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

Grades K–5
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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*.

Want to learn more about the author and find downloadable resources for *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

Information in Action is a professional development resource created by Nell K. Duke. In addition to the professional book, Inside Information, the resource includes more than 15 professional learning videos, access to online resources, and four model units per grade level. The model units are educative curriculum materials, meaning that they are designed not only to provide curriculum for students, but also to support your learning as a teacher; you learn by doing.

PLCs working with Information in Action can enhance their book study by watching the videos and trying out a model unit (or units) while reading and reflecting on Inside Information.

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!

Want to learn more? Go to www.scholastic.com/InformationInAction
Planning and Scheduling Your PLC Meetings

Consider where you’re starting: Is project-based instruction brand new to the team? Does someone on the team have more experience with the approach that the rest of the team can draw on?

For teams new to the approach, consider allotting more time to study *Inside Information*, as well as to plan and implement one or more project-based units focused on informational reading and writing. Keep in mind that this is not a passive read-and-respond exercise. You’ll get the most out of the experience by studying, observing, and/or implementing project-based units as you read. This will help you develop the skills needed to effectively teach informational reading and writing using a project-based approach.

Options for Applying What You’re Learning

PLC members might start by:

- Studying the book first and then starting to design and implement a unit or units.
- Supporting one teacher in implementing a “pilot” unit, while studying the book.
- Each implementing a grade-appropriate unit, following similar pacing, so that members can exchange information, ideas, and reflections on similar phases of the unit while they read the corresponding chapters of *Inside Information*.
- Implementing units in a staggered fashion, so that each member can be supported and provide support at different phases, while the group reads and rereads relevant parts of the book.

Setting a Meeting Schedule

We’ve prepared a Meeting Organizer that covers the material in *Inside Information* along with the suggested focus for the meeting (pages 8–11). You may want to combine or extend meetings to cover more or less material, depending on your goals and experience with project-based approaches.

If you decide to implement one or more units as you work with the book, consider your implementation schedule along with the meeting schedule you develop. Keep in mind the following:

- Many project-based units targeting informational reading and writing span approximately 15–20 sessions (or lessons). Sessions can be implemented flexibly—for example, on a daily or biweekly basis.
- Your implementation will lag behind your reading. Before beginning your first unit, read Chapters 1 to 4 of *Inside Information* to get a solid grounding in the theory and research behind project-based instruction, understand the five-part unit structure, and take an in-depth look at the first two phases (the Project Launch and Reading and Research). From there, read Chapter 5 before entering the Writing and Research phase, Chapter 6 before entering the Revision and Editing phase, and Chapter 7 before entering the Presentation and Celebration phase. Once you’re up and running, read Chapter 8 for ideas on how to make project-based instruction professionally manageable.

**SCHEDULING TIPS**

- For a quarter-year study, consider planning at least weekly meetings.
- For a half-year study, consider planning at least bimonthly meetings.
- For a full-year study, consider meeting several times during the first month to cover the material outlined in the first three meetings (page 8). Then meet at least on a monthly basis.
# Meeting Organizer

This section offers suggestions for a series of meetings that support your PLC in planning and implementing project-based units while you read and respond to *Inside Information*. It reflects the recommended pacing described in the scheduling section on the previous page. Clearly, your PLC will need to adjust the pacing and adapt the suggestions to meet your goals and timeframe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th><em>Inside Information</em> Chapter to Read</th>
<th>Meeting Activities (Pages listed in this column refer to the study guide.)</th>
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</table>
| 1       | Preface: The Rise of Informational Text, or Be Careful What You Wish For! (pages 6–10) | Reflect on your own instruction around informational reading and writing.  
Discuss Duke’s thinking about the current focus on informational reading and writing. (See prompts, page 12.)  
Set goals for your PLC and for the next meeting. Design a meeting schedule based on your groups’ goals and the timeframe you have. (Review suggestions for scheduling, page 7.) |
| 2       | Chapter One: The Power of Project-Based Instruction (pages 11–24) | Reflect on the variety of informational texts you’ve used this week.  
Discuss Chapter One, including the big ideas behind project-based instruction for reading and writing informational text. (See prompts, page 12.)  
Set goals for your next meeting. |

For PLCs implementing project-based units, the “Plan” prompts below can help you pace your implementation appropriately (see page 7 in this guide). Keep in mind that first responding to the book alone is a reasonable option for groups just getting started with project-based instruction. In this case, please return to the “Plan” prompts when you are ready to plan a unit.

| 3       | Chapter Two: Designing Project-Based Units to Teach Informational Reading and Writing (pages 25–58) | Reflect on any project-based learning you may have previously implemented.  
Discuss Chapter Two, including how to design an effective project-based unit focused on informational reading and writing. (See prompts, page 13.)  
Plan for the unit(s) PLC members will implement later in the book study. Generate ideas using information from Chapter Two and the Project-Based Unit Planning Template from Appendix A as a guide. (See also page 12 of this guide for a link to a digital version.) Be sure to consider the purpose, audience, and product of the unit, the five-phase structure, and the texts you might use in each phase.  
Set goals for your next meeting. |
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| 4       | Chapter Three: The Project Launch (pages 59–73) | Reflect on what it means to launch any big project successfully.  
Discuss Chapter Three, including the essentials of an effective Project Launch. (See prompts, page 13.)  
Plan the Project Launch, reviewing the purpose, audience, and product for the unit(s) the PLC has chosen to design.  
Set goals for the next meeting. |
| 5       | Chapter Four: The Reading and Research Phase (pages 74–118) | Reflect on ways you’ve taught reading and researching in the past.  
Discuss Chapter Four, including the essentials of an effective Reading and Research Phase. (See prompts, page 14.)  
Plan the Reading and Research Phase for the unit(s) the PLC is developing.  
Set goals for the next meeting. |
| 6       | Chapter Five: The Writing and Research Phase (pages 119–157) | Reflect on ways you’ve taught informational writing in the past and/or your current implementation of the Project Launch and Reading and Research phases, if applicable.  
Discuss Chapter Five, including the essentials of an effective Writing and Research phase. (See prompts, page 14.)  
Plan the Writing and Research phase for the unit(s) the PLC is developing.  
Set goals for the next meeting. |

**Tip:**  
Consider beginning to implement the unit(s) you may be planning after this session!
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| 7       | Chapter Six: The Revision and Editing Phase (pages 158–173) | **Reflect** on ways you’ve taught revision and editing in the past and/or the current implementation of the Writing and Research phase, if applicable.  
**Discuss** Chapter Six, including the essentials of an effective Revision and Editing Phase. (See prompts, page 15.)  
**Plan** the Revision and Editing phase for the unit(s) the PLC is developing.  
**Set goals** for the next session. |
| 8       | Chapter Seven: The Presentation and Celebration Phase (pages 174–179) | **Reflect** on how you have wrapped up writing projects or assignments in the past and/or the current implementation of the Revision and Editing phase, if applicable.  
**Discuss** Chapter Seven, including the essentials of the Presentation and Celebration phase. (See prompts, page 15.)  
**Plan** the Presentation and Celebration phase for the unit(s) the PLC is developing.  
**Set goals** for the next session. |
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| 9       | **Chapter Eight:** Making Project-Based Instruction Professionally Manageable (pages 180–186) | **Reflect** on how you’ve made other initiatives or innovations in your classroom professionally manageable in the past and/or the current implementation of the Presentation and Celebration phase, if applicable.  
**Discuss** Chapter Eight, including strategies and tools to make project-based instruction professionally manageable. (See prompts, page 15.)  
**Set goals** for the next meeting. |
| 10      | Taking Stock and Planning for Next Steps | **Reflect** on the success and challenges you have faced or you anticipate facing as you implement project-based instruction to develop informational reading and writing.  
**Discuss** what has worked well for your PLC and what changes you might make going forward. Celebrate the work you’ve done and all you’ve learned together!  
**Set goals** for ongoing learning about project-based instruction. For example, is each member ready to implement a model unit or additional model units—or begin planning a new unit collaboratively or on his or her own? How can the PLC support this work? |
Discussion Prompts for
Inside Information Chapters

Preface: The Rise of Informational Text, or
Be Careful What You Wish For! (pages 6–10)

✓ Discuss your students’ current attitudes toward informational text—
What digital or print texts have they responded to most positively this school year?

✓ Consider the text types listed on page 8. Which types do your students have the most access to and familiarity with in their reading (both self-selected and instructional)? Which might they need more help accessing? If you brought examples of informational texts to this session, consider using these as a jumping-off point.

✓ Draw on what you know so far about informational texts and project-based instruction. Discuss these two author claims:
  - “Nonfiction is not a genre” (page 9).
  - “[P]roject-based instruction is a great match for informational texts” (page 10).

Chapter One: The Power of Project-Based Instruction
(pages 11–24)

✓ What do you think are the most compelling arguments supporting project-based instruction? Use the points Duke makes on pages 11–18 and any of your own experiences and understandings of project-based instruction for the discussion.

✓ Consider the project-based unit structure Duke proposes on page 22 for projects using informational texts. How is this similar to and different from other units you may have planned or observed?*

✓ Duke suggests a three-part “session” structure on pages 23–24. How does this structure align with the way you currently organize lessons?*

✓ As Duke notes on pages 18–22, there are many ways project-based instruction can fit into the school schedule. What are some ways project-based instruction may fit into your schedule? (It may be helpful to refer to implementation calendars in your Teacher’s Guide on page 23.)

*You may want to use Duke’s Project-Based Planning Template (Appendix A) as a point of reference. (Downloadable forms of this template, including a version you can modify, are available at http://umich.edu/~nkduke/. Select “Inside Information…Downloadables” in the Publications dropdown menu.)
Chapter Two: Designing Project-Based Units to Teach Informational Reading and Writing (pages 25–58)

✓ Review the key instructional goals Duke recommends we consider when starting to plan a project-based unit focused on informational reading and writing. What are the key standards your school or district is trying to address?

✓ How does Duke suggest we approach identifying the genre(s) for a project?

✓ Discuss the importance Duke places on drawing on and developing students’ interests when planning the unit. Consider the interests and assets your students and their families have to offer that might be woven into a project-based unit. Could your team use any of Duke’s ideas for gathering more of this information (pages 34–36)?

✓ Review the sample project-based unit “Conserving a Local Ecosystem Proposal” in Appendix B. Respond to the following:

  • Project Launch: How does this session establish the purpose and audience for the project? How might these elements make the project meaningful to the students who participate?
  
  • Reading and Research: How do the sessions in this phase build necessary background knowledge and help students gather information for the project?
  
  • Writing and Research: Use the “Research Sandwich” image on page 46 to review the role of research throughout the writing process. How can research be included during the sessions in this phase?
  
  • Revision and Editing: Notice Duke’s emphasis on the importance of revision in students’ development as writers. Use the second pie chart on page 49 to consider the number of sessions recommended for this phase relative to what you might expect.
  
  • Presentation and Celebration: Think of ways a celebration might be closely tied to the project. What message might students take away if the celebration has nothing to do with the project?

Chapter Three: The Project Launch (pages 59–73)

✓ Review the “Tips for a Successful Launch” (pages 59–64). What stands out for you as key when planning for a project launch?

✓ Consider Duke’s example of the “Nickels for New Jersey” project launch (page 62). What lessons can be learned from this unsuccessful launch?

✓ Evaluate the sample Project Launch sessions (pages 66–67). What seems particularly compelling for the target age group? How do these plans increase the likelihood that all learners will be engaged?

✓ Discuss what you notice about the three-part session structure presented on pages 69–73 and reflect on ways your current lesson plans are similar and different.

✓ Which management tips in the three different parts do you think are the most important for you and your students? Are there any structures you may need to work on in advance of the Launch (e.g., teaching students to work in partners or small groups)?
Chapter Four: The Reading and Research Phase (pages 74–118)

✓ Discuss Duke's assertion that although “writing what you [already] know” might be advisable for many kinds of literary writing, for informational writing we work to learn more than we already know. How does the Reading and Research phase lay the foundation for students to write successfully for the project?

✓ The Reading and Research phase offers multiple opportunities to gather information from a variety of sources. Share ideas for supporting students in accessing and engaging with a range of print, video, and online texts.

✓ Research points to the importance of explicitly teaching comprehension strategies. Discuss how strategies can be taught as a means to an end, rather than as an end unto themselves.

✓ Consider the make-up of your class and the suggested targets for instruction during the Reading and Research phase (pages 76–93). What kinds of support do you currently provide students as they read informational texts? In what areas might you provide for more support? Share ideas with colleagues.

✓ Describe the gradual release of responsibility model (pages 98–100) in your own words. Share an example of instruction you’ve implemented or observed that reflects the model.

✓ Share your top three take-aways for how to teach in the Reading and Research phase. Look to the second half of the chapter (pages 98–118) for ideas that are new or that you consider important to review when planning for this phase.

Chapter Five: The Writing and Research Phase (pages 119–157)

✓ What are some of the writing standards you’ve addressed or plan to address this year? Which do you find or think you’ll find most challenging? Share effective strategies you’ve used or suggest ones you’d like to try from this chapter.

✓ How do you currently use graphic organizers to support your students’ reading and writing? Consider Duke’s suggestion for letting these tools do “double duty” (page 126). Discuss how you might continue or expand your use of graphic organizers to support students as they write and research?

✓ Share your top three take-aways for how to teach in the Writing and Research phase. Look to the second half of the chapter (pages 135–156) for ideas that are new or that you consider important to review when planning for this phase.

✓ If you use a workshop approach, discuss elements of your instruction that you can apply to project-based instruction and any ways you may need to shift your approach to support students in the Writing and Research phase of a project-based unit designed to develop informational reading and writing.
Chapter Six: The Revision and Editing Phase (pages 158–173)

✓ Students often resist revising and editing their writing. Discuss how having an authentic audience and purpose encourages students to engage in these processes.

✓ Duke recommends using multiple strategies to teach revision and editing. Share ideas from the chapter you can use for project-based instruction.

✓ Do you currently have students engage in peer editing? If so, how do you teach your students to give clear and specific feedback? Share your successes. If you have not yet had your students peer edit, share ideas for beginning to include this as part of your writing instruction.

✓ When giving feedback on students’ writing, what do you typically focus on? Discuss how Duke suggests focusing and structuring feedback to best support students’ writing (pages 162–168).

✓ Consider the benefits of implementing school-wide or district-wide revision and editing strategies and tools such as the Editing Marks Chart on page 161. Brainstorm together ways to introduce strategies or tools that would work for your school or district or ways to strengthen what’s already in place.

Chapter Seven: The Presentation and Celebration Phase (pages 174–179)

✓ The presentation and celebration stage signifies a milestone in your work with project-based instruction. Students have been involved in research, reading, and writing and now they are at the point of presenting that work to their authentic audience and celebrating. Discuss how a presentation and celebration can be focused so that it reinforces the key elements of a project.

✓ What kinds of work must be done in order to get the project “audience-ready”? Why is the audience’s response so critical for students to receive?

✓ Celebrations need to be strongly connected to the project itself. Discuss how the celebration ideas for each of the three project examples on pages 176–179 are linked to the project purpose and how that connection might affect the success of the project.

Chapter Eight: Making Project-Based Instruction Professionally Manageable (pages 180–186)

✓ What are the biggest challenges you face or anticipate facing in implementing project-based instruction?

✓ What are some options for managing the project load you plan to take on this year? Are there some project ideas you can use each year with students that won’t get old?

✓ Consider and discuss options for sharing and collaborating on projects within this PLC and beyond. How might you make use of the collaboration templates and guidelines on pages 184–186.
Sources Cited


More Research on Project-Based Instruction, Please!

Want to take a deeper dive into the research behind teaching informational reading and writing through project-based instruction? Download *Information in Action: The Research Base* at www.scholastic.com/InformationInAction (“Research & Funding” tab).