

Fall 2015

Literacy Strategies for Reading and Understanding Nonfiction Texts in the Elementary Grades

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Analytical Review of the Literature

Literacy Strategies for Reading and Understanding Nonfiction Texts in the Elementary Grades

By

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Fall 2015

A culminating project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of
The College at Brockport State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Literacy

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Abstract

Elementary teachers must educate their students to read and understand nonfiction text so they will not only be successful in elementary school, but will also be prepared for the increased demands placed on them in the upper grades and beyond. This literature review investigated the question, what are the most effective literacy strategies teachers can use to better teach the reading of nonfiction texts to elementary students? Data collection was accomplished by gathering academic, peer reviewed articles and scholarly texts containing information on teaching nonfiction to elementary students. The data was then analyzed through content analysis for appropriate strategies and teaching methods. The research presented two main factors which would help students to read and understand nonfiction text. The first factor consisted of aspects of teacher instruction including selection of texts, explicit teaching, teaching methods, and reflection. The second factor, strategy instruction, included a variety of strategies that could be used by students to increase comprehension of nonfiction text. These instructional strategies, grouped by theme, included comprehension, text structure, text features and elements, twin texts, pre-/during/post, oral, and vocabulary. Recommendations are that students should be exposed to numerous and varied nonfiction texts, teachers should be provided with professional development, instructors should maintain a variety of methods and strategies to use as needed, and researchers should investigate the teaching of nonfiction further. Educators succeed when they scaffold student learning, and with repeated use, students will internalize expository text reading skills and strategies, allowing for transfer and continued student success as they become lifelong learners.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In one of my classes for my master's degree in literacy, I needed to develop a case study of a school. I searched for information and conducted interviews in order to find the needs and strengths of the school so I might create a literacy plan to improve the school's overall performance. I conducted two interviews with administrators in an elementary school. I discovered through these interviews that the students in this school struggled with reading and comprehending nonfiction text. This notion of students struggling with nonfiction was based on weak scores from specific parts of the ELA exam which the principal knew involved reading and comprehension of nonfiction text. I also learned from the principal and the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction of this particular school that teachers needed to learn how to better teach reading, and especially reading of nonfiction text. This schoolwide, literacy case study sparked my idea for doing a research review on the methods and strategies for teaching nonfiction text. I wanted to not only improve my own knowledge of the topic, but to create something which could help other teachers as well.

Problem Statement

A major problem is many students struggle to read and understand nonfiction texts and many teachers lack the teaching methods and strategies to help their students succeed at this task (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). The emphasis on literacy in elementary schools increases each year. Since the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, administrators in 71% of schools across the country push aside science and social studies in order to fit in more literacy (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Writers of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require students to read more difficult texts, including nonfiction texts, at a younger age. Elementary

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teachers are required to use nonfiction texts in their classrooms fifty percent of the time (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Elementary students often struggle to read these more difficult texts (Moss 2004; Williams et al., 2005). The goal of the writers of the CCSS is to prepare our students to be college and career ready by the time they leave high school. However, I have learned from my experience and by speaking with others with whom I have worked, that with teachers already stretched to the breaking point and classes filled with a mix of cultures, reading levels, and motivation, the task seems daunting. Teachers do not have the time to search for resources, and often the resources they receive do not fulfill the needs of their diverse students. Teachers need help finding researched strategies to facilitate student success at reading nonfiction text. By researching this topic, I have provided teachers with a toolkit of reading strategies to foster improvement in reading nonfiction at all elementary grade levels.

Significance of the Problem

Elementary teachers in the past rarely taught children how to read or understand nonfiction. Teachers focused on fiction texts in the past because they were not as accustomed to using nonfiction texts during instruction and were unfamiliar with the appropriate teaching methods needed when using these texts (Hall, Sabey, & McClellan, 2005; Moss, 2004). Experts believed children in the lower primary grades mentally struggled to decipher nonfiction text (Hall et al.; Moss). In a study of 20 first-grade classrooms, Duke (2000) discovered, “only 3.6 minutes per day [were] spent with informational texts” (p. 203). Younger students need to become adept at reading nonfiction text as the skill will be important not only for the upper grades of middle and high school, but for college and career readiness and life itself. In the

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technological world of today, students need to understand nonfiction as many electronic communications present in an informational format.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to collect, read, and analyze previously written books and articles about the topic of teaching elementary students how to best read and comprehend nonfiction texts. My research will culminate in an analytical literature review and a professional development session which will be made available to teachers so they may better serve their students. This research is significant because the reading of nonfiction text is being required by the writers of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Teachers are being asked to teach nonfiction texts up to fifty percent of the time (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers). Younger students are being asked to read a significant amount of nonfiction in school and many elementary students struggle to read and understand informational text (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008; Williams et al., 2005). Some administrators, including the principal of a local elementary school where I work, believe, based on ELA exam scores and their own observations, that teachers need a toolkit of methods and strategies for teaching reading of nonfiction to elementary students. I hope this research paper will provide just the information they need so elementary students will be able to succeed at reading nonfiction text.

Research Question

What are the most effective literacy strategies teachers can use to better teach the reading of nonfiction texts to elementary students?

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Background/Rationale

As a new teacher in the field of elementary and literacy teaching, I have seen firsthand the way children struggle with reading, not only nonfiction reading, but fiction reading as well. I have been told by administrators that they feel teachers need professional development in the area of teaching reading of nonfiction texts. Therefore, I intend to research the problem in order to provide other teachers, as well as myself, with tested strategies which will help students to better read nonfiction texts.

My Positionality as the Researcher

I graduated from The State University of New York at the College at Brockport with certifications in elementary education and special education grades 1-6. I began teaching children long before I obtained my degree and officially teach now as a substitute teacher in a rural district in western New York. I began my master's degree in the fall of 2012 at The State University of New York at the College at Brockport in the area of literacy education. Reading has always been very important to me and I had discovered through volunteering and substitute teaching that many children struggled with reading. I had learned in college that if a student could not read well by the completion of third grade, they were unlikely to do well in the rest of their school career, often dropping out before graduation (Hernandez, 2012). Since nonfiction texts are now a big part of the reading program and they can be even more difficult to read, these kids need all the help they can receive. I hope to give those children the boost they need to succeed throughout the rest of their lives.

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Research Context

Data collection protocol was a content analysis. Articles were accumulated, read, and analyzed for appropriate strategies and teaching methods which helped elementary students to read nonfiction texts. Information collected was grouped by themes. Strategies included were shown to be successful and easily replicated and generalizable. All articles were scholarly, peer reviewed articles.

My research design was a literature review, qualitative in nature. I gathered the most up to date information I could find, from books written by current authors, to scholarly, peer reviewed articles. Some historical background was also included. I collected the strategies and evidence of their success, and will pass the information on to others so teachers will know what to teach and students reading of nonfiction texts will improve. My design included a literature review and specific teaching strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In my search for information on teaching reading of expository text, I found two basic factors to help young students improve in their reading of nonfiction texts. The first is the teacher and how he or she instructs the students. The second is the many different strategies which would help students to read this more difficult type of text. I came across many different types of strategies including comprehension strategies, teaching text structure, teaching text features and elements, teaching with twin texts, pre-reading, during reading, and post reading strategies, oral strategies, and vocabulary strategies.

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Teacher Instruction

Teachers can begin by making a wide variety of informational text available to the students (Calo, 2011; Moss, 2005). Exposure to these types of texts help students to become familiar with their features and structures (Maloch & Horsey, 2013), and provide them with facts about the world they live in (Calo). When deciding to teach text structure in expository texts to younger students, teachers should keep a few things in mind. First of all, it is imperative to think about and carefully choose the nonfiction texts themselves (Hall et al., 2005). Moss (2004) explains that the books should be “well written, accurate in terms of content and illustration, and appropriate to the age level of the child” (p. 712). Furthermore, selected texts should be written plainly, contain simple concepts, and be free from complicated vocabulary (Moss).

Gill (2009) agrees, providing us with specific factors we should consider when choosing nonfiction picture books for young readers. First she tells us to examine the text to determine if it has aesthetically pleasing traits, including aspects like color, appealing pictures, and an easy to read font and size. Visually interesting books are more likely to be noticed and read. Next, she says to check and see if the information in the book is correct and dependable. Are names of experts offered, additional informational features like glossaries provided, and illustrations depict truthful representations (Gill)? Finally, she wants us to see if the design of the writing is appealing. Check to see if the writer peaks the reader’s interest, if the author provides simple and understandable explanations for ideas, and vocabulary is spotlighted, elucidated, and explained (Gill). If teachers make selections of nonfiction based on their own knowledge of the best criteria for their level of students and give needed support when using reading material which lacks the needed structure, they will be able to control the struggle students have in early elementary school to comprehend nonfiction (Hall et al., 2005).

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Many researchers agree that in order to teach young students to read expository text, they must be taught explicitly (Calo, 2011; Furtado & Johnson, 2010; Greg & Sekeres, 2006; Marinak & Gambrell, 2008; Moss, 2005). Teaching comprehension strategies, as well as text features and structure should be included (Furtado & Johnson; Marinak & Gambrell; Moss). Teachers can start by making students aware of the purpose for reading nonfiction texts (Calo), which is they “convey and communicate factual information” (Hall et al., 2005, p. 212). Next, the more specific purpose of the author should be communicated (Marinak & Gambrell). For instance, what particular information is the author trying to provide? Are they trying to explain a math concept, or share information on the hammer-head shark? Ask students to think about their own reasons for reading the text. What do they hope to gain? Knowing the purpose for reading will help students to focus and come to a better understanding of what they will learn from the reading.

Another important teacher strategy is modeling (Calo, 2011; Greg & Sekeres, 2006; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 32). The teacher presents and describes a strategy, models using the strategy for better understanding, and then shares his/her thinking while using the strategy during reading (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 32). In this way students can see first-hand how they might try out the comprehension strategies to better understand the text. Demonstrating a think-aloud is another way for teachers to model strategies for students and show how they create meaning (Calo; Harvey & Goudvis, pp. 32, 46). Through think-alouds, teachers reveal what is going on in their own heads by explaining how they “activate . . . background knowledge, ask questions, and draw conclusions” (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 46). Thinking aloud helps students understand what they should be doing while reading, to create meaning (Calo; Harvey & Goudvis).

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Maloch and Beutel (2010), conducted a “qualitative study [which] explored the nature of student initiations during interactive read-alouds” (p. 20). One of their research questions asked, “What role did the teacher play in acknowledging, inviting, and building on these [student] contributions?” (p. 21). Student initiations are important because talking about text helps us to understand text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 53). Maloch and Beutel found three ways the teacher supported “students’ initiations” in an interactive read-aloud (p. 27). First, the teacher created an atmosphere that helped students to feel safe enough to join in on classroom conversations. Next, the teacher encouraged students to become involved in the readings, urging them to “stop and think about the texts they were reading” (Maloch & Beutel, p. 27). Finally, during interactive read-alouds, the teacher responded to “student initiations” with a range of instructional methods (Maloch & Beutel, p. 27).

One method, “validating and acknowledging students’ initiations,” supported and encouraged students to contribute to the classroom discussion (Maloch & Beutel, 2010, p. 27). In order to reveal one student’s thinking to the rest of the group, the teacher would restate what the student said and ask the student to elaborate on his/her thoughts (Maloch & Beutel). When trying to reinforce the use of a strategy, the teacher responded to the student by acknowledging their use of the strategy, identifying the strategy used, and reviewing the way the strategy was used (Maloch & Beutel). The last method they mentioned was the teacher presenting student’s comments or questions back to the class for discussion (Maloch & Beutel). These teaching methods used during an interactive read-aloud invited students to actively participate in text, allowed the students and teacher to learn from each other, and gave the students a time to practice their strategies with feedback, which ultimately led to a better understanding of the text (Maloch & Beutel).

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These researchers showed that the teacher has an active part in encouraging students to participate in discussing text (Maloch & Beutel, 2010). She must create a safe haven, encourage students to become involved in text by stopping to think about what they read, and respond to student questions and comments with an assortment of instructional methods. Because of these actions, students will be more likely to participate, acquire more meaning from the text, and teacher and students will learn from each other.

Effective teachers are reflective teachers. Frey and Fisher (2007) inform us of the importance of reviewing a lesson to analyze our teaching, think about how effective we were, and consider how we can improve our instruction (p. 38). They remind us that what we teach and who we teach are two elements which always change. Therefore, it stands to reason that how we teach will also need to constantly change, as we “make adjustments and improvements to suit the [changing] needs of [our] students” (Frey & Fisher). These authors also suggest that having a variety of instructional strategies in our personal toolkits will help us to find answers to the reflective questions we ask ourselves.

Comprehension Strategies

Many comprehension strategies are available which can be taught. Predictions can be made when looking at pictures (Webster, 2009) or during reading (or listening) (Maloch & Beutel, 2010). These predictions help students become more involved in the text (Maloch & Beutel). Making connections is another comprehension strategy (Calo, 2011; Furtado & Johnson, 2010; Maloch & Horsy, 2013; Webster). Reading about therapy dogs during a study of the local community could trigger a text-to-world connection (Calo). When reading about a certain topic, text-to-text connections can be made (Maloch & Horsey). A text-to-self

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connection might be made if a student reads about a food which can be grown or eaten (Webster). An increased understanding of the text can be the result of making these connections (Webster).

Asking questions is another important comprehension strategy (Calo, 2011; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Maloch & Beutel, 2010). When we take an active part in reading a text, we think about what we read, which leads to asking questions (Harvey & Goudvis). Asking questions can also help students to come to a better understanding of the text (Maloch & Beutel).

Compare/contrast questions provided by teachers are a strategy to help students concentrate on the most important information (Williams et al., 2005). Making inferences can also help students to better understand a text. Calo suggests students can think about what they know, what the text reveals, and what photos or illustrations portray to fill in blanks left by the author. Finally, according to Greg and Sekeres (2006), summarizing is also a good comprehension strategy. Summarizing can help students to focus on the most important facts while keeping that information in the forefront of their memories (Greg & Sekeres).

Greg and Sekeres (2006), have two other suggestions to improve students' comprehension. First they suggest students should be encouraged to read a text several times (Gregg & Sekeres; Webster, 2009; Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, & Pollini, 2009). One way to promote rereading is to have students read a text, then take part in an activity which supports what they read (Greg & Sekeres). The two things will help explain and reinforce each other (Greg & Sekeres). These authors also suggest having students create a visual model of the text, such as a drawing, a web, or a chart, as a valuable strategy for supporting understanding (Gregg & Sekeres).

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Graphic organizers are a visual model of text and teachers/researchers used them in many of the studies and articles I reviewed. One teacher had students fill out graphic organizers relating to cause and effect (Calo, 2011). Furtado and Johnson (2010) and Greg and Sekeres (2006) used a KWL chart to introduce a text. Students in the Furtado and Johnson study also used an “expository organizer rubric” which asked for a topic and five supporting details (pp. 10-11). Marinak and Gambrell (2008) show us several types of graphic organizers. The first is an informational text map which could be used to check for understanding or to help students gather their information for a summary (see Appendix A for example of informational text map). The second is a compare and contrast text map which contains attributes and supporting details for two major ideas (see Appendix A for example of compare and contrast text map). The third is a compare and contrast writing guide which helps students to write sentences which can be used to develop a summary (see Appendix B for example of compare and contrast writing guide). The fourth is a compare and contrast summary pattern in which the student enters “author’s purpose, major ideas, supporting details, and vocabulary” (p. 81) (see Appendix B for example of compare and contrast summary pattern). Finally, Williams et al. (2005, 2009) used a matrix in their two studies. The matrix is a type of graphic organizer which lends itself to the compare and contrast structure. Not only can text structures and elements of expository text be explained by graphic organizers (Marinak & Gambrell), as a visual structure, graphic organizers help to scaffold comprehension (Furtado & Johnson).

Teaching Text Structure

The topic most reported and researched was the teaching of text structure. Structure is “the manner in which information in the text is organized for presentation” (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). The nonfiction text structures seen most often are description, sequence,

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compare/contrast, cause and effect, and problem and solution (Hall et al., 2005; Marinak & Gambrell; Moss, 2005; Williams et al., 2009). Moss (2004) tells us “These structures provide students with a map that guides them through the text” (p. 712). She also claims students will have a better understanding of the author’s message if they become familiar with the organization of nonfiction text.

When deciding to teach text structure to younger students, it is important to choose expository texts with a single, obvious text structure (Moss, 2004). “Each text structure should be taught individually; students need time to master one structure before learning another” (Moss, p. 713). Choosing books with various text features, like tables of contents, headings, and page layouts will help students to recognize the text structure the book presents (Moss).

Teaching clue words is another strategy to help students navigate the text structure of expository texts (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008; Williams et al., 2009). Clue words, or signal words, can give students an idea of what type of text structure a book contains (Marinak & Gambrell). Students who learn to use “expository text comprehension strategies [like] clue words,” better understand nonfiction texts (Hall et al., 2005). Clue words for a particular text structure can be taught prior to reading (Williams et al., 2005; Hall et al.). Examples of clue words for the text structure sequence, for instance, are first, next, then, before, and finally (Marinak & Gambrell).

Williams et al. (2005), conducted a study in which they posed three questions. They first asked “whether instruction on text structure can help second-grade students to improve their comprehension of compare-contrast expository text” (p. 539). Next, they wondered if content knowledge acquisition would suffer if the lesson emphasized text structure. Finally, they

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wondered if the text structure instruction would benefit all the children in the inclusive classroom, including those children who struggled or had special needs. Students (128 second graders) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (a) text structure instruction, (b) instruction on content only, or (c) no instruction (Williams, et al.). The materials used in the Williams et al. study included “a comprehensive animal encyclopedia, trade books, and carefully constructed compare-contrast paragraphs” (Williams et al., p. 540).

Teachers used five different animals for the lessons, each animal coming from a different group such as bird, reptile, fish, mammal, and amphibian (Williams et al., 2005). Each lesson compared two of those animals according to the features of classification including “type of skin covering, how they bear their young, how they get oxygen, and whether they are warm-blooded or cold-blooded” (Williams et al., p. 541). They began with two well-known animals so the children could learn the compare-contrast strategy procedure without having to think too much about the content (Williams et al.). The teacher began every lesson with a reason for the lesson and then presented the clue words for the compare-contrast model, which were “alike, both, and, compare, but, however, than, contrast (Williams et al., 541). Students were able to look at these written words and then come up with sentences using the clue words (Williams et al.).

Next, the teacher would find the two animals in an encyclopedia or trade book and read to the students in order to pique their curiosity (Williams et al., 2005). The class would then participate in a teacher led discussion about the two target animals for that lesson (Williams et al.). Vocabulary work followed, with teachers providing important words and explaining ideas related to animal classification, and students producing sentences using those vocabulary words (Williams et al.). Students would then focus their energy on reading a compare-contrast paragraph independently and then follow along while the teacher reread the same paragraph

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(Williams et al.). Reading a secondary text on the same topic gave the students extra practice with their reading and listening to the teacher read improved their comprehension by eliminating any decoding problems the students may have had (Williams et al.). Students would then go back and label the similarities and differences within the paragraph, circle the clue words, and then verbally produce “well-structured comparative statements” which included a clue word, explaining the animals’ similarities and differences (Williams et al., p. 541).

Finally, the students put the information learned from the paragraph into a matrix type graphic organizer, using one matrix for each of the four features of animal classification (“type of skin covering, how they bear their young, how they get oxygen, and whether they are warm-blooded or cold-blooded”) and one matrix to show a distinctive physical characteristic of a particular animal the paragraph highlighted (Williams et al., 2005, p. 541). The students would check off their choices, decide if the animals were similar or different, and then create a “well-structured comparative statement” which corresponded to what the matrix presented (Williams et al., p. 541). The teacher followed this activity with questions which targeted the compare-contrast structure, assisting students to write about what they had learned from the paragraph and recorded in the matrices (Williams et al.). These questions were: “(a) What two things is this paragraph about? (b) How are they the same? and (c) How are they different?” (Williams et al., p. 542). Using these questions as a strategy, students were better able to pull the facts from the paragraph and write a summary (Williams et al.). To wrap up the lesson, the class would go over the “eight clue words, vocabulary, and strategies (clue words, matrices, and compare-contrast questions)” (Williams et al., p. 542).

Williams et al. (2005), concluded that teaching text structure to second graders does improve students’ comprehension of nonfiction text. Not only did students learn how to deal

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with a particular type of nonfiction text, but they also learned the subject matter as well (Williams et al.). They found teaching text structure in this way helpful to all students in the inclusive classroom, even those who struggled with reading or had special needs (Williams et al.). Furthermore, these students showed they could comprehend non-instructional texts of the same type with what they learned about text structure (Williams et al.) However, Williams et al. also found students would have to be taught each text structure individually because results showed that learning about one text structure doesn't transfer to knowledge of a second text structure. This program contained all the components of good nonfiction comprehension instruction, including clue words, vocabulary words, graphic organizers, and compare-contrast questions, and this program succeeded (Williams et al.).

The research study directed by Williams et al. (2005), demonstrated how second grade students were taught the compare/contrast text structure. The study included having students use comprehension strategies like the purpose for reading and clue words, and vocabulary work. Teachers read aloud from animal encyclopedias and nonfiction trade books and a discussion ensued. Then students read independently from compare/contrast paragraphs. Students filled in a graphic organizer (matrix) and vocally came up with a comparative statement. Finally students answered three compare/contrast questions and used their answers to write a summary. Williams et al. found teaching text structure to second graders helped them comprehend compare/contrast expository text. The researchers also found content knowledge acquisition did not suffer, and this type of instruction benefits all levels of readers.

Hall et al. (2005), sought to find out if teaching text structure during guided reading would have positive results on second graders' understanding of nonfiction text. In their study, three groups were set up into which students (72 second graders) were randomly assigned: (a) a

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group learning content only, (b) a group learning text structure, and finally (c) a group which would be given no instruction at all (Hall et al.). The nonfiction texts the students would be using included “informational books from a guided-reading collection, and well-structured compare/contrast paragraphs written by the authors” (Hall et al., p. 218).

The text structure program contained three parts. In the first part, the teacher helped the students to become acquainted with the text (Hall et al., 2005). Becoming familiar with the text included an introduction to the subject of the text, a definition of and search for vocabulary words, and a review of, identification of, and practice with clue words used for comparison (Hall et al.). The second part involved students mumble reading the text aloud while the teacher stepped in to assist with any word problems as needed (Hall et al.). Finally, during the third part, guided-reading groups discussed the text, reviewed vocabulary, and explored ideas (Hall et al.). Students filled in a compare/contrast matrix (see Figure 1 for an example), a type of graphic organizer, to show what they had learned and finished the process by completing a written summary (Hall et al.).

Animal Matrix

Finding out how animals are the same and different

Animal	Is the animal warm-blooded or cold-blooded?	
	Warm-blooded	Cold-blooded
Lion	X	
Snakes		X

Lions and snakes are: the same different

How? Lions are warm-blooded, but snakes are cold-blooded.

Figure 1 Sample matrix with well-structured comparison statement (Hall et al.).

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The findings of Hall et al. (2005) suggest teaching text structure to second grade students improves their understanding of nonfiction texts. They also concluded that when teaching text structure, students used the nonfiction text comprehension strategies of clue words and graphic organizers more successfully. Students were better able to “gain a conceptual understanding of compare and contrast,” one type of nonfiction text structure, “and produce well-structured summaries better than those students who received content instruction or no instruction” (Hall et al., p. 229). One surprising finding was that struggling readers did just as well as average or advanced readers in the program (Hall et al.). However, the researchers found no transfer of these nonfiction text comprehension skills. They believed the lack of transfer was caused by the brevity of the program (only 6 weeks) and the complexity of unstructured texts which students struggled to decipher (Hall et al.). According to Williams et al. (2005), a longer program (8 weeks) does show students transferred these skills. Students need to be able to use these strategies in order to categorize the facts found in nonfiction texts which will also help them to better understand these texts (Hall et al.).

Hall et al. (2005), taught second graders the compare/contrast text structure through guided reading. Students were introduced to the text, worked on defining vocabulary, and learned about clue words. Since this group was a guided reading group, the students read the texts quietly to themselves, with teacher assistance when needed. A discussion followed along with a vocabulary review and exploration of ideas. This group used a matrix graphic organizer (compare/contrast) and a topical web graphic organizer (main topics and subtopics) to show their learning. Lastly, students wrote a summary from the information in the web. These researchers discovered that teaching the nonfiction compare/contrast text structure to second graders did

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increase their nonfiction reading comprehension. They also found students better able to use clue words and graphic organizers, gain conceptual understanding of compare/contrast, and produce well-structured summaries. Students of every reading level showed positive results, whether labeled as struggling readers or advanced readers.

Williams et al. (2009), conducted a study in which they asked the question, “Can explicit instruction in text structure help second graders improve their comprehension of authentic text?” (p. 4). Researchers randomly divided students (215 second graders) into groups, those being taught text structure and those being taught content only. The researchers began their instruction with texts on well-known animals so students could focus on the process without trying to learn new content. They also had a discussion of the difference between fiction and nonfiction, and the reason why a person would read nonfiction. Finally, they made sure to discuss the difference between a compare-contrast paragraph and a descriptive paragraph. After the first couple of lessons, the emphasis of their instruction was on the compare-contrast model. At about lesson ten, an extra text structure was added to the writing so students would become familiar with texts of mixed structure, which is most likely what they would find in real life (Williams et al.).

The researchers also used comprehension strategies which complimented the teaching of text structure (Williams et al., 2009). In their study, students learned the lesson purpose and examined the appropriate clue words before each lesson. The class generated a list of clue words which the teacher displayed on the board and students used to create sentences (Williams et al.). Next, the teacher read expository texts and a dialogue would take place in order for students to become engaged and eager to learn about the topic (Williams et al.). Vocabulary development was also a big part of their instruction, specifically those tier 3 words. Teachers gave simple

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definitions and had students ask questions and create sentences (Williams et al.). The class reviewed these tier 3 words just before they appeared in the text (Williams et al.).

After the vocabulary review, students would gain reading practice by reading the paragraph which included the compare/contrast structure independently, then tracking the words as the teacher reread the paragraph (Williams et al., 2009). Students would then focus on the similarities and differences of the animals presented in the text and color code the clue words (Williams et al.). Students would then share sentences aloud that they created which showed how the animals compared (Williams et al.). Finally, the students would use a graphic organizer (matrix) to chart the information from the paragraph (Williams et al.). Once students completed this activity, they would answer three questions to help them write statements about what they had learned from the chart and paragraph: “(a) What two things is this paragraph about? (b) How are they the same? (c) How are they different?” (Williams et al., p. 6).

Williams et al. (2009) concluded that elementary school students learn expository text structure successfully. They found the information children acquire during this training allows them to understand “novel text, both well-structured and not-so-well structured” (p. 16). Finally, they also found this skill can be taught within science or social studies classes without reducing the quality or quantity of content knowledge obtained.

The researchers in this study investigated whether explicit teaching of text structure improved the comprehension of nonfiction texts for second graders (Williams et al., 2009). They started by explaining and discussing the difference between fiction and nonfiction, the purpose for reading nonfiction, and the difference between a compare/contrast paragraph and a descriptive paragraph. They had students use comprehension strategies and vocabulary

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development. Teachers read aloud expository texts and discussed them and then students read a compare/contrast paragraph independently. The teachers reread the paragraph and then asked students to talk about the similarities and differences of the animals. Finally, the teachers asked students to enter the information into a matrix graphic organizer and then answer compare/contrast questions to help them write about what they had learned. These researchers found that explicit instruction in text structure does improve expository text comprehension of second graders. They also found no reduction in quantity or quality of content learned.

These three studies had many similar points. They all investigated whether teaching text structure would improve the comprehension of young students during the reading of expository text. They all prepared the students for reading nonfiction in one way or another. Their teaching included comprehension strategies and vocabulary strategies. The use of graphic organizers was a common theme and helped students to show their learning and write summaries. All three of the studies concluded that teaching text structure for nonfiction texts to young students does increase their comprehension of those texts. Hall et al. (2005) and Williams et al. (2005) found the instruction benefitted all levels of readers. Williams et al. (2005) and Williams et al. (2009) discovered students learned just as much content when learning text structure and content as those who only learned content. This discovery leads me to believe that teaching nonfiction text structure to young students in this way is beneficial and successful.

Teaching Text Features and Elements

Another strategy to help students read and understand expository text is to teach text features (Calo, 2011; Gill, 2009; Greg & Sekeres, 2006; Maloch & Horsey, 2013; Moss, 2005). Michelle Horsey defined text features as “anything on the page besides the small black print”

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(Maloch & Horsey, p. 480). Text features include such things as photographs, headings, table of contents, indexes, sidebars, marginal notes, captions, diagrams, maps, glossaries, graphs, charts, appendices, and typeface (Gill; Greg & Sekeres; Moss). Text features are important for several reasons. Visual features like photographs, maps, or graphs can add to the reader's knowledge of a subject by showing a true image or communicating information (Calo; Gill; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 214; Maloch & Horsey). Other text features like headings, bold letters, or differences in font, can focus a student's attention on vital information (Gregg & Sekeres; Harvey & Goudvis, pp. 158, 242). Planning shared reading time with expository text is a good strategy for introducing and discussing text features (Frey & Fisher, 2007, pp. 107-108; Maloch & Horsey; Moss). Choosing one or two text features as a focus for a daily mini-lesson is another strategy used to familiarize young students with nonfiction text (Calo; Maloch & Horsey). A third strategy would be to create a chart on the wall which showcases text features, including just the feature and purpose (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 214), or the name of the feature, an example of the feature, a description, and how the feature will help the reader (Maloch & Horsey). A similar activity would be to have each student make a miniature book for him/herself containing learned text features (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 160). These charts or booklets can be expanded as children learn each feature and will function as an important resource to help students remember to use all text features to gather information from expository text (Maloch & Horsey).

Expository text need not always be read from beginning to end, but different sections of the text can be explored by students based on interest or need (Calo, 2011; Gill, 2009; Gregg & Sekeres, 2006; Maloch & Horsey, 2013). Therefore, becoming acquainted with text features is an important part of learning to read nonfiction text as those text features will help students to begin the job of looking for information (Gregg & Sekeres). Text features also help students to

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better understand what they read by providing a visual component to the task (Calo; Gill; Gregg & Sekeres). Some features, like photographs, charts, diagrams, and graphs, provide information in a visual form (Calo). Other features, like captions, labels, and headings, provide guidance on what students should look at or what the students will be reading (Calo).

Another important factor to consider when young students read expository text is the accuracy of the information (Gill, 2009). Gill found out during her research that some informational texts show discrepancies in their reporting of the facts. Illustrations may not portray or reinforce the truth of the writing (Gill). Facts in a nonfiction text may become unclear when an author combines the features of an expository text and a story book in one volume (Gill). This melding of text structures can confuse young students (Gill). Therefore, in order to discover whether a text is indeed from a scholarly source, several text features can be examined (Gill). Features such as introductory comments, endnotes, or source notes may provide evidence of knowledgeable authors and research material or methods (Gill). Also, expert consultants may be accredited or suggestions for further reading may be provided (Gill).

Teaching text elements is also important for student comprehension of nonfiction texts (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). Nonfiction texts generally contain five text elements, including author's purpose, major ideas, supporting details, aids, and vocabulary (Marinak & Gambrell). The use of aids or text features can help students become familiar with the way nonfiction is set up, so they can better navigate through the text in order to discover the subject, main ideas, and supporting details the author is trying to convey (Marinak & Gambrell). Important tier 3 vocabulary words, needed for comprehension, along with their definitions, can also be found by looking for bold print or through the use of a glossary, two other types of text features (Marinak

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& Gambrell). These elements can act as an “instructional framework” to sustain early students in their endeavor to become familiar with nonfiction writings (Marinak & Gambrell, p. 77).

Teaching of Twin Texts

Many teachers integrate the teaching of content areas with literacy by using Twin Texts (Calo, 2011; Camp, 2000). This method gives students the opportunity to learn science, social studies, or math topics while at the same time practicing and improving their reading and word skills (Calo; Camp). The teacher chooses a nonfiction text and a fiction text which have similar topics or matching themes (Camp; Soalt, 2005). One such example might be the fiction story *Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon and the nonfiction text *Bats* by Celia Bland, which are both about bats. Fiction and nonfiction texts each have their own method of presenting the material, but by using the two together; students understand the content of the fiction book because of the familiarity of the format, while also being engaged with the pictures and facts of a nonfiction text (Camp). Students will be more likely to recognize and comprehend the different text structures of the two types of texts when a common theme is used (Furtado & Johnson, 2010; Soalt).

Camp (2000) informs us that, “The use of Twin Texts is a viable method for both teaching and learning critical reading and thinking skills” (p. 400). Investigating a particular subject with Twin Texts can “build knowledge, develop text-related vocabulary, and increase motivation (Soalt, 2005, p. 680). When teachers use the Twin Text method in their classroom, they may find their students more engaged and eager to learn (Camp; Soalt).

Furtado and Johnson (2010) conducted an action-research case study of first graders to see if by teaching through twin texts of fiction and nonfiction and focusing on text structures, teachers could improve the summarization skills of early elementary students. They used many

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different comprehension strategies including graphic organizers, prediction, questioning, vocabulary, teachers' think-aloud and modeling, working in pairs, and presenting and commenting on summaries (Furtado & Johnson). Teachers introduced each of the graphic organizers so students would become familiar with them. A narrative text structure graphic organizer was introduced which asked students to report the title, author, setting, characters, problem, important events, outcome, and theme/message (Furtado & Johnson). The graphic organizer for the expository text included a topic and five individual lines for the supporting details (Furtado & Johnson). A KWL chart was also used for the expository text, which asks students to write what they know, what they want to know, and what they learned (Furtado & Johnson). The final graphic organizer used was a four square activity for learning vocabulary. In this graphic organizer, the student writes the word in the top left square, the definition in the bottom left square, "a personal association" in the top right square, and finally create a drawing in the bottom right square (Furtado & Johnson, p. 278). In this way, unknown vocabulary can be discussed and studied.

An important finding of this study showed students' performance scores increased 38% on narrative text and over 23% on expository texts by using this twin text approach (Furtado & Johnson, 2010). The authors came to the conclusion that first grade students can work with nonfiction texts without much trouble. They even found the children they studied, who happened to be all boys, showed a higher level of eagerness and interest in the nonfiction selections used. These results lead us to believe young students can read expository text just as easily as fiction, and may even prefer informational text over narrative text.

The two researchers used twin texts of fiction and nonfiction, focusing on text structure, to improve summarization skills (Furtado & Johnson, 2010). They used comprehension

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strategies, including graphic organizers, vocabulary strategies, and asked students to present and comment on summaries. These researchers found student performance increased and young students have no problem working with nonfiction texts.

Pre-, During, and Post-reading Strategies

Paula Sunanon Webster (2009) conducted a study of 30 first grade students. Her research question involved discovering if these students' understanding of science would be positively affected by teachers reading aloud nonfiction texts, including pre- and post-reading activities. Before looking at a text, the teacher might start by asking students to write down what they know about the topic (Webster). Teachers can use this information to become aware of a student's background knowledge and choose specific texts which will increase their understanding of words and content (Webster). The teacher then began pre-reading activities, like introducing the book and talking about the cover with her students (Webster). She also highlighted important vocabulary words, writing them on the board and then showing the students the glossary and index and linking these two features to nonfiction texts (Webster). The teacher also used realia, actual items which relate to the text, to increase interest and invite students to make connections (Webster). During a picture walk, the instructor also asked students questions which encouraged them to make inferences based on the pictures (Webster).

During the reading of the text, the teacher modeled fluent reading (Webster, 2009). She would also write a sentence from the book on the board, point at each word as she read (tracking), and then ask the students to repeat, or echo the words back to her (Webster). The teacher would ask questions and answer any questions the students had. She would even reveal

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her own thinking and finished the reading by composing a drawing on the board which related to the text (Webster).

One of the post-reading activities included students drawing their own picture from the story and giving a retelling or writing about the text (Webster, 2009). Another post-reading activity is a directed look-back (Webster). A directed look-back starts with the teacher rereading specific sections of the text while students study the pictures (Webster). Students then help the teacher collect and write important facts about the topic as she asks them questions about what they hear and see (Webster). This activity also models for the children that good readers often look back in the writing to locate or check on information learned (Webster).

The teacher-researcher used information gathered including field notes, interviews, and student artifacts to analyze the data (Webster, 2009). She found these students made real life connections with the facts learned from nonfiction texts (Webster). Students learned how to take part in the directed look-back of a text in order to collect important information (Webster). Teaching strategies allowed nonfiction texts to be more easily navigated by students (Webster). Finally, Webster found that “teacher read-alouds increased content knowledge and expanded vocabulary” (p. 664).

Webster (2009), wondered if students would better understand science if teachers did read-alouds and used pre-, during, and post reading activities. She began by choosing books which would increase student knowledge of vocabulary and content. Pre-reading activities included introducing the book, working on vocabulary, realia, asking questions, and inferencing. During the reading she used modeling and think-aloud, and helped students practice their reading using tracking and echo reading. Finally, she asked and answered questions and drew a picture

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representing the text. For post reading activities she had them draw a picture, retell or write about the text, and practice a directed look back. Webster found these teaching strategies helped students to navigate nonfiction text more easily, learn to use the directed look back to gather information, and increased their content and vocabulary knowledge.

Oral Strategies

Discussions about texts in school are one of the best ways for students to comprehend what they have read (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 53). These discussions cannot just be meaningless conversations however, the dialogue needs to have a purpose (p. 53). These discussions should be stimulating students to think (p. 53). Harvey and Goudvis give us some examples of ways to promote thoughtful discussions. Turn and talk is when the teacher pauses during whole class instruction and encourages students to share their thinking with another classmate (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 54). Turn and talk helps students to take part in the reading, think about what they heard, and foster understanding (Harvey & Goudvis). Jigsaw discussions are another forum in which students “work in small groups to read a particular section of a piece or to read one of several articles on a similar theme or topic” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 54). This forum requires students to be accountable for a close read of a little bit of text and then asks them to communicate what they have studied to their classmates (Harvey & Goudvis, p. 54). The responsibility the students take on encourages them to think about the text, find understanding, and then communicate the information from the text to others (Harvey & Goudvis).

Think-pair-share is a teaching strategy which helps to foster purposeful discussions (Frey & Fisher, 2007, p. 25). The teacher asks a question, students think about the question for a few

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seconds, then turn to a neighbor to share their thoughts (Frey & Fisher, p. 25). After a bit more time has passed, the teacher asks for responses from the group (Frey & Fisher, p. 26). This system encourages more students to participate because they are allowed time to think and hear other's thoughts on the matter (Frey & Fisher, p. 26).

Maloch and Beutel (2010), conducted a qualitative study of fifteen second graders to investigate the types of student talk which took place during interactive read-alouds. They found students responded to text in six different ways “including: predictions, observations, connections, clarifying questions/comments, entering story world, and meta-process questions/comments” (p. 22). These researchers did not see any *predictions* or *entering the story world* during a conversation about a nonfiction text. Researchers saw those initiations mainly during the reading of fiction. However, researchers did see and record the remaining initiations. Students made observations about pictures (photos and illustrations) seen in the expository text (Maloch & Beutel). They also made many clarifying comments and asked questions in order to better comprehend the text, as well as making connections to what they already knew (Maloch & Beutel). Students sought out other nonfiction texts to help clear up their questions and confusions and made text to text connections with them (Maloch & Beutel).

During their research, Maloch and Beutel (2010), found interactive read-alouds became a safe and supportive place for students to try out some complex thinking skills needed to comprehend text. Interactive read-alouds also allowed students to practice comprehension strategies in an environment where they could receive instant feedback from the teacher or their classmates (Maloch & Beutel). Student contributions added to the general knowledge of the group and could have also triggered ideas and connections from peers, allowing children and

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adults alike to make meaning together (Maloch & Beutel). Interactive read-alouds improve the understanding of a text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 48; Maloch & Beutel).

The researchers investigated the types of student initiations made during an interactive read-aloud (Maloch & Beutel, 2010). For nonfiction texts, students made observations, connections, clarifying comments and asked questions. They found an interactive read-aloud is a safe place for students to participate in discussions and practice comprehension strategies. Student contributions added to the general knowledge of the class and caused classmates to share ideas and connections. In this way, the teacher and students can make meaning together. Maloch and Beutel (2010), discovered interactive read-alouds improve students' understanding of text.

Vocabulary Strategies

Webster (2009), noted that teachers should preview vocabulary words before reading and introduce students to the glossary. They should explain how the glossary is only found in nonfiction text and use this opportunity to discuss the definitions of the words (Webster). Hall et al. (2005), suggested that when teachers introduce vocabulary they should define and discuss the words with the students. Creating sentences with the vocabulary is another way for students to learn about the words (Williams et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2009). During reading, students can look for the vocabulary words in the text (Hall et al.). Teachers can make themselves available for vocabulary support when students read independently or during guided reading (Hall et al.). Webster stated that a read-aloud is a great way to expose young students to new vocabulary. Teachers can also focus on vocabulary in the reading when students or teachers

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read-aloud (Furtado & Johnson, 2010). After reading a text, Hall et al., suggested students should review and discuss the vocabulary words.

Seeing words in several different contexts is beneficial for students, Soalt (2005) informs us. Expository and fiction texts with the same theme may contain the same or synonymous words (Soalt). The definition of these words may change slightly in different contexts which will provide students with a richer understanding of the vocabulary (Soalt).

A four-square graphic organizer is a beneficial strategy to help students learn vocabulary (Furtado & Johnson, 2010). Students draw a square and then divide the square into four equal parts. In the top left square students write the vocabulary word (Furtado & Johnson). In the bottom left square, they write a definition of the word (Furtado & Johnson). In the top right square, students write “a personal association” to the word (Furtado & Johnson, p. 278). Finally, in the bottom right square they create a drawing (Furtado & Johnson). The four-square graphic organizer is a vocabulary activity the class can work on together, discussing what to put in each square and sharing definitions (Furtado & Johnson).

The Preview-Predict-Confirm (PPC) strategy is a vocabulary strategy. This strategy helps to increase a child’s knowledge of tier 3 vocabularies by requiring students to manipulate and examine domain language (Yopp & Yopp, 2004). For the first part of PPC, Preview, the teacher does a picture walk of a nonfiction text with her students (Yopp & Yopp). For the second step, the teacher asks her students to make a prediction of words they might find in the book and explain why they think the author would use those (Yopp & Yopp). Then students divide into groups of about four students each and record any words they think will be in the book, onto cards (Yopp & Yopp). Each team sorts their word cards into categories with

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headings (headings are shared with the class) (Yopp & Yopp). Each group must then choose three words from their collection, including one they think will be the most common (everyone will have), one they think is the most unique (no one else will have), and one they think is the most intriguing and they would like to know more about (Yopp & Yopp). Students write these words on sentence strips and a presenter from each group will share their choices (Yopp & Yopp). The teacher and students discuss these words and how they might fit into the book (Yopp & Yopp).

In the third step, Confirm, the students learn if their predictions match up with the author's word choices, while listening to the text being read aloud or reading the text for themselves (Yopp & Yopp, 2004). Finally, students compare their own list of words with the words found in the author's book and talk about the positive results of previewing a book this way (Yopp & Yopp).

The PPC strategy may be used for many legitimate reasons. According to Yopp and Yopp (2004), the PPC strategy helps to improve a student's "comprehension of a text through attention to vocabulary and domain knowledge" (p. 81). They also say this strategy encourages predicting and asking questions, two more important comprehension activities. After predicting and creating questions, students look forward to the reading of the book because they wonder if the words they chose might also be chosen by the author (Yopp & Yopp). This curiosity increases motivation. Students also take part in other learning behaviors such as oral language when defending chosen words, social interaction during book discussion, and listening to and learning from their classmates (Yopp & Yopp). Finally, this strategy prompts students to think critically about the text and how words relate to one another when they sort word predictions

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(Yopp & Yopp). Only one set of authors presents this strategy and no further research on the effectiveness of the PPC strategy surfaced.

Chapter 3: Summary and Conclusions

Being able to read nonfiction is a skill all students need to learn in order to be ready for college, careers, and life as an adult. To speak to this need, the writers of the Common Core State Standards demand students read more difficult texts, especially expository texts, at a younger age, and require teachers to use nonfiction texts in their classrooms fifty percent of the time (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers 2010). Unfortunately, elementary students struggle with reading and comprehending nonfiction text and teachers lack the teaching methods and strategies to help their students succeed (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). Therefore, the research question which shaped this literature review asked, what are the most effective literacy strategies teachers can use to better teach the reading of nonfiction texts to elementary students? The answer to that question is substantial and complicated and involves such things as changing teachers mindset or preconceived notions about using nonfiction texts in the classroom, knowing what strategies will help students read and understand nonfiction text and presenting those strategies individually through explicit teaching and modeling, and providing the materials needed by students to practice those strategies independently. The question now is, more specifically, what can be done to help elementary students succeed at reading and understanding nonfiction text? First, teachers need to realize and accept that the use of nonfiction texts in their classrooms can be beneficial to young students. Second, professional development must be sought out by teachers and provided by administrators. Third, teachers must provide appropriate, quality nonfiction texts.

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Conclusion 1: The Use of Nonfiction can be Beneficial to Young Students

In the past, research suggested that reading and understanding nonfiction text challenged young students (Hall et al., 2005; Marinak & Gambrell, 2008; Moss, 2005). However, according to the recent literature, nonfiction texts can be beneficial to elementary students in many ways. Researchers have found young students can read and understand nonfiction more easily than previously thought (Furtado & Johnson, 2010). They claim young students are just as able to read and comprehend nonfiction texts as fiction texts (Furtado & Johnson). When students are shown nonfiction text at a young age, they are able to study expository text features and structures (Maloch & Horsey, 2013) and their comprehension increases (Gill, 2009; Hall et al.; Moss). In fact, two studies showed struggling readers gained just as much comprehension as competent readers when learning nonfiction text structure alongside content in second grade classrooms (Hall et al.; Williams et al., 2005). In elementary school, learning to read and reading to learn are counterparts in which a student's advancement in one improves the other (Moss). Findings suggest increased exposure to nonfiction texts may actually improve students' average reading ability (Moss). The more often a student reads, the more improved their reading ability, therefore availability of their preferred genre is important (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). Familiarity with expository texts and educating students at an early age will allow students to be better prepared and prevent problems in more advanced grades (Gill; Hall et al.; Moss).

Informational texts can be great for motivation. Many students like and even prefer expository texts over fiction (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). When expository texts are made available to all ages of elementary students, they become more motivated to read (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008; Moss, 2005). This increase in motivation translates into increased reading time which improves reading ability (Gregg & Sekeres). Motivation is also an important element for

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how well a student understands a text (Soalt, 2005). A child is more liable to comprehend a particular text if he or she is interested in that text (Soalt). Nonfiction texts can catch the interest of young readers, who have an inquisitive nature, and provide children with answers to their questions (Duke, 2000; Maloch & Horsey, 2013).

Informational texts can be the most effective avenue to general reading ability for both boys and students who have trouble reading (Furtado & Johnson, 2010). Boys are often more interested in informational texts than fiction which can be a wonderful motivator to encourage boys to read (Furtado & Johnson; Moss, 2005). In fact, the boys in the Furtado and Johnson study demonstrated much more excitement for the nonfiction texts which researchers chose. Calo (2011) found some struggling readers more likely to choose informational texts either because they could not read the words or because the pictures were so vibrant. Students could still interact with a text by gaining information from pictures and asking questions about those pictures (Calo). Nonreaders would also be able to access nonfiction books because of the visual features.

Additional benefits to young students interacting with nonfiction texts are that these texts allow students to investigate areas of interest and increase their own knowledge and proficiency of specific topics (Duke, 2000). Students can improve their self-confidence when they become the expert on a favorite subject. Expository texts also support links between school and parents, helping students to make connections with the subjects adults talk about and read at home (Duke; Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). Teachers and students are able to have discussions with deeper meaning when teachers read expository texts to the class (Gregg & Sekeres). Real world facts and topics which appear in nonfiction texts are a part of our everyday lives and encourage more

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extensive thinking and talking, while also fostering connections. Thinking and talking about a topic, as well as making connections, leads to better comprehension.

Conclusion 2: Need for Professional Development

According to the literature, teachers in the past were not accustomed to nonfiction text and additionally were unaware of how to teach particular nonfiction structures in order to facilitate student understanding of nonfiction texts (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). Professional development on teaching nonfiction texts is rarely provided to primary teachers and little preparation on content area reading is offered during teacher training (Moss, 2005). This lack of guidance leads me to conclude that professional development is needed for instructional methods and strategies used to teach students to read and comprehend nonfiction texts. Since informational texts have become a bigger focus in our modern classrooms, teacher education in this area is more important than ever.

Professional development on teaching nonfiction should contain several elements. First, administrators and teachers should investigate the professional literature to find current, researched, and proven teaching methods and strategies for teaching expository text (Moss, 2005). Administrators could arrange for teachers to have blocks of time on a regular basis in which teachers could start out by reading, sharing, and discussing the professional literature and then follow up the next time with an informational presentation on how to apply the recommendations given in the reading (Moss). Next, teachers could try out one of the strategies with their own students and then share their results with colleagues (Moss). Finally, support services, such as demonstrating a nonfiction lesson or suggesting materials connected to content literacy state standards, could be provided by a peer coach (Moss).

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Another possible method of professional development would be for a small group of teachers to attend a conference which provided information on teaching nonfiction. Those same teachers could come back to their school and pass on the information to their peers through handouts, discussions, or even presentations of their own. Teachers could read scholarly books over summer break, to be discussed and implemented on their return in September. Finally, teachers should remember to utilize their colleagues as resources. Teachers who succeed in teaching nonfiction text could be asked to talk to a group or allow others to observe one of their lessons during a class. In these ways, teachers can learn not only from the literature and professionals, but also from each other. Teachers must be proactive in the advancement of their teaching skills and administration must provide opportunities for learning.

In my investigation of the literature, I learned about many teaching methods and strategies which would help young students to read and understand nonfiction texts. As a literacy specialist, I would provide professional development by giving an informational presentation on these methods and strategies. I would present all the facts, but focus on the elements which might be less known. I would not only present information, but would provide suggested activities and encourage teachers to try them out. I would also provide demonstrations and relevant materials which could be taken away from the training.

Teaching text features is one way to help students recognize a nonfiction text as well as navigate through the text. I would suggest a couple of activities which would give students practice with and exposure to nonfiction texts. I would even have the teachers try out one of the activities themselves. One activity would be to use twin texts. The teacher could show each text and point out the features while explaining them. The features could be written on chart paper for continued reference (Maloch & Horsey, 2013). Another activity would be to do a book sort.

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The students could each be given a book or choose a fiction or nonfiction book from a pile. The teacher would then ask each student which genre they had and have them explain their reasoning regarding their response.

Teaching text structure would be a big part of this training. Teaching text structure was the most researched and written about strategy, and showed positive results in student comprehension. For this topic I would provide important information on how to begin. For instance, teachers should use texts with a single text structure so students will not become confused (Moss, 2004). Teach only one text structure at a time so students can focus on and learn that text structure (Moss; Williams et al., 2005). Teachers should also teach the text structure initially with well-known content so students can focus on the text structure training and not have to worry about learning the content (Williams et al., 2009). Finally, teachers should use vocabulary strategies so students will not struggle with the content specific words during reading. Examples of vocabulary strategies which could be used include the four-square strategy (Furtado & Johnson, 2010) or the preview/predict/confirm (PPC) strategy (Yopp & Yopp, 2004). Each of these strategies could be modeled or practiced during the professional development session and take away materials could be provided.

Teaching students about clue words when teaching text structure is an important task for educators. I would advise teachers to present clue words before reading and have students use them in sentences (Williams et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2009). Graphic organizers can also be introduced to teachers and provided as handouts, so teachers can have students use them to arrange the information found in the reading (Williams et al.; Williams et al.). I could model the use of graphic organizers to show how students would use them to make well-structured statements (precise information from the reading and including a clue word) (Williams et al.;

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Williams et al.). Finally, I would talk about or model the strategy of using a paragraph frame or structure specific questions in order to guide students to think about the main ideas in the paragraph, and write a summary (Williams et al.; Williams et al.). Teachers should also be given useful ideas and examples to take back to their own classrooms. I would end the presentation with a discussion and question and answer session.

Conclusion 3: Provide Appropriate Texts

Teachers should consider accuracy of content to be the most important element when choosing nonfiction texts for their elementary aged children (Gill, 2009). This accuracy includes facts and information as well as pictures or other types of visual features such as charts or graphs. Looking at the nonfiction text features helps teachers to judge whether a text is accurate or not. Author observations or explanations may contain verification of the investigative process (Gill). Look for clarification of informational resources, a list of professional advisors, or a bibliography to determine where the author obtained the information as well as the writer's own background or expertise in the field (Gill). Additional text features which could offer further information include indexes and recommendations for texts on similar topics (Gill). Teachers should read through the text themselves to ascertain if the pictures agree with the words, the words are clear and make sense, and the information is organized in a logical manner (Gill). Finally, teachers should be cautious of texts which try to combine narrative elements and informational features in a single book. These merged texts may cause students to become confused about what an expository text is while also blurring the lines between what is real and what is imaginary (Gill).

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The student's grade and reading achievement is another important aspect to consider (Moss, 2004). The writer should highlight important words, give their definitions, and present concepts in a kid friendly manner (Gill, 2009), so students can progress through the text with the least amount of difficulty. One advantage to nonfiction is that even if the student cannot read or has trouble with the reading, he or she can examine the pictures and other visual elements and still obtain information from the text (Calo, 2011; Gill; Webster, 2009). Finally, educators will be able to assist young primary students in being successful in reading and understanding expository text as long as they choose informational texts based on the age and reading ability of their students and help students with unstructured texts by giving them guidance and reinforcement (Hall et al., 2005).

Educators should provide numerous nonfiction texts on a range of topics to their classes (Calo, 2011; Moss, 2005). These expository texts could include nonfiction trade books, newspapers, news magazines for kids, biographies, how-to texts (Maloch & Horsey, 2013), and internet materials (Calo; Moss, 2004). The more informational texts are available, the more likely that students will pick them up and look at them. Being surrounded by informational texts will also help students become acquainted with those text elements which provide a map of sorts, allowing students to find their way through the text (Maloch & Horsey). Having texts with an assortment of topics will ensure that students will find something which interests them. Another way to ensure students explore these books is to provide nonfiction texts which have bright, attractive photos and illustrations (Gill, 2009). Students will be more likely to choose an informational text if the cover is eye-catching, the pictures are fascinating, and the words are easy to read. Another suggestion is for educators to select and provide informational companion texts which have the same subject or premise as a favorite narrative story (Soalt, 2005). By

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providing these companion texts, a student may become motivated to read a genre they would not normally choose. If teachers diligently choose accurate, appropriate nonfiction texts and fill their classroom libraries and book boxes with many of these books on a variety of topics, students will not only become familiar with expository text, but will also increase their word and content knowledge.

Implications

Implications of this research to my personal life are knowing how to teach explicitly, knowing what strategies to use and when, applying what I have learned to be an effective teacher in my own class someday, and passing on these teaching methods and strategies to others through professional development. Implications of this literature review for other teachers are using this review as a resource, utilizing researched instructional methods to educate students, and implementing direct instruction of strategies. Implications of this research on schools pertains to how a school's administration expends money. Implications of this literature review on researchers are that more research studies need to be completed.

This research has provided me with many instructional methods which I can implement with my own students. For example, I should teach explicitly and scaffold instruction by modeling strategies, sharing my thinking, guiding student practice, and encouraging students to use the strategies independently (Greg & Sekeres, 2006). I can also increase comprehension for all students by acknowledging and responding to student initiations in specific ways, including repeating questions and comments, asking students to expand on their thoughts, labeling and reviewing strategies used, and turning questions and comments back to the class for discussion (Maloch & Beutel, 2010). The studies I reviewed gave examples of these instructional methods.

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Knowing these instructional methods had been researched and revealed successful outcomes will give me the confidence to use them when needed. I also realize nonfiction texts can be integrated into ELA and content classes throughout the day, so knowing these teaching methods and strategies will be beneficial in all areas of teaching. With the strong emphasis on literacy and the recent push for the use of more nonfiction texts in the classroom, I must collect as many strategies as I can to ensure that I will be an effective teacher and my students will be successful at reading and understanding nonfiction text. I do understand however, that I must also keep up with current research so I can collect and utilize new strategies or teaching methods as they are discovered. I look forward to learning more about the use of technology in literacy and whatever strategies are developed to help students navigate this type of nonfiction text. I plan to be a lifelong learner and hope to be an effective teacher now and in the future.

Beyond using the strategies in my own classroom, as a literacy specialist, I would like to offer professional development on teaching nonfiction to other teachers. This training would include modeling text features and demonstrating how to search the text for information instead of having to read from front to back (Calo, 2011; Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). I could also model asking questions, and making real world connections to a text. I could communicate how discussing the visual elements of the pictures can help students to activate background knowledge and share what they already know, increasing the knowledge of all students. Rereading is also an important strategy to emphasize because nonfiction can be so dense with information that a student would have to read the text several times to extract all the information (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). I would also discuss clue words and how to help students become familiar with them. Finally, I would review the Preview-Predict-Confirm strategy which increases children's knowledge of content vocabulary. I would have the teachers try out the

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activity themselves so they can see how the activity works. I believe teachers should walk away from a professional development with practical suggestions, activities, and materials which they can easily duplicate in their own classrooms.

Teachers these days have large class numbers, a diversity of students, and many teaching responsibilities on their plates. They just do not have the time to read all of these different articles and studies or to come up with strategies on their own. This literature review brings the researched teaching methods and strategies together in one place and reports on their effectiveness. Reading through this literature review will allow teachers to learn and use new methods and strategies without using up a lot of their precious time.

The students today are diverse in more than one way. They are diverse in their interests, culture, and also in their reading levels. Educators need to know the most effective teaching methods for instructing these diverse students in nonfiction. This literary review explains how teachers can model a strategy, reveal their thinking, provide guided practice with feedback, and allow students to practice independently (Greg & Sekeres, 2006). The review will also explain how teachers should respond to student initiations. Instructional methods will be provided and teachers will be informed about when and how to use them. Educators will also be supplied with many strategies they can model for their students. Using text features and rereading text to pull out information are two important strategies to demonstrate when using nonfiction text (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). I hope students will learn these strategies and hold on to them to use again later in life when texts are even more difficult to decipher. These strategies can also be shared with other teachers. I anticipate this review will be an asset to teachers and students alike.

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In order for students to be exposed to nonfiction text, classrooms must be filled with them. The school's administration is responsible for providing teachers with nonfiction texts or the means to buy them. School libraries should also be stocked with a wide selection of nonfiction texts which teachers and students can borrow. Classroom sets, small group sets, and theme groupings could be purchased and kept in the library and signed out by the teachers. Teachers could request the purchase of specific groups of books based on what content they need to teach. Libraries can usually acquire different types of nonfiction texts, like magazines and graphic novels. The technology department could obtain E-readers or on-line reading programs for young students. Students are interested in different forms of text and different topics, so if the class or library offers a choice, they are more likely to peak each student's interest and see every child reading.

Only six actual studies for teaching nonfiction reading to elementary students were found for this literature review and only half of those had participant numbers greater than seventy. Elementary students need to improve their comprehension of informational texts to be successful in higher grades and beyond. Therefore teachers need to learn instructional methods and strategies to help students to comprehend expository texts. These instructional methods and strategies need to come from academic research studies which have proven positive results. Implications for researchers are that they need to conduct more studies in which actual classroom research takes place with significant numbers of students. These researchers should test instructional methods and strategies for teaching elementary students to read and comprehend nonfiction text so teachers can help students to be successful in their school and adult lives.

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Recommendations

When researching strategies which would help students read and understand nonfiction text, I found a lack of good studies on this topic. Teaching text structure was the only strategy in which I found more than one study to corroborate positive results. These same studies were also the only ones examining large numbers of students. When looking at the other studies, two researched a single class, and one only considered four students. These low participant numbers caused me to have less confidence in some of the successful outcomes reported than I would have had if the studies contained larger numbers of participants. While small studies are not generalizable, they can be valuable when grouped together as they could then point to trends. I recommend researchers implement more studies, preferably with large numbers of participants, on teaching elementary students to read and understand nonfiction text. The information they gather on instructional methods and strategies could then be passed on to teachers so recommendations could be put to immediate use.

The goal of teachers is to help elementary students improve their reading and comprehension of nonfiction texts so they will be successful in the upper grades and ultimately their future lives. In order for educators to accomplish this goal, teachers need to know how to teach explicitly and have a variety of strategies to teach students. This knowledge may come from professional readings, like research based books and articles, or learning could come from professional development opportunities offered by the administration or at a conference. An administrator could assign a book reading for the summer break to be discussed when school resumes or a teacher could share an article they read on their own. Several teachers could attend a conference, and then come back and share what they learned with their peers. Teachers who excel at teaching a particular topic, could share what they do, give a demonstration, or allow

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their lesson to be observed. Even a teacher from another school could provide training. Our colleagues can be one of our greatest resources. Teachers need to take advantage of these learning opportunities when they can, try out learned strategies in their own classroom, and share ideas with others. Literacy development is a top priority at most schools so this topic should be discussed on a regular basis. Above all, teachers must stay up to date by learning new instructional methods and teaching strategies whenever the opportunity arises. Professional development is critical for educators to provide students with the tools they need to conquer informational text (Moss, 2005).

To create interest and encourage students to look at and read nonfiction texts, teachers should try to fill their room with an array of books on a variety of topics. Books which are colorful, interesting, and unique will attract student attention (Gill, 2009). These books should also be provided in a wide range of reading levels as well. Asking students to share their interests is also a good idea. Students need to read nonfiction and then talk together about what they learned. Provide books which make connections to local news stories or community groups or events (Calo, 2011). Books with these associations will increase interest. The teacher could share their favorite childhood books. Sharing might help teachers to make a connection with their students and could definitely open up a conversation about books and reading. Reading enthusiastically and showing genuine curiosity will inspire students to do the same (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). Teachers can be a role model by sharing their own enthusiasm and commitment to reading when reading alongside students during DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) time, a time for independent silent reading. When teachers learn something fascinating from a nonfiction text, they can share that fact with their class. Students may become motivated by teachers who demonstrate interest in continued learning. Teachers can share something they are

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reading right now. A sentence or paragraph from their own text could become a teaching moment when used to demonstrate to students how adults still use those reading strategies, like context clues, questioning, or rereading. The teacher's objective is to encourage students to emulate and internalize those good reading skills they learned from us so they will still be using them and reading successfully when they become adults.

In my own experience I have heard students say, "Why should I learn this?" Let them know why someone would read a nonfiction text, whether to learn about something, to learn how to do something, or to answer a question. Give them some specific examples for why they will need this skill in the future. Explain how administration at college and trade schools require their students to read a lot of expository text. The teacher might choose several careers and discuss what kinds of expository text people in that career might have to read. Teachers or administrators could even plan a career day in which they would invite adults to talk about their jobs and incorporate literacy by asking these adults to share what kind of expository text they encounter in their daily lives. Information learned during "Career Day" might be enough incentive to convince students to work at reading in order to reach a particular goal in the future.

Technology in our world today continues to advance by leaps and bounds. Even young children are exposed to technology. Most schools these days have a computer lab or a handful of computers in each classroom. I personally know of administrators who incorporate e-readers and laptops into classrooms and even schoolwide. Literacy today includes technology and the internet, so students today need to become literate in all types of expository text (Moss, 2005). That being said, studies being done specifically on reading technological expository text are limited. Even the articles and studies I did review did not include any actual use of technology. I believe researchers need to conduct more studies in the area of digital literacy, including

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possible strategies for reading and understanding this type of expository text. Studies need to be done to discover the best ways to prepare young students for the technology they will encounter each day as well as in their future. Research studies can investigate these concerns and give us the answers we need to prepare students to be successful in their digital activities.

With the steadily increasing use of technology, administrators and teachers must keep up with the times. “The literacy demands of today’s technological society require that students not only be able to read and write in the print world, but also in the digital world” (Moss, 2005, p. 46). Nonfiction text can take many shapes in the life of a student these days, including the Internet. Therefore, literacy teaching needs to expand to these digital materials. Students not only need to learn how to read and understand the nonfiction text found on websites, but also to determine if the site is reliable and the information accurate. The teacher must learn these skills of navigation and comprehension so they might instruct students in the same. Many teachers will need training in technology. Teachers should try to be proactive and seek out help and training when needed.

Besides training, administrators can also provide hardware and software to keep teachers on the cutting edge and to help keep students interested in school. Many teachers these days have computers in their rooms and often have some sort of Smartboard technology as well. Administrators need to provide training so these tools can be used effectively. Other devices which could be brought into the classroom are laptops, Chromebooks, and tablets. These devices could be used for strategy practice, reading, or research. E-books are widely available and may help to motivate a child to read if downloaded on a handheld device. Books can even be downloaded for free on some sites. Special programs can provide on-line books for students to read at school or at home. If administrators do not have the money for these tools, perhaps grant

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money is available, corporate sponsors could be found, or devices could even be borrowed. With administrative support and teacher guidance, students will be more prepared to navigate, read, and comprehend the text in our world of digital literacy.

Summary

The instruction of literacy today is a daunting task. Classrooms are filled with a diversity of students from different cultures, who have different languages, and read at many different levels. Not only do teachers have to overcome these differences, but also have to teach children to read and understand many different types of text. Expository text reading is on the rise in elementary schools and a very important skill for upper grades as well as college, careers, and life itself. Expository text also fills the digital world which expands daily. Therefore, teachers must have a variety of strategies at their disposal and feel confident in how to use them. Elementary teachers can demonstrate and pass on these strategies through explicit teaching like modeling and think aloud. Students will acquire those same strategies by observing the teacher, practicing the skills with guidance and feedback, and then feeling the confidence to use those strategies in their own independent reading (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). These nonfiction text reading skills and strategies will be utilized and expanded throughout student's lives, making them successful lifelong learners.

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Appendix A

Informational Text Map for *Wild Babies* (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008)

Author's Purpose	To share information about the birth and development of wild babies.
Major Idea	Emperor Penguin
Supporting Detail	Baby animal is called a chick.
Major Idea	Giraffe
Supporting Detail	Baby animal is called a calf.
Aids	photographs
Vocabulary	Kindergarten, range, downy

Compare and Contrast Text Map for *Wild Babies* (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008)

Major Idea

Major Idea

Giraffe		Penguin
---------	--	---------

Supporting Details

Attributes

Supporting Details

Africa		Live		Antarctica
One		Number of babies		One
Live		Type of birth		Egg
Kindergarten		Protection of young		Kindergarten

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Appendix B

Compare and Contrast Writing Guide for *Wild Babies* (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008)

Where does the animal live?		
	Antarctica	Africa
Giraffe		X
Penguin	X	
Signal words: but, while, both, similar		
Giraffes and penguins are: the same <i>different</i>		
How?		
Giraffes live in Africa, but penguins live in Antarctica.		

Compare and Contrast Summary Pattern for *Wild Babies* (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008)

Introduction

The following summary compares and contrasts _____
and _____.
Wild Babies is a (fiction/non-fiction) book about _____
_____.

Compare

_____ and _____ are similar in several ways.

Contrast

_____ and _____ are different in several ways.

Signal Words

Comparison: similar, both
Contrast: different, while