THE EFFECTS OF NONFICTION BOOK CLUBS
ON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Megan Bright

An Abstract
of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Education Specialist of Human Services/ Learning Resources
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
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ABSTRACT

By

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The adoption of the Common Core State Standards has placed an increased emphasis on the importance of students’ exposure to nonfiction text. This research sought to determine if the use of nonfiction book clubs within a library setting could be a viable way to increase the number of nonfiction texts that students self-select. Ten students participated in a nonfiction book club taught by the librarian. Skills taught in book club were reinforced by the classroom teacher during the school day. Students were given a reading interest survey prior to participation in the book club and were given a similar survey following the club to see if their reading preferences had changed during the course of the study. The teacher also made observations of her students’ reading preferences before and after the study. The findings indicate that nonfiction book clubs are a successful method to increase nonfiction circulation within an elementary school library.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Educators across the country are in the process of adapting their instruction to meet the needs of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In addition to a call for increased text complexity, the CCSS require students to read an increasing amount of nonfiction text. By the fourth grade, the CCSS require that students are reading equal amounts of fiction and nonfiction text. At the elementary level this is a significant change from the picture books that students traditionally choose to read and that teachers love to use for instruction. A study of 20 first grade classrooms found that students were only spending an average 3.6 minutes a day in whole-class instruction involving nonfiction text (Duke 215).

Because of the library media specialist’s unique knowledge regarding research and information retrieval, he or she plays an important role in helping teachers and students as they begin to encounter more nonfiction texts. In addition to teaching nonfiction text features and research skills, library media specialists promote the reading of informational text through book talks, library displays, and the use of nonfiction book clubs.

Statement of the Problem

Although teachers understand the benefits of an increase in using nonfiction texts for instruction, it is not always easy to motivate students to choose these materials for pleasure reading. In some instances, teachers and students have developed a negative attitude toward nonfiction, assuming that it is dry, factual, and meant solely for research. In order to increase the number of nonfiction texts read by elementary school students, students need to find enjoyment in the materials they are reading. For this reason, students need access to highly-engaging nonfiction. Nonfiction book clubs expose students to nonfiction that they may not typically read and connect them with texts that will pique their interests.
Purpose of the Study

This study began with a desire to increase nonfiction circulation in the elementary school library. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, teachers have begun to seek out ways to increase the amount of nonfiction their students are reading; library media specialists are in a position to help ease this transition. To meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards, librarians and teachers can work together using nonfiction book clubs to improve student attitudes toward nonfiction and increase their likelihood of choosing nonfiction texts for pleasure reading. Nonfiction book clubs may allow students to experience a variety of nonfiction texts within a casual, interactive setting. By allowing students to engage in open discussions of nonfiction texts, the hope was that students would find an excitement for nonfiction reading. Besides reading nonfiction during classroom instruction, the researcher was curious to see if students would begin to self-select more nonfiction text from their school library. In addition, by partnering with a classroom teacher for the study, the researcher hoped to gain insight into how the use of book clubs could influence the teacher’s approach to nonfiction.

Research Questions

This research study incorporated several areas of focus. The overarching goal of the study was to discover methods to increase the reading of nonfiction text among elementary school students. Nonfiction book clubs were determined to be the primary instructional method for the study. Throughout the research process, the researcher kept the following three questions in mind:

1. How does exposure to a variety of nonfiction texts affect students’ reading selections?
2. How does participation in a book club affect student attitudes toward nonfiction texts?
3. How does the use of nonfiction book clubs affect a teacher’s attitude toward nonfiction instruction?

Limitations of the Study

This study faced several limitations including time, demographics, and size. In order to be manageable without causing disruption to the school day, this study targeted one classroom within one grade level. The choice of a different classroom or grade level could have changed the results of this study. The duration of the study was limited due to the district’s previous curricular plans. A longer study could have allowed for more data regarding the long-term influence of nonfiction book clubs on students’ attitudes and book selections. Finally, any changes in attitude on the part of the classroom teacher are limited to the attitudes of the one teacher involved in the study. In order to draw greater generalizations about the attitudes of classroom teachers, a larger sample size would be necessary.

Definition of Terms

Basal reader – an anthology of grade-level text used for the instruction of reading

Book club – a group of individuals who meet on a regular basis to discuss a common literary work

Common Core State Standards – a framework of grade-level standards adopted for use by 45 states (CCSS)

Inquiry – a research process by which students seek answers to authentic questions

Instructional coach – an individual trained in professional development and instructional strategies who offers support to classroom teachers

Narrative nonfiction – nonfiction text that incorporates literary elements such as plot, characters, and figurative language; also called literary nonfiction
Nonfiction text – any body of text composed of factual information in the format of books, articles, or electronic text such as webpages; sometimes referred to as informational text

Research Design

Research for the Review of Literature began with searches in three main areas: the transition to the Common Core State Standards, the importance of nonfiction literature, and methods for increasing nonfiction circulation. The research included journal articles, research studies, and websites. The following databases were consulted: *Academic Search Elite, Library Literature & Information Science Full Text*, and *ProQuest Central*. The search began with the terms “nonfiction text” and “Common Core State Standards.” However, after some initial findings, the term “elementary” was added to help narrow the results to those affecting elementary school students. As more specific information was needed, search terms including “inquiry” and “technology” were also added.

Summary

This chapter presents the framework for this study. The importance of nonfiction text was explored with relation to the Common Core State Standards. This led to the identification of the need to increase the amount of nonfiction text read by elementary school students. From there, the research questions were identified. The terms used in this study were defined, and the limitations of the study were explored. Then the research process was briefly explained. Chapter two will provide a review of the literature concerning this topic. Chapter three will explain the methodology of this study, chapter four will explain the findings, and chapter five will present the answers to the research questions and the conclusion.
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

With forty-five states adopting the Common Core State Standards, teachers are forced to consider their current curriculum and how closely it aligns with these new standards ("Key Points"). The Common Core places an emphasis on a student’s ability to use a variety of resources to solve real-world problems. In addition, it suggests that by the fourth grade, students should be reading an equal amount of fiction and nonfiction texts (Moss “Information” 205). Unfortunately, this high amount of factual reading is not occurring in many schools. Students continue to struggle with the reading of nonfiction text and their instructors struggle with how to teach it. This creates a unique opportunity for school librarians to aid both teachers and students in this process. Librarians are uniquely trained to be experts at using nonfiction resources and can help support teachers during this time of transition.

In this chapter, the background of the Common Core Standards will be discussed as well as the potential benefits of reading nonfiction texts. Opportunities for integrating technology will also be explored. The connection between inquiry and nonfiction will be described in conjunction with the librarian’s role as an instructional coach. Finally, students’ choice of reading materials will be discussed in relation to potential methods of increasing nonfiction circulation, including book talks, displays, and book clubs.

The Common Core and Nonfiction Texts

Although the field of education has undergone many transitions over time, the creation of the Common Core State Standards may prove to be one of the largest changes in the history of education in the United States. Developed in 2010 by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Common Core
State Standards (CCSS) were developed to remedy the problem of undereducated students graduating from the public school system. Although every state may have their own academic standards, the CCSS were intended to be all-encompassing and prepare all of the nation’s students for college and the work force (Loertscher and Marcoux 9). In addition, they were created to more closely align the education system of the United States with that of nations around the world (Morris 8). As of October 2013, all but five states had adopted the Common Core Standards in math. All but four states had adopted the English language arts standards (“Key Points”).

In order to prepare students for the increasingly complex work force they will enter, the Common Core Standards (CCSS) call for a dramatic increase in text complexity. Considering the literacy skills that are required in most careers, almost all occupations include the need for professionals to read and write expository text. Unfortunately, American students have not traditionally received an appropriate level of instruction using informational or expository text (Moss “Information” 203). According to the website of the Common Core, “Through reading a diverse array of classic and contemporary literature as well as challenging informational texts in a range of subjects, students are expected to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspective” (“Key Points”). In addition to increasing the rigor of texts, the standards also combine disciplines to more accurately reflect tasks that students will come across in collegiate and real-world settings (Morris 10). Instead of teaching reading and writing in isolation, the standards call for teaching English and language arts skills across all content areas.

Qualities of Nonfiction Text

When educators begin having discussions about teaching reading and writing skills across the content areas, nonfiction text comes to the forefront. Not only is nonfiction text what students will encounter most frequently as they enter the workforce, it is also what they will use
most as consumers of information. According to Hall and Sabey, after a student reaches the 6th grade, the CCSS calls for non-narrative texts to be used for more than 75% of instruction (261). In addition, the text contained on the Internet is around 96% informational (Hall and Sabey 261). The researchers recommend that educators nationwide take the steps necessary to prepare students to encounter this high percentage of nonfiction text.

Although teachers may think of nonfiction as a selection of trade and reference books within the school library, all varieties of nonfiction text can be considered. Duke emphasizes that informational text is one type of nonfiction. Informational text is “written with the primary purpose of conveying information about the natural and social world (typically from someone presumed to be more knowledgeable on the subject to someone presumed to be less so) and having particular text features to accomplish this purpose” (205). According to the Common Core State Standards, informational text takes on a broader definition, including biographies and autobiographies, text about history, and the social sciences; it also includes technical texts like directions, charts, forms, and digital resources (“Key Points”).

In the past, it was commonplace that in the primary grades, students learned to read; and in intermediate grades, students began reading to learn. However, more recent studies have shown that students need to be exposed to all modalities of text from a young age. In 2000, Nell Duke conducted research in 20 first grade classrooms in and around Boston, Massachusetts. The study focused on what types of print were being displayed in the classroom, were available in classroom libraries, and were being taught as written language instruction. Surprisingly, Duke found that only 2.6% of text displayed on classroom walls was informational in nature. Classroom libraries contained an average of only 9.8% informational text, and numbers were significantly lower in schools with lower socioeconomic levels. After spending 79 days observing students and teachers in these classrooms, Duke found that students spent an average
of 3.6 minutes per day in whole class language activities that used informational text (Duke 215). These figures present a contrast to the standards set forth by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. NAEP recommends that by 4th grade, at least 50% of students’ reading be informational text (Moss “Information” 205). However, Moss points out that these ratios can be difficult to achieve when the resources being used in America’s classrooms are inadequate. Moss found that the basal readers many schools rely upon do not meet the NAEP standard of 50% nonfiction (Moss “Information” 214). If students and teachers are spending such little time with nonfiction text, they might miss the benefits nonfiction text has to offer.

The use of nonfiction text in the classroom benefits students in three key ways: comprehension, writing, and engagement. In the area of comprehension, Martin and Kragler conducted a study in a Midwestern town using 28 students enrolled in half day kindergarten classes. Children were evaluated in the fall and once again in the spring to see what strategies they were using to read fiction and nonfiction books. Martin and Kragler found that when the students were reading and interacting with nonfiction text, they consistently used more strategies to create meaning. The children used pictures to help tell the stories. These images allowed the students to make more text-to-self connections and more predictions about the rest of the story. In addition, while students were reading nonfiction text with images, they were less likely to get frustrated or feel like they were having problems. Their own personal connections to the text and ability to interpret the text using its images made the students more likely to see themselves as readers. Martin and Kragler concluded that when students felt more success, they became more likely to continue reading (150). Young and Moss also emphasize the positive impact reading nonfiction has on comprehension, noting that the text tends to showcase vocabulary words that students may not otherwise encounter, which helps to build background knowledge.
Nonfiction also provides a variety of text structures that fiction works would not expose students to, and it satisfies a child’s internal curiosity to learn more about the world around them.

Multiple studies have concluded that students’ writing improves through the use of nonfiction in the classroom. According to Maloch and Bomer, students write what they read. The more students are exposed to informational text, the more capable they are of becoming quality writers of expository text, which is necessary when they enter the work force (206). In addition, the more students are exposed to various text features that are common in nonfiction writing, the more likely they will incorporate those same features into their work (Maloch and Bomer 206). Gill provides similar reasoning, contending that the quality of nonfiction works has increased drastically as it begins to have a literary value instead of being used solely for information. In the past, nonfiction works were frequently dry books, written to convey facts. However, modern nonfiction has begun to develop more literary characteristics including plots to help compel readers.

The improved visual elements and accuracy of today’s nonfiction create an engaging writing format that students can use as a model for their own works (Gill 267). According to Gill, many of the best modern nonfiction books offer detailed reference lists and resources for students to find additional information. In this way, the author is not only sharing information about the content, but also about the reliability of the research process. Historically, one of the initial contacts students made with nonfiction was through the use of encyclopedias for beginning research. This dry, factual writing style has led some students to believe all nonfiction conforms to this predictable, encyclopedic style. However, Harvey argues that quality nonfiction writing is engaging and enjoyable to read. Because nonfiction texts are so prevalent in the world, students have the opportunity to read a variety of texts with which they can connect. As authors begin to write nonfiction that is more engaging, it becomes the responsibility of teachers
and librarians to ensure that students are able to connect with these texts (Harvey 19). Moss presents a similar argument noting that literary nonfiction is presented in such a way that it is possible to appreciate the author’s craftsmanship. It is enjoyable to read because the information is embedded in a story-like format (Moss “Information” 209).

The use of quality nonfiction texts has also been shown to increase student engagement. Young and Moss contend that nonfiction books allow students to connect to issues and areas of interest that are barely mentioned inside textbooks. Instead of lightly skimming over a topic, reading nonfiction books allows students to explore their own personal interests in-depth (Young and Moss 207). Similarly, Williams found that children were often more interested in nonfiction. When students are more excited by what they are reading, their comprehension improves (248).

Based on Harvey’s observations, fiction readers often sit still and become absorbed into the story. However, nonfiction readers cannot sit still because they have to share every extreme fact they find. Nonfiction helps cultivate a zealous love for knowledge. This love of knowledge will engage students in the classroom and keep them coming back for more (Harvey 15).

Access to Nonfiction Texts

Although the importance of reading and understanding nonfiction may be understood by teachers and librarians, these materials may not naturally attract students. Renaissance Place is a company that provides online quizzes for students to test the comprehension of the books they have read. When researchers look at the top forty titles on which students have taken online quizzes, all of books fall into two genres: pop series fiction that is typically written below grade level and books that were assigned by classroom teachers. No nonfiction books appear in the top forty list (Loertscher and Marcoux 11). Ruth Clark addresses this problem in her article, “Readicide – Killing the Love of Reading in Our Schools.” Clark contends that some programs
compel students to read for the sole purpose of passing a quiz. Some students may lose their love of reading because they are only reading books as a means to pass a test (Clark 8).

Although nonfiction books may not be popular for completing reading comprehension quizzes, that does not mean that they are unpopular among students. In actuality, younger students report liking nonfiction more than their teachers realize. Although some teachers may perceive that students dislike nonfiction, Vent and Ray conducted research showing that 85% of students self-reported that they enjoyed reading nonfiction (42). In the past, studies showed that younger readers preferred to read fiction books, but their interests expanded as they entered the intermediate grades. More and more, educators are now pushing expository texts at younger grade levels and students are beginning to choose these books on their own. Studies have shown that self-selection increases reading (Mohr 83). Similarly, students become better readers by doing more reading (Mohr 82). Kathleen Mohr conducted a study of 190 primary level students using nine picture books. Five of the books were fiction books and four were non-fiction books. She presented the books to the children and asked students to choose one book. A startling 84% of children chose nonfiction books and 46% of the children selected the exact same book, a nonfiction book about animals (Mohr 90).

Although the numbers of students preferring nonfiction are high at the primary level, these percentages tend to decrease as students age. And even those students who report liking nonfiction are not always selecting those types of materials when they visit the library. Although 85% of children reported liking nonfiction to Vent and Ray, circulation reports for the same children show that nonfiction materials only accounted for 35% of circulation (42).

Several studies have shown that students begin changing their selection habits around third grade. According to Davilla and Patrick, when students reach the ages of 9 to 11, if they are not already readers, they are likely to develop an ambivalent attitude toward reading, citing
that they are unable to find reading materials that are interesting to them (Davila and Patrick). Students of these ages who reported liking reading could each attribute a specific book that has hooked them in the past.

As librarians and teachers strive to increase the amount of nonfiction text consumed by their students, it may be important to broaden the spectrum of reading materials they allow. Eighty-three percent of students say that they enjoy reading magazines, and comics consistently rate well with young readers (Davila and Patrick 202). Students of a lower socioeconomic level report liking comic books more than their peers who are at a higher socioeconomic level (Davila and Patrick 202). In addition, “[a] book’s attractiveness matters to today’s students, who are accustomed to an array of visual media and expect to see materials with a strong visual impact. Attractive presentation means the difference between a book students will select and one they will reject” (Young and Moss 209). In the past, teachers and librarians had a tendency to push students toward fiction books because these had a greater likelihood of being on the students’ reading level. Only in the past few years have quality nonfiction resources come onto the market for primary students (Palmer and Stewart 426).

Loertscher and Marcoux also emphasize the need to expose students to a vast collection of resources. They point out that every possible format should be covered within the classroom and recommend that educators take special care to make sure they are using both print and digital resources. They believe that students should have access to these resources around the clock and that teacher-librarians play a key role in providing access to informational text (Loertscher and Marcoux 11). Many school library websites offer students constant access to subscription databases and electronic resources.

One final factor to consider regarding book selection is that of library policies. Research by Johnson and Donham suggests that reading success by third grade can be a predictor of future
academic success. For some children, the number of visits to their school library played a role in their achievement. Students who visited the library with a greater frequency tended to have higher test scores. However, especially at the kindergarten level, studies show that strict circulation limits are common, which gives these students less opportunity to check out the books that will help foster their love of learning in the future. By examining their circulation policies, libraries functioning on a fixed schedule can allow students to check out more books at a time to feed this passion for reading (Johnson and Donham 11).

**The Role of Technology, Nonfiction, and the Common Core**

One key component of teaching informational text is offering students the opportunity to experience text in all of its forms. This means giving students experience reading and interacting with digital texts. The Common Core State Standards require that students complete complex tasks that showcase their critical thinking skills. Such tasks place an emphasis on informational reading that is likely to occur in the real world (Lamb and Johnson 61).

At times, it is easy to narrowly think of nonfiction as a section of books in the library. However, Meth points out that technology helps students interact with text in a digital environment. She found success with using WebQuests to motivate students to verify bizarre scientific statements related to animals, such as “horned lizards can squirt blood from their eyes” (77). Because students were so engaged by the unique topic, they approached the reading of nonfiction websites with a different lens. After they read and gained the basic answers to their questions, they were able to relate their answers to a larger, more significant topic (Meth 77).

Lamb and Johnson have developed a five-step plan to demonstrate how librarians help meet the need for increased levels of nonfiction reading. Their plan revolves around five key components: plan, present, process, product, and promoting passion (61). These distinct processes each provide unique opportunities for collaboration between teachers and librarians.
Technology integration occurs during the planning of lessons, the presentation of information, within the process of research, during the creation of a final product, and as a vehicle for exciting and engaging students. During the planning stage, Lamb and Johnson emphasize that librarians are experts on where to find engaging nonfiction. Librarians can consider pairing nonfiction resources such as magazine articles and websites with fiction books that students are already reading. Many authors offer digital components that supplement their books. Because the Common Core asks students to synthesize information in ways besides reading, this becomes an opportunity for librarians to incorporate additional types of media into lessons and resources lists including podcasts and infographics.

Under the umbrella of presentation, Lamb and Johnson share that teachers can integrate videos or interactive graphics to help keep students’ attention. In addition, librarians can look for opportunities to create transmedia experiences where participants transition through multiple technologies in a seamless manner. These occasions more closely mimic real-world scenarios where individuals incorporate multiple technologies into both the research process and the communication of information.

Technology also allows for the creation of a social element where students interact and share their ideas with other classmates within the presentation stage (Lamb and Johnson 63). For example, with the appropriate instruction, online discussion boards allow students to collaborate and share knowledge and alternative viewpoints with their classmates. This type of discussion board also promotes academic conversations. It provides another venue for students to use written communication and help improve verbal communication skills within the classroom setting (Tucker 34). While verbal discussions allow for some students to respond, student personalities often play a part in who is heard and who is overlooked. In verbal discussion boards all students have an equal opportunity to share their ideas and comments.
Perhaps the most obvious area for technology integration comes during Lamb and Johnson’s product phase. Instead of writing the traditional report about their findings, students have a myriad of technological options at their fingertips. Many online tools are available including sites that create comics, maps, and digital avatars that will read a student’s words (Lamb and Johnson 64).

Although creating a final product by using technology may seem like an obvious choice, Fontichiaro urges teachers and librarians to use more technology during the learning process in lieu of creating a final product. She believes that the learning also occurs during the research portion of the project and educators sometimes place a disproportional emphasis on the creation of a final product (Fontichiaro). Loertscher and Marcoux also encourage teachers to use technology to create smaller projects instead of class oral presentations. By compiling each individual student’s work online, students can view a selection of presentations by their classmates without taking the time for every student to present to the class (14).

The final component in Lamb and Johnson’s five steps is to use technology to promote passion. The Common Core standards encourage literacy in all of its many forms. Similarly, librarians want students to embrace learning both inside and outside of school. By making real-world connections, educators engage students’ brains and ignite their love of learning. One suggestion is to use cameras for students to record their own experiences and share their knowledge with others, both inside and outside of the classroom (Lamb and Johnson 66).

Incorporating technology into the reading and inquiry process helps students to demonstrate their knowledge of the standards and become engaged in the entire process.

The inclusion of technology also provides for the opportunity for differentiation (Lamb and Johnson 62). Students begin to have choice over their content. Instead of limiting students to topics available in their school libraries, the incorporation of technology allows both students
and teachers the potential to access a much wider array of information. In addition, the use of technology provides teachers with an easy way to find resources that are accessible to students at a variety of reading or skill levels.

**The Connection Between Inquiry and Nonfiction**

As adults, nonfiction texts are used on a daily basis to answer authentic questions and solve real-world problems. In order to find the information they seek, adults use research skills to access the material that will contain their answers and determine how to read the material. However, as Loertscher and Marcoux point out, state testing over the past decade has forced teachers to abandon authentic problem-based learning and replace it with content knowledge that will be covered on the test (Loertscher and Marcoux 12). This culture of over-testing has created a society where inside the classroom, teachers only ask questions to which they already know the answers; and it is only outside of school that students are asking authentic questions (Harvey 15). Teachers are not sure what to do with nonfiction anymore (Palmer and Stewart 426). Instead of teaching students to use nonfiction resources to find specific, pre-determined answers, students’ authentic questions could be the basis for the instruction of research skills. This allows students to use a questioning and research process instead of simply transferring information from a nonfiction resource to a worksheet. Students do not benefit from knowing how to research if they are never given enough time to actually process and evaluate the information they find (Morris 11). Teachers and librarians cannot keep teaching research skills in isolation from questioning skills. Instead, focusing instruction on the real-world inquiry process of asking questions, searching for answers, evaluating resources, and drawing conclusions helps students develop skills they will use throughout their lives.
Nonfiction and the Inquiry Process

The heavy emphasis on test scores has helped create a culture of teachers who are unsure of how to make time for nonfiction and authentic questioning. On a daily basis, students ask questions that teachers are unable to answer because of time constraints and prescribed curriculum (Ness). The introduction of the Common Core State Standards has provided a new reason to revive the teaching of inquiry skills, but many teachers are unsure of how to proceed. Cathy Tower documented her own struggles with the inquiry process as an elementary classroom teacher. Although she was excited about the inquiry process and about allowing students to explore the world around them, she struggled with implementation. Tower assumed that her students would enter her classroom with the basic ability to read, understand, and interpret nonfiction texts (551). However, she found that her students did not have enough background knowledge about any topic to even develop quality research questions. Students were quick to ask basic questions that could be answered using any nonfiction source. Tower had to teach her students that if a question could be answered in one book or article, they were thinking too small. As the process continued, Tower noticed that her students were unable to use nonfiction texts efficiently. She had to stop the momentum of her instruction to go back and teach students how to use text features such as glossaries and indexes to quickly find information. Not all of her students knew that nonfiction texts are not meant to be read from cover to cover (Tower 553).

In order to have success with nonfiction texts, students must be able to filter and classify the information they are taking in. Hess found that her students had the most success when they began by sorting their questions into similar categories. Then, students were able to create their own headings and increase their likelihood of finding similar headings in the text that would point them toward the information they were seeking. Using headings in this way helped keep students from reading unnecessary information (Hess 230).
Palmer and Stewart point out that students in primary grades need to have experience conducting investigations before they are ready for true inquiry. They argue that younger students need some experience doing fact-finding assignments so they build those basic research skills (428). In primary grades, teacher-developed questions help students focus and guide their reading. However, in intermediate grades, searching for answers to teacher-developed questions becomes a way for students to shut off their brains and begin simply regurgitating information (Palmer and Stewart 432). Instead of reading text because of an authentic desire for information and understanding, teacher-constructed questions provide students with key words that they use to skim through the text. Little understanding is gained because students are only copying the information they see. Fontichiaro explains that this problem is often exposed when teachers begin questioning students about their research. Teachers find that students have used vocabulary that they do not understand and that students are able to repeat what they have read, but not express it in any way that shows comprehension (Fontichiaro). Having experienced teachers and librarians lead students through the inquiry process helps prevent these common pitfalls.

**Librarians as Instructional Coaches for Inquiry**

Tower’s struggle with inquiry from a teacher’s perspective draws attention to the unique skill sets that library media specialists provide. Teachers say that they struggle to teach informational text because of a myriad of reasons: the vocabulary is too difficult, students lack necessary background knowledge, the text structure is unfamiliar, there is not enough time, there are not enough resources, the curriculum is limiting, and students are not interested (Ness 31). In many instances, the excuses seem to outweigh the benefits, and the skills needed to read and use informational text are put off for another school year. However, Kristin Fontichiaro argues that this becomes the place for librarians to enter the picture. School librarians not only devote their
time to teaching these skills to students, they also structure their resources in such a way that teachers benefit as well.

Librarians provide professional development opportunities for teachers showcasing research skills, the inquiry process, and resource evaluation. “By sharing excitement about the reading part of research and of course by designing instruction that supports it, librarians can motivate students to interact more purposefully and deeply with information” (Morris 11). Librarians show teachers where they can seamlessly integrate this instruction into what they are already teaching. While teachers may be initially overwhelmed by this increase in nonfiction text, the intervention of librarians reminds teachers how many of these standards are already being covered. By taking the time to train teachers, librarians empower them to create more authentic learning environments that boost critical thinking and support the Common Core Standards (Fontichiaro). When school librarians are comfortable with the standards, they remind school principals and teachers of how these skills are already being taught and supported in the library (Morris 11).

**Promoting Nonfiction**

As the Common Core State Standards become fully integrated in curriculum across the country, it will become necessary for both teachers and librarians to find ways to increase the amount of nonfiction text that students are reading. Providing access to physical texts, access to digital texts and activities related to nonfiction, and activities that require inquiry, nonfiction materials might also be directly promoted to students. There are several promotional options that have had success. Many researchers indicate the importance of using read-alouds with nonfiction texts to increase student exposure. Other studies show that that use of book talks and displays helps draw students’ attention to nonfiction literature (Vent and Ray 43). In order to ensure libraries are stocked with informational texts that students want to read, some librarians
have also expanded their readers’ advisory services to incorporate nonfiction titles (Alpert 30). Through readers’ advisory services, librarians are in regular contact with their patrons and are listening to patrons’ interests and needs. Studies also suggest that the creation of nonfiction book clubs could provide a new avenue for students to share and collaborate about nonfiction (Heller 364).

The Use of Read-Alouds with Nonfiction Text

One powerful way that librarians support and encourage nonfiction reading is through the use of read-alouds. Reading text aloud to students provides several benefits. Not only does it expose students to varieties of text they may not choose on their own, it also allows teachers to model the thinking processes that good readers use as they discover new text. Sunday Cummins and Cate Stallmeyer-Gerard conducted a study to see how students could benefit when they read text aloud to students. They found that students were able to hear examples of what good reading sounds like, students were able to improve their comprehension, and teachers were able to help students build background knowledge about subject areas where students were lacking (Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard 400). As they read aloud to students, the teacher paused to emphasize text to text connections. They were also able to demonstrate self-monitoring behaviors as they shared their thinking with their students. Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard found that students began to incorporate details from their read-alouds into other aspects of their work (401). After students had spent two days participating in an interactive read-aloud about glaciers, several students incorporated facts that they remembered into their writing journals. Other students included labeled illustrations that demonstrated their understanding of the book’s subject matter. This transfer of knowledge highlights the power of thinking aloud with students. Overall, their study showed that using read-aloud and think-aloud strategies with students improved students’ abilities to synthesize information.
Besides the benefit of exposing students to new content areas with nonfiction read-alouds, this process also allows teachers the opportunity to model the various ways that a reader explores the many text features that tend to accompany nonfiction texts. In many real-world situations, nonfiction text is read out of sequence. Teachers can model this for students, showing them the many different ways that one learns about a topic of interest (Gill 266).

As more and more nonfiction titles offer a blend of fictional characters and accurate information, teachers can open conversations that discuss with students which aspects are true and which are fictional (Gill 264). *The Magic School Bus* series is a classic example of this. Although the teacher, class, and incredible magic bus of this series are all very much fictional, the scientific concepts presented to students are remarkably accurate. These books provide talking points for teachers to discuss with students where the factual information ends and when the fictional story begins (Gill 264).

However, every nonfiction book is not suitable for a read-aloud. Stephanie Harvey suggests that teachers choose read-aloud books based on their content, text features, and writing quality. She emphasizes that books need to be accurate, but that they also need to be well-written in order to engage students and pique their curiosity (20). Barbara Moss suggests that read-aloud books meet her five criteria: authority of author, accuracy of text content, appropriateness of book for kids, literary artistry, and appearance of book (Moss “Using” 123). She argues that teachers got away from using nonfiction text as read-alouds because the books were not engaging and the literature was not of a very high quality. However, she points out that using quality books has a multitude of benefits, including connecting to the curriculum, providing additional background knowledge, exciting students about the learning process, and exposing students to a quality expository writing structure (Moss “Using” 124).
In the past, teachers would read informational text aloud to students because it was too difficult for the students to read themselves (Palmer and Stewart 426). Instead of challenging students to embrace the text features and succeed, teachers became quick to do the work for their students. However, today’s publishers are providing higher quality nonfiction for students at all reading levels. Read-alouds are just one way that teachers begin to transfer the power of reading nonfiction back to their students.

**Book Talks and Displays: Advertising Nonfiction**

Cheryl Vent and Julie Ray noticed that only 35% of their circulations were nonfiction titles, despite 85% of students reporting that they enjoyed reading nonfiction (42). In an effort to boost nonfiction circulation, Vent and Ray considered several strategies including book displays, book talks, book pairings, and a book pass. They tried a different strategy with each of four different fourth grade classes to see which provided the best result. For one class, they created displays using posters, newspapers, magazines, and books to help entice students to check out nonfiction titles. Included on their posters were quiz questions that they hoped would prompt students to want to find answers on their own (43). This strategy did increase nonfiction circulation, but the other strategies showed more dramatic results.

With a second class, they used book talks to explicitly introduce students to new nonfiction titles. Jane Charles provides several tips for successful book talks with students. She suggests that the more outrageous a text is, the more likely students are to engage with the presenter. She also suggests finding ways to connect with the audience including participatory questions or images from the titles being presented. Some nonfiction topics are so engaging that students will find it hard to believe that they are not fictional (Charles 12). Vent and Ray also experienced success with this method and managed to increase circulation by 50% (Vent and Ray 43).
The third group of students was presented with a selection of book pairings. Vent and Ray considered fiction titles that students had already read within their classroom and presented nonfiction books that would discuss similar themes or content areas. After four weeks, every student in this class had checked out at least one nonfiction item.

The final class participated in a book pass where students had the opportunity to spend a few minutes examining many different nonfiction titles. Each student was provided with one nonfiction book. After a few minutes, the book was passed on to the next student, allowing students to be exposed to a wide variety of materials in a relatively small time period. This group of students saw circulation increase from 35% to 65% after four weeks (44).

Overall, the results showed that students were expressing interest in a wider variety of nonfiction topics at the end of the study. In addition, nonfiction circulation increased at all grade levels during this time, even though the study was only explicitly conducted with fourth grade students (44). This suggests that the excitement of one grade level may have the power to change how an entire school selects books.

**Readers’ Advisory Services**

Although readers’ advisory services are fairly common at public libraries, they tend to focus on fiction titles. However, as more authors have begun writing narrative nonfiction, libraries are able to expand their collections while paying attention to their patrons. Using similar techniques to the readers’ advisory strategies for finding fiction, libraries are helping readers to discover nonfiction titles and authors (Alpert 25).

Narrative or literary nonfiction combines the power of storytelling with journalistic facts and is a means to “expand the community” of nonfiction readers (Alpert 25). Fiction storytelling elements are used to make the story more engaging to the reader, but the story is grounded in historical fact, unlike historical fiction which may revolve around completely fictional characters.
and dialog. Although nonfiction is typically read with the purpose of gaining information, narrative nonfiction is read for enjoyment. Although people know to look for nonfiction books by subject, they are less likely to know how to find narrative nonfiction because they are less concerned with the topic and more concerned with the books’ themes or delivery methods (Alpert 28). Alpert found that library patrons enjoy reading narrative nonfiction because it combines the best of both genres.

The Use of Book Clubs to Promote Nonfiction

Besides whole-class read alouds, some teachers and librarians have had success using book clubs to promote and encourage nonfiction reading among their students. Mary Heller invited four first-grade girls to participate in a nonfiction book club. The club began by activating the girls’ prior knowledge so their reading could have something to build from. Then, students would participate in an active read-aloud event where all club members were talking about the story as they read. After the girls had finished reading the nonfiction selection, Heller would encourage reader-response time as she posed open-ended questions. Overall, Heller found that the use of nonfiction book clubs helped improve students’ oral language, reading, and writing skills (Heller 358). She also noted that the format of book clubs allows time for teachers to actively listen to children as they read and share, makes use of the social nature of children, and allows time for students to share their personal stories and connections in a way that whole-class instruction cannot (Heller 359).

Although Heller’s nonfiction book club was student-centered, Denise Morgan conducted a nonfiction book club specifically aimed at teachers. Morgan invited teachers in her building to participate in a book club where they would have the opportunity to read nonfiction books intended for their students. Morgan’s intention was that teachers would gain a greater exposure to the nonfiction titles available in the library and would gain confidence in their own ability to
recommend these titles to their students. Because many of the participants felt unfamiliar with the world of children’s nonfiction, all of the books were selected by Morgan. Although she was initially concerned that teachers would not engage in the process, she found that teachers made the same text-to-text and text-to-self connections that Morgan encouraged among her students. Through Morgan’s book club, teachers began to recognize that they did not have enough nonfiction text in their classroom libraries. They began incorporating more nonfiction texts into their classroom instruction, using more nonfiction titles for read-alouds, and began noticing that their students really did love nonfiction (Morgan 12). Teachers also reported that their own negative perceptions of nonfiction had changed as a result of the book club (Morgan 12). When teachers become more comfortable and familiar with nonfiction, they become more likely to embrace its use in their own classrooms.

Conclusion

The rigorous nature of the Common Core State Standards is going to demand that students, teachers, and librarians work together to integrate more nonfiction reading into the school day. Fortunately, the benefits of reading nonfiction texts on a regular basis help to ease this burden. There are a variety of technological resources available to help aid in this transition; and the skills students gain will not only help them while they are in school, but will also prepare students for the world that lies ahead. By utilizing the skills of library media specialists, teachers and students use the inquiry process to connect with nonfiction texts. Some possible strategies to increase the consumption of nonfiction text include relaxing circulation policies, offering professional development for teachers, using book talks to promote nonfiction books that are already in library collections, and supporting students through nonfiction book clubs.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has caused educators across the country to reconsider the amount of time they have students spend reading nonfiction text. In order to prepare students for college and their future careers, the CCSS call for students to be well-versed in the reading of nonfiction and its text features. Because this shift to informational texts places some teachers in unfamiliar territory, it becomes a natural place for school library media specialists to showcase their knowledge of this genre. The use of nonfiction book clubs is one way to promote the reading of nonfiction materials. Library media specialists can explore nonfiction texts with students in a non-threatening environment.

The purpose of this study was to explore how participation in a nonfiction book club could influence students to read more nonfiction. Students’ reading interests were studied before and after their involvement in the book club. Specifically, these research questions were addressed:

1. How does exposure to a variety of nonfiction texts affect students’ reading selections?
2. How does participation in a book club affect student attitudes toward nonfiction texts?
3. How does the use of nonfiction book clubs affect a teacher’s attitudes toward nonfiction instruction?

Participants

The book club took place in a suburban Midwestern school from August to October of 2013. A total of 22 third-grade students in a suburban school district in western Missouri were invited to participate in a nonfiction book club taking place during the school day. The building demographic data for 2013 showed a total enrollment of 649 students, 83.8% of whom are white, 6.2% Hispanic, and 3.4% African-American. The percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch is 29.7%. The school principal and the school district granted permission to
Nonfiction Book Clubs 27

conduct the nonfiction book club. A letter was sent home with students informing parents about the book club (Appendix A). Although the study was primarily designed by the library media specialist, the classroom teacher, who also signed a consent form (Appendix C), also reinforced skills taught during the book club within the regular classroom setting.

One third-grade class of 22 students was invited to participate in the book club. The parents or guardians of students in the class were given an informed consent form that included the number of weeks for the study and a statement of confidentiality. When parental permission was granted through the return of informed consent forms, students were provided with informed assent forms (Appendix B), which were explained to all students before signing. The assent form explained what would be expected from students and explained that they had the right to remove themselves from the study at any time.

Students and parents were notified through the informed consent and assent forms that all data collected would be kept secure and confidential. Contact information for the researcher, the researcher’s advisor, and the University of Central Missouri’s Human Subjects Review Board office was provided to both parents and students in the event that questions arose. Ten students returned consent and assent forms and were admitted to the nonfiction book club. This group of students contained five males and five females. Seven of the students were Caucasian, two students were African-American, and one student was Hispanic. Three students participating in the book club received free lunches and one student received reduced lunch prices.

The Treatment

A nonfiction book club was scheduled to meet formally on a weekly basis for six weeks in the afternoons for 45 minutes of the regular school day. The book club met in the library classroom and was facilitated by the school librarian, who is also the researcher. Students who chose not to participate in the study remained in their regular classroom for instruction from their
classroom teacher. Between weekly book club meetings, the classroom teacher agreed to allow students to discuss their reading with their fellow book club members. She also reinforced the skills taught during book club during regular reading lessons.

During book club meetings, students participated in a variety of activities including listening to nonfiction books that were read aloud, discussing their own personal book choices, reading books in small groups, and working with the library media specialist to select new materials of personal interest. Several of the books presented during the study included: *America’s Champion Swimmer: Gertrude Ederle* by David Adler; *Pop!: The Invention of Bubble Gum* by Meghan McCarthy; *Tillie the Terrible Swede: How One Woman, A Sewing Needle, and a Bicycle Changed History* by Sue Stauffacher; and *The Watcher: Jane Goodall’s Life with the Chimps* by Jeanette Winter.

The format of the book club was very informal, with students choosing to sit on the floor instead of in traditional desks or tables. Students were able to comment or ask questions as they had ideas instead of raising hands and following traditional classroom procedures.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Before the study began, students were asked to complete a survey using pencil and paper about their personal reading preferences. The directions of the survey were explained by the researcher and the questions were read aloud to students. Throughout the study, students (under supervision of the researcher) kept a record of all materials they chose to check out from the school library. In addition, the researcher took anecdotal notes during each book club meeting. Upon completion of the study, students were given a second survey using pencil and paper to determine if any of their attitudes toward nonfiction texts had changed. The survey was read aloud to students by the researcher and she answered any questions that arose. In addition, the third grade teacher was interviewed before the book club started (Appendix G) and after
(Appendix H) it concluded to see if any of her own attitudes toward teaching nonfiction texts had changed as a result of the study.

**Data Analysis**

Upon completion of the personal reading preference survey, the researcher tallied the results and compiled them into a table format to look for any trends. This information was used to inform the instruction during the book club. Throughout the study, the researcher compiled the data from student reading logs into a table to determine if students changed their ratios of fiction to nonfiction books. Upon completion of the study, students’ responses during the post-survey were compared to their previous responses. Student information was coded so conclusions could be drawn from the interest inventory, library checkouts, and the post-survey. Responses from the teacher interviews conducted prior to and following the study were compared to look for changes. These results are presented in Chapter Four: Findings.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine if nonfiction book clubs could be used as a method to promote nonfiction reading to students and increase nonfiction circulation. In order to determine the impact of the book club, students were given a reading interest survey prior to beginning the study. Students kept a log of the books they selected from the library throughout the study to determine if they changed their book selection habits. They were also given a survey following the completion of the study to determine if their attitudes had changed. The students’ teacher was interviewed prior to and following the study to see if she noticed any difference in students attitudes or behaviors in the classroom setting.

Results of the Student Reading Interest Survey

Before the book club began, students were given a Student Reading Interest Survey (Appendix E). The purpose of this survey was to determine students’ initial feelings about nonfiction texts and set a baseline for data collection. In this survey, nine out of ten students were able to correctly define nonfiction. The student who responded incorrectly wrote that nonfiction is “fictional text.” When asked to choose between reading fiction and nonfiction books, 9 out of 10 students responded that they would rather read nonfiction text. The chart below indicates that when asked how frequently students liked to read fiction or nonfiction text, the participants indicated they prefer reading nonfiction more frequently than they prefer reading fiction.
Students were also asked if they had ever recommended a book to another student. Six students indicated they had recommended a book to a friend. When specifically asked if they had previously recommended a nonfiction book to a friend, only four of ten students answered yes.

The survey also asked students about their feelings while reading nonfiction. Given the options bored, indifferent, or excited, one student reported feeling indifferent toward nonfiction while all nine other students answered that reading nonfiction makes them feel excited. The final question on the pre-research survey asked students if they enjoyed talking about books with other people. The graph below displays the following information: One student indicated that he or she never enjoyed talking about books with others. Six students indicated that they sometimes enjoyed it. Two students said they enjoy it most of the time, and one student reported enjoying conversation about books with other students all of the time.
Prior to the book club, the cooperating classroom teacher was interviewed to determine her attitudes and perceptions regarding the teaching of nonfiction. This teacher has spent nine years in the classroom setting and over time has observed that her male students tend to prefer reading nonfiction. In addition, she prefers teaching nonfiction to teaching fiction because, “It just seems more pertinent to what they will read for the rest of their lives.” Furthermore, she says that nonfiction “ties in so nicely with bundled units because it allows me to more easily teach science and social studies topics during reading and writing workshop, thus making everything tie in much better and helping students make connections with reading, writing, etc.”

When asked about the common reasons she sees students struggle with nonfiction texts, she indicated that many of the problems students have are related to the variance in text features between fiction and nonfiction. The primary strategy she has used to try to increase the amount of nonfiction her students read is that she has established the requirement that students maintain
“a 50/50 balance in the book box and depending on the mini lesson of the day, I may ask them to pull and read a fiction or nonfiction book.”

**Results of the Student Reading Post Survey**

Following the book club, students completed a post survey similar to their Reading Interest Survey (Appendix F). In the post book club survey, all ten students were able to correctly define nonfiction. Many of the definitions the students wrote included the words “true stories” or “true facts.” When students were asked if they preferred fiction or nonfiction text, two students responded that they prefer reading fiction text while eight students indicated they prefer nonfiction text. This shows a one student shift toward fiction from the pre-study survey.

When participants were asked how frequently they enjoyed reading fiction and nonfiction text, their responses were as seen in the following charts:

![Fiction Enjoyment Before and After Book Club](Figure 3)
Following the book club, students were asked if they had recommended a book to a friend. Seven of ten participants answered that they had recommended a book to a friend, showing a one student increase from the pre-research survey. When specifically asked about recommending nonfiction books to friends, eight students indicated in the post-research survey that they had recommended a nonfiction book to a friend. This shows a four-student increase from the responses prior to the book club. When asked about their feelings while reading nonfiction, three students indicated they felt indifferent toward nonfiction and seven indicated they felt excited. This showed a two student decline from the number of students who indicated they were excited while reading nonfiction prior to the study.

Students were also asked if they enjoyed talking about books with other students. These responses showed an increase in the number of students who enjoyed talking about books all of the time following the book club. Results can be seen below:
When students were asked if they enjoyed participating in the nonfiction book club, nine out of ten students indicated that they enjoyed participating all of time, while one student indicated they enjoyed participating most of the time.

The final question in the survey following the nonfiction book club asked students to describe what they enjoyed most about book club in their own words. While student responses varied, five of the ten students indicated in some manner that what they enjoyed most about book club was the opportunity to talk with other students about the books they were reading. Three students indicated that they enjoyed reading the same book as their classmates and having portions of that book read aloud to them by the facilitator. One student wrote, “I learned to be a more fluent reader by reading out loud (sic) in groups.”

As a follow-up question, students were asked to indicate how the nonfiction book club was different from what they experienced in their regular classroom lessons, which use the Readers Workshop model. Four students wrote that book club allowed them to talk with their
fellow students about the books they are reading and that they did not typically have that experience within the classroom. Four students also wrote that book club provided students with the opportunity to read the same book in a small-group setting. Students described that in class, they read books individually or occasionally with a partner.

Results of the Classroom Teacher Interview Following the Study

Following the nonfiction book club, the student’s classroom teacher was interviewed a second time to see if she noticed any changes in her students as a result of the book club. During the interview, she indicated that, “When I asked them to pull and use a nonfiction book from their book box during our independent reading time, they were all more than willing to do so and had books in their boxes already. In general, there was much more nonfiction reading during conferring times. Also, many of the students needed to go to the library multiple times during the week as they finished their books.”

One of the primary successes she noticed was that, “The kids loved it! They were excited to not only read nonfiction, but to also share out facts they were finding on the topics they were interested in.” She added that although she always enjoys teaching nonfiction, it was nice to have students as excited to read it as she was to teach it. The classroom teacher was unable to find any downfall to nonfiction book clubs other than that she had wished all of her students had been able to participate.

When asked specifically about changes in the attitudes of any of her students, the classroom teacher said that, “A couple of them seemed much more engaged during independent reading time when they were reading nonfiction books. I think some of them had interests, but just hadn’t been previously pushed or encouraged enough with nonfiction. Book club allowed them to have extra help exploring their interests and finding those books in the library.”
Overall, the classroom teacher indicated that nonfiction book clubs were a very positive experience for her students. She was so pleased with the results that she planned to begin incorporating nonfiction book clubs into her classroom during the school day with several of her advanced students.

**Results from the Reading Log**

Student participants were asked to log the library books they checked out each week and to track whether the books were fiction or nonfiction. Prior to the study, the classroom teacher required students to maintain an equal distribution of fiction and nonfiction texts in their book boxes. During the first book club meeting, student book logs were distributed and students were told they could begin checking out any ratio of books they wanted. After one week, student logs showed an average of 57% of self-selected books were nonfiction. Throughout the following meetings, the average number of nonfiction books selected by each student rose to a high of 84% nonfiction during week five of the study. Week six of the study showed a decrease to 68% nonfiction circulation in the library, but this corresponded with the classroom teacher’s introduction of a new fiction unit and request that students have at least one example of fictional text in their book boxes. The overall trend during the study is on the graph below.
Several students commented that they had discovered new areas within the nonfiction section of the library and were excited by many of the books they found. One student responded, “I learned that I am interested in World War II. I had only ever read spider books before.”

**Summary**

In summary, this study examined the relationship between participation in a nonfiction book club and students’ attitudes toward nonfiction text. Ten third-grade students in a suburban Midwestern school participated in a six week nonfiction book club facilitated by the school’s librarian. Students were given written surveys prior to and upon completion of the study to determine any changes in opinions over time. In addition, the students’ classroom teacher was interviewed to see if the book club had any carry-over effects into the regular classroom setting. The results of the study indicated that participation in the nonfiction book club led to an increased enjoyment of reading nonfiction text. In addition, it led to an increased number of
nonfiction books self-selected by students during their library checkout time. According the classroom teacher, students participating in the study were more willing to read nonfiction texts during class and were more engaged in the activities she led throughout the week. She also noted that these students made an increased number of trips to the library each week as they finished reading their books and sought out new materials.
The purpose of this study was to determine if participation in nonfiction book clubs could improve student attitudes toward nonfiction text and increase the number of nonfiction texts that students selected from the library. Based on the findings in chapter four, the following research questions were answered:

1. How does exposure to a variety of nonfiction texts affect students’ reading selections?
2. How does participation in a book club affect student attitudes toward nonfiction texts?
3. How does the use of nonfiction book clubs affect a teacher’s attitudes toward nonfiction instruction?

**Exposure to Texts Increases Students’ Nonfiction Circulation**

Successful promotion of nonfiction titles introduces students to new nonfiction books and helps connect students with new areas of interest. Research shows that using techniques such as read-alouds to promote nonfiction helps introduce students to subjects with which they may otherwise not come in contact (Cummins and Stallmeyer-Gerard 400). In addition, book talks are another method that library media specialists can use to help increase nonfiction circulation (Vent and Ray 43). The results of this research study show that by exposing students to a variety of nonfiction books through book club meetings, students increased the amount of nonfiction they selected from 50% of their library checkouts to a high of 84% of their checkouts. Exposure to new and varied formats of nonfiction text sparked new curiosities in some students.

**Book Clubs Promote Positive Attitudes toward Nonfiction**

Participation in a nonfiction book clubs increases students’ enjoyment of nonfiction. The participatory nature of a book club helps students engage in meaningful dialogue about text and
allows students to connect with their peers in new ways. Heller’s study using nonfiction book clubs shows that their format allows time for teachers to actively listen to children as they read and share, makes use of the social nature of children, and allows time for students to share their personal stories and connections in a way that whole-class instruction cannot (359). These findings are supported by the results of this study where 90% of student participants stated they enjoyed the book club all of the time; the remaining student indicated he or she enjoyed book club “most of the time.” In addition, four students indicated they enjoyed reading nonfiction “most of the time” and five others indicated they enjoyed reading nonfiction “all of the time.”

When asked to describe what they enjoyed most about the study, five of the students mentioned that they enjoyed the interactive nature of the book club and the opportunity to discuss books with their peers. Three students mentioned that they enjoyed participating in read-alouds. Four students indicated that they enjoyed being in a small group setting, away from their regular classroom.

**Book Clubs Promote Positive Feelings toward Nonfiction Instruction**

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards has called for an increase in the amount of nonfiction texts teachers should be using. This has led to frustration among some teachers as they try to raise the level of rigor in their classrooms (Tower 551). Fontichiaro mentioned that this is an area where the expertise of the librarian helps ease the burdens of the classroom teacher. Although the classroom teacher participating in this study indicated that she enjoyed teaching nonfiction prior to the study, she shared that the use of nonfiction book clubs helped her students to become as excited as she was. The students’ positive feelings about the materials they were reading in book club transferred to the lessons she was teaching as a part of her classroom curriculum. Students in her classroom who had participated in the book club expressed such positive feelings about it that she planned to create a similar book club in her
classroom. Seeing students enjoy their reading through participation in a book club helps teachers enjoy teaching with nonfiction texts.

**Conclusion**

Because of the need for students to be able to read and understand a variety of nonfiction texts, it is the responsibility of educators to ensure that students are exposed to these texts in a way that is engaging and interactive. The use of nonfiction book clubs allows students to interact not only with a variety of exciting, dynamic texts, but also with their classmates who add a new dimension to the process. Students enjoy interacting with one another, and nonfiction book clubs allow students to do so in a positive way that reinforces skills being taught in the regular classroom. Nonfiction book clubs expose students to new ideas, thought processes, and interests. Collaboration between the classroom teacher and school librarian allows students the opportunity to explore their own individual interests and passions outside of the classroom walls, while drawing upon each educator’s area of expertise.
WORKS CITED


Appendix A

Using Book Clubs to Increase Nonfiction Reading

PARENT/ GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Identification of Researcher: This research is being done by Megan Bright, a graduate student in the Library Science and Information Services Program at the University of Central Missouri.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to find out if participation in a nonfiction book club will increase a student’s likelihood to read nonfiction texts.

Request for Participation: I am inviting your student to participate in a study on nonfiction book clubs and reading attitudes. It is up to you and your student whether you would like to participate. If your student decides not to participate, he or she will not be penalized in any way. You or your student can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If your student does not wish to answer any of the questions, your student may simply skip them. You may withdraw your student’s data at the end of the study.

Description of Research Method: This study involves weekly participation in a book club for six weeks. Students will complete a short survey using pencil and paper at the beginning of the study to gauge their attitudes toward nonfiction texts. The survey questions will be read aloud to your student. During the study, your student will complete a log of the materials he or she checks out from the library. Upon completion of the book club, your student will complete a second survey to determine if attitudes toward nonfiction texts have changed. The book club will occur during approximately 45 minute sessions once per week, during the school day.

Privacy: All of the information I collect will be confidential. No identifying information will be used in the findings of my study and all data collected will be kept secure until the completion of the study, upon which time it will be destroyed. In my research, I will use a pseudonym for our school so my research will not be connected with this building.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday classroom instruction. Any medical treatments provided if an injury occurs will be at the expense of the participant, in accordance with school policy.

Explanation of Benefits: Your student will benefit from participating in this study by getting exposure to an increased variety of nonfiction texts and reading strategies. Students may also enjoy discussing books with other students in a setting outside of the regular classroom.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact me. I can be reached at mbright@liberty.k12.mo.us or at (816) 736-7128. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4621.
If you would like for your student to participate in this program, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep.

I have read this letter and agree to participate.

My student’s name: _______________________________

Parent Signature: _____________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
Appendix B

Using Book Clubs to Increase Nonfiction Reading

Student Assent Form

**Researcher and Research Topic:** My name is Megan Bright. I am trying to learn about using book clubs because I would like to find ways to get students to read more nonfiction books. If you would like, you can be in my study.

**What will happen in this Research?** If you decide you want to be in my study, you will join a book club taught by either myself or your classroom teacher one day a week during the school day to participate in a nonfiction book club. Before our book club begins, you will complete a survey using pencil and paper to tell me how you choose which materials you check out from the library. I will read the survey aloud to you. During our book club, we will read nonfiction books together and talk about what we are reading. You will also keep track of what library materials you check out each week. When our book club ends, you will take another survey to see what you thought about participating in the book club.

**What are the good and bad things that come from you being in the research study?** If you choose to participate in this book club, you will have the chance to read a variety of nonfiction books with other students in a small group setting. You may find new types of books that you enjoy reading. You may also enjoy spending time with your classmates talking about books. Some of the books that we read may be challenging. There may be times when you will disagree with the opinions of your classmates.

**I will not share your personal information:** I will put things I learn about you together with information I learn about the other students in our club, so no one will be able to tell what things came from you. When I tell other people about my research, I will not use your name, so no one will be able to tell who I am talking about. I will also use a pretend name for our school, so no one will be able to tell which building I am talking about.

**Parent/Guardian Approval:** Your parents or guardians have to say it’s OK for you to be in the study. After they decide, you get to choose if you want to do it, too. If you don’t want to be in the study, no one will be mad or upset with you. If you want to be in the study now and change your mind later, that’s OK. You can stop at any time.

**Researcher Contact Information:** My telephone number is (816) 736-7128. You can call me if you have questions about the study or if you decide you don’t want to be in the study any more. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4621.

I will give you a copy of this form in case you want to ask questions later.

**Agreement**

I have decided to be in the study even though I know that I don’t have to do it. Megan Bright has answered all my questions and I know that I can stop being in the study at any time.
Appendix C

Using Book Clubs to Increase Nonfiction Reading

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Identification of Researcher: This research is being done by Megan Bright, a graduate student in the Library Science and Information Services Program at the University of Central Missouri.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to find out if participation in a nonfiction book club will increase a student’s likelihood to read nonfiction texts.

Request for Participation: I am inviting you to participate in a study on nonfiction book clubs and reading attitudes. It is up to you whether you would like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions, you may simply skip them. You may withdraw your data at the end of the study.

Description of Research Method: This study involves weekly participation in a book club for six weeks. Before the study begins, you will be interviewed to determine your attitudes toward nonfiction and book clubs. During the study, you will lead a book club of approximately 12 students through the study of several nonfiction texts. You will also help students keep reading logs of the materials they check out from the library. Upon completion of the book club, you will be interviewed by the researcher to determine if attitudes toward teaching nonfiction texts have changed. The book club will occur during approximately 45 minute sessions once per week, during the school day.

Privacy: All of the information I collect will be confidential. No identifying information will be used in the findings of my study and all data collected will be kept secure until the completion of the study, upon which time it will be destroyed. In my research, the school will be referred to by a pseudonym.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday classroom instruction. Any medical treatments provided if an injury occurs will be at the expense of the participant, in accordance with school policy.

Explanation of Benefits: You will benefit from participating in this study by getting exposure to an increased variety of nonfiction texts and reading strategies.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact me. I can be reached at mbright@liberty.k12.mo.us or at (816) 736-7128. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4621.
If you would like to participate in this program, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep.

I have read this letter and agree to participate.

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
4/30/2013

Megan Bright
mlb73540@ucmo.edu

Dear Megan Bright,

Your research project, 'The Effects of Nonfiction Book Clubs on Elementary School Students', was approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee on 4/30/2013. This approval is valid through 4/30/2014. Your informed consent is also approved until 4/30/2014.

Please note that you are required to notify the committee in writing of any changes in your research project and that you may not implement changes without prior approval of the committee. You must also notify the committee in writing of any change in the nature or the status of the risks of participating in this research project.

Should any adverse events occur in the course of your research (such as harm to a research participant), you must notify the committee in writing immediately. In the case of any adverse event, you are required to stop the research immediately unless stopping the research would cause more harm to the participants than continuing with it.

At the conclusion of your project, you will need to submit a completed Project Status Form to this office. You must also submit the Project Status Form if you wish to continue your research project beyond its initial expiration date.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the number above.

Sincerely,

Janice Putnam Ph.D., RN
Associate Dean of The Graduate School
putnam@ucmo.edu
Appendix E

Student Reading Interest Survey

1. In your own words, what is nonfiction?

2. If you had to choose between fiction books and nonfiction books, which would you choose?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All of the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Do you enjoy reading fiction books?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. Do you enjoy reading nonfiction books?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Have you ever recommended a book to a friend?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. Have you ever recommended a nonfiction book to a friend?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. Which word best describes your feelings when reading nonfiction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bored</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Excited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. Do you enjoy talking about books with other people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix F

Student Reading Post Survey

1. In your own words, what is nonfiction?

2. If you had to choose between fiction books and nonfiction books, which would you choose?
   
   Fiction               Nonfiction

3. Do you enjoy reading fiction books?
   
   Never      Sometimes      Most of the time      All of the time

4. Do you enjoy reading nonfiction books?
   
   Never      Sometimes      Most of the time      All of the time

5. Have you ever recommended a book to a friend?
   
   Yes          No

6. Have you ever recommended a nonfiction book to a friend?
   
   Yes          No

7. Which word best describes your feelings when reading nonfiction?
   
   Bored          Indifferent          Excited

8. Do you enjoy talking about books with other people?
   
   Never      Sometimes      Most of the time      All of the time

9. Did you enjoy participating in the book club?
   
   Never      Sometimes      Most of the time      All of the time

10. What did you enjoy most about the book club?
Appendix G

Classroom Teacher Interview Questions - Pre-Study

1. How many years have you been a classroom teacher?
2. In your opinion, how do your students feel about nonfiction texts?
3. As a teacher, do you prefer teaching fiction texts or nonfiction texts? Why?
4. Do you feel students prefer fiction texts or nonfiction texts?
5. Do you feel the amount of nonfiction text your students read is appropriate to meet the expectation of the Common Core State Standards?
6. What are some common reasons that you see students struggle with nonfiction texts?
7. Have you tried any strategies to increase the amount of nonfiction your students read? If so, please explain.
8. Have you ever led students in participation of a nonfiction book club before?
Appendix H

Classroom Teacher Interview Questions - Post- Study

1. How effective do you feel the nonfiction book clubs was toward increasing the amount of nonfiction your students read?

2. Can you elaborate on any successes of the book club?

3. Were there any downfalls of the book club?

4. Did you notice any changes in the attitudes of your students as a result of the nonfiction book club? If so, please explain.

5. Did you notice any changes in your attitudes toward teaching nonfiction as a result of the nonfiction book club? If so, please explain.

6. How likely do you think you would be to use nonfiction book clubs within your classroom as a result of this study?

7. Is there any other information about your participation in the book club that you feel I should be aware of?