Inside Information
Developing Powerful Readers and Writers of Informational Text Through Project-Based Instruction

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Introduction to the Study Guide

Thank you for taking an important step in your professional development—joining colleagues in a professional learning community or study group (referred to in this guide as a “PLC”) to explore leading-edge thinking in the field of education. This guide will help you understand and apply to your teaching the information and ideas presented in Nell K. Duke’s Inside Information: Developing Powerful Readers and Writers of Informational Text Through Project-Based Instruction.

This guide serves as a tool for a range of teams, both vertical (multi-grade) and horizontal (single grade), as well as teams with minimal or mixed levels of experience with project-based instruction.

Identifying Your Professional Learning Goals

Take a moment to consider your specific learning goals when it comes to planning and implementing informational reading and writing instruction. What are you finding success with right now? What are the particular challenges you and your colleagues face? What do you hope to learn from studying and working with Inside Information?

Using this guide along with Inside Information can support your PLC at any stage of learning, whether you are embarking on project-based instruction or deepening your work with this approach. The guide offers this overarching goal: to help you learn to effectively design and implement project-based units that meet the particular strengths and needs of your students as readers and writers of informational texts.

THE BOOK STUDY: A TOOL FOR POWERFUL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

As your team discusses and applies new ideas from Inside Information, you’ll want to be sure you’re getting the most out of your time together. This guide incorporates the following research-supported ideas and structures for effective professional development:

• Professional collaboration: The guide supports teachers in regularly meeting and working together in a range of interactive learning communities (e.g., PLC teams formed around the same grade, subject, or school) to learn about using project-based instruction to develop students’ informational reading and writing skills.

• Ongoing professional learning: A series of meetings and opportunities to practice designing and implementing project-based instruction provides ongoing inquiry as the group reads and responds to Inside Information.
• **Clear learning goals:** Goals are established for the book study as a whole and for what participants will accomplish during each meeting.

• **Presentation of the why and the how:** Discussion prompts help the group understand the research behind using a project-based approach to develop informational reading and writing and the tenets of effective practice.

• **Standards alignment:** Planning activities can be used to align the PLC’s project-based work with school, district, and state expectations/standards related to informational reading and writing.

• **Implementation and reflection opportunities:** Designing and implementing one or more projects over the course of the reading provides team members opportunities to attempt and reflect on new practices, analyze student work, and deliver presentations to one another about new knowledge.

• **Observation and feedback:** The design of the meeting guides team members to observe and provide feedback to one another on lessons from any project-based unit they are implementing to improve reading and writing.

Note that the most effective professional development is multifaceted, reflecting all or many of the characteristics above. (For reviews and guidelines, see: Darling-Hammond, 2012; Desimone, 2011; Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, & Soloway, 1997; Roth et al., 2011; Wilson & Berne, 1999.)

**Making the Most of Your First Meeting—Goal Setting**

To come up with identifiable goals, you may want to list several sets: school goals, grade-level learning goals, and individual professional learning goals. Notice where the goals intersect. Aligning individual, PLC, and school goals has a cumulative effect that is likely to improve student achievement overall. As your group reviews proposed PLC goals, set measurable goals to monitor your progress. Aim to establish both short-term goals for each meeting and long-term goals for the duration of this year’s work in the PLC—and make a point of celebrating when goals are met. This sets expectations for success and cultivates a sense of accomplishment and resourcefulness, both for the PLC as a team and for the individual members.

As part of your planning, consider completing the Planning Template for Collaboration (Walpole and Najera, 2013), included on pages 184–185 of *Inside Information*. This organizer is well-suited to PLCs working on project-based instruction for developing informational reading and writing; it guides the PLC to focus on goals and measure whether the group’s plans are working.
Maximize Your Learning
With Information in Action

PLCs working with Nell K. Duke’s *Information in Action* have four model units per grade level to work with, as well as access to a professional learning video series with the author.

Try Out a Model Unit: Are you eager to try out a unit in your classroom right away—and learn as you go? The process of implementing these carefully-crafted model units will help you deepen your understanding of project-based instruction using informational texts—and prepare you to develop your own units targeting informational reading and writing down the road.

Attend a Virtual Workshop: Duke’s workshop-style videos complement the progression of chapters in *Inside Information* and show examples of effective practice from real classrooms—another key to successful professional learning!

Look for a suggested sequence for watching the videos in tandem with the implementation of a model unit in the Meeting Organizer on pages 8–12.

Access the videos and other online professional support materials at www.scholastic.com/InformationInAction. Follow the directions for setting up an account in the Open Me First envelope in your Information in Action kit or contact customer service at ScholasticCustomerSupport@scholastic.com or (888) 326-6546, Option 4.