

Developing and Communicating Expertise: Informational Genres

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A Note About the Term “Informational Text”

The Common Core State Standards uses
the term much more broadly than I
have. They place biography,
procedural text, and persuasive text,
among many other genres, under
“informational.”



The Purpose of Informational Text

- Informational texts are written for the primary purpose of conveying information about the natural or social world to a person or people who want or need to know that information.
 - Informational texts are read for the primary purpose of obtaining information one wants or needs to know.
 - Informational texts are written by someone who knows the information to be read by someone who does not.

(Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006/2007; Duke, Caughlan, Juzwik, & Martin, 2012).

Principle 1: Design Compelling, Communicatively Meaningful Environments.

The Zoo Guide Project

Credit to Kathryn Roberts for
curriculum development



Principle 2: Provide exposure and experience.

- We have to provide exposure to and experience with the specific genres of text we want students to be able to read and write.
 - (e.g., Duke & Kays, 1998; Kamberelis, 1999; Park, 2008)
- Model texts are powerful tools in developing speaking and writing.
 - (Dean, 2008; Dressel, 1990; Hillocks, 2007)
- Modeling comprehension processes through think-alouds appears to be a powerful tool for developing comprehension.
 - (Kucan & Beck, 1997)



Principle 2: Provide exposure and experience.

In the zoo guide project children:

- read letters from the head veterinarian at the zoo and sent her letters in return
- emailed questions to zoo personnel and interviewed them in person
- listened to presentations by zoo personnel
- listened to factual books that were read aloud to them
- observed animals and took notes or drew pictures of what they saw
- gathered information from books and websites about animals (with help from mentors).

(Duke, Caughlan, Juzwik, & Martin, 2012)



Informational Text Features

- Informational text (more narrowly defined) often requires the reader to learn new information and integrate that information with what is already known (e.g., Martin & Duke, 2011).
- Informational text is often read differently than some other kinds of text. For example, it is often read:
 - nonlinearly
 - selectively
 - at a varied pace

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Informational Text Features

- Researchers have identified a number of common features of informational texts for young children, including:
 - Structural features
 - Language features
 - Graphical features
 - Navigational features
- (Duke & Kays, 1998; Pappas, 2006; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007)

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Principle 3: Explicitly teach genre features.

- Explicitly teaching these features is not necessarily effective (Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007).
- Decisions about what to teach when should be informed by:
 - Students' own writing
 - The needs of the audience
 - State or national standards



Principle 4: Explicitly teach genre-specific or genre-sensitive strategies.

Features appropriate for informational text reading include:

- Previewing
- Skimming and scanning
- Searching
- Monitoring, clarifying, fixing-up
- Activating background knowledge



Principle 4: Explicitly teach genre-specific or genre-sensitive strategies.

- Predicting (what the author will tell you next, not what will happen next)
- Visualizing
- Visually representing (e.g., using graphic organizers, drawing, role-playing)
- Inferring
- Questioning
- Summarizing (as you read and at the conclusion of reading)



Principle 4: Explicitly teach genre-specific or genre-sensitive strategies.

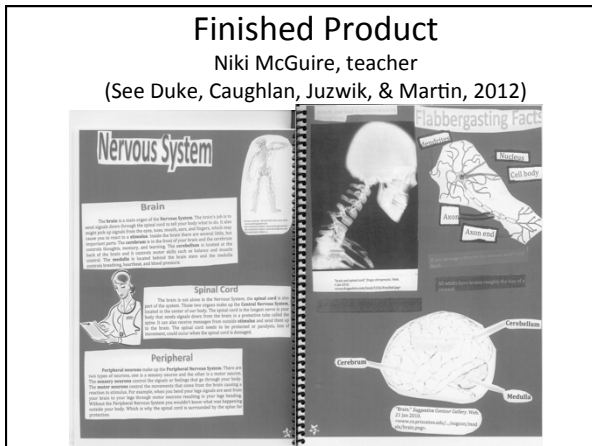
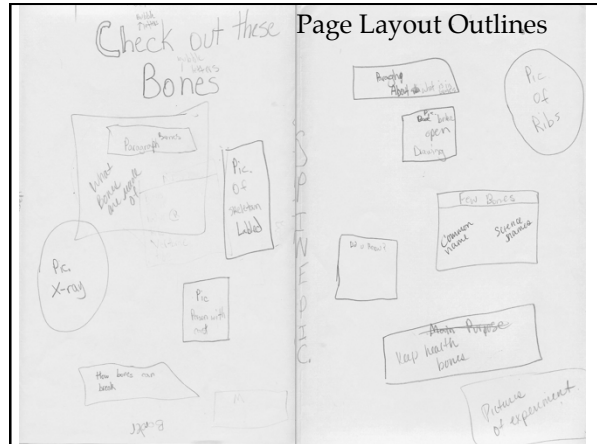
For writing I'll briefly discuss three strategies:

1. "the octopus approach"
2. page layout outlines
3. genre-specific revision prompts



The “Octopus Approach”

Informational author Stephen R. Swburne, as quoted in Robb (2004), explains:
 “I have what I call an “octopus” or “multi-armed” approach to research. I get in lots of field time [for observing]. I read books and magazines. I check references in the library. I surf the Internet. I telephone experts and scientists. I interview people. I rely on all these sources to give me a foundation of fact on my subject.” (p. 82)



Genre-specific Revision Prompts

For informational text:

- Does the text grab the reader’s attention?
- Does the text alert the reader to the topic?
- Does the text help the reader find the information she/he wants or needs to know?
- Does the text (sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph) present the information clearly?



Genre-specific Revision Prompts

- Does each graphic help the reader learn and understand? Are there additional graphics that would be helpful?
- Does the text, page by page, keep the reader's attention on the information?
- Do mechanical issues (sentence by sentence or in the text as a whole or both) get in the way of focusing on the information?



Principle 5: Offer ongoing coaching or feedback.

- Possible sources of feedback:
 - Teacher
 - Students within the classroom
 - Students from another classroom
 - Guest reviewers visiting the classroom
 - Guest reviewers reached electronically
- *Some feedback should come from an audience that very similar to the target audience.*



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