

Varieties of Non-Fiction Text

Summary: In elementary grades, the majority of non-fiction or informational text is done through read-alouds. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, two California State University – Fullerton professors discuss a study of the amount and types of non-fiction text that are used during read-alouds and suggest ways to maximize that genre.

Practical Applications

The usage of non-fiction text has been shown to have numerous benefits for student learning. The authors conducted a research study of over 1,000 K-3 teachers and found the following regarding the amount and types of non-fiction text used during read-alouds:

- Less than 10% of texts used in read-alouds were informational (expository)
- Of those informational read-alouds, fully 85% were about a science topic
- Of those science read-alouds, fully 75% were about life science (e.g. animals)

The authors suggest many reasons for this over-emphasis on life science, including a lack of strong children's texts about other topics such as math or social studies, and even a lack of texts about space science or physical science. Whatever the reason, suggestions for teachers to maintain a diversity of topics include:

- Keeping a log of read-aloud books and their genres
- Utilizing other types of media to source read-aloud material, such as Internet-based text, magazines and newspapers
- Conduct internet searches to locate high-quality children's texts about non-fiction topics, many of which are produced by various reputable councils and associations.

The authors also include best practice ideas for doing non-fiction read-alouds, including:

- *Before Reading:* Point out connections to other learnings; conduct background activities or discussions; preview the text; highlight text structures; set the purpose for reading
- *During Reading:* Note new or familiar vocabulary terms; point out how text structures aid reading; pause and model comprehension strategies
- *After Reading:* Provide opportunities for discussion; help students make connections to real-life; create cross-subject linkages; ask difficult, broad questions; provide additional texts for students' individual exploration

Conclusion and Citation

Informational non-fiction texts make up a tiny fraction of the text that students engage with, despite playing a key role in developing student's reading skills and knowledge about the world around them. Teachers can take steps to ensure their classroom has a wide range of texts.

Yopp, H. & Yopp, R. "Young Children's Limited and Narrow Exposure to Informational Text." *The Reading Teacher* 65.7 (Apr. 2012), pp. 480-490. <http://bit.ly/Hyq3aN> (subscription only).