughout all the discussions, the teachers casually mentioned wanting the group to continue and the value of discussing the books with other teachers. Aware that the question might be construed as leading, I chose to ask the question anyway. In response to my question, all six teachers suggested having other teachers participate in book clubs. The reasons they offered to support this notion provided insight into their thinking about how this structure supported their own learning.
It seems the book group provided a necessary structure that enhanced the teachers' participation. Deena mentioned:

Time is our worst enemy and because of that, we don't take the time that is necessary. It was so beneficial the time we used to discuss these books and to discover books that I am sure everyone of us will find some way to use them in our classrooms for years to come. (Exit interview, p. 3)

The structure of the book group also placed some pressure on the readers. Each participant knew they would be expected to talk about the book so they “put a little more time into it.” (Katie, Exit interview, p. 3) Often participants walked away from a discussion with a feeling of “Ah, I didn’t think of that,” according to Katie. (Exit interview, p. 3) Katie did not know of many nonfiction authors prior to her participation in the study. She felt that if teachers were exposed to informational books, they would learn what to consider when selecting additional books. The structure of the book club required active participation from the teachers. The commitment to read and discuss informational books appeared to help teachers make the time to participate in something that would benefit them in their classrooms. The teachers recommended having other teachers participate in book group discussions as a way of helping them feel more comfortable with informational books. Whether it was the structure, the subtle pressure, or being introduced to new titles and authors, the teachers provided specific reasons why participation in a book group was helpful to them in learning about informational books.

Summary

The teachers mentioned more factors inhibiting the use of informational books in the classrooms than factors supporting its use. The demands of the curriculum in one
school forced some teachers to incorporate more nonfiction into their literacy related instruction. Beyond that, the teachers provided personal and observed reasons why using this genre in the classroom was difficult. The teachers believed that participating in a book group would help teachers learn more about informational books and increase their knowledge base with this genre.

Research Question #4: What impact did book group discussions as a means of professional development have on teachers’ attitudes, understandings, selection and use of informational books?

Throughout the transcripts, written notes, and interviews, the teachers identified how their participation in the book group impacted their attitudes, understandings, and use of informational books. Three major areas emerged as to the impact these group discussions had on the teachers. (See Table 4. 21). The first category is the role of discussion in the book group meetings (61 idea units). This category contains four subcategories: copy machine talk (8 idea units), role of discussion in shaping teachers’ opinions (12 idea units), the benefits of a group discussion format (27 idea units), and self-reflection on the role of discussion (14 idea units). The second core category, reflection on the book group experience (70 idea units), contains two subcategories: lack of author recognition (25 idea units) and participation in the study (45 idea units). The third main category is new insights (76 idea units). Within this category, four subcategories emerged: including more informational books in the classroom (14 idea units), reexamining old beliefs and creating new literacy practices (22 idea units), read alouds and book talks (16 idea units), and wanting the book group to continue (24 idea units).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Category</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Idea Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Discussion in Meetings</td>
<td>Copy machine talk</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The role of discussion in shaping teachers’ opinions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The benefits of a group discussion format</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The group self-reflects on the role of discussion</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Idea Units 61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on the Book Group Experience</td>
<td>Lack of author recognition</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participating in the study</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Idea Units 70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Insights</td>
<td>Including more informational books in the classroom</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reexamining old beliefs and creating new literacy practices</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read alouds and book talks</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Idea Units 76</td>
<td>Wanting the book groups to continue</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.21: Categories and subcategories related to the overall impact of teachers’ participation in the book discussion group.
The Role of Discussion in the Meetings

The teachers specifically recognized the importance of discussions in making them feel comfortable and more at ease in their understanding of the books. In the beginning sessions, the discussions provided validation for teachers' initial impressions and thoughts about the books. Teachers shared their confusion about the content within the group, but also specifically addressed it individually in writing. Following the first session, five out of the six participants wrote how the discussions made them feel more at ease with the information presented and in their thinking about the book.

In regards to understanding the content presented in the book, *An Extraordinary Life: The Story of the Monarch Butterfly*, three teachers felt reassured to see that other teachers experienced confusion and had questions about the book. For example, Lindsey wrote, "I am glad to see I'm not the only one that needed to talk about certain ideas and throw out questions." (Exit note, 1-8-01) Holly said almost the same thing when she stated, "I was glad to hear that I was not the only one who didn't understand the whole book." (Exit note, 1-8-01) Katie shared, "I was glad to know that others didn't understand every aspect of the book. There was so much new information that I had never even considered before." (Exit note, 1-8-01) These open admissions, at least to me, let me know the concern some teachers felt prior to our first discussion. As adults, they were reading children's books filled with detailed, technical information, some of which could be confusing, and they did not want to be the "only one" who did not understand. The level of anxiety for participants may have been increased since this particular group was made up of teachers of various grade levels and from several schools. However, this level of concern could also exist if the book group consisted of teachers from the same school.
Lindsey, Holly, and Katie shared this concern and they all taught at the same school. While others were concerned about not understanding the whole book, Doris had a more personal concern, that of not feeling as knowledgeable about nonfiction. She wrote, “I was very nervous about this first meeting. I was worried that my knowledge of nonfiction would not be up to date, and that I would say something totally politically incorrect. I had made up my mind not to open my mouth.” (Exit note, 1-8-01) Fortunately, when the meeting began this did not occur and she went on to write “Obviously, I felt comfortable enough to open my mouth constantly.” (Exit notes, 1-8-01) Teachers’ initial feelings, fraught with personal questions and uncertainties, seemed to have lessened as the discussions began and other’s thoughts and confusions were aired to the group.

In addition, the teachers also heard a wide array of responses and comments from others about the same book. Katie wrote, “I was amazed to see the bits and pieces that each member found interesting. Different members seemed to find different facts essential to the story.” (Exit note, 1-8-01) Lindsey echoed that sentiment by writing, “It was very interesting to see so many viewpoints about the book,” (Exit note, 1-8-01) while Deena commented on enjoying the “back and forth exchange of opinions about the book.” (Exit note, 1-8-01) The teachers came with their own opinions about the book, but were open, and enjoyed hearing what other teachers shared. It seems the teachers entered discussions with their own personal thoughts, but left entertaining new thoughts or were at least aware of how others perceived the book.

Copy Machine Talk

The need for discussion and knowing what others thought about the book was contagious. The four teachers working at the same school (Holly, Beth, Lindsey, and
Katie often began discussing the book prior to attending the meeting—at the copy machine in the morning. They did this, Beth said, because “we [were] always anxious to see what the other person thought.” (Exit Interview, p. 5) Even though these teachers began their discussions of the book in the morning, it did not seem to deter their levels of participation or involvement with the whole group in the evening. They often shared their morning conversation with the group and the thinking that had occurred since that point. For example, Holly and Lindsey had a morning conversation about the book A Drop of Water. Lindsey liked it and Holly did not. Holly then reported to the larger group that she thought, “Oh, I’d better go look at that again. I must have missed something.” (#2, p. 12) The teachers felt compelled to talk about these books and did not wait until the meetings began.

The Role of Discussion in Shaping Teachers’ Opinions

Throughout the meetings, the teachers shared how another person’s comments helped them see a book in a new light. During the second meeting, the books A Drop of Water and Hurricanes were discussed. Holly expressed her dislike for A Drop of Water to Lindsey at the copy machine that morning. She shared her feelings with the group later that afternoon when she said, “I wanted to keep reading (Hurricanes) because I wanted to keep learning more (whereas) A Drop of Water, the more I read, the more I wanted to look at the pictures.” (#2, p. 9) This brought laughter from the group, and then Lindsey shared her thinking about the book. This portion of the transcript immediately followed Holly’s comment above, after the laughter died down.

LJ Well I think that is the beauty of this book (A Drop of Water). I would never pick this up and read this to my kids.
D Why?

LJ Because I don’t think it is a story. I would read parts of it.

BR (It has) way too much information.

LJ Way too much information, wonderful information. I think they would miss it. When you are teaching the water cycle. . . Today, actually, I pulled this out because I was thought about it. We were doing poems about snow and we were talking about snowflakes. I was like “Oh, you have to see this picture” and we read this and they were like “Wow” but I would have never gotten out this book (by itself) and shown them the snowflakes. They would have been like “Who cares?” I think (with) every page, it was hard to read the whole way through. But if you read, if you were doing something on ice, like this, the photographs—molecules in motion, the pictures catch (the student’s attention) but I think it would be overwhelming if you did it all together because it is really makes you think. (#2, p.9)

A few pages of transcript later, Holly refers to this comment by Lindsey and their earlier conversation by the copy machine by saying:

(Note: The first page of *A Drop of Water* reads “We are going to spend an hour today in following a drop of water on its travels.”)

I thought this *A Drop of Water* was going to be a story. I thought ‘Oh’ and then when I read it and maybe it is because you said, you made a really good point, if I wouldn’t have sat down and read it page for page (I might have enjoyed it more). You couldn’t remember what you read from one page to the next because they didn’t go together. You got to the end and I thought ‘What did I learn?’ but I think what you said Lindsey makes a lot of sense. (#2, p. 12)

At the third session, Holly refers back to her experience with the book *A Drop of Water* as she has since shared this book with her students. Holly refers to this pivotal moment by saying:

It made me realize that you have to talk to people about books. We talked about it our staff development last week, what we were doing here and it really made me realize (how important talk is). I think before we came I didn’t care for *A Drop of Water*, but after listening to everybody, I mean, now I love it. I just think it is so cool. I have used it four or five times in
my classroom. I showed everybody what Lindsey showed everybody here at the staff meeting. (#3, p. 18)

The tape ends here and a few seconds of the conversation are lost, but she continues to say:

HK  You get other ideas, do you know what I mean? I wouldn’t have put A Drop, I mean, I would have put A Drop of Water out (in the classroom), but I wouldn’t have talked about it as much. And now I was pulling it out, yeh, like every time something is happening outside, especially lately, I mean it is raining, it is sleetng, it’s snowing, its liquid. There is a bubble in the classroom, we’re washing our hands, we are washing our hands and a bubble stuck to the end of the sink and we said, “Oh, look.” I mean, I don’t know why, it made me realize I need to keep this out. (#3, p. 18)

In her exit interview, Holly named this discussion as her most memorable experience by sharing:

That is the only one that I can remember that I wasn’t sure coming into it (our meeting) how I felt about the book and after talking I was totally changed about the way I judged it. I don’t remember exactly how I felt but I remember that I just thought it was too much. I like a story (format, like we read in An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly) and it (A Drop of Water) was just like a picture and explanation, a picture and explanation. I wasn’t sure how to use it. It couldn’t be a read aloud. I have never had that type of book that I really didn’t know what to do with it so, of course, I just didn’t like it. Then Lindsey made me get all excited about it because of the way she read it. (Emphasis hers, Exit interview, p. 1)

The participants openly discussed all aspects of the books, found others accepting of their opinions, and found that other people’s opinions pushed their thinking about the books.

While the former example highlights how discussion helped shape Holly’s thinking, other participants commented that the discussions made them rethink their initial impressions about the books also. Beth discussed her reaction to The Great Fire as liking the beginning part, but feeling differently by the end. She felt that by the time she
was finished with the book, she did not like it as much, but “listening to people talk made me like it again.” (Exit interview, p. 2). I asked her if it was anything in particular that someone said, she answered:

Nothing in particular . . . I liked learning all about the fire and that story. It was after the fire was over, (that) I started losing interest. And then Lindsey started talking about how she just questioned, “What do you do? How do you recover from this?” (this mass destruction that destroyed an entire city) and I thought, “You know, that is a good point.” I did not think about it like that. I just thought, “Yeh, who cares? They are building shafts.” (for make shift housing) She was really into the reconstruction part and that helped me. (Exit interview, p. 2)

Beth talked about these discussions as “opening my mind,” (Exit interview, p. 1) and Holly described it as “broadening my perspective.” (Exit interview, p. 1). The sharing of various viewpoints seemed critical in shaping the teachers’ thinking about a book.

The Benefits of a Group Discussion Format

As a checkpoint at the end of our third discussion, just prior to leaving, I asked the teachers to comment on the feel of this format and our discussion of books. They replied by saying:

DM (It feels) comfortable, comfortable.

KH (It) opens you up, like a lot of people mentioned things and it is something I never thought about. You expect your kids to do that when they talk to each other about books but you never really . . . It almost like you never really explain (what it is about and how it can help). It is almost like it would be really neat if the kids could see the teachers talking, to see a book discussion or something. To get them to realize why it is so important and it is hard to explain why to them, what comes about of it (the book club discussions).

BR I love it. It is something I do naturally anyway when I read a book or when I know someone has read the same book. You talk about it.

DM And it is okay to disagree. You see that there is no right or wrong. You are coming from different points of view and looking at different uses. Your
background knowledge plays a tremendous amount (in what you take away and understand).

DJ I am really glad what you (Holly) said about when you read it, you had one opinion and then after you listened then you (had another opinion). Sometimes I would have a negative (reaction). Something (in the book) would just hit me negatively. I don’t even know what it would be and I would start being really picky with the book by myself, but then I would get in here and listen. . (and change my mind). To tell you the truth, Monarch, when I first started reading it, I was like “Oh great, what I going to do, none of my kids can read this.” I was just really upset with such big words (used in the book) and I keep trying to look for books that are good quality and yet my kids can read them. I mean, not that I don’t want to use a lot of things for read aloud too but when I first read that book, it turned me off. Then after I came and listened to everybody and now that (book), I think, is one of my favorites.

DM It teaches you to just look at books both positively and negatively. Before I knew, I was like you. I would read a book and either liked it or didn’t. But now I am tending to look a little more. There are (some) good and bad in all books, not good and bad but just stronger and some things are not as strong, according to what you are looking for. (I am) being more opened minded with books especially nonfiction.

KH It just opens you mind

DM It really does, to all kinds of possibilities.

KH And you are not going to, you may think, “Oh I don’t agree with her” but then you are still going to think about what she said. You are still going to think about it whereas if someone wouldn’t have said something that was different from what you thought you might have been just like, “Okay, well, I think this.” (and that would be the end).

DM It is a neat social skill to teach your kids that you can discuss things and disagree and it is okay.  
(#3, p. 20-21)

The teachers spoke to the influence other people’s opinions had on their thinking. Disagreements about a book can be, in their eyes, both informative and thought provoking. The setting provided a safe enough environment where the teachers felt comfortable sharing their differences of opinion with each other.
Reflections on the Role of Discussion

The group noticed the influence the discussions exhibited on their thinking. They often revisited this topic throughout the sessions. At the last session, Doris reflected on the important role conversation had played throughout the meetings. She posed a question during the last meeting that demonstrated her acute awareness of what the conversations were doing for the teachers in their bi-monthly interactions. The transcript that follows shares the participants’ thinking about how the role of dialogue aided them in rethinking their previous opinion about a book.

DJ Why is it that when we hear someone else talk about a book, we start liking it?

LJ Because I think you look at different aspects (of the book and think) “Oh, well, that is true.”

DM I think it opens your eyes. It is (because of) the dialogue that you hear all different points of view and it validates what you know, but you can (also) question (each other) and it allows you to think. (#5, p. 29)

The teachers reflected on how dialogue influenced their personal thinking. This constant dialogue provided teachers with the opportunity to see that individuals remembered different parts of the book and that these different remembrances and opinions were okay. Laughter occurred as teachers appealed for second opinions or additional information concerning certain portions of a book. In discussing Immigrant Kids by Russell Freedman, I inquired about the soda vendor and asked how the people drank the soda because I could not believe it would be from the same glass. That little
detail did not escape me, but it left Lindsey saying, "I never would have (noticed that). I
didn't even pick that up. I guess I was thinking there were cans or . . . . (Laughter from
the group). I have to read this again now that you said that." (#4, p. 8)

There were other similar instances where confusion or misinterpretation caused
teachers to have a difference of opinion or sent a participant searching back into the book
to help make her point or to find the answer to a question. This appeared to help the
teachers see how much they, in fact, missed from the book and while they did not pick up
on everything, they did indeed understand the book. It seems that once the teachers were
placed in situations where they realized that they did "not get everything" from a book,
they became more willing in their talk to accept this same occurrence with children. Katie
shared that she gave the book that we read on mummies to one of her students. She was
concerned that he did not have enough background information and would not "get"
everything from the book. The student gave a book talk to the class on the day of our last
meeting. Katie was amazed with what the child retained and how excited he was to tell
his classmates about this topic. She commented that even a difficult text "can bring
something to somebody whether it is the same thing for me as it is for you." (Exit
Interview, p. 1)

The teachers stated their willingness to allow students the freedom to explore
informational books and come away with information that is personally significant to
them as a reader as opposed to knowing all the facts in the book. Their insights about
students reading this genre seemed to stem from the dialogue they had together in which
the teachers were faced with different interpretations the other teachers shared with the
The conversation below immediately follows the dialogue presented previously and occurred at our final meeting where the book *The Great Fire* was discussed.

KH  I think it is good to see and know that different kids are going to take different things from this (book) . . . . There have been plenty of times when I didn’t remember (what someone brought up) and then I remembered the part. Just (the) different things that different people are going to take from it (reading the same book).

HK  when you share it with your kids, you can say, I often say, ‘Mrs. Ralph thought this (about the book). I thought this’. My kids could probably tell you 12 books on my bookshelf what Mrs. Ralph thought and what I thought. I like to share that with them.

KH  It is okay that you pick up different things from a book and (you don’t have to) pick up all the same thing.

DJ  Doesn’t it make you realize how valuable book talk is?

(Great agreement from the group)

LJ  YES! And literature circles. As much as we all love reading or else we wouldn’t have been here, we also all love talking.

(Laughter)

LJ  It sounds silly but out of all seriousness, what do we do every morning on Monday morning in the copy room, (we ask) ‘What did you think about the book?’ We talk about it before we come here. They all knew that they didn’t like this book and they knew I liked it. When you find something your interested in or not you want to share it.

KH  you want to know, you also need . . .

LJ  . . . . that validation . . .

KH  I didn’t feel as bad that I didn’t like it that much because someone else didn’t like it that much either so maybe

KH  I was so excited to read this (*The Great Fire*) and I just walked away (and was less impressed)

BR  and now I like it a lot more, now I would not say that I dislike this book.
LJ probably at the beginning (the first session) if we had read the Monarchs (An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly) and I was the only one standing ground saying that I hated it even though you all liked it (it would have been hard). But this time, you guys all didn’t like it today, I knew I liked it but

DM I liked it too

LJ you do need that validation and sometimes if you have strong feelings

DM you pointed out so many good things that I didn’t (notice) as a reader because I read it more as an adult than as a child would. So pointing out all the things she (Holly) was reading at her level as a teacher looking (out) for her students, that really honed into some very interesting points that I hadn’t even perceived. I just liked it because I liked it and not what it would do with kids. That was neat, that is what is neat about this club is that we got to hear all those different sides. (#5, p. 29-30).

The teachers expressed their understanding that people respond differently to books and remember different things. From their own experiences, they realize this is okay and it does not mean that they did not understand the book. When these differences occur, it is important to talk to others whether for the sake of receiving validation of some sort, or seeing the book in a new light. The teachers wanted these lessons of agreeing and disagreeing with others, and changing one’s mind about an initial reaction to a book to be passed on to their children. Beth wrote, “I always like how people notice different things about the book. I think it is an important lesson for kids to learn. I need to share this with my students.” (Exit notes 4, 2-20-01)
A Teacher Reflects on the Power of Discussion

When asked about her most memorable experience, Deena cited the last book club meeting by saying:

I think probably Monday, our last one, where we didn’t want it to end and we just wanted to go on and on and on. It was like finally we were beginning to click on a level that we were very much connecting to each other as teachers, as human beings, understanding each other... We just wanted to stay and talk more and more about our experiences with books and things. So that I think, I saw that happen at that level and that was like an “ah-ha” for me. It was like “Wow, this would be so neat with kids.”... But to be on that level, to discuss that book, to go that depth to discuss books, various books, it just showed me that we really need to do it more than once and how beautiful it can be.

I went home feeling so terrific; I was so hyped up. I felt like I had gained so much. I was so sad in a way to see it end because it seemed like we just found the groove... It was like all the parts came together. It was very dynamic.

(Exit Interview, p. 1-2)

Summary of Findings From the Teachers’ Talk about the Discussions

The teachers felt the book club discussions provided them with multiple benefits. From the discussions the teachers realized that:

- People rarely understand the whole book. Not everyone understands all parts of the book equally well.
- People notice different things and have different reactions to certain books.
- Personal contributions to the conversations are influenced and shaped by the comments other people make.
- There are multiple ways to use these books in the classroom.
- It can be exciting to read different books and talk about them with colleagues.
- Individuals’ learning styles and personalities influence their thinking and reactions to the books.

Table 4.22 provides examples of comments that support the summary of findings with regards to the power of discussion, according to the teachers.
From the discussion the teachers realized:

| People rarely understand the whole book. | “I was glad to hear that I was not the only one who didn’t understand the whole book.”  
(Holly, Exit notes, 1-8-01)  
“I am glad to see that I’m not the only one that needed to talk about certain ideas and throw out questions.”  
(Lindsey, Exit notes, 1-8-01)  
“It is okay that you pick up different things from a book and you don’t all have to all pick up the same thing.”  
(Katie, #5, p. 29)  
“I always like how people notice different things about the book. I think this is an important lesson for kids to learn. I need to share this with my students.”  
(Beth, Exit notes, 2-20-01) |
| People notice different things during their reading. | “I was amazed to see the bits and pieces that each member found interesting. Different members seemed to find different facts essential to the story.”  
(Katie, Exit notes, 1-8-01)  
“It was very interesting to see so many viewpoints about the book.”  
(Lindsey, Exit notes, 1-8-01)  
“It is interesting to see the different things we all picked up on by just what our interests are.”  
(Katie, #1, p. 20) |
| Sometimes they did not know what they were going to say about the book until they heard another person’s comment. | “On the way here I commented that I had no idea what I was going to say about these books, other than, I liked them. Of course, once people started talking I found that I did have comments to make”  
(Beth, Exit notes, 1-22-01)  
“I was amazed at the ideas that entered my mind as we spoke... things that I hadn’t thought of when I read the book.”  
(Holly, Exit notes 1, 1-8-01). |

Table 4.22: Benefits of participating in a group discussion.
Table 4.22 Benefits of participating in a group discussion  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From the discussion the teachers realized:</th>
<th>Examples of what they said to indicate this:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| There are multiple ways to use these books in their classrooms. | “I got several ideas for how to read and use this book.”  
(Holly, Exit notes, 1-8-01)  
“There were lots of great teaching ideas.”  
(Deena, Exit notes, 1-8-01) |
| It is exciting to read different books and talk about them with colleagues. | “I was very excited to come to this book club.”  
(Katie, Exit notes, 1-8-01)  
“I really enjoyed talking about the book. I can’t wait to get my hands on the rest of them”  
(DJ, Exit notes, 1-8-01)  
“I also loved Holly’s remark about how she has been looking forward to this all day. That’s refreshing. I like to be surrounded by people who love what they do.”  
(DJ, Exit notes, 2-20-01) |
| Adults (and children) have different personalities and experiences and this shapes how they read and react to the book. | “When you’re reading, it depends on what kind of mood you are in because there was one the books that you all loved and I read it at a bad time. I wasn’t thinking a darn thing about the book. (I was) just trying to get it done and I didn’t enjoy it. Then when you guys talked about it and I liked it.”  
(Lindsey, #5, p. 15)  
“I was glad to see that everyone felt differently about the book. It’s quite interesting to see how different people react depending one their past experience.”  
(Katie, Exit Notes, 1-22-01) |
Table 4.22 Benefits of participating in a group discussion continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From the discussion the teachers realized:</th>
<th>Examples of what they said to indicate this:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers need to talk to each other.</td>
<td>&quot;... teachers need this all the time. I mean you just really do.&quot; (Holly, #3, p. 18).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Doesn't it make you realize how valuable book talk is?&quot; (DJ, #5, p. 29).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discussions influenced the teachers’ thinking about the books.</td>
<td>&quot;It really opened my eyes. I may not have thought of certain things while I was reading. Listening to other people talk about the books and share their ideas and their thoughts made me think ‘Oh ya, you are right.’ It made me look at it again. (Katie, Exit interview, p. 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I wasn't sure coming into (the meeting) how I felt about the book and after talking about it, I totally changed the way I judged it.&quot; (Holly, Exit interview, p. 1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflection on the Book Group Experience**

From the teachers’ comments and reactions, it seems as if they previously had considered informational literature as one-dimensional and never really had the opportunity to examine this genre or their attitudes towards it in any depth. Throughout this process the teachers spoke of their minds being opened, their perspectives broadened, and their knowledge base increased with regards to this genre. In addition to their own personal views concerning informational books, as they met with fellow teachers, they
also discussed ways the books could be utilized with their students. This book group was
designed for the specific purpose of allowing teachers to respond as readers; and,
although I gave no specific mention at any time about reading these books as teachers,
that is what they did at least some of the time. These teachers were unable to separate
their teacher-selves from their personal-selves. I discussed this in my last interview with
Holly. She asked me incredulously if I really thought they would not respond to the
books as teachers. I replied I did not think they would talk about it as teachers as much as
they did. Holly then quickly reminded me that “teaching is a way of life, not a career.”
Depending on how the book resonated with each participant, they either got personally
swept away with the story and forgot about their teacher role, or they read it as a teacher
all the way through. When reading the book as teachers, their conversations were filled
with ideas for how to use the book or with concerns about possible stumbling blocks for
students. Many of these teachers’ concerns have already been reported in response to the
third research question.

After our third book group session, I asked the teachers to reflect upon their
experience in writing. Holly commented, “The book club has given me the opportunity to
be able to really see the books, not just the words, not just the pictures, but the multiple
meanings each page can hold. I guess I’ve realized that I’m close minded when it comes
to books.” (Exit notes, 2-5-01) Deena commented that the book group helped her look at
nonfiction books in many ways while Katie said this experience “opened my eyes to
nonfiction and introduced authors of nonfiction.” (Exit notes, 2-5-01) Some teachers
liked reading new authors and new titles. Beth shared:
Being in the book club has helped me become more familiar with some good nonfiction books and authors. It makes me read them, which is sometimes necessary. My intentions are good, but I sometimes have to be forced to do it. It has also helped me share some great nonfiction books with my class and helped me to allow them to use nonfiction books for independent reading.

(Exit notes, 2-5-01)

Deena mentioned that her participation has provided her with a “wider range of books to choose from.” (Exit notes, 2-5-01) Lindsey shared, “It would be easier for me to use them (informational books) if I had more knowledge of authors and books. That is what the book club has done for me. I am gaining knowledge of texts and a variety of ways to read nonfiction.” (Exit notes, 2-5-01) By the third session, it appeared that the teachers were becoming more comfortable and knowledgeable with the genre along with learning about well known nonfiction authors by reading their books.

These intermediate teachers realized they did not have a strong knowledge base of nonfiction writers and titles. The importance of knowing good authors and titles repeatedly surfaced. Table 4.23 lists the titles read during the book group sessions. The teachers were asked to respond to a series of questions about the books and the authors of the books. Tallying the numbers provides a quick overview of the ways in which the teachers had previously dabbled with nonfiction. When selecting the books, I specifically chose authors who were highly regarded with most of them having written several books. While many teachers had heard of several of the titles prior to participating in the study, only two of the titles had been read. The teachers who had read one of the books also owned that particular book. All six teachers had heard of Seymour Simon, Aliki, and Russell Freedman, and one person knew of Patricia Lauber. Laurence Pringle, Walter Wick and Jim Murphy were unknown to the group. Of the six authors listed, only some
of the teachers owned books by Simon, Aliki, and Freedman. The low numbers in many of the categories suggest that teachers were not very familiar with nonfiction authors and their collections did not consist of books from these well-known writers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Have heard of this book</th>
<th>Read this book prior to book club</th>
<th>Own this book</th>
<th>Heard of the author</th>
<th>Own a book by this author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monarch Laurence Pringle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricanes Patricia Lauber</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Drop of Water Walter Wick</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscles Seymour Simon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mummies Aliki</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Kids Russell Freedman</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Fire Jim Murphy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=6 participants in the study.

Table 4.23: Survey of teachers’ recognition of informational authors and titles.
Lack of Author Name Recognition

I asked the group to share their opinions as to why informational books were not making their way into the classrooms. From Table 4.25 and the teachers’ conversations throughout the sessions, it appeared that the teachers did not have as broad a knowledge base for informational books as they did for fiction books. The teachers were simply unaware of many informational titles and authors currently available. The following conversation highlights this point:

BR I really didn’t honestly know any good titles like this. Like we talked about in the interview, when I think of nonfiction, I think of biographies and that’s primarily what I have in my classroom. But now that you have given us these books, I know more titles, I know more authors. I went to Barnes and Noble and I saw lots of them that I wanted (to buy). I only bought one but it (having these books) just helps and it helps me teach my kids how to find books like this to use.

LJ In reading, as a reader, when I was a child I loved reading fiction books. Actually in my classroom library are a lot of books I read (when I was young). I have Ramona (by Beverly Clearly) all those books. So I feel, I am capable of picking those out. When I go to pick out nonfiction, I have a harder time because I don’t have that knowledge base whereas when I go to pick new fiction books for my classroom I don’t have to sit there and read them (because) “Oh, I know this author. I have heard of this.” I feel that you have more background (because of the fiction books we read as a child) whereas if I go to try and pick a nonfiction book, I am going to need to read it before I buy it because I have no idea. I have no background knowledge of “Okay, I know this author, I like her, I can just pick up this book.” (#2, 17-18)

The teachers shared their difficulties of selecting appropriate informational books when they possessed little author name recognition for this genre. Many staples in today’s classroom libraries consist of books that the teacher herself may have read as a child, such as books by Beverly Cleary, Judy Blume or Roald Dahl, authors of predominately
fiction novels. A lack of author name recognition for informational writers could result in these types of books not finding their way into elementary classrooms.

**Participating in the Study**

I had planned to ask the teachers about their reasons for joining this study at their exit interviews, but the teachers, it seems, were just as curious. At our second meeting, the teachers questioned each other about their reasons for joining the study. The teachers first talked about wanting to learn about different authors of informational books. The teachers then shared other reasons for participating. The transcript that follows documents a portion of that conversation.

DJ  Is that one of the reasons why you wanted to be in this group?

LJ  Yeh

The rest of the group nods and agrees with Lindsey’s response.

DJ  Because that is one of the reasons I wanted to (join this study) because I thought ‘Ya, will this will give me more knowledge so that I can better (use these books with my students)

BR  Yeh

DJ  Because I feel this is a weakness so

BR  Yeh. I would say, too. I would even like to keep it going because because it does force me to pick up a nonfiction book every couple of weeks and read it and get to know it. Then I get excited about it and I go and tell my kids about it, and then they get excited about it, and lots of them are reading these books.

LJ  And it is good to hear. I think it is neat. I told my kids that we are doing this and they think it is so neat that we as teachers are sitting around and having these book talks and stuff. I know Beth, I just got the flier, and she is starting a book club for the teachers. We have a book club and we are reading professional books and this (meaning reading school related books) has caught on and the way we always talk at school anyway, you
know, just doing it at your building. So you do start getting the knowledge because I would have no idea, I just don't have that knowledge. (#2, p. 18-19).

In addition to the discussions that occurred spontaneously, I also asked the teachers at our last interview to share their reasons for participating in the study. The teachers realized that nonfiction literature, specifically informational books, was an area that needed attention. In addition, gaining exposure to informational titles and authors appealed to many of the participants. Katie thought introducing nonfiction books to her students was difficult so she joined the book club because she thought that reading and talking about different informational books would be helpful. Self-motivation to seek out new titles and authors can also be difficult, and Beth acknowledged that she joined the study because “using nonfiction in my classroom was something that I wanted to do. I just needed a way to motivate myself to do it and this was my way of starting to get to know them.” (Exit interview, p. 1) DJ shared her ongoing desire to keep up with the literature, but feeling as if she were losing touch with what was the “newest and the latest and the best.” She viewed her participation as a way of learning about new literature. Lindsey mentioned wanting to further her knowledge, and struggled initially with the time commitment. At first, Lindsey was not going to join because she was busy but then:

the more I thought about it, I realized that even though I kind of use nonfiction, I could use it so much more. All of my professional development is with fiction. (What) I have had is mostly with fiction books and how to use them in the classroom so I thought it would help me gain insight before I used them with my children. (Exit interview, p. 1)

The teachers had multiple reasons for joining the study. The bi-monthly structured meetings forced the teachers to read new informational books. It also provided subtle
pressure on them since they knew they would discuss the books with colleagues. In addition, it seems some of the teachers took their own professional development into their own hands.

I asked the participants during our exit interviews to respond to the following question: What would you tell someone who has never participated in a book group what being a member of this group means to you? (question modified from Zaleski, 1997). In their own words they shared:

It opens your mind to other people’s point of view, and gives you a perspective that is not linear that enables you to see a book from other people’s perspective and think about things you hadn’t thought about. It even makes you change the way you felt about the book from the initial reading. I just think it is also just a great way to get people excited about reading and the more the teachers are excited about it, the more the kids are excited about it. That was proven so many times with just the things we talked about. It was amazing. I just think it is a wonderful opportunity and I think it is a great thing that teachers should be doing it all the time. (DJ, Exit interview, p. 1)

It has broadened my perspective that I have about how children perceive books. I am constantly aware of how you read a book is not how someone else might read a book. Especially with what Lindsey said today, she kind of said it all (when she said) that when you can talk to other people about it, you realize that how you read it, when you read it, and the purpose you are reading it for at the time makes a big difference in what you pick up and in your own judgement about the book. (Holly, Exit interview, p. 1)

This issue of perspective continued to be addressed, this time with Katie as she said:

I think it has opened my mind to other people’s opinions. You may walk in with a certain opinion about a book, but maybe walk away with an opening of my eyes to something that was, that I hadn’t considered before. It has been good to hash it over and get other people’s input about the books. I think that is one of the most valuable things. (Exit interview, p. 1)

Deena appreciated the level of discussion about the books. From these discussions, she often learned information she never knew and considered aspects of the book she never
thought of prior to attending the meeting. Beth’s response was short and to the point when she answered, “I would tell them that it gives you lots of new insights about the books. It makes you think about a lot of things that you might not have thought about when you were reading.” (Exit interview, p. 1) Obtaining a list of new authors and titles to use in their respective classrooms was a strong selling point for many of the teachers in their decision to join the study. The discussions surrounding these books seemed to take their level of understandings, use for, and opinions about these books to a new level.

New Insights

The teachers spontaneously reflected on their practices throughout the book meetings and during their interviews. As the teachers began to have more experiences with reading and discussing informational books, they began to discuss aspects of their classroom instruction and practice that possibly could be revamped to include the use of more informational texts. The teachers also shared their students’ reactions to the informational books they used in their classes. The children’s reactions seemed to play a part in the teachers’ consideration for the increased use of this genre in the classroom.

Two areas of improvement and self-reflection were mentioned most frequently by the teachers: 1) they began to actively examine the presence of informational books in their classroom; and 2) they reexamined prior beliefs and created new literacy practices in which informational books played a more dominant role in their instruction. The second category breaks down further to address the specific instructional areas where
teachers infused informational books into their literacy instruction. Table 4.24 provides an overview of the areas where teachers modified existing classroom practices to include the use of informational books.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in Classroom Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers reported the inclusion of more informational books in the following areas:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classroom Libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Free Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Independent Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Read alouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Book Talks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.24: Classroom Changes.

Including More Informational Literature in the Classroom Library

The teachers began to reexamine the books they had in their classroom libraries. At our second meeting, in which two science related topics were discussed (Hurricanes and A Drop of Water), Deena commented:

I have a lot more historical fiction because history is my thing. I just love it. I have two big shelves of historical eras and different things. My science section is sparse so it is nice to see the science (related books) that I wasn’t aware of. This is making me look into different areas instead of just keeping me in the historical or geography or social studies (topics). (#2, p. 19)
Beth noted that she used little nonfiction in her room prior to joining the study and said, "If I used any (nonfiction) it was biographies and not informational books." (Exit interview, p. 1). When I asked why this was the case, she replied, "Because that is what I had." (p. 1) Holly realized her nonfiction collection consisted of "really only historical fiction and biographies." (#2, p.20). The teachers realized their classroom collections were narrow in regards to variety within the nonfiction genre.

In March, several of the participating teachers were provided with money to order books for the upcoming school year. At one school where four of the participants worked, each teacher received $500.00 for classroom use. The teachers in the study specifically mentioned ordering informational books to add to their classroom collection. "We are trying to order nonfiction books that they (the students) will read during reading workshop." (#4, p.11) Beth said, "I just bought about twenty informational books from the book club (using her own money) and we also got $500.00 to spend from the school and most of what I ordered was nonfiction." (Exit Interview, p. 2). In her exit interview, Lindsey stated, "All I ordered was nonfiction. I have so many fiction books so now I am really trying to focus on nonfiction." (Exit Interview, p. 1). Not all the books added to the classroom library were recent purchases. Katie usually obtains many of her books from the library and said, "I am going to really try and make sure they are reading nonfiction during their independent reading. I am a lot more aware of different authors and can now go to the library and pick out books for their independent reading." (Exit interview, p. 2). Holly admitted in a whisper that she pulled some of her nonfiction books out of a box. When I asked her why they were in a box, she admitted, "I don’t know. I really don’t
know. There were ones where I thought no one is going to read that.” (Exit Interview, p. 5). A child in her room immediately began to read those previously boxed up books. The teachers reported actively examining their collections and brought more informational books into the classroom for their students to read.

**Reexamining Old Beliefs and Creating New Literacy Practices**

The teachers' examination went beyond their bookshelves; they also began to question where informational literature might be missing from their literacy instruction. In addition, many teachers realized they were not providing their students with the time or opportunity to read informational books. The teachers observed students’ positive reactions when reading informational books. This helped confirm the teachers’ decisions to include more of this genre in the classroom. DJ felt she had access to quality informational texts from the school bookroom, but believed she was not using them to their fullest advantage. She shared her thoughts with the group at our third session. In this transcript, she refers to “log jamming,” something she does with her students to have them keep a record of the books they have read during their silent reading time at school and their at home reading. Typically, the students were expected to read chapter books since chapter books, in her eyes, were typically longer in length and contained more text. The students created individual goals for the number of books they wanted to read each quarter. A hundred pages equaled one book and informational books rarely meet this page requirement. She talks below about her change in thinking:

**DJ** We (DJ and the team teacher) have been trying to find a way that we can use these (informational books) more so we (thought about) our silent reading time. We have decided. I sat down with the kids today and talked about when we could have more time to do this kind of reading and they all came up with a plan. From now on, Fridays, our log jamming,
which is normally, their book, it is usually a chapter book that they read a little bit everyday and everybody is on a different book and we spend time everyday doing that. On Fridays, from now on, they are allowed to not read that (their chapter book) and pick a nonfiction or a current event or something like that to read during that time. I am so excited now to see because they could write about these things and I am excited to see what they write about.

D How did you make this decision?

DJ I think it came from this meeting with this group that I felt like I wasn’t using enough nonfiction and except for me reading aloud to them or if they just happen to pick a book up (on their own to read). Of course, when I am doing certain topic, I have a bunch of those (nonfiction) books sitting out and they are welcome to go through them, but I don’t actually set the time aside specifically for that. I find that a lot of times, if I don’t do that, if I don’t give them the time, they don’t have the time to do that because they are so busy with a million other things. I just thought we would try it and see. They were really excited today when we talked about doing that. The TAG (gifted) kids were really worried because at first I was like “Well, I thought about doing it on Wednesday when the TAG kids aren’t here because they are missing their log jamming time anyway.” They were like “No, No, No”.

D So they wanted to be involved and wanted to read nonfiction?

DJ Yeh, they did.

(#3, p. 8)

In the fourth meeting, DJ provided the group with an update on how her students have embraced this new practice. She reported, “I told you about the way we were doing log jamming right now, every Friday, and they love it, they absolutely devour the books. (They) come up (to me) arguing about books (who gets to read what). They are talking about them.” (#4, p. 15). In her exit interview, she shared that she knew this was a good idea when she observed her students. She noted that they were “really excited about them (the nonfiction books) more than I had ever seen, so that is how I know it was a good idea because they were so excited about it and were really looking forward to doing it.” (p. 3)
The teachers held certain, unexamined beliefs about informational texts that they uncovered throughout the course of the meetings. For instance, several teachers came to the realization that they were only allowing fiction books to be read during students’ independent reading time. Many of the teachers conducted a workshop approach to reading instruction where the students were given opportunities to select the literature they wanted to read on their appropriate reading level. The students would dialogue with the teacher once a week by responding in writing to the book they were reading. The teachers expressed concerns similar to the ones DJ expressed earlier of the perceived shorter text found in many informational books. While no teacher admitted to banning the reading of informational literature in their classrooms, many realized that they did not promote it either. Holly shared she never “really stopped them before, but they never really asked and I never showed them (these kinds of books). Now, I am giving them the option.” (Exit interview, p. 2). Her students now have the option to select these texts for their independent reading. When elaborating on her reason for the change, she said:

I didn’t have them or promote them as much. I didn’t take the time to read them. Now (after introducing the students to the titles we have read) I realize I can’t stop now. It would be terrible for my children if I just stopped reading (and talking about these kinds of books). Darryl wants to know every week what the next book is (that she is reading for the book club). So I need to continue that and bring them into my classroom and get them from the library. I think before I just didn’t read them so, I just didn’t talk about them. (Exit interview, p. 2).

Similar to Holly’s revelation, Beth shared a realization about her expectation that children should only read fiction books during independent reading. She described her change of thinking about these texts by saying:

I mean I’ve changed because last year I didn’t want them (the students) reading anything but a chapter book for independent reading. I knew that I
shouldn’t be that way but it was my own way of thinking and (I was concerned) in their journals, wondering what [are] we going to talk about? But now that I have read some (informational books) and I see how much you can talk about it with them. I’ve tried this year to move away from that and let them have more of a choice (in their book selection). Now I can really encourage it because now I know (how rich these conversations can be). (#2, p.22).

At our last interview, Beth realized that informational books “can be used for independent reading and they (the students) can have good conversations and good journaling, which is what I was leery of in the beginning.” (Exit interview, p. 4). Katie held similar concerns and admitted:

I guess I thought it was going to be very difficult for the students to respond to a nonfiction text but now after going to the group, obviously, you can talk for two hours and respond to a nonfiction text just as easily or more easily than you can to a fiction text. (Exit interview, p. 2)

It seems as if the concern over the “reading value” of informational literature was alleviated after the teachers had several opportunities to read and discuss informational literature themselves. One teacher admitted that she had not “read informational books to know that there were really things to discuss.” (#5, p.28) After experiencing the richness of discussions and thought-provoking texts, the teachers began to see the learning opportunities and enjoyable experiences informational books provided for the reader.

The teachers were still concerned about managing certain aspects of literacy instruction when increasing the use of informational books with their students. The teachers were concerned about the length of an informational book in comparison to a novel and the shorter amount of time they envisioned it would take for students to read these books. Although by the third meeting, the teachers expressed a lessening of this concern.
Before my thinking was “Oh, that is not long enough.”

Yeh, they will be done with that book (soon).

But now I realize that it doesn’t matter if they are reading a different one everyday.
(#3, p.17).

In particular, several teachers were worried about how to handle their students’ weekly journal writing. The teachers were concerned about the possibility of students reading several informational books by the time their turns came around to receive a written response from their teacher. Holly explained her concern by stating:

It is hard because Jasmine took the book (An Extraordinary Life: The Story of the Monarch Butterfly) home and read it in a night. She is an amazing reader and I wanted, I was just so disappointed because I was ready to write back a couple of times, and her journal wasn’t due for two days. I said ‘Well do it anyway’ and she did. She wrote a great journal about it and gave a book talk but then it was over and now she is on to another book. It is harder to do shorter books like this in independent (reading) because of that. I only collect the journals once a week and they have read three (books) because they have 35 minutes to read everyday plus our kids beg to take them home. We don’t want to say no so it is hard to keep up with journals and try to keep up with their reading.

As Holly stated, this concern with the journal writing, there was also, in part, disappointment that she would not be able to have an extended conversation with the student about the informational book she was reading.

Read Alouds and Book Talks

The teachers reported reading portions of the group’s informational literature to their students as read alouds. DJ discussed her decision to try and increase the number of nonfiction picture books she shared with her students. DJ said she read a picture book
aloud almost daily to her students in the morning. Since the meetings began, she said she has “chosen to do more nonfiction (for read alouds) and I find myself searching and seeking them out more now than I did before.” (Exit interview, p. 2)

The teachers also introduced the books we read to their students by giving book talks. Book talks are succinct ways of enticing the students about a book, “selling the book” so to speak. Beth stated that for “all the books that we read, I did a book talk. I am naturally excited about all of them anyway, so it is easy for me to show that to my kids and get them interested.” (Exit interview, p. 2) Deena had not given any book talks prior to the beginning of our meetings, and learned about them through our discussions. She began giving book talks to her students about the titles we were reading and then displayed these books in a basket marked “new nonfiction.” Holly previously gave book talks, but had highlighted mainly fiction books. Since reading the informational books, she provided her students a book talk for each of the texts. She mentioned in her interview:

That is why I am glad I did this, because now all my kids, whether they picked up a book or not, have now experienced seeing a lot of nonfiction even if they didn’t pick it up. . . It is in their mind and no one can take that away from them. (Exit interview, p. 4)

The teachers often waited until the next day after our meetings to introduce the book(s) to their students, using some of groups’ discussion highlights to entice the students. Book talks allowed the teachers to call the students’ attention to the informational books available in the classroom, and since the teachers had read these books, they were also able to speak of them as readers.
The teachers reported changes in their understandings about informational books and the use of them in their classrooms. New literacy practices were created, and existing practices modified, during their participation in these sessions. It appears their personal involvement in reading informational texts and their discussion of these texts may have helped them reconsider the use of informational texts with their own students.

**Wanting the Book Group to Continue**

Many teachers specifically mentioned wanting the book group to continue. The teachers wanted to continue the group for various reasons. Beth said, “If I could keep doing this with my school, I would love it. [That is] if I could find people who wanted to do it. I would really like to keep it going. I just don’t think anyone else wants to add more to what they already have to do.” (Exit interview, p. 3) When asked if she would stay with nonfiction books or include fiction titles for the teachers to read, she said, “For now, I would stick with nonfiction because I think most people are familiar with fiction. I mean, in your children’s literature classes in college most of us read a lot of fiction books.” (Exit interview, p. 3) When asked if she had anything else to share about her experience in being a book group, Beth replied, “I want it to keep going because it is forcing me to read. Not forcing me, but it is making me motivated to read nonfiction.” (Exit interview, p. 6) Asking her to explain why this book group is keeping her motivated instead of doing it on her own, she added:

> When I do it on my own it is easy to say . . . to put it off until a later time. When I am reading the book for this (meeting) I know that I am going to talk about it as an intelligent person, so I know I have to be done reading it. I want to be able to talk to my kids about it. (Exit interview, p. 6)

Holly shared her feelings when she responded:
I just wish it wasn’t over because I really think of all of us, we all have high hopes that we are going to keep going, but there is going to be another workshop or something else that we have to go to and then this will get put aside. I wish it wasn’t over. Now we have to do it our own.

It is hard because you are choosing between writing in the journals, grading homework, getting something on the internet for my class or (asking) should I read this book so I can talk to kids about it tomorrow. But now this (reading informational books) will be at the forefront of our mind and I think now, after talking to everybody, we realize how important it is. I knew it was important to read books, talk about books and nonfiction but knowing it and acting on it are two different things.

I need to act on it. I realize how hypocritical I’ve been in saying it is important. If someone asked me I would say, “Ya, it is important” and that was it. Period. But now I realize I need to act on it. I need to show my kids the books. They all have been exposed to them; they all are excited about them. Soon they are going to be, my whole class is going to be tired of those and I am going to need to have a whole new set in there ready to go and now I am going to have to continue to add to my collection. (Exit interview, p. 8-9)

The format and structure of the group propelled the teachers to read informational books on a regular basis. The teachers recognized and acknowledged the difficulty of constantly searching for and reading new books on their own. The established routine of the book group aided in the teachers’ desires to keep current with the literature as well as motivated them to participate. Teachers are constantly weighing their ‘to do” list against the clock; reading new books, unfortunately, sometimes does not always win out. As Holly said, “We are teachers without time,” (Exit interview, p. 7) and it appears the regular schedule of a book group offered the teachers a routine they could follow.

Overall, the teachers believed the book club meetings and discussions increased their awareness of this genre. The discussions provided a rich catalyst for teachers to examine their own reactions in light of the others in the group. The teachers reached a deeper level of thinking and understanding about the books as a result of the discussions than if they had read these books alone. Through their participation in the book group, the
teachers read a small core of informational authors and modified current instructional practices to include the use of more informational books into their classrooms.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine intermediate teachers’ attitudes, understandings, and interactions with informational books. I believe that utilizing a book group format led to an increase in the participants’ awareness of informational books and how they can be used in the classroom. Through the discussions, the teachers made meaning, shared instructional ideas, voiced concerns, and broadened their understandings about informational books. Regular discussion played a critical role in the teachers’ exploration with this genre.
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was undertaken to describe intermediate teachers' attitudes, understandings, and knowledge of informational books. The teachers engaged in a book group discussion setting as a means of professional development. Four questions guided my inquiry:

- What attitudes do teachers hold about the genre of informational books both personally and for classroom use?
- What understandings, issues, or concerns are raised about informational books within the book group conversations?
- What criteria or factors do teachers consider that influence the use, or lack of use, of informational books within the classroom?
- What impact did book group discussions as a means of professional development have on teachers' attitudes, understandings, selection and use of informational books?

Throughout the study, each of the teachers completed a survey, engaged in individual interviews, wrote responses, and attended five book group sessions. I compiled, cross-referenced, and analyzed data to determine patterns related to the above questions.
Discussion of the Findings

Question One: Teachers' Attitudes Towards Informational Books

The first question focused on teachers' attitudes towards informational books both personally and for classroom use. Because personal attitudes influence individuals' choices, examining intermediate teachers' attitudes towards informational books provided a means for gauging their feelings towards this genre. I examined interview transcripts and completed surveys as data sources concerning teachers' attitudinal beliefs.

No known research exists that specifically examines intermediate teachers' attitudes towards informational books. This question is an important stepping stone in examining the use of informational books in the classroom. While many can hypothesize about the lack of use of this genre in the classroom, hearing the teachers' experiences directly helped determine where this problem might begin and its surrounding parameters.

What teachers feel and believe influences their actions in the classroom and knowingly or unknowingly guides the teaching decisions they make. Several of the teachers in this study reported having little recollection of past experiences with informational books as students; they reported turning to fiction books for their personal reading. Most of the teachers did not speak of selecting informational books from an established knowledge of good authors or titles. Nor did they mention using any kind of established criteria when evaluating the books they selected. The teachers described feeling "comfortable" with using informational books, but admitted that they needed to use these books more in their instruction. Interestingly, the teachers thought their students had a high level of interest towards these books and these books increased students'
knowledge base and provided the students with real-life reading opportunities. Teachers also thought informational books were difficult for students in aspects such as language, content, and organization. Most of the teachers' classroom libraries were heavily weighted with fiction books.

My findings extend some of the research currently available. For instance, research by Scharer, Freeman, Lehman, and Allen (1993) found students' reading habits and personal preferences influence the decision making of teachers. The teachers in this study agreed that they were also influenced by what their students would like to read. A larger group of teachers surveyed also concurred with this statement. Also, Scharer, Peters and Lehman (1995) found the teachers' personal values were reflected in the books they chose. Trussel-Cullen (1999) proposed something similar when he suggested teachers' personal preferences and attitudes might be a reason why many students are experiencing such limited exposure to informational books. The imbalance found in many of the teachers' classroom libraries towards fiction, combined with their stated preference for reading fiction books as adults, may support these two findings. Since teachers purchase many of the books in their classroom library with their own money, the abundance of one genre over another may speak to their personal preferences and purchasing habits. The teachers in this study showed that their own preferences are somewhat mitigated by their concerns about students' capabilities and interests as well.

It is easy for a topic to be pushed to the side or avoided for a long period of time when it is not regarded with a lot of enthusiasm. While the teachers in this study understood that informational books serve a purpose that would benefit students, they seemed unsure about how to go about making that purpose worthy of their own time and
energy. They had to weigh the time it takes to find and then read appropriate books. They also had to make decisions about how to best integrate chosen materials successfully into their curriculum against the many other demands on their time.

Consequently, partially influencing the use of informational books is teachers' knowledge base. The teachers' confidence with this genre is influenced by their knowledge about these books. This study shows that teachers need regularly planned experiences with informational books if they are to make informed use of this genre. In addition, they need a better way of selecting and evaluating books. It would be useful if teachers had the knowledge of the criteria set forth by experts in the field that is often used to judge informational books. Teachers need to learn how to effectively use these books with students. Educating students to become competent with this genre requires teachers who feel comfortable with and knowledgeable about it.

**Question Two: The Nature of Conversation During the Book Group Meetings**

The second research question addressed the understanding, issues, and concerns raised about informational books during the book group conversations. These teachers met with colleagues to discuss informational books across five, two-hour meetings. The loosely structured discussion format allowed the teachers to begin each discussion any way they wished. What the teachers chose to talk about and what generated lively discussion during the sessions, provided information concerning how the teachers thought about each book, along with issues and concerns they might have about using these books with their students.
The teachers’ conversations centered around three major areas: 1) personal reactions; 2) classroom use; and 3) noticing and critiquing behaviors. The conversations about these different topics emerged casually throughout the discussions, very similar to daily conversation that can flow back and forth among several topics.

It was not surprising to find that the teachers responded personally to the books and discussed some of the larger social issues the books presented to the reader. Teachers often shared personal stories and connections about the books. They asked each other for clarification and shared additional information they knew about a topic. When discussing the different social issues, they often responded as individuals first and then discussed how they could approach this topic as teachers.

How to use informational books in the classroom created a lot of conversation among the teachers. The teachers greatly benefited from hearing ideas and suggestions from other teachers. At first, it seemed that many of the teachers only considered using a book in a certain way, but after discussing that book with colleagues, they found other viable means for using the book. The teachers seemed limited in both past experiences and knowledge of the different ways informational books could be used for instructional purposes. After the teachers themselves began to read and discuss the books, it appeared they realized that informational books contained rich information for discussion.

Teachers shared the books with their students and then shared their students’ reactions to those same books with the book group.

The teachers also voiced their concerns about the kinds of difficulty students experience with informational books. Overall, the teachers found their students to be excited and interested in informational books, stating that many of the students chose to
read the same books the teachers read for the group. While they noted that their students enjoyed reading these books, they also listed concerns they felt impeded their students’ understanding of these books. Issues frequently arose such as vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, and concern students would not understand everything in the book. Teachers compared their own experiences as readers with the reading experiences of their students. They began to realize that they did not remember or comprehend everything, but they still understood the book. The teachers began to realize that their students could encounter this same situation and still finish the book with an adequate level of understanding.

The third main area of discussion occurred when the teachers began to notice and critique various aspects of the informational books such as the text features they liked or found helpful. They also began to critique features present or absent from the books they were reading. For example, the teachers thought a map located at the beginning of one book was helpful, but that it should reappear throughout the book. Sometimes they critiqued the author’s writing style, judging if they found it accessible or inaccessible to the reader. They also compared the books with regards to presentation, illustrations, and content. In addition to critiquing different aspects of the books, they shared their own critical reading of the books by talking about what they wanted or expected from the book and if the author met those expectations.

Open-ended discussions were conducted as part of this study to allow free-flowing dialogue and to promote the surfacing of teachers’ own topic priorities. It was during these discussions that teachers raised issues and addressed concerns. The results, I found, were that teachers were unaware of the almost limitless options with informational
books, applicable in any daily classroom setting. It is imperative that teachers explore these ways in order for informational books to have a positive impact on education. Also, during these discussions, I found teachers were taking a broader and more flexible view of applying these books to their own teaching experiences after they examined themselves as readers. Finally, the teachers shared with their students their own problems as readers. Teachers need to learn about aspects of informational books so they could feel comfortable critiquing the quality of informational books. The more teachers are able to read critically, the better able they are to share this information with their students.

Question Three: Factors That Influence the Use or Lack of Use of Informational Books

The third research question explored the factors that influence the use or lack of use of informational books within the classroom. From the current research, it is apparent that informational books are being underused in today's classrooms. Throughout their discussions and interviews, the teachers highlighted factors that might contribute to the use or lack of use of these books with students. The teachers suggested more possible reasons for the lack of use than reasons supporting the use of informational books in the classroom.

The curriculum decisions made by the principal in one school caused the teachers to use informational books more frequently with their students. They did so because of a mandate. One teacher thought she would not have used them as much if it were not for the curriculum demands placed on her as a teacher. This was one of the factors that the teachers felt promoted the use of informational books in the classroom.
The teachers provided a variety of reasons why informational books were not being used by them or by other teachers. The teachers admitted that personal preference plays a large role when making decisions about the books to use in the classroom. They also thought many of the books contained a great deal of information and that the students would be unable to understand everything. Some teachers worried about conversing with a student about a book when they lacked knowledge about that topic. Some teachers felt this placed them in a vulnerable position, as they had no real way of "checking" on the accuracy of the child's information. Teachers were not aware of the Orbis Pictus award, which is especially designated for nonfiction books. They felt that many teachers, including themselves, simply did not possess an extensive knowledge of informational titles or authors. The participating teachers thought that someone who did not have much experience with informational books would not promote or use them as much as a teachers who had repeated experiences with this genre.

Many of the informational books in the classroom, according to these teachers, often came from the library. The teachers checked out several books about a topic and brought them into the classroom. This meant that informational books come and go in the classroom and many teachers did not evaluate them against any criteria when selecting them other than by matching the topic being studied. The teachers also felt it was difficult to find books on appropriate reading levels for some of their students.

One area of influence that garnered a lot of discussion was that many teachers did not know what to do with informational books. Unlike fiction that a person simply reads
from beginning to end, informational books offer many different paths to the reader. Teachers may be challenged by the multiple decisions and options informational books provide and unsure of how to handle them.

The teachers in this study supplied many factors that may influence the use or lack of use of informational books in the classroom. Several of the factors were personal issues such as knowing how to best use these books, and selecting books based on personal interests. Some issues related directly to the students, such as the question of the amount of information they would understand. Several issues related to informational books, themselves, as teachers felt they were less visible and more difficult to find than fiction books. The teachers in this study felt, however, that participation in a book group would help other teachers learn about this genre. The structure of the book group forced these teachers to make time for reading informational books, allowed them to talk about these books, and provided them with a forum to hear different opinions and ideas.

In addition to a lack of understanding of how to best use them in the classroom, many of the reasons the teachers provided for the lack of use of this genre in the classroom stems from a personal lack of familiarity of authors and titles. It is critical that teachers become familiar with informational books. When teachers are unaware of or unfamiliar with informational books, then they are also unaware of the possibilities that exist within the books. If teachers have difficulty locating these books, informational books will continue to be underused. Teachers must have experiences not only reading, but also discussing these books so they can explore the multitude of ways informational books can be used in the classroom.
Question Four: The Impact of Book Group Meetings on Teachers’ Understandings of Informational Books

Finally, the fourth research question dealt with the impact the book group discussions had on intermediate teachers’ attitudes, understandings, selection and use of informational books. While the previous questions addressed attitudes, issues, and concerns surrounding this genre, this last question specifically examined the participation of teachers in the book group sessions.

The teachers credited the group discussions with playing a critical role in enhancing and expanding their understandings of informational books. The discussions helped teachers view the books from other people’s perspectives. In some cases, the teachers completely changed their mind about a book because of the discussion. The teachers realized the multiple, yet valuable, perspectives a reader can take and remember from a book. The talk also provided the teachers with opportunities to discuss how to use these books in the classroom. As mentioned previously, teachers noted this concern as a reason why informational books were not often used. In addition to being an enjoyable experience, the teachers found this group discussion time necessary as the talk influenced their thinking about the books and the ways the books could be used in the classroom.

The teachers also discussed their overall participation in the book group. Participation fostered a new way for thinking about this genre. It also provided the teachers with a small group of authors and titles they could use in the future, which is why some teachers joined the group. Others felt the group helped them with using the books with their students. Their participation helped them see how accessible
informational books can actually be for their students. The more books the teachers read, the more they experienced how rewarding these books are as a vehicle for discussion and learning.

Lastly, classroom practice was the other major area influenced by the book group discussions. The teachers began to reexamine their classroom instruction and found that informational books were being under utilized. Many of the teachers made a conscientious effort to include and increase the amount of informational books their students read. They began allowing and encouraging their students to read these books for independent and silent reading. They introduced the books that we read to the class through book talks. They even read some portions of the books aloud. In addition, the teachers examined their classroom libraries and began to purchase more informational books.

From this study, it became evident that teachers need time to talk about something new and unfamiliar. Talk with colleagues offers teachers reassurance, support, and confirmation when evaluating this genre. The teachers in this study found the discussion time to be invaluable for their own learning. This increased support and personal level of comfort contributed to their willingness to experiment more with this genre. Providing teachers with a list of good informational books and authors is not enough. The opportunities for teachers to read these books and to discuss them with fellow teachers opened avenues of possibilities they had not previously considered. The book group discussions offered the teachers a non-threatening way to experience this genre. The
discussions not only provided the teachers with ideas and activities, but also helped generate a confident willingness to immediately create changes in their classroom practices.

Comparing this Study to Previous Research

The book group format was an embodiment of several theories related to teacher reflection. Within this format, the teachers actively participated and examined their own learning process and the processes of others. This arrangement elaborates the ideas put forth by many scholars (Duckworth, 1987; DeFord, 1991; Lambert, 1995; Lyons, 1993; Schon, 1987; Walker & Lambert, 1995) about creating environments where teacher reflection can occur. The teachers had five occasions to share their thoughts and reactions to seven books. They engaged in discussion with other teachers, and compared reactions to the same book. This research also extends the work of Rodgers, Fullerton, and DeFord (in press). Instead of discussion emerging from a common observation as described in their study, a shared text became the catalyst for discussion in this study. Through this book group formation, the teachers explored other people's ideas and ways of learning. In this study, opportunities for collaborative work and constant reflection played a role in improving and refining classroom practices, supporting the ideas and findings already established by researchers (DeFord, 1991; Lambert, 1995; Lyons, 1993; Schon, 1983), and examining the importance of teacher reflection. This book group format of professional development utilized conditions necessary to promote and support teacher reflection and incorporated Vygotsky's theories of learning. There was a mixture of
levels of expertise among the participating teachers. As they talked, they provided a conversational setting where the more experienced among them could help and instruct the less experienced.

According to Vygotsky, social interaction influences cognitive development. In his theory, dialogue is viewed as a means for humans to create knowledge together. This theory was supported in this study. The teachers engaged in dialogue around children’s informational literature and this dialogue influenced, shaped, and changed their thinking. Teachers were active participants in their own learning and learned from each other, with each teacher leaving with a broader understanding than she had prior to the discussion. The teachers spoke highly of this experience, specifically of being able to learn from others and hear different opinions about the books. Dialogue provided the means for teachers to develop and create knowledge together.

My study on intermediate teachers’ interactions with informational books in a book group format supported and extended the current research on teachers as readers and book groups in several ways. Many studies (Goldberg & Pesko, 2000; Flood, Lapp, & Ranck-Buhr, 1995; Zaleski, 1997; Zaleski, Duval, & Weil, 1999) have found a carry over from the teachers’ personal enjoyment of reading the books to a change in their classroom practices. I found similar results in my study. Zaleski’s (1997) dissertation study found teachers’ beliefs and attitudes, along with classroom practices, changed as a result of their participation in her study. These components were also found in my study. Zaleski (1997) found that the book group format uncovered what the teachers knew about reading and literature and provided a forum for teacher reflection. I also found this to be true because their talk provided evidence as to how the teachers perceived this genre,
along with their depth of understanding and familiarity with informational books. Similar
to the findings in several research studies (Flood & Lapp, 1994; Flood, Lapp, and Ranck-
Buhr, 1995; Fox & Wilkinson, 1997; Smith, 1994), participation in a book group had a
direct impact on the literature used in the teachers' classrooms. The teachers in this study
reported using more informational books with their students and introduced many of the
books they read with the group directly to their students.

This study extended the research on book groups previously available, in which
teachers in the book groups read fiction literature. Rather than using fiction literature with
teachers, informational books were used to provide them with exposure to this genre.
These books were appropriate for intermediate age students. The use of informational
books instead of fiction was a departure from previous research studies on book groups,
which makes this study unique. The potential exists for using this format with other, less
familiar genres.

Implications

From this research, several implications emerge for preservice and inservice
education for teachers. These avenues of education need to help teachers learn how to use
informational books in the classroom. Many teachers in this study stated that they had not
been introduced to good examples of informational books in their preservice education.
Many preservice teachers take one children's literature course that attempts to survey all
the different genres. But because a course like this is a brief survey of a very broad field,
informational books may not be covered or may be under-represented within the course.
Teachers need to become familiar with titles and authors of informational books. Making
teachers aware of special awards presented to informational books and reliable sources that include reviews of informational books will provide them with tools to continue their exploration with this genre after they have finished their formal education. Teachers need a method for acquiring new informational books once they have exhausted the titles they already know.

This study also provided evidence that it is important that teachers know how to evaluate informational books. While some of the basic criteria for evaluating fiction and informational literature overlap, writing style being one, certain criteria are uniquely employed to evaluate informational books. For example, examining a book for its accuracy and organizational style is one criterion. While a "below average" quality fiction book may not provide the reader with a rich literary experience, the reading of a "below average" informational book may contain inaccurate or misleading information that the child might accept as acknowledged truth. Therefore, it becomes important that teachers know the criteria for analyzing informational literature equally as well as they do for fiction.

Reading methods courses should specifically address strategy instruction for reading informational books. Teachers must understand that students need specific instruction on how to read this genre. The reading of informational books requires different skills and strategies than fiction does. Students must learn to access the text through the index, to use headings as signposts, and to "read" sparsely worded visual elements. Teachers need to learn about these strategies in order to integrate this knowledge into their teaching of reading. If class time is spent on how to read this particular genre with preservice teachers, then they might begin to view this genre as...
needing the same amount of attention as fiction in reading instruction. In addition, preservice teachers should experience informational books as appropriate vehicles for read alouds so that they, in turn, will consider reading informational books aloud to their students. Preservice teachers should view informational books as literature that can be read for pleasure as well as for information.

The reciprocity of reading and writing is often discussed in preservice language arts classes. Reciprocity refers to the students being able to draw upon their knowledge and experiences in reading to help themselves in writing and vice versa. This reciprocity needs to be addressed in regards to informational books. By allocating time for instruction with this genre, the teacher provides benefits to the students in both reading and writing. Multiple experiences in reading different kinds of informational books may help students in their writing of an informational piece as they have already experienced several different formats in the books that they read. Uncovering the organizing structure in an informational book might make it easier for students to write in this genre. If the students use certain words in their writing to signify the reader to the structure being used, such as first/second, or if/then in their writing, then this same language might become more visible to the students in their reading. Reading about the author's research process might provide information that the students can try when engaged in their own research.

Graduate level classes in education should revisit and elaborate many of the ideas suggested for preservice teachers. The opportunity for teachers to take a specific course on informational literature could address many of the points mentioned above. I took a
class specifically about nonfiction books my first year in graduate school. I consider that
class to be the catalyst for my interest in this genre, an interest that eventually grew into
this dissertation study.

This study supports the need for curricula specifically designed to promote
instruction with this genre. This plan should be yearlong as opposed to a six- or ten-week
unit never revisited once completed. Teachers may need some broad-based goals to help
them learn how to use these books with students. The ideas that follow represent key
goals or concepts that both teachers and students should understand as a result of this
intensive directive. First, students need continued exposure to this genre in various ways.
There should be explicit instruction about this genre and students should have exposure
to a large variety of quality books. Students should learn how to be careful consumers of
informational books and to read these books for personal enjoyment as well as for
gathering information. In addition, students should be encouraged and expected to read
informational books during their silent, independent, and guided reading. Informational
books could also be used for literature circles. Second, students should learn to analyze
the text organization features employed in the book. Through both reading and writing,
students should understand the authors’ research processes and the multiple ways of
judging the authenticity of information. The creation of an informational book curriculum
including these components should help students develop a strong base for their
understandings and future encounters with this genre.

The books teachers bring into the classroom should be high quality. While the
practice of quickly gathering a larger number of books from the library introduces many
nonfiction books into the classroom, there is the danger of a “book flood” (Bamford and
Kristo, 2000). With this flood of books, there is a great possibility that many of the titles will contain out of date or inaccurate information. Some may be poorly written. Bamford and Kristo caution against bringing unread books into the classroom and advocate carefully selecting the books that students will read so they will encounter only strong examples of nonfiction literature.

In a conversation with a Literacy Specialist in one of the participants' schools, we discussed this very notion. He thought many classrooms looked “book rich,” but most of the nonfiction books were borrowed from the library. He estimated that 90% of nonfiction books in the classrooms at his school were from the library and not owned by the district or by the classroom teachers. “What does that say for our love of books if all we own is fiction,” asked Literacy Specialist Tony Keefer. “Does that send a message about the value of nonfiction to the kids?” (Tony Keefer, phone conversation, 12-5-01). These questions offer interesting ideas to contemplate about the nonverbal message teachers might be sending to their students.

As a means of professional development, teachers could engage in book groups around informational literature at their own schools. During the meetings, teachers respond to the books personally, but also discuss how to integrate these books into their classroom instruction. This sharing allows teachers to hear about using these books in ways they might not have previously considered. Book groups are relatively inexpensive to operate and provide teachers with a painless way to learn about new authors. Teachers can also explore the intricacies of this genre with fellow teachers. Book groups provide teachers with a way to examine their own perceptions and attitudes toward this genre. Teachers may also examine their use of this genre in their own classrooms.
Currently, teachers feel pressure to prepare students for high stakes testing, especially the reading and writing of informational texts. In addition, the schools feel pressure to produce future employees who are critical thinkers, readers, and writers. Teachers can use informational books to help prepare students to meet these demands only after they understand and are comfortable with this genre themselves.

**Directions for Further Research**

There are several areas for future research that stem from this study. First, the frequency of the book group meetings could be extended from the five meetings that occurred during this study to meeting monthly for the duration of a school year. With nine or ten sessions, the teachers would have the opportunity to read and discuss more books. The teachers in this study began to embrace informational books and began to use them more in their classrooms. If these sessions continued, future research could answer the question: Would the teachers begin to talk about text structures and the kinds of strategies students would need to read these books? The nature of my research provides teachers with opportunities to learn more about informational books. Extending the length of a study may bring about a shift in the teachers’ ability to critique the informational books they read. They may begin to explore how their experiences translate to specific, strategic instruction for students about this genre.

Also, the book group format could be revisited with teachers reading children’s informational books combined with the reading of one or two key articles about using informational books in the classroom. This way the teachers could still learn titles and authors, while simultaneously receiving helpful suggestions and activities for how to best
utilize informational books from the articles. For several sessions the teachers could read
the books and increase their comfort level with this genre. At that point, an article could
be introduced to help the teachers learn more about different literacy practices using
informational books. The combination of reading an article and an informational book for
a meeting would provide the teachers with opportunities to discuss the merits of the
article and if desired, to see how the book they read could be used in the manner the
article suggested.

Another direction for future research might be to conduct classroom observations
of teachers using informational books. The language teachers used during their
discussions of informational books might be interesting to investigate. Do the teachers
convey excitement about these books or do they take more of a neutral or dismissing
tone? In this study, the teachers began to note and critique aspects of the books; they
expressed both excitement for some books and indifference for others within the group.
The teachers often conveyed how they felt about the book by the tone they used. By
focusing on the teacher's language with their students, data could be collected about the
kinds of positive, neutral, or negative messages that are being subtly conveyed to the
students. Observations could provide additional data and could describe in greater detail
how informational books are being used, showcased, and promoted in intermediate
classrooms.

Research that focused on students while their teachers participated in a book
group might also be useful. The teachers in this study informed their students that they
were participating in a book group and reported that their students repeatedly asked them
about the books they were reading in the group. The teachers shared that part of their
lives with their students. Do the students begin to read more informational books than before the teacher joined the group? Students’ perception of their teachers’ participation in a book group might be a helpful area to add to the research literature.

Finally, the intermediate grade teachers in this study read children’s informational books. Since researchers have called for the inclusion of more informational texts at younger grades, exploring a similar book group format with primary teachers might be useful. Would the concerns and issues they raised be similar to those raised by the intermediate grade teachers? Would the dynamics change since the books would be shorter to read? Would the book group discussions impact their classroom practices as it did for the intermediate grade teachers? This area is currently untapped as little to no research exists about primary teachers’ attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about informational books.

**Final Thoughts**

Informational literature employs different text structures than commonly found in fiction books. Students need regular exposure to informational books, as do the teachers, so the students can successfully read these materials in school-related and life-related situations. Students also need specific guidance as to how to read these materials, including how to capitalize on the text structures and how to utilize the non-textual features provided to support and extend meaning. Before this instruction can happen, the classroom teacher needs to be comfortable and well versed with these books and features. Prior to the explicit teaching of these features and text structures, the teacher needs to possess a favorable attitude towards this genre and a belief that this genre offers many
unique learning opportunities not available in fiction books. Teachers, themselves, need multiple encounters with informational books in order to begin gathering experiences that extend and broaden their knowledge about this genre.

This study described six intermediate teachers’ experiences with informational books as a means of examining their attitudes, understandings, and knowledge about this genre. The teachers’ attitudes towards this genre became more favorable as they began to experience for themselves the possible level of discussion and learning from reading informational books with their peers. The teachers changed their existing literacy practices and began utilizing these books more with their students. Students began working with these books in various literacy related activities. Undoubtedly, this exploration with intermediate teachers is just a first step in a long succession of steps towards meeting the final goal of educating students to become proficient readers and writers of informational texts. It is an important step, however, because the people who are responsible for helping students meet these critical literacy goals need multiple opportunities to work with and learn about informational literature before being expected to instruct students about this genre.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY
Directions: Read the following statements, and circle one of the responses that will indicate the relationship of the statement to your feelings.

1. I use informational books at least once a week in my classroom.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

2. I have purchased an informational book for classroom use in the past 3 months.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

3. I use informational books regularly for my read alouds.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

4. I have read at least one informational book to my class this year.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

5. My collections of fiction and informational books are about equal.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

6. Informational books are a critical component of instruction.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

7. I mainly use fiction literature in my reading instruction with students.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

8. I often select informational books that match with a content area topic.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

9. As a student in elementary school, I had positive experiences with informational books.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA SD

10. Many children have difficulty reading informational books.  
    1 2 3 4 5  
    SA SD

11. The books I select to use in my classroom represent what I like to read.  
    1 2 3 4 5  
    SA SD
12. Students would enjoy a read aloud with an informational book.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

13. Using an informational book for read aloud would take too long.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

14. I select books to use in my classroom based on what I think my students will like to read.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

15. Children enjoy reading informational books.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

16. Informational books are best used for teaching content area material.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

17. My students get exposure to informational books when I teach the content areas.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

18. I believe children's literature should be incorporated into the curriculum.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

19. I feel confident in selecting informational books to use in the classroom.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

20. I learned a lot about informational books in my children's literature classes.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

21. Informational books need to be read from cover to cover.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

22. Students should be able to transfer their skills used in fiction reading to nonfiction books.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

23. Informational books help students become critical thinkers.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

24. It is not easy to read an informational book to the class because they take too long.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

25. Children need to specifically be taught how to read informational books.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD

26. I can name at least three good informational books for students at my grade level.  
   1 2 3 4 5  
   SA  SD
Participant Interview

Number of years teaching experience

How many years have you taught the following grades?

What grade are you currently teaching?

What is the highest year or grade of school you have completed?

In what year did you obtain your bachelor’s degree?

Have you ever had an academic course in children’s literature?

In these classes were children’s informational trade books discussed?

If you attended Ohio State, have you taken the course specifically about nonfiction literature?

Have you attended the Children’s Literature Conference at The Ohio State University in the past five years (1995-2000)?

What journals do you currently subscribe to?

What journals do you have access to in your school library?

Do you read the reviews of children’s books in the newspaper?

How do you get the names of the books that you want to check out the reviews for?

What books are you currently reading as an adult?

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Can you list the last good informational book you have read as an adult?

Do you personally, on a regular basis, read children’s books, either fiction or informational?

Do you have any memories (positive, negative or neutral) about your experiences with informational books?
Informational books in the classroom

Do you incorporate children's literature into your reading and writing program?

Have you peppered a few picture books in there for read aloud?

Have you personally purchased any children's literature books for your classroom since June of 2000?

What are some of the titles?

Have you bought any informational books since June of 2000?

How many fiction books would you say you have bought?

How do you select the books you will use in your classroom?

In what ways have you used informational books this year with your students?

Do you enjoy using informational books with your students?

How comfortable do you feel with using informational books in the classroom?

What kinds of observations have you made about students' interactions with informational books?

Specifically, what have you taught your students about informational books?
  - Text structure-
  - Drawing inferences-
  - Synthesizing material-
  - Judging authenticity-
  - Forming opinions-
  - These books can be enjoyable-

How are your books stored in your classroom?

About how many informational books do you have available to children in the classroom?

Do you reserve some specifically for teacher use?

Does your use of informational books differ from the fall to spring semester? Or does your use of these books remain the same throughout the year?
In your opinion, how should teachers use informational books in the classroom?

What level of interest do you think children have towards these books?

What do you think that does for them?

What difficulties, if any do you think children have with reading informational books?

What are some of the perceived benefits for using informational books in the classroom?

Why do you feel teachers use or (do not use) children’s informational books in the classroom?
REFERENCES


Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching.* (3rd ed.). (pp. 119-161). New York: Macmillan.


CHILDREN’S LITERATURE TITLES CITED


