Reading Comprehension Instruction of Effective Grades 5 and 6 Saint Lucian Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study set out primarily to investigate the nature of reading comprehension instruction in Saint Lucia, and to examine the explanations of teachers with regard to the factors that they perceive contribute to Grade 6 students' failure in the main idea comprehension test in the national Common Entrance Examination in Saint Lucia. Four effective Grades 5 and 6 teachers (two per grade) from two Saint Lucian primary schools participated in a total of four individual semi-structured interviews and were observed in their regularly scheduled reading comprehension lessons. A total of 27 lessons were observed and audio tape-recorded to examine the nature of reading comprehension instruction in the classrooms. From this cohort of lessons, a sample of 16 lessons was randomly selected and transcribed to determine the presence of direct instruction in comprehension strategies, and the quality of instruction that took place. This quality was measured and described in terms of the elements of the Direct Instruction Model (Pearson & Dole, 1987), the nature of questioning, and time allotted to instruction. This data was also used to make comparisons between Grades 5 and 6 classes. The results show that the four teachers perceived that there are four areas of blame for students' poor performance in reading comprehension: the teacher's inability to instruct, the students' poor decoding and comprehension abilities, the inadequacy of the main idea test, and the teaching materials available for teaching comprehension. However, the main factor perceived by teachers as contributing to the students' poor performance is teachers' inability to instruct. Nonetheless, the observation of the Grades 5 and 6 effective teachers' reading comprehension lessons showed that these teachers were indeed teaching a number of comprehension strategies. They relied predominantly on the question answering strategy in all their lessons which was mainly taught in combination with other

strategies. However, it was the teaching of summarization through the main idea that was the dominant strategy more explicitly taught in 7 of the 16 lessons observed, appearing more frequently in the Grade 6 classes. An assessment of the quality of the reading comprehension instruction revealed that 11 of1 6 lessons, included all the four elements of direct instruction, and were rated as 'excellent' in quality. None of the lessons had fewer than two elements identified on the model. An assessment of the types of questions asked also showed that questioning was used both for the purpose of assessment and as an instructional strategy. The timing of the lessons support the quality of instruction, as 90% of the total time observed was allotted to instruction. The greater portion of that time went to guided practice (38%) and independent practice (33%) of reading comprehension strategies. This study shows that explicit comprehension instruction of strategies is evident in the reading comprehension classes of the 4 effective Saint Lucian Grades 5 and 6 teachers. It is therefore recommended that educational officials ensure that similar practices are maintained in other Saint Lucian classes, that the reading comprehension instruction practices of a wider cross section of Saint Lucian teachers be examined, and that future research looks into other probable causes of students' failure on the main idea comprehension test.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the educational context in Saint Lucia where the study was undertaken, and to identify the purpose, rationale, and significance of the study.

1.2 Saint Lucian Educational Context

To rationalize the need to study reading comprehension instruction in Saint Lucia, it is important to understand the educational context in which we operate. The island of Saint Lucia is located in the Eastern Caribbean with a population of approximately 160,000 (Saint Lucia Government Statistics Department, 2001). The official languages in Saint Lucia are English and French Creole due to the island's British and French heritage. The language of instruction in Saint Lucian schools is English, and formal schooling begins at around age 5 in Grade K. Entry into secondary school is dependent on examinations. Up until 2006 not every child in Saint Lucia had the opportunity of secondary education. This was only attainable with success in the national exam at the end of Grade 6. This exam, called the Common Entrance Examination, determined the educational futures of students aged 11 and over, who, if not successful, would perhaps leave school with a Standard 6 School Leaving Certificate. The highest level of education provided on the island is tertiary through the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College which offers a Bachelor's Degree in Education through the University of the West Indies.

In theorizing the need for a qualifications system for Saint Lucia and other

Eastern Caribbean islands, Frederick (2005) describes the Saint Lucian educational system as one which is exclusive because it condemns a large proportion of the population to failure. Frederick (2005) clarifies that this is "because of its parity of esteem-the recognition of a primarily academic achievement" (p. 29).

The Common Entrance Exam is thus a very important exam and even with the recent introduction of Universal Secondary Education in 2007, it continues to determine which of the 24 secondary schools in Saint Lucia, primary students will attend. Frederick (2005) verifies that access to higher education in Saint Lucia begins at the Common Entrance Examination. The exam is summative and is sat by Grade 6 students, aged 11 plus, attending both public and private primary schools. The exam comprises sections in Mathematics, a General Paper which covers Social Studies and Science, and English Language.

In 2006, the year prior to the implementation of Universal Secondary Education, 4141 primary school students were processed for the Common Entrance Examination. Of these, 2192 were male and 1949 were female (Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit, 2006). For this 2006 exam, the average composite score ranged from 9% to 92%. The national mean was 46%, a decrease of 6% from the 2005 national mean of 52%. In the 2006 exam, 2000 or 48% of the candidates scored at and above the national mean, while 2141 scored below the mean (Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit, July, 2006). A Synopsis of the 2006 Common Entrance Examination results showed that not every child who sat the exam was assigned to a secondary school. Of the 4141 candidates, a total of 3614 were assigned to the 24 secondary schools. The remaining students either failed the exam or their average composite score did not fall within the range of scores for the secondary schools of their choice (Office of the Registrar,

Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit, 2006).

The English language component of the Common Entrance Examination which is of particular relevance to this research has two parts, Part A and Part B. Part B involves a main idea paragraph for comprehension and a composition. For the main idea comprehension, students are expected to read a short passage and using their own words write the main idea in one sentence (Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit, 2001). See Appendix A for a sample of this test item. The highest possible score on this item is 10 and the lowest is 0. Reports from the Ministry of Education in Saint Lucia show concern for the number of students over the years who scored zero in this comprehension section of the examination (Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit, 2000, 2006). A report on the candidates' performance in the 1998 local examinations stated that, "there was a general improvement in the students' ability to handle the main idea question although the performance was still below what was expected" (Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit, January, 2000, p. 10). The report compared two consecutive years, stating that in 1997, 2754 students out of 5113 (53%) scored zero as compared with 1498 out of 3526 (42%) students in 1998. In 1998, 63% of the students scored 5 or less out of 10. In 2006, another Ministry of Education Report in Saint Lucia showed that out of a total of 4141 students sitting the exam, only one student scored 10 on the main idea test, while 82% scored zero (Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit, November, 2006).

This trend in poor performance on the main idea has been recorded for the period 1999 to 2006 in Table 1 which has been reproduced from the Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit (November, 2006). The

mean scores show that students are struggling to identify the main idea.

Table1

Students' Performance on the Main Idea

Year	Mean (Total score 10)	Standard Deviation
2006	0.555	1.374
2005	1.365	2.175
2004	1.763	2.137
2003	0.582	1.646
2002	1.550	2.426
2001	2.221	2.778
2000	3.236	3.090
1999	2.955	-

Note. Dash indicates the standard deviation was not calculated.

Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit (November 2006).

1.3 Purpose/Rationale

While every section of the Common Entrance Examination is important, the focus of this research is the reading comprehension component. The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, it is to find out the views of effective Grade 5 and 6 primary school teachers in Saint Lucia concerning why students are performing poorly in the main idea comprehension. It is expected that through interviews with effective teachers of the final two grades of primary school (where there is a concentration on the preparation for the Common Entrance Examination) that one will be able to

identify from these teachers' perspectives some of the plausible reasons for the consistent failure in the main idea component of the exam.

This data on teachers' perception of reading comprehension failure in the national exams will complement the second aim of this study which is to investigate the area of reading comprehension instruction as it pertains to the teaching of reading comprehension strategies in two primary schools in Saint Lucia. The intention is to observe or take a "snapshot' of the direct instruction practices of effective Grade 5 and 6 teachers, and to examine the cognitive reading strategies that they teach. This observational data will provide first hand information about what is happening in reading lessons in Grade 5 and 6 classes in Saint Lucia, where it is anticipated there will be an emphasis on the teaching of reading comprehension, in particular the main idea strategy, on which students are tested at the end of Grade 6.

This study then seeks to attach the teachers' voices to what is actually seen, or to corroborate information from semi-structured interviews with observational data.

1.4 Educational Significance: Who will Benefit and How?

There are a number of stakeholders who will benefit from the results of this study. In the Ministry of Education in Saint Lucia, the Education Officer for Instruction and the Curriculum Officer for Language Arts will be able to utilize the data to effect changes in the English Language Curriculum, if necessary. These officials, responsible for the Language Arts Curriculum will be able to make relevant changes to the curriculum as well as policy decisions which can effect changes in either content, or assessment. They will also be able to organise appropriate training for language teachers through workshops, seminars and professional development day sessions which emphasise reading comprehension instruction and strategies.

If the results show effective reading comprehension instruction practices in the classrooms, then these officials may wish to ensure similar practices are being used in other Saint Lucian classrooms. If it is found that a high level of practice already exists, the Testing and Measurement Officers and the Registrar of Examinations may see a need to alter their testing and measurement instruments related to the assessment of reading comprehension. The "Main Idea Test" in particular which poses the greatest problem to Grade 6 students may either be eliminated as a result or amended in terms of its content or scoring device.

At the school level, principals and teachers will be able to use the results to alter their reading programmes and to facilitate professional development training in the area of reading comprehension instruction, if necessary. Teachers will become more aware of their instructional practices and hopefully provide students with the requisite strategies to enhance their reading comprehension.

The students who are the main beneficiaries of this study will hopefully be provided with more instructional time and better quality instruction in a wide variety of strategies that will ensure that they are well equipped with all the tools necessary to construct meaning from their written texts. However, if the findings show that Saint Lucian students are being taught well, then these students may also benefit by the main idea test being made more relevant to reading comprehension.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant literature on reading comprehension instruction and research concerning teachers' explanation of students' failure in reading comprehension. This information will serve as justification for the current study and the research questions outlined at the end of the chapter.

2.2 Defining Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a complex process that has been conceptualized and explained in a myriad of ways. Dymock and Nicholson (2007) suggest that "to define reading comprehension would be to define reading" (p. 10). Gough and Tunmer (1986) have proposed a "simple view" of reading by equating reading with the product of decoding and linguistic comprehension. Reading comprehension, according to Gough and Tunmer (1986) is, "the process by which, given lexical (i.e., word) information, sentences and discourses are interpreted" (p. 7). This view of reading suggests that given perfect word recognition, a child should read and comprehend a written text in the same way that he or she would understand that text if it were spoken (Juel, 1988). Reading comprehension therefore cannot occur without decoding and linguistic comprehension. Problems with decoding, linguistic comprehension or both will result in poor reading comprehension. Juel (1988) who clearly supports this view of reading, explains that "comprehension is the process by which the meanings of words are integrated into sentences and text structures" (p. 438). Pressley (2000) also theorizes that reading comprehension begins with

decoding. He explains that words have to be processed in relation to one another in order "to understand the small ideas in the text and then both consciously and unconsciously, operating on the ideas in the text to construct the overall meaning encoded in the text" (p. 551). Vellutino (2003) conceptualizes reading comprehension in a similar fashion by explaining that it depends on adequate development of two processes: word recognition and language comprehension.

The notion of reading as being interactive or transactional between the reader and the text is held by Duke (2003) who believes that readers actually navigate through the text, evaluating its accuracy to see if it fits their own agenda and then finally arriving at a self-selected location. Pardo (2004) simplifies her definition of comprehension by stating that it is a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge, experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text. Comprehension therefore occurs in the transaction between the reader and the text (Kucer, 2001).

Pardo (2004), reasons that the reader brings a number of things to the literacy event. The text has certain features, and yet meaning emerges only from the engagement of the reader with the text at that particular instance. In Pardo's (2004) model of comprehension, there are the four elements: the reader, the text, the context and the transaction, all of which combine to render meaning making (Pardo, 2004).

The making of meaning is therefore an active process. Harris, Turbill, Fitzsimmons, and McKenzie (2006) agree that children bring to the reading process all their previous reading, writing, listening and speaking experiences. As a result, the text triggers a particular schema in the brain of the reader which guides the reader to select from the text whatever relevant information assists in making meaning of that

text. McNeil (1984) holds a similar view of comprehension when he argues that in a process approach, what the pupils already know affects what they will learn from the reading.

Duffy (2003) summarizes all these definitions when he conceptualizes comprehension as "the essence of reading" (p. 22). He purports that it is the thinking that we do to interpret the meaning in text. To his conception of comprehension he adds that it is 'strategic', meaning that readers employ strategies or plans to comprehend (Duffy, 2003). Duffy (2003) further qualifies comprehension in the following ways. He says that it is proactive, because a reader must be actively thinking and constantly monitoring meaning; tentative, because predictions at one moment may get changed in the next moment; personal, in that meaning resides in the reader's interpretation, which in turn is controlled by his or her prior knowledge; transactive, because the reader's background interacts with the author's intention; thoughtful, because the reader must always analyze the clues the author provides; imagistic, because you use the authors clues to create a picture in your mind of what is happening; inferential, because the reader can only make a calculated guess about the author's meaning since the author was operating from one set of experiences and the reader from another; and reflective, in that good readers evaluate what they have read and determine its significance and/ or how it can be used (p. 23-24).

In defining reading comprehension, Sweet and Snow (2003) argue that "reading comprehension is a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning" (p.1). By using the words *extracting* and *constructing,* they are stressing the importance of both translating print to sound and in addition, formulating representation of the information being presented by either building new meanings or making accommodation for new meanings into existing schemas. This idea of

reading takes into account the text as well as the reader's abilities and experiences as a determiner of reading comprehension (Sweet & Snow, 2003).

Reading comprehension is therefore a complex cognitive process where readers' prior knowledge and experiences serve central roles in the interpretation of texts. This transactional view assumes that the readers are actively making meaning as they metaphorically dialogue with the authors of texts. Some reading researchers also emphasize the equally important component of decoding in reading comprehension and indicate that without decoding, reading comprehension cannot occur (Dymock & Nicholson, 2007; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Juel, 1988; Pressley, 2000; Torgesen, 2002). The consensus also seems to be that meaning constructed by the reader is a function of the ideas explicitly represented in the text as well as the reader's response to those ideas based on prior knowledge (Pressley, 2000; Sweet & Snow, 2003).

2.3 Reading Comprehension and Fluency Instruction

Another integral part of the complex reading process is fluency. Fluency has been regarded as the "neglected' aspect of reading (Allington, 1983). With regard to its definition, it has been viewed at times essentially as an oral reading phenomenon. However, Chard, Pikulski, and McDonagh (2006) suggest that because most readers spend a minimal amount of time engaged in oral reading compared to silent reading, a definition of fluency needs to embrace more than oral reading. Harris and Hodges (1995) define fluency as "freedom from word-identification problems that might hinder comprehension (p. 85).

Chard, Pikulski, and McDonagh (2006) agree that for struggling readers, fluency and its reciprocal relationship to comprehension is often ignored as a focus

for remedial attention. However, since the influential report of the National Reading Panel (2000), fluency instruction has received substantial attention from both researchers and practitioners. The National Reading Panel (2000) has thus identified fluency as one of the five critical components to reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Walker, Mokhtari, and Sargent (2006) reason that fluency is critical to reading because it requires the simultaneous, thoughtful coordination of various cognitive, linguistic, and affective competencies. Young readers normally develop knowledge and skill in orchestrating these competencies gradually over their primary school years, and as readers advance in their reading development, most of them learn to recognise words more quickly and with greater accuracy. Other readers fail to develop such facility with word decoding (Walker, Mokhtari & Sargent, 2006). Research supports that automatic word reading is undoubtedly crucial for reading fluency and comprehension, since it allows the mind to have more capacity for comprehension when less attention is directed to word identification (Samuels, 2002, 2004; Samuels & Flor, 1997).

The promise of specific oral-reading practices for promoting improvements in fluency and general reading achievement has been cited in several studies (Hoffman, 1987; Morris & Nelson, 1992; Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993). Some researchers have also developed instructional routines aimed at improving students' fluency (Hoffman, 1987; Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Sturtevant, 1994; Stahl & Heubach, 2005). For example, Hoffman (1987) described the Oral Recitation Lesson (ORL) as a subsititute for a traditional basal lesson. In the ORL the teacher initiates the lesson by reading a passage aloud to the students. This is followed by a discussion which leads to the construction of a story map, then a summary of the passage. Further to

this, the students are required to read the story repeatedly to the teacher. Rasinki (2006) claims that lessons which are dedicated to oral readings, and to repeated, and assisted readings, have the potential to significantly impact reading achievement among elementary school children.

That fluency instruction is connected to overall reading achievement is well acknowledged by researchers and practitioners. Fluency instruction normally appears in the form of oral recitation or guided oral practice. In acknowledging the relationship between fluency and comprehension, Pressley, Gaskins, and Fingeret (2006) state that, "fluency and comprehension are not so much linear processes but are interdependent in a "blurry" sort of way" (p. 62). For this reason, they assert that comprehension strategies should be taught to all readers from the beginning of reading instruction even though they may not yet be fluent.

2.4 Vocabulary Comprehension Relationship

Reading comprehension depends on word knowledge, and the aim of vocabulary instruction is to teach strategies for discovering the meanings of unfamiliar words. Such instruction is also designed to promote word knowledge that will enhance text comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). The National Reading Panel (2000) has identified five main methods for teaching vocabulary.

1. Explicit Instruction: Students are provided with the definitions or other attributes of words to be learned.

2. Implicit Instruction: Students are exposed to words or given opportunities to do a lot of reading.

3. Multimedia Methods: This involves teaching vocabulary by going beyond the text to include other media.

4. Capacity Methods: Practice is stressed to increase capacity through making reading automatic.

5. Association Methods: Students are encouraged to make connections between what they know and words that are unfamiliar.

Mckeown, Beck, Omanson, and Pople (1985) examined two components of a vocabulary program to determine their contribution in improving verbal processing skill. The two aspects examined were the nature of the program and the frequency of instructional encounters. The Grade 4 participants in this research were from four classrooms in three small urban public schools. Three of the classes were randomly assigned to experimental groups while the fourth was a control. Prior to the experimental phase students were administered a standardized reading and vocabulary test. The instructional program was a vocabulary intervention which was designed to teach 24 difficult words in 12 lessons of approximately 30 minutes duration. The three types of instruction were: traditional instruction requiring only associations with words and definitions, rich instruction presenting elaborated word meanings and diverse contexts, or extended /rich instruction which added activities to extend use of learned words beyond the classroom. The results of that study show that high frequency yielded better results, and as far as instruction, the extended/rich instruction group showed an advantage over rich in fluency of access and story comprehension (McKeown et al., 1985).

Vocabulary occupies a significant position in reading comprehension. Hence a number of instructional methods have been identified and used to actively engage students in word learning. Findings from the National Reading Panel's (2000) review of research also show that explicit instruction in vocabulary is highly effective and that both vocabulary and comprehension improved as a result of the direct instruction.

2.5 Teaching Reading Comprehension

Since reading comprehension is complicated, Pressley (2000) proposes that it requires a complicated educational strategy to meet the goal of improving readers' comprehension skills. The notion that comprehension is teachable resounds clearly in the existing literature on reading comprehension instruction (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Durkin, 1978-1979; Dymock & Nicholson, 1999, 2007; Graham & Wong, 1993; Palinscar, 2003; Pressley, Wharton Mc Donald, Mistretta-Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998; Pressley, 2000, 2006a, 2006b; RAND, 2002; Raphael & Wonnacott, 1985; Silverii, 2006; Smith & Elley, 1994). The National Reading Panel (2000) also correlates improvements in comprehension with direct instruction by claiming that "the rationale for explicit teaching of comprehension skills is that comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 14). Duffy (2002) agrees that strategies can be taught directly and that more importantly, these strategies benefit struggling readers.

2.5.1 Direct/Explicit Instruction in Reading Comprehension

What needs to be conceptualized foremost is what is meant by direct or explicit instruction in reading. The literature presents many definitions and interpretations of the term 'direct instruction'. Berliner (1981) explains that direct instruction consists of a conflux of conditions and teacher behaviours that have been associated with effective classroom instruction. This involves content coverage, opportunity to learn, academic engaged time, and allocated time. Similarly, Duffy and Roehler (1982) also stress that direct instruction relates to teacher variables and not task variables. For Duffy and Roehler (1982) this means academic focus and

careful teacher monitoring of students' learning. Therefore, at the heart of direct instruction lies the teacher, a reality that may not be favourably accepted by the constructivists and learner-centred theorists. Nonetheless, Baumann (1983, p. 287), reinforces this idea by claiming that:

> In direct instruction, the teacher, in a face-to-face, reasonably formal manner, tells, shows, models, demonstrates, *teaches* the skill to be learned. The key word here is *teacher*, for it is the teacher who is in command of the learning situation and leads the lesson, as opposed to having instruction directed by a worksheet, kit, learning centre, or workbook.

Pearson and Dole (1987) present a similar concept of direct or explicit comprehension instruction which they claim differs from the traditional basal paradigm of mentioning, practising and assessing. They explain that their model is different in three important ways. First, teachers do not merely mention what the skill or strategy is. Second, students do not simply practice on their own, and finally, teachers go beyond assessing students' performance on the strategy. Rather, teachers allow students to apply the strategy in new and different reading situations. Pearson and Dole's (1987) model of direct or explicit instruction therefore consists of the following elements: modelling, guided practice, consolidation, independent practice, and application.

Pearson and Dole's (1987) model of direct instruction shares similar features with the transactional strategies model of direct instruction. Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Almasi, and Brown (1992) conceptualise this approach to teaching comprehension strategies as one where student and teacher transactions lie at the centre of instruction. In transactional strategy instruction, classroom discourse consists of teachers providing support or scaffolds to students and guidance, as

students attempt to use strategies. Another model of explicit instruction called SAIL, that is, Student Achieving Independent Learning, is an adaptation of the transactional strategy model as the teacher and students share responsibility. At the beginning of the instruction the teacher assumes most of the responsibility for instruction by defining, explaining and modelling the strategies. As the instruction proceeds the teacher releases regulation of the strategies to the students, coaching and scaffolding them when needed (El-Dinary & Schuder 1993). The SAIL model is similar to that of Pearson and Dole (1987) which follows a routine of teacher explanation or modelling to independent practice of the strategy by the readers.

Palincsar and Brown's (1984) reciprocal teaching procedure provides another model of direct comprehension instruction where the teacher and the students take turns to lead a dialogue about sections of a text. This procedure involves teacher demonstrations of activities after which the student participates. Guidance and feedback to students are also important features and are provided at appropriate levels to students.

Kamil (2004, pp. 221-222) illustrates that typically, direct instruction of cognitive strategies consists of the following:

1. Readers developing self awareness of those cognitive processes that are amenable to instruction
2. A teacher modelling the action(s) that readers can take to enhance their own cognitive processes during reading
3. Readers practising those strategies with teacher assistance until readers achieve a gradual internalization and independent mastery of those processes.

Duffy (2002) claims that, explicit instruction differs from traditional

approaches to comprehension instruction. He explains that "it uses strategies to mean a technique that readers learn to control as a means to better comprehend" (p. 30). Another assumption made by Duffy (2002) is that explicit instruction is intentional and clear information about how strategies work will allow struggling readers to have control over their comprehension. In this explanation the teacher does not control the strategy; rather, it is the reader.

Direct instruction therefore concerns the explicit or direct teaching of comprehension strategies. These strategies must be made clear to the readers through clear explanations from the teacher or through modelling to the point where the readers are in control of the strategy, can work independently, and at the same time monitor their comprehension.

2.5.2 Reading Comprehension Strategies

There are many reading comprehension strategies that have been discussed in the literature on direct reading instruction. However, in this section, I will focus on the reading comprehension strategies that have been investigated scientifically and recognised by the National Reading Panel (2000). This section will also commence with a definition of a strategy as opposed to comprehension skills, as the two are commonly used interchangeably in the literature on reading comprehension.

2.5.3 Comprehension Strategies vs. Comprehension Skills

The terms s*trategy* and *skill* both appear in the literature. According to Griffith and Ruan (2005) these terms have been used indiscriminately without regard for differential meaning and interchangeably to describe different processes during reading. Griffith and Ruan (2005) explain that an action becomes strategic when it is

selected from among alternatives to attain a particular goal. Thus for Griffith and Ruan (2005) the use of strategies is intentional and purposeful. Conversely, a skill is defined as process which is applied automatically. Paris, Wasik, and Turner (1991) took an interesting view of the two concepts when they suggested the interchangeability of skills and strategies by saying that "an emerging skill can become a strategy when used intentionally" (p. 611) and that a strategy can become a skill. "Indeed strategies are more efficient and developmentally advanced when they become generated and applied as skills" (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991, p. 611).

Similarly, in distinguishing between a skill and a strategy, Duffy (2003) clarifies that a skill is something one does automatically. It is done the same way every time, (for example, tying one's shoelaces). In reading in particular, Duffy (2003) illustrates that being able to instantly recognize and say a word such as "the" is a skill. Conversely, according to Duffy (2003) a strategy is a plan. One is thoughtful when doing it and makes adjustments to suit the situation. Duffy (2003) also explains that strategies can be classified as before-reading, during-reading and after-reading strategies. Examples of strategies according to Duffy (2003) are: predicting, imaging, monitoring, questioning, summarizing, inferring, drawing conclusions, evaluating and synthesizing, and identifying the main idea.

Shanahan (2005) also makes a distinction between skills and strategies. He recognises that in many treatments these words are treated as synonyms. However, as he explains, this is not the case in the report of the National Reading Panel (2000). He clarifies that when teaching letter-sound relationships or vocabulary, the aim is for children to use these automatically, that is without conscious attention. Skilled activities are activities that can be done quickly, easily and with little or no conscious attention. Strategies on the other hand are different from skilled activities. To use

strategies well, the student has to be reflective and purposeful; instead of trying to do something quickly without paying attention, strategies slow the reader down and focus his or her attention according to the demands of purposes and needs. Shanahan (2005) explains that when readers want to understand and remember a text well, they should preview the text carefully to have a clear idea of what it might be about; think about what is already known about the topic or make predictions about what information will be presented; stop along the way during reading and ask questions about what the text says; and summarize the text occasionally to make sure it is being understood. Shanahan (2005) says that none of these actions speeds a reader along and none of these actions can be done without thinking. None of these are useful if they are carried out without intention or purpose. He summarizes that strategies, unlike skills, require conscious, purpose-directed actions.

Shanahan (2005) in his report to the National Reading Panel also makes a distinction between comprehension strategies and teaching strategies. He explains that comprehension strategies are "intentional actions that a reader can take to increase the chances of understanding or remembering the information in a text. Instructional strategies, by contrast, are actions or procedures that a teacher might use to teach something" (p. 28).

The National Reading Panel (2000) affirms that "comprehension strategies are specific procedures that guide students to become aware of how well they are comprehending as the read and write" (p. 4-40). Shanahan (2005) argues that strategy instruction explicitly teaches students thinking processes or problem solving techniques that they could use intentionally to construct understandings as they read.

Thus, in this current study, I adopt the notion of strategy employed by Duffy (2003), Shanahan (2005) and the National Reading Panel (2000). The common thread

in all their definitions is that comprehension strategies are deliberate and purposeful actions taken by readers to ensure that they are making sense of the text that is being read. These strategies might be at times invisible to the teacher as they are operating in the mind of the readers through self questioning or mental imaging. However, students also give evidence of these strategies while they are reading.

2.5.4 Strategies that can be Taught

As reading comprehension is strategic, there are a number of plans that students can be taught to employ as they read. The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that there was sufficient evidence to support the teaching of a number of comprehension strategies. These strategies include: question answering, question generating, comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic organizers, story structure and summarization. Strategies related to the activation of prior knowledge, vocabulary instruction and mental imagery were also successful in many studies (National Reading Panel, 2000). However, as useful as these strategies are, the most learning was gained when multiple strategies were used in combination (Shanahan, 2005). The strategies are described in the following subsections.

Question Answering

Commonly, question answering involves asking students questions about what they have read. Kamil (2004) informs that the questions are posed either in the text or before or after the passage is read. At other times, teachers ask the questions. Kamil (2004) also suggests that students who are left on their own, experience much difficulty answering questions. However, strategy instruction in how to answer questions enables students to better comprehend by assisting them in locating the

information in the text. Kamil (2004) also accepts that because questions are the dominant form of comprehension assessment, the strategy is particularly important for students who have problems with answering questions.

Fordham (2006) concurs that questioning is undeniably important but inserts that not all questions are equal. She claims that the type, timing, and purpose of questions matter considerably in determining whether or not students create meaning from the word on a page (Fordham, 2006).

One specific questioning strategy that has been identified and studied is the Question Answer Relationship (QAR). Ezell, Hunsicker and Quinque (1997) suggest that if students are taught this strategy it will enhance their reading comprehension skills. The strategy was first described by Pearson and Johnson (1978) and later modified. According to Ezell et al. (1997) it is a taxonomy which teaches students to realize the need to consider two sources of information when reading a text: (a) information acquired from their personal experience and (b) information provided by the text. Raphael (1986) claims that QAR instruction teaches students three comprehension strategies (a) locating information (b) determining text structures and how they convey information and (c) determining when an inference is required.

The Question Answer Relationship is defined as *text explicit*, or "here" which means that the question asked could be answered completely by using information from only one sentence from the passage. A *text implicit* or "hidden" QAR consists of a question that has its response located in the passage but not stated directly. A QAR is categorized as *script implicit*, or "in my head" when students can find the answer to the question from their own knowledge base or by drawing on their experiences (Graham & Wong, 1993).

Raphael and Au (2005) contend that teaching students the QAR will

encourage students to demonstrate higher levels of literacy. The authors argue that traditional questions which simply require readers to locate and recall information constitute one-third to one-quarter of the questions they will face. However over half the higher level questions will require students to provide a short or extended response instead of simply selecting from multiple choice options. Raphael and Au (2005) add that to be judged as proficient readers of fiction, students must demonstrate that they can think deeply about and write in response to questions that address themes and lessons, elements of plot structure and multiple points of view. To demonstrate high levels of literacy when reading non-fiction, students need to be able to draw on their knowledge of text organisation such as causal relationships and be able to identify important details in various media (Raphael & Au, 2005).

Research suggests that QAR has a positive effect on students' reading comprehension (Graham & Wong, 1993; Raphael & Pearson, 1985; Raphael & Wonnacott, 1985). For example, Raphael and Wonnacott (1985) trained Grade 4 students to recognize the relationship between comprehension questions and answer sources. In the first experiment, students received four days instruction about sources of information for answering comprehension questions. Their results showed no difference from that of the controlled group. In the second experiment the length of the instruction was extended to an 8 week period. The results showed that the experimental group performed at a significantly higher level than students in the control group. Validation of these findings involves checking the element of randomization. An analysis of variance was performed on the students' reading comprehension scores to ensure that randomization had resulted in equivalent groups. This study suggests that instruction in comprehension strategies is possible but that it requires extended time in the reading curriculum as indicated in the second

experiment.

Graham and Wong (1993) investigated the effects of explicitly teaching average and poor readers a comprehension question-answering strategy. Thirty-eight girls and 45 boys were randomly assigned to one of the three treatment conditions. Students in the control group were exposed to the same materials used by those in the two treatment groups. Students in the two treatment groups learned a 3H mnemonic strategy (that is, Here, Hidden, and in my Head) to indicate question–answer relationships that were text explicit, text implicit, or script explicit. Results of the study indicated that both types of training in the strategy resulted in significant improvements in the students' reading comprehension performance.

Question answering is a highly effective comprehension strategy that readers should be taught to use (Ezell, Hunsicker, & Quinque, 1997; Graham & Wong 1993; Raphael & Pearson, 1985; Raphael & Wonnacott, 1985). The QAR strategy in particular has proven to be successful in improving comprehension performance of elementary school students as the students are taught specifically how to identify the relationship between questions and answers.

Question Generating

Compared to question answering, the question generating strategy is more active as students are not limited to the questions posed by others. Instead, generating questions on their own helps readers reach that point of independence as they learn to ask and answer their own questions (Kamil, 2004).

One specific reading-thinking strategy described by Macek (1999) which encourages readers to generate their own questions is called the KWL. There are three principal steps in this strategy:

1. K (Know) or recalling what is known about a topic
2. W (Want to Know) or finding out what the students want to learn
3. L (Learned) or identifying what has been learned

Throughout the use of this strategy readers are actively generating questions which initially involve the recall of prior knowledge. Macek (1999) also highlights the multifaceted nature of this strategy by explaining that it is an excellent tool not only for generating questions but as a graphic organizer. Kamil (2004) agrees that the question generating strategy can be used independently or as part of a multiple strategy instruction as in reciprocal teaching.

One study conducted by Parker and Hurry (2007) explored the strategy of question generating by studying the teaching of reading comprehension of 51 teachers of literacy at Key Stage 2 in 13 London primary schools. This study explored the extent to which comprehension strategies were explicitly taught within the Literacy Hour and the range of opportunity which was provided for students to generate their own questions. The results from interviews and observations revealed that direct teacher questioning, mainly in the form of 'teacher-led recitation', was both the most frequently advocated and the dominant strategy used for teaching comprehension. The teachers did not make strategies explicit to their students nor did they encourage children to generate their own questions about the text (Parker & Hurry, 2007). The qualitative study analyzed observations and video recording of the reading lessons, which was also triangulated with interviews of all 51 teacher-participants who had to describe the strategies which they used to teach reading comprehension.

Question generating encourages a more active role on the part of readers as they question themselves as they read, thus monitoring their comprehension, and achieving independence as readers. The KWL was proven to be a useful strategy

which facilitates this type of self-questioning.

Comprehension Monitoring/Metacognitive Reading

The strategy of comprehension monitoring consists of readers becoming aware of how well they understand what they are reading (Kamil, 2004). When readers have difficulty understanding a text they have to be able to use the right strategies to correct their understanding. Instruction then in comprehension monitoring provides readers with the steps that they can take to resolve reading problems as they arise.

One study conducted by Moely, Hart, Leal, Santulli, Rao, Johnson and Hamilton (1992) observed teachers in Kindergarten though Grade 6 during Language Arts instruction. The results of that study showed that teachers gave strategy suggestions during 23% of the lesson intervals. The majority of these strategy suggestions focused on cognitive strategies such as repetition and activation of prior knowledge, as opposed to metacognitive strategies.

Another study by Bruce and Robinson (2000) was designed to assess the effectiveness of a metacognitive approach to teaching both word recognition and reading comprehension to Year 5 and 6 students who were struggling with reading. The study also investigated effective methods for implementing the program in the regular classroom. There were 44 students in the experimental group and 26 in the control group. The intervention programme was three 30 minute sessions per week for a total of 30 weeks. Reciprocal teaching procedures incorporating word identification strategies were used for comprehension training. The results from standardized measures showed significantly greater improvements for students in the experimental condition. Results also showed that most of the improvements took place in phases led by the experimenter rather than by the teacher. While there are questions about

the amount of coaching received by the teachers as well as the duration of the intervention in this study, the findings suggests that reciprocal teaching of comprehension skills and a metacognitive approach are effective tools in assisting children with comprehension difficulties.

Metacognitive strategies thus allow students to have knowledge of their own reading abilities, or cognitive processes, and by extension, enhance students' comprehension. Samuels, Ediger, Willcutt, and Palumbo (2005) assert that this strategy of thinking about one's thinking can be learned and become automatized to the extent that the reader is unaware that they are being metacognitive.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative, collaborative learning or peer tutoring is both a social organization for instruction as well as a strategy. It involves organising the class into smaller groups to work together on specific tasks (Kamil, 2004). When students tutor or instruct one another in the use of reading strategies the evidence is that they learn these strategies. Their intellectual discussions therefore increase their reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The significance of this strategy has been noted in several studies that have been carried out to either evaluate or examine its effectiveness in the teaching of reading comprehension (Fuchs, Fuchs, Kazdan, & Allen, 1999; Judy, Alexander, Kulikowich, & Wilson, 1988; Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, & Brown, 1992; Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987).

Judy et al. (1988) conducted a study to determine whether training delivered by either direct instruction or inquiry methods had a significant effect compared with a control on sixth-grade students' performance in a verbal analogy test. They also

compared the scores of gifted and non-gifted students to consider the effects of the tutoring role on students' ability to solve analogy problems. The 194 participants were students from nine Language Arts classes. The classes were randomly assigned to two treatment conditions and a control condition. The dependent measures used were the Woodcock Word comprehension subtests and an embedded analogy task, designed to test for transfer of learning to reading comprehension. The embedded analogy task was the only self designed, non-standardized measure used in this study. However, the self-designed instrument which consisted of 20 multiple choice items was pilot tested on university students as well as gifted and non-gifted sixth-graders, who indicated the suitability of the tests to their age and ability levels (Judy et al., 1988). To further establish scientific rigor, the researchers assessed the fidelity of their treatments with six doctoral students who coded the instruction given by the tutor as either direct or inquiry. According the authors the inter-rater reliability was 0.98 (Judy et al., 1988).

This study supported the findings that training does improve students' analogy performance at the sixth-grade level (Judy et al., 1988). Another major contribution is in the area of peer tutoring and its effects on both the receiver and the deliverer of that instruction. Judy et al. (1988) report that peer tutoring has positive effects on the receivers; that is, those who received the peer tutoring did much better at solving analogy problems than those who did not. This study shows strong support for the use of peer tutoring or cooperative learning as an effective comprehension strategy and as Judy et al. (1988) sum up, "students may well be able to communicate with peers in ways that adults do not" (p. 252).

In another study examining the effects of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) in reading, Fuchs et al. (1999) found that across Grades 2, 3 and 4, students

who prepared for what they describe as elaborated help giving, corrected more errors and engaged in more elaborated help. Fuchs et al. (1999) also found that in reading comprehension, intermediate students improved more with elaborated helping but primary students improved more without elaborated help giving.

In this study, the participants were 15 general education teachers at Grades 2 and 3, and nine general education teachers at Grade 4. To be eligible, the teachers had to include students with chronic reading difficulties and problematic social behaviours during their reading instruction. The teachers were randomly assigned to two treatments: collaborative reading activities operationalized with peer assisted learning strategies, or contrast, which was no collaborative reading activity. The teachers then implemented respective treatments with all the students in their reading class. The PALS procedure which was awarded the US Department of Education Program Effectiveness Panel's certificate of effectiveness comprised three main activities which teachers implemented in their classrooms over a 21 week period. Each week the participating teachers incorporated three 35 minute PALS sessions into their regularly scheduled reading classes. These sessions involved pairing all the students, with each pair having a higher and lower performing student. The first activity every day was partner reading which was designed to improve reading accuracy and fluency. The second activity was designed to develop comprehension through summarization and main idea identification. During this session, the student read orally one paragraph at a time to identify its main idea. The tutors guided the identification of the main idea by asking the readers (a) who or what the paragraph was mainly about, and (b) the most important thing about the who or what. The readers were required to put these bits of information into a sentence of 10 or fewer words. Students gained points for their summary and then switched roles. During

these sessions they also monitored and corrected their reading errors. The third activity in this procedure was a prediction relay which extended paragraph shrinking to larger portions of text and required students to formulate and (dis) confirm predictions (Fuchs et al., 1999). After implementing this procedure the researchers used a standardized measure called the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) to assess the students' learning. This diagnostic instrument provides more detailed coverage of reading skills than other tests and places more emphasis on the lower achiever by including relatively easy items. The researchers also recognized the limitation of relying on the reading comprehension measure. The measure was not sensitive to the kinds of progress that the higher achievers in the study may have realized since it was designed for lower achieving students. Additionally, apart from using reading achievement tests, the data was also analysed from *in situ* observations which characterized the nature of help students provided during PALS over the 23 week period (Fuchs et al., 1999).

The studies covered in this section indicate that explicit training in strategies such as peer assistance or cooperative learning can lead to gains in comprehension and that there should be alternatives to whole class, didactic instruction which often fails to address the learning needs of many students.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are described as visual or spatial representations of text (Kamil, 2004). A number of studies have also documented the difficulty students have in selecting important information as well as the use of graphic organizers to facilitate comprehension (Armbuster, Anderson, & Meyer, 1991; Berkowitz, 1986; Taylor, 1986, Winograd, 1984). The National Reading Panel (2000) highlights that

the use of visual and semantic maps on the content of a passage benefits the student in terms of better memory of what was read.

Results of a study conducted by Berkowitz (1986) suggested that students in middle-grade classrooms would benefit from instruction in map construction. The investigation compared two experimental methods of instructing sixth-grade students in the organization of ideas in content reading as a framework for reading, with two control study methods which did not emphasize text organization. The study involved 99 sixth-grade students who were assigned to instructional procedures based on their classes. All the participants were administered a standardized comprehension test two weeks prior to the instructional phase of the study. This test revealed similarities in the students' reading abilities; however, after six weeks of instruction in the individual procedures, the experimental procedure of map-construction fostered a significantly greater recall of textbook passages than the control procedures of question-answering. According to Berkowitz (1986) the findings suggest that a study strategy which helps students to focus on text structures does facilitate greater recall than a conventional questioning procedure.

Another study conducted by Armbuster, Anderson, and Meyer (1991) examined the effectiveness of using a frame, which was a type of instructional graphic, on Grade 4 and Grade 5 students' ability to learn from reading their Social Studies textbooks. The study involved four replications, or rounds in which the instruction using frames to supplement the textbook was compared with instruction that was provided in the teachers' edition of the textbook. The participants were 164 fourth-grade and 201 fifth-grade students from the regular classrooms of six fourth and six fifth-grade teachers in 10 elementary schools in one educational district. Passages for the study were from the students' Social Studies textbooks and the

testing materials were criterion referenced tests prepared by the authors themselves. Results showed that the framing condition was more successful for the fifth-grade students. One possible explanation for this difference in success according to Armbuster et al. (1991) is the differences in the content of the chapters at the two grade levels.

Reading in the middle grades involves a lot informational text and the use of graphic organizers as a comprehension strategy appears to enable students to select, organize and integrate ideas in texts in more effective ways than other methods.

Story Structure

The teaching of narrative text structure is another reading comprehension strategy which has received attention in the reading comprehension literature and reading research (Baumann & Bergerson, 1993; Dymock, 2007; Dymock & Nicholson, 2007; Fitzgerald & Spiegel, 1983; Gordon & Rennie, 1997; Idol, 1987). Story structure denotes the organisation of a narrative text into common elements. These elements are setting, initiating event, internal reactions, goals, attempts, and outcomes (National Reading Panel, 2000). The National Reading Panel (2000) has identified story structure as one of the cognitive strategies which can be taught to students to facilitate comprehension and memories of stories. The rationale for doing so is that stories make up the majority of the texts used in primary school reading. Of the 17 studies identified in the report of the National Reading Panel (2000), covering Grades 3 through 6, only half focused on poor readers. The success of this strategy was more frequent with poor or average readers than with more skilled readers. Nonetheless, the National Reading Panel concedes that this kind of instruction may assist all types of readers in terms of writing and the reading of literary texts (National

Reading Panel, 2000). Dymock (2007) has also made a case for the teaching of story grammars as an overall structure for teaching narrative text structure.

A number of intervention studies instructing students in this strategy have also provided evidence of its effectiveness in improving comprehension. For example, Idol and Croll (1987) found improved performance in students who were trained to use story mapping procedures as a schema building technique to improve reading comprehension. Their study involved five elementary students from the second to fifth grade who learned to identify the setting, problem, goal, action and outcome of narrative stories. The improvements that students showed in daily reading lessons suggest that mapping of story components is an effective way to build structural schemata (Idol & Croll, 1987).

The teaching of story structure as a comprehension strategy has been advocated by many, as students' comprehension of texts is enhanced when they are able to identify the overall structure of texts.

Summarization

Summarization is a strategy which serves two functions. It encourages the reader to concentrate on main idea in the text instead of details, and it also allows the reader to process the text by excluding irrelevant information (Kamil, 2004). Duffy (2003), however, makes a distinction between the main idea strategy and summarization. He claims that the two are sometimes confused but the difference between them is that main idea thinking is a search for a single most important idea being conveyed, while summarizing is about creating a brief retelling of an entire text. Kamil (2004) stresses that few students are taught explicitly to summarize what they read and consequently few students develop the necessary skills to prepare good

summaries. He points out that not only does summarizing improve comprehension but that improvement is transferable to other situations.

Studies of the summarization strategy focus on students' ability to identify the main idea or to making inferences (Afflerbach & Walker, 1992; Baumann, 1984; Reutzel & Cooter, 1988; Sjostrom & Hare, 1984). Research on this aspect of summarization will be dealt with in more detail in Section 2.6.

Other studies investigated the effectiveness of the strategy in relation to knowledge of text structure of expository writing at varying grade levels (Armbuster, Andrson & Ostertag, 1987; Carnine, Kameenui, & Woolfson, 1982; Taylor, 1982; Taylor & Beach, 1984).

One successful approach to teaching summarization through text structure is to teach readers to use typographical cues (headings, subheadings, and paragraphs). Taylor's (1982) hierarchical summarization research was first conducted with fifth-grade students and then experimented with seventh-graders (Taylor & Beach, 1984). While the summarization strategy was successful, a drawback of this strategy is that it is highly dependent on the heading-subheading organizational format and on the ability of these headings to communicate the structure of the text.

Assuming that middle-grade students have difficulty forming macostructures of expository texts or identifying the main idea, Armbuster, Anderson, and Ostertag (1987) explored the effect of text structure instruction on 82 middle-grade students' ability to learn from reading expository text. Students were assigned to either a structure training group which received direct instruction in recognising and summarising a conventional text structure (problem/solution), or to a traditional training group which read and discussed answers to questions about social studies passages. While the assignment was non-random, the selection of the students was

based on their score in a recent standardized comprehension test and the fact that they were not enrolled in a remedial reading class. After 45 minute sessions on instruction over 11 days, students' ability was measured by responses to main-idea essay questions and by written summaries of two passages. The measures used were criterion tests purposefully developed for the project and the results showed that students' ability to abstract the macrostructure of problem/solution text read independently, was improved by the structure training (Armbuster et. al., 1987).

Summarization is a very important comprehension strategy which also relies on other strategies such as main idea, making inferences and identifying text structure. Explicit training in this strategy is necessary and has proven successful in enhancing students' comprehension.

Mental Imagery

The research on imagery and reading comprehension is based on a theory that mental imagery is a knowledge representation system that readers can use in organising and retrieving information from written texts. Block and Pressley (2002) claim that there is ample evidence to suggest that mental imagery facilitates reading comprehension in both children and adults. Studies have documented that elementary school students only need minimal training and teacher scaffolding in order to effectively use mental imagery as a reading comprehension strategy (Borduin, Borduin, & Manley, 1994; Gambrell & Bales, 1986; Gambrell & Koskinen, 2002; Pressley, 1976).

The results of Gambrell and Gales (1986) study have been interpreted as support for the use of mental imagery as a comprehension-monitoring strategy. In order to investigate the effects of mental imagery, on the comprehension monitoring

performance of poor readers, the authors randomly assigned 62 fourth-grade and 62 fifth-grade students to two treatments. One treatment involved imagery instruction and the other was general instruction. The 124 participants were from five public schools and were identified on the basis of scoring below their grade level on the reading portion of a standardized achievement test (Californian Achievement Test). During the 30 minute training sessions, students in the experimental group were advised to make pictures in their mind to help them understand and remember what they read. On the other hand, the students in the control group were asked to do whatever they could to understand and remember what they read. During the testing session, one day subsequent to the training, the participants read two passages: one containing explicit inconsistency, the other containing an implicit inconsistency. The Chi Square analysis carried out detected a significant difference in favour of the group trained to use imagery.

This study designed to investigate the effects of induced mental imagery on below-average Grade 4 and Grade 5 students, is also in line with the research by Sadoski (1983), suggesting that imagery is of functional significance as a reading comprehension strategy with regard to problem solving.

Activation of Prior Knowledge

Pressley (2002) claims that the activation of prior knowledge is a strategy that has been validated as effective in improving comprehension in students in Grades 4 through 8. This involves teaching students to compare their lives with situations in the text or to make predictions based on prior knowledge about what might happen in the text (Pressley, 2002).

A study by Dole, Valencia, Greer, and Wardrop (1991) examined the

comparative effectiveness of two different instructional strategies for activating and building prior knowledge. The strategies were both based on the schema theory but differed in their method of presenting information to students. In the teacher-directed strategy the teacher directly explained the information deemed necessary for understanding the text to be read. In the interactive strategy, the teacher leads discussion to help students activate their prior knowledge about topics in upcoming texts. The subjects in this study were 63 fifth-grade students who were randomly assigned to three groups, the two strategy groups and a control group for whom no pre-reading instruction was provided. The treatment spanned two days and to ensure the validity of the instruction, the materials used were passages from the fifth-grade basal readers. The results of this study showed that the teacher-directed strategy was the most effective treatment in producing increased passage-specific comprehension, followed by the interactive strategy group. Students in the control group scored the lowest on comprehension (Dole et al., 1991).

Clearly this study shows that pre-reading instructional strategies in the form of activation of background knowledge is more effective than no pre-reading instruction. Other researchers such as Stevens (1980) also support that existing schema is pivotal to text comprehension and they suggest that teachers have to build students' prior knowledge to maximize their comprehension of texts. The following section (2.6) provides further details about studies on this comprehension strategy.

Multiple Strategies

Although there is evidence of improvements in using the individual strategies described above, it is believed that skilled readers use more than one strategy (National Reading Panel, 2000). In multiple strategy instruction, students are

therefore taught how to adapt the strategies and use them flexibly depending on the task.

Conclusion

The findings of the studies presented in this section substantiate that a wide range of reading comprehension strategies can be directly taught. The studies also show that students can improve in their comprehension abilities as a result of the explicit or direct explanations that they receive.

2.6 Direct Instruction of Main Idea Comprehension Ability

This section now focuses on literature relating to main idea comprehension as this is the focus of the current study.

The teaching and testing of main idea comprehension is pervasive because this is an important reading skill. Readers are faced with large numbers of texts, all of which cannot be recalled, hence, it is necessary for readers to be able to discriminate important from less important ideas so that memory can be efficiently used to retain essential information in a text (Baumann, 1984). There is also empirical support for the notion that the ability to comprehend main ideas, not only discriminates good readers from poor readers, but that it is directly related to more global measures of comprehension (Baumann, 1984).

While studies have indicated that adult readers are capable of comprehending the gist, theme, central thought, or main ideas of prose passages (Afflerbach, 1990; Afflerbach & Johnston, 1986), research indicates that children have considerable difficulty with this task (Baumann, 1983, 1986a; Taylor, 1980; Winograd, 1984). Afflerbach (1990) also agrees that constructing a main idea from text is often a difficult reading task, especially when the main idea is not explicit. As a result,

several studies have investigated the effect of direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies, specifically related to main idea identification (Baumann, 1984; Cain, Oakhill, Barnes, Bryant, 2001; Jitendra, Hoppes, Xin, 2000; Oakhill, 1993).

In light of the success researchers have had training students in comprehension strategies with instruction which was systematic and direct, Baumann (1984) developed a direct instruction paradigm for teaching students main idea comprehension and also to evaluate its effectiveness relative to traditional instruction in main ideas and to no instruction at all. Consistent with Duffy and Roehler's (1982) definition of "direct instruction," the direct instruction paradigm used in Baumann's (1984) study required the teacher to be responsible for the "academic focus, sequencing of content, pupil engagement, monitoring, and corrective feedback, with a gradual shift of responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student as the lesson progressed" (p. 96). The Grade 6 participants were grouped on academic level and randomly assigned to three experimental groups: a strategy group where subjects received intensive main idea instruction according to a five-step procedure, a basal group in which subjects were administered basal lessons, or a control group in which subjects were engaged in unrelated vocabulary development exercises. Results suggest that the direct instruction group significantly out-performed both the basal and control group on a series of measures that assessed varying aspects of main idea comprehension. Baumann (1984) claims that these results can be interpreted as further support of the effectiveness of a direct instruction paradigm for teaching reading comprehension skills.

While the results of this study are in congruence with research on direct instruction and do support the efficacy of a direct instruction paradigm for the

teaching of reading comprehension strategies, there are several limitations. The main concern relates to the ecological validity or the ensuring of a natural instructional environment. Although the lessons were conducted during normal reading sessions the instruction was administered by the researcher- a person unfamiliar to the students. Baumann (1984) admits that a natural environment is needed to determine if the principles implemented in his study are effective in improving students' comprehension of main ideas and other comprehension abilities in large scale settings.

Karlin (1985) questions the findings of the study conducted by Baumann (1984). The first issue deals with whether Baumann (1984) actually tested the effectiveness of his instructional programme since he himself states that, "instruction in how to identify main idea and how to construct a main idea outline (two dependent variables) was not contained in the basal reader that was used…" (p. 103). Karlin (1985) clarifies that in the basal programme there was a minimal amount of instruction and practice provided in recognizing implicit main ideas of single paragraphs.

Karlin (1985) also critiques the internal and external validity of the project. With regard to the results of the study, Baumann (1984) compares the superiority of the direct instruction paradigm for the teaching of the reading comprehension skill of main idea to that of basal reader instruction in main idea. The question that Karlin (1985) poses is whether it is superior to instruction in 'all' basal readers. The suggestion is that Baumann's (1984) generalization is unwarranted and that users of basal reading manuals are not obliged to follow all its directions prescriptively, but rather, need to be flexible in deviating from the directions in the manuals.

Afflerbach (1990) conducted a study which examined the influence of prior knowledge on expert readers' main idea comprehension strategies, when the main

idea was not explicit. The participants of this study were anthropology and chemistry doctoral students who had to read texts both from familiar and unfamiliar content areas and provide verbal reports of the strategies they used in constructing a statement of the main idea. From the verbal reports the researcher was able to identify three methods for constructing the main idea: automatic construction, the draft-and-revision strategy, and the topic/ comment strategy. The readers reported automatically constructing the main idea statement significantly more often when they had prior knowledge of the content domain of the text. When the readers lacked that prior knowledge, they resorted to the strategy of draft-and-revision (Afflerbach, 1990). Afflerbach (1990) hypothesized that readers lacking knowledge of the content domain may have to rely on strategies instead of constructing the main idea automatically. As a result, Afflerbach(1990) acknowledges that automatic construction of main idea is sometimes a mediated strategic task. Thus, it is recommended that instruction should be designed to acknowledge the difficulty of this task.

Durkin (1978-1979) agrees with instructional emphasis at the inferential level of comprehension by claiming that teachers should be explaining how to determine the main idea of a paragraph. The idea of timing was also an important element of Durkin's study (1978-1979). The measurement of time spent on explicit instruction in reading comprehension provides very valuable data which allows one to make comparisons in relation to other classroom activities**.**

Another study which focused on direct instruction of main idea identification strategy was carried out by Stevens, Slavin, and Farnish (1991). The 486 third-and fourth-grade students in this study were assigned to one of three instructional treatments in strategies for identifying the main idea of passages. The treatments included cooperative learning with direct instruction, direct instruction alone, and

traditional instruction control. The study revealed that students in the two instructional treatments which incorporated direct instruction on main idea strategies, performed significantly better than those in the control group in identifying main ideas of passages (Stevens et al., 1991).

Jitendra, Hoppes, and Xin (2000) investigated the effectiveness of a main idea strategy and also a self-monitoring procedure for improving comprehension of textual material. The participants were middle school students with learning disabilities. The results of this study indicated that the instructional procedures led to increased reading comprehension of students in the experimental group on the training measure (Jitendra et al., 2000). This research adds to the growing body of literature showing that explicit teacher-mediated instruction can effectively promote comprehension.

2.7 Teacher Explanation and Perception of Reading Failure

While a plethora of research points to strategies instruction as a panacea for addressing students' reading comprehension problems (Hilden & Pressley, 2007; Lutz, Gutherie, & Davis, 2006; National Reading Panel, 2000) it is also worth considering what reading teachers are saying about the reasons for students' poor comprehension (Henderson, 2002; 2007; Westwood, Knight, & Redden, 2005). In this section, literature which provides insights into teachers' explanations or perceptions of the factors that contribute to students' poor reading comprehension abilities will be discussed.

Classroom pedagogies reflect the different ways in which teachers' beliefs and understandings about literacy are translated into classroom practices and reading instruction in particular. Apart from their practices, literacy beliefs also correlate to teachers' perceptions of literacy or reading failure (Henderson, 2002).

A study conducted by Henderson (2002) reveals how teachers in three schools used narratives of blame as part of their theorising of literacy failure in relation to Queensland's Year Two Diagnostic Test. Semi-structured interviews were carried out over a two-year period with Year 2 and 3 teachers as well as the principals. The interviews investigated teacher's beliefs about the causes of literacy failure, changes that had been made to classroom practice as a result of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net results, and intervention programs. Teachers' narratives were categorised into three groups: blaming families, blaming children, and explanations that moved beyond blame and centred instead on the teaching of the instruction. Despite the range of explanations which the teachers provided, Henderson (2002) reports that the teachers in the study based their pedagogical decision for literacy failure and intervention on a deficit model of literacy learning.

Theorising literacy failure is all connected to one's understanding of literacy and pedagogies. Luke and Freebody (1997) explain that literacy understandings can be clustered into three families of approaches. The traditional understandings about literacy have been described as skills-based and are associated with pedagogical practices which emphasise skill, drill, and memorization. Progressivist-centered approaches on the other hand theorize literacy as the active construction of meaning and are consequently associated with practices that develop psychological and cognitive processes within the individual. The third category, identified as cultural-critical approaches, represent understandings of literacy as a social practice. This approach to literacy defines literacy in terms of socially and culturally constructed practices. This concept of literacy relates students' background to their success in literacy.

Traditional and progressivism approaches, although defining literacy learning

differently, both focus on psychological, cognitive and social differences among students. Henderson (2002) explains that when these frameworks predominate, the problem for literacy failure can easily be located in the individual students and their family background. This way of conceptualising reading or literacy failure leads to a deficit discourse with children and their parents being blamed for their poor performance. Deficit logic that blames children and their families for reading underachievement locates the problem in the background, outside the school setting and beyond the control of the teachers (Henderson, 2007).

Other explanations of reading failure have also focused on the teachers actions so that the solution to students' difficulties rests with the teacher and in creating a more conducive learning environment, or in refining the teaching procedures or instruction to ensure student success (Clay, 1991; 1993).

The cultural-critical approaches which offer another view of literacy, recognise children's membership of particular social groups in terms of gender, class, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. From this viewpoint, literacy can no longer be viewed as a set of neutral skills, rather an ideological practice that varies in certain settings and for specific purposes (Luke & Freebody, 1997). This view offers novel ways of explaining reading or literacy failure. Instead of focusing on the attribute of the learner, questions can be asked about which particular literacy is being valued and whose standards are used to make judgements about success and failure.

The literature on theories of literacy suggests that teacher' beliefs or conceptualization of literacy impacts on the explanations which they provide for students' failure in literacy. However, explanations of blame do not only point to the learners and their families, they also point to the teachers and the nature of the instruction which they provide the students to prevent literacy failure.

2.8 Research on Reading Comprehension Instruction in Saint Lucia.

The Saint Lucia educational context has been described in Chapter One. However, it is worth reiterating that reports from the Ministry of Education in Saint Lucia highlight the magnitude of the reading problem that exists in Saint Lucian schools as seen in the failure in main idea component of the Common Entrance Examination (Office of the Registrar, Educational Evaluation and Examination Unit, 2000; 2006). To date, the Ministry of Education in Saint Lucia has put in place a team of educators to investigate the core cause of poor reading comprehension (Ministry of Education, 2007).

This concern for students' failure in reading comprehension has intrigued many educational personnel, and parents. After a thorough search for studies related to reading comprehension instruction in Saint Lucia, only one study was found that investigated the instructional practices of primary school teachers as it pertains to reading comprehension (Biscette, 2003).

Biscette's (2003) study assessed the instructional approaches used to teach reading comprehension from the perspective of three fifth-grade teachers. The study focused on three main objectives. The first was to determine the instructional approaches used to teach reading comprehension in terms of instructional objectives, instructional methods, and assessment procedures. The second objective was related to teachers' prior knowledge and beliefs about the reading process, and the third objective examined the extent to which teachers use research and theory to inform their practices. The primary source of data for this study was through observations and interviews.

The results of Biscette's (2003) study revealed that teachers have relatively

strong beliefs about the value of reading. Conversely, the observational data revealed the non-existence of reading comprehension instruction at the Grade 5 level. This result is consistent with Durkin's (1978-1979) classical work investigating reading instruction where she discovered that out of 4,469 minutes only 28 minutes were spent on instructing students of Grades 3 through 6 in reading strategies. Biscette's (2003) study revealed that teachers taught reading comprehension without any kind of theoretical framework to guide their instructional approaches. She also found that teachers were focusing more on content objectives than on attitude and process objectives. Another important observation from this Saint Lucian study was that students were seldom engaged in the meaning-construction process which involves the interaction of the student, the teacher, the text and the context. This finding is worth considerable attention because as was discussed earlier, this is what is fundamental to reading comprehension. Sweet and Snow (2003) remind us that there are three dimensions to reading comprehension: the reader, the text and the activity, and all these define the phenomenon which occurs in a larger sociocultural context.

However, while Biscette's (2003) study has interesting and important findings, the study leaves room for further investigation into the domain of reading comprehension instruction. One area of enhancement lies with the participants of such an investigation. As indicated earlier, the study did not include the Grade 6 students who experience the failure on the main idea test. It is my assumption that there would be a heavier focus on teaching the main idea or teaching comprehension strategies in general in Grade 6 as students prepare for the exam at the end of that year. The proposed study intends to include effective teachers of Grade 6. It is expected that much understanding will be gained about the teaching of the main idea strategy and other comprehension strategies in general.

2.9 Conclusion

The purpose of reading comprehension is to understand information presented in written texts. While this may seem straightforward, many children struggle to comprehend what they read. Reading comprehension failure is attributed to factors such as the family, students' abilities, and poor comprehension instruction (Henderson, 2002). Spooner, Gathercole, and Baddley (2006) claim that this deficit in reading comprehension is evident in the numerous studies conducted to determine either the causes of reading failure or the effectiveness of particular strategies on improving comprehension. The new direction in reading research is to focus on teachers' direct instruction of comprehension strategies. These strategies are intentional plans which define comprehension as a problem-solving task and are not to be confused with skills. The philosophy underpinning this view is that reading comprehension is teachable and through a process of teacher demonstration, modelling, scaffolding and guided practice, students will be able to reach that point of self regulation or independence. Baumann (1986b) supports the idea that what teachers directly teach to students, they will learn.

The results of many of the studies presented in this chapter, suggest that direct instruction in comprehension strategies is a viable option for improving students' gains in reading comprehension. Evidence of this came mainly from experimental studies which involved the teaching of one particular strategy to one group of students and denying another group that direct instruction, or allowing them to continue with their traditional methods.

Although research on reading comprehension instruction is extensive internationally, there is a dearth of empirical evidence pertaining to reading

comprehension instruction in Saint Lucia. The proposed study which relates to the Saint Lucian context will add to the existing body of international knowledge and also the existing local knowledge relating specifically to Saint Lucia. The study conducted locally by Biscettte (2000) did not address the notion of direct instruction of comprehension strategies at Grades 5 and 6. It is therefore expected that the addition of observations of Grade 6 classes in the present study, will fill a gap in the literature regarding what transpires at that level, before students sit the Common Entrance Exam in main idea comprehension.

Additionally, no other research has measured the instructional time of elementary teachers in Saint Lucia during reading comprehension lessons. The element of time will add an important dimension to the results, as it will facilitate both a qualitative and quantitative measurement of the direct instruction sessions in reading comprehension.

The questions which emerge from this review and the particular educational context will follow in the next section (2.10).

2.10 Research Questions

Question 1

What are effective Grade 5 and 6 Saint Lucian teachers' perceptions of the factors that contribute to students' failure in the main idea reading comprehension exam at the end of Grade 6?

Question 2

What is the nature of reading comprehension instruction in effective Grade 5 and 6 Saint Lucian teachers' classrooms?

Sub-questions

(A) What comprehension strategies are taught by effective Grade 5 and 6 Saint Lucian teachers?

(B) How well are reading comprehension strategies taught by the effective Grade 5 and 6 teachers?

(C) What is the difference in reading comprehension instruction between Grades 5 and 6?

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Overview

This study involved the observation of the reading comprehension instruction of four effective teachers' upper grade primary school teachers in Saint Lucia. Two participants were from Grade 5 and two from Grade 6. A total of 27 lessons were observed and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher (four in total). These interviews served two purposes. The first was to find out the teachers' perception of factors contributing to the Saint Lucian students' failure in reading comprehension and secondly to triangulate the data from the observations.

This chapter provides a detailed account of how the study was conducted within its underpinning epistemological paradigm. A description of the sampling method, the participants, and the data collection instruments are also presented. Critical to this section, are insights into pertinent ethical issues and issues relating to the validity and reliability of the data.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Different research paradigms are suitable for different research purposes and questions. Purcell-Gates (2004) claims that ethnography which allows researchers to view literacy instruction as it occurs naturally, follows from particular types of research questions. Ethnography seeks to explain and describe, and is a suitable methodological approach for research questions that ask, *what is happening*? This sort of qualitative design is not for researchers who already know what they are

seeking or for those who have a hypothesis to test. Rather, it is for those who are curious about some aspect of literacy as it occurs naturally in sociocultural contexts such as schools and classrooms (Purcell-Gates, 2004). This study sought to explore what was happening in classrooms with regard to reading comprehension instruction. As a result, it was more appropriate to situate this study in a naturalistic, interpretive paradigm that emphasised the view that the social world should be studied in its authentic state without intervention or manipulation by the inquirer (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

However, although many literacy studies incorporate a phenomenological or interpretive stance, not all are conducted within the same epistemological paradigm. The current study in particular, did not adopt a purely phenomenological approach as the researcher's role was not that of a participant interacting with the teachers and students in the classroom. Rather, the researcher adopted a more ecological approach. Purcell-Gates (2004) explains that while the interpretive researcher strives to participate in the community of interest, the ecologically framed researcher remains more detached and objective.

This current study was therefore designed predominantly as structured classroom observations of effective teachers' reading comprehension instruction strategies. The teacher participants were from Grade 5 and Grade 6 classes of primary schools in Saint Lucia. This structured observation was achieved by the use of a prepared observational checklist which identified a range of possible types of instruction that could appear in a comprehension lesson. This design has been favoured by many researchers in the field of literacy and those investigating the behaviour of teachers (Chissom, 1987; Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass & Massengill, 2005; McDaniel-Hine & Willower, 1988; Sargusingh, 2003).

In addition to the unobtrusive observations, qualitative interviews were also conducted. This approach is in tandem with the assumption that reality is multi layered and that there is a need to examine situations both as an observer and through the eyes of the participants.

3.3 The Sample

This section provides information on the sampling technique used to select the site and the participants. A description of the site, the teacher participants and their classes is also included.

3.3.1 Site Selection

In this study, purposeful sampling strategies were used in selecting both the schools and the participants. The site selection strategy was used to select two primary schools performing in the top ten positions on the national exam for Grade 6, in Saint Lucia- the Common Entrance Examination. This information was derived from the Testing and Measurement Unit of the Ministry of Education in Saint Lucia. The purpose of this criterion was to facilitate favourable access to the sites based on the schools' successful performance. The principals of the two schools selected purposefully from the list were informed that their school's outstanding performance was the rationale for selection (see Appendix B for Information Letter to Principals).

The two schools, identified in the study as School A and School B, are both co-education schools located in the capital city. School A is an inner-city school with a roll of approximately 372 students. It does not have an infant department and therefore only has classes of Grades 4, 5 and 6. At the time the data was collected, the school did not have an appointed principal but rather a Teacher-in-Charge. The

staff at the school comprises both trained and untrained teachers. School B is suburban and community-based with a roll of approximately 500 students. It is a combined school of both infant and primary grades. The reception grade is Grade K and the final grade is Grade 6. There are two classes at each grade level. The entire teaching staff of School B consists of qualified teachers.

3.3.2 The Participants

The second type of purposeful sampling used in this study was reputational-case sampling. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) explain that this is when the researcher obtains the recommendation of a knowledgeable expert for the best examples. In this case, the experts were the principals who were asked to nominate one Grade 5 and one Grade 6 teacher from their school to participate. This was for the purpose of arriving at a small core of competent teachers who would be observed during their reading comprehension lessons. These two grades (Grade 5 and 6) were also selected because it was expected that, at the Grade 6 level in particular, owing to the preparation for the Common Entrance Exam sat at the end of Grade 6, the teachers would be concentrating on the teaching of reading comprehension- the main idea in particular- as it is a crucial component of the national exam. Grade 5, was also included to provide a more comprehensive view, a snapshot of what obtained in the schools in terms of the instructional approaches or strategies of teachers, as they taught their students to construct meaning as they read.

In School A, the two teachers who were nominated and consented to participate were both female and over the age of forty years. They both had at least 20 years of teaching experience and were both qualified teachers with a General Teaching Certificate. The General Teaching Certificate is awarded after successful

completion of a two year teacher training programme and is endorsed by the University of the West Indies. For the sake of anonymity, the Grade 5 teacher will be referred to as Miss P, and the Grade 6 teacher will be called Miss A.

In School B, one participating teacher was male and one, female. They were also qualified teachers with General Teaching Certificates. The teacher of Grade 5, who will be called Miss S, has approximately six years in the teaching service. She is the youngest of the 4 participants. The Grade 6, teacher Mr. L, like the 2 participants of School A, has also served the teaching profession for more than 20 years. He has taught at the Grade 6 level for 12 years.

3.3.3 Participants' Classes

At School A, the Grade 5 teacher, Miss P, taught a class of 32 students of whom 17 were boys and 15 were girls. The approximate age of the students in Miss P's class was 10 years. The class was identified by the teacher as a high performing Grade 5. With regard to the students' decoding abilities Miss P claims that the majority of their students were able to decode except for one or two who manifested the problem in their difficulty with spelling. Miss P also claims that her students do not have problems with reading comprehension.

At the same site, the Grade 6 class taught by Miss A had a total of 33 students -20 boys and 13 girls. Their approximate chronological age was 11 years. Miss A describes her students as having major problems with decoding. She specifies their inability to pronounce words with consonant blends and vowel digraphs. Miss A explains that most of the students begin the school year only being able to answer comprehension questions at the literal level of comprehension. This group of

students was identified by Miss A as the weakest of the Grade 6 classes at the school, an evaluation based on their performance in class tests.

At School B, the Grade 5 teacher, Miss S, was responsible for a class of 26 students-15 boys and 11 girls with an approximate age of 10 years. The teacher informed the researcher that some students read at their grade level while others read at a Grade 4 level. The class average in their last reading comprehension test was 51%. Miss S described her students' decoding abilities as similar to those of the other Grade 5 participant, Miss P. She explains that most of her students were able to decode except for a few who had difficulty with spelling. However, Miss S describes her students as having major problems with reading comprehension. She also describes her students as dependent learners because, on their own, they have difficulties, as opposed to when they are working together with the teacher.

At the same school, Mr. L had a class of 32 students with an equal number of boys and girls. Their approximate age was 11 years and the teacher reported that they were of mixed ability. Mr. L describes most his students as having a major problem with decoding. He explains that his students have difficulty with phonetic skills such as identifying letters, and knowing the short and long sounds of vowels. Mr. L also reported that most of his students have comprehension difficulties.

The teachers' accounts of their students' abilities are based primarily on their observations in the class and various school-made tests but not as a result of any formal standardized diagnostic measures.

3.4 Description of Data Collection Instruments

Three data collection instruments were used in this study. Both an observation checklist and a field notes sheet were used during observations. The interview protocol was used for subsequent interviews with the teachers.

3.4.1 The Observation Checklist

The observation checklist was designed to capture the type of reading comprehension strategies the teachers used in their lessons. The first part included demographic data such as the school, the grade level, the date, the time and the lesson number. The second part entailed a number of columns, the first of which listed 11 types of comprehension instruction. These strategies were derived from the National Reading Panel (2000). Two adjacent Yes and No columns were provided to indicate the presence or absence of the strategy in the lesson. The checklist also included a rating scale which allowed the assessor to judge the reading comprehension lesson by assigning marks ranging from 1 - 4. The scores represented the following:

1- Minimum comprehension instruction

2- Good

3- Very good

4- Excellent

This scoring was based on evidence of four elements in the Direct Instruction model adapted from Pearson and Dole (1987). The four elements are: teacher explanation/modelling, scaffolding, guided practice and independent practice. One mark was allotted to each element that was observed. For example a lesson which was observed with 2 elements such as teacher explanation and guided practice would be awarded 2 marks and be evaluated a ‘good’ in terms of instruction in the strategy,

whereas a lesson with all elements would gain score of 4 out of 4 and thus judged as 'excellent' in quality (see Appendix C for a sample of the observation protocol).

3.4.2 Organisation of Field Notes

The field notes accompanying the observational checklist were designed to support the data which was mechanically recorded. This was taken in a special notebook which was headed with the lesson number, the grade, the school, the date, the time and the participant's assigned name. Following this was a two column section which was labelled 'Teacher Activity' on the left and 'Student Activity' on the right. The time that specific activities started and ended was also indicated. Appendix D provides a sample of the field notes.

3.4.3 The Interview Protocol

The interview schedule was designed for two purposes. First, to elicit further details about the participants' reading comprehension instruction other than what was noted during the observations, and secondly, to find out the teachers' perceptions on their students' poor comprehension. It was semi-structured with six open ended questions to guide the interview. The questions were thus related to the participants' feelings and perceptions about their reading lessons, their approaches, students' failure in main idea reading comprehension, as well as the decoding and comprehension abilities of their students. These questions were generated based on the literature related to reading comprehension. Other probing questions which arose were as a result of something particular that was observed in a lesson or new information that the participant shared (see Appendix E for the interview questions which formed the general framework of the interview).

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

This section focuses on how the data was collected from the initial field entry to the post observation interviews with the teachers

3.5.1 Field Entry

Permission to enter the two sites was granted to the researcher by the principals. On arrival at the schools, the researcher met with the principals and further explained the project. Information letters were left with the principals for the two nominated teachers (see Appendix F for a copy of the Information Letter to participants).

3.5.2 The Non-Participant Observation

One week after making initial contact with the participants and receiving their informed consent, the gathering of firsthand or 'live' data began at both sites. The researcher was introduced to the students by the participating teachers and was also allowed a few minutes to talk to the students about her presence in their classroom as well as the need to have a small tape recorder placed on a desk at the front of the class to tape record the lesson. Being that the observation was designed as non-participant, the class teacher in all the classes assigned the researcher to the teacher's desk. In School A, Grade 5, the researcher was seated at the front left side of the classroom. In the Grade 6 classroom in the same school, the researcher was positioned to the front left corner of the classroom. In School B, Grade 5, the teacher's desk was to the back, right hand corner of the room, and in Grade 6 of the same school, the researcher was situated at the front left side of the classroom. Due to the crowded environment of the

classroom, the teacher's seat was the only one available in the classrooms. Therefore while the researcher's role was of an unobtrusive nature, the most ideal location was in the Grade 5 classroom of School B, where the students' backs were to the researcher, thus encouraging less attention. Nonetheless, the effective classroom management skills of the teacher participants allowed the students to be directed to the lesson and not to the researcher.

After settling the class, the teacher signalled to the researcher when the lesson was about to begin. At this point the audio tape recorder was turned on either by the researcher or the student on whose desk it was placed at the front of the class. If that was the case, the student would have been instructed beforehand which button to press. This minimized researcher activity in the class by removing the need for the researcher to move to the front of the class.

Holding an observational protocol, a note book for field notes and a digital watch, the non-participant observer recorded every detail of the reading comprehension lesson, categorizing the notes into Teacher Activity and Student Activity. The time was recorded at the start of each activity to facilitate calculations of the duration of instructional time. Using the observational checklist of reading instruction strategies, the researcher placed a tick next to the strategy that was evident in the lesson. If there was a combination of strategies, a tick was placed under the column on Multiple Strategies. Notes were also written in the Comments section of the checklist, at times providing specific examples of a particular type of comprehension instruction in action.

The period of observation in each class lasted approximately 35 minutes as is the regular duration of reading lessons. While most of the reading lessons were at their regularly scheduled times, all the teacher participants voluntarily allowed

flexibility in their timetables, shifting their reading lessons to a period that permitted the researcher to observe the maximum lessons possible for the day, at each particular site.

At the end of each lesson the researcher sought clarifications on what was observed and whenever possible, collected samples of students' work and whatever reading passage was used in the lesson. This was a brief session as the teacher participants had to prepare for their subsequent lessons. Further probing was left for the formal interview session.

The observation period began on 30 April 2007 and ended on 17 May 2007. During that period, 16 lessons were observed in school A and 11 in School B, making a total of 27 observed reading comprehension lessons. It was not possible to observe further lessons as all primary schools on the island, specifically the Grade 6s, were preparing for the very significant Common Entrance Examination on the 8th June, 2007. See Table 2, for a summary of these observations per grade level and school. A few internal school matters such as staff meetings and the absence of the participants, affected the projected number of lessons observed in School B, more so in the Grade 6 class which yielded only 5 lessons. The audio tape-recorded lessons were transcribed and coded for purposes of confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix G for lesson transcript codes).

Table 2
Number of Reading Lessons Observed at each School

Grade	School A	School B	Total number of lessons
5	8	6	14
6	8	5	13
Total number of lessons	16	11	27

3.5.3 The Individual Interview Process

Semi-structured interviews are a commonly used interview technique employed in qualitative research in which a schedule is prepared but is sufficiently open ended to enable the contents to be reordered, digressions and expansions made, new questions to be included, and further probing to be undertaken (Cohen et al., 2000). The present study employed this type of interview, which indeed reflected uniqueness for each participant. Although there were six generic questions guiding the interview, for example questions related to teachers' perception of poor comprehension and reading abilities of their students (see Appendix E), probing questions also emerged as the discussion unfolded naturally. Flick (1998) claims that the social interaction and the nature of the qualitative interview means that it may unfold in unexpected ways; and so it did in this study as each participant and the researcher engaged in conversations of reciprocity, richness of response, and honesty.

Cohen, et al., (2000) agree that in this type of naturalistic research, one of the canons of validity in interviews includes honesty. Other researchers also concur that in interpretive approaches like the one employed in this study, there is a shift in the view of the interviewer as a neutral recorder to a view of the interviewer as an agent

in a dialogic relationship, operating in a spirit of mutual trust and (Bishop, 1997; Burgess, 1984; Oakley, 1981). Interview participants also expressed candour as a result of the symmetrical and trusting relationship that was developed throughout the data collection process.

The interviews took place in July 2007, one month after the completion of the observations and after all teachers had either completed their third term tests or preparation for the Common Entrance Examination.

In most cases the interviews took place at the participants' school, in an unoccupied room or classroom which was less disturbed by surrounding activities. In the case of the Grade 6 teacher of School A, who was on sick leave for the rest of the school term, the interview took place at her home.

Owing to the emergent nature of the interviews, they varied in duration from thirty minutes to one hour in some cases, as certain participants were more vocal and forthcoming with the richness of their explanations.

The purpose of the interview process was explained briefly prior to beginning the interview. All interviews were audio tape-recorded and were initiated with the same question for all the participants. The following question allowed them all to reflect in an unrestricted way on the reading lessons that were observed. The question asked was, "Tell me how you felt about your reading lessons? Just talk to me about them." In some cases adjustments and modifying wording and paraphrasing to certain questions were made accordingly. While some may argue that this may result in bias, Harala, Smith, Hassel, and Gailfus (2005) contend that this is the nature of this sort of interviewing which also obtains in feminist and other cultural studies. Carspecken (1996) supports that such interviews range from interviewer giving bland encouragements, non-leading leads, active listening and low inference to high

inference paraphrasing. This approach results in depth or richness of data-the hallmark of semi-structured qualitative interviews. Each participant's interview was transcribed and coded for anonymity (see Appendix G).

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Threats to validity and reliability cannot be completely erased from any study; however the effects of threats can be reduced by close attention to these concepts (Cohen et al., 2000). This section will now address how threats to validly and reliability were attenuated in the current study.

3.6.1 Validity

Validity in ethnographic research refers to the degree to which one's data and interpretation corresponds to "the way it is" within the phenomenon being investigated (Purcell-Gates, 2004, p. 98). While in the interpretive paradigm this concept is a bit fuzzy, researchers have procedures for approaching it to guarantee rigor. In this study such rigor was ensured through triangulation. Purcell-Gates (2004) agree that this is an appropriate way of ensuring validity of data. This is simply the gathering of data from different sources for the purpose of confirmation. While the main source of data for this study was derived from classroom observations of teachers' reading comprehension instruction, this data was crosschecked with post observation interviews with each participant.

Validity of this project's data was also attained through prolonged fieldwork. Spindler and Spindler (1992) suggest that it is important for a researcher to be in situ long enough to see things happening repeatedly rather than just once. In this study, between five and eight lessons per participant were observed. The teacher participant,

in the class where five lessons were observed, confirmed in the post observation interview that all other lessons for this part of the school term would have been similar to what was observed. Hence, sufficient regularities were observed, thus ensuring the validity of the data collected.

McMillan and Schumacher (1997) have identified participant review as an additional strategy to enhance design validity. In this study such was the case as the participants had an opportunity to review the transcripts of data obtained from their interviews, for accuracy of representation.

3.6.2 Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research is a highly contentious issue as it is seeking to apply to qualitative research, the tenets of reliability of quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2000). However, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explain that in qualitative research, reliability can be viewed as a fit between what the research records as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting. This degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage was ensured in this study by means of mechanically recording both the lessons and the interviews. This was backed up by detailed field notes during the observations, which were organized and timed into categories of teacher and student activities (see Appendix D for a sample of field notes). By extension, the accuracy of data was maintained by verbatim transcriptions of all lessons and interviews thus permitting low inference descriptors, which could affect interpretations. Inter-rater reliability was also established for the scoring of the lessons to ensure consistency in the use of the rating scale.

3.7 Summary

The methodology described in this chapter is situated in a naturalistic and interpretive paradigm, where truth was sought by seeing and hearing things first hand. The qualitative design involved the observation of 4 teacher participants of Grades 5 and 6 in two primary schools in Saint Lucia. Reputational case sampling was used to select the participants who were nominated by their principals on the basis of their competence. From the context of their reading comprehension lessons, live and fresh data (Cohen et al., 2000) were recorded as field notes, checked on an observational protocol and simultaneously audio taped to ensure quality of the design. The observational data was further triangulated with data from semi-structured open-ended interviews with all 4 participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of this observational study, which examined the reading comprehension teaching of 4 effective Grade 5 and 6 Saint Lucian teachers, to determine the nature of reading comprehension strategy instruction. Teachers were also interviewed to determine their perceptions and explanations on the matter of students' poor reading comprehension performance. A total of 27 reading comprehension lessons, triangulated with four semi-structured, open-ended interviews with each participant provided the data. I will first present an explanation of the data analysis procedures, (Section 4.2), followed by answers to the research questions. These answers, which fall under various categories, will be presented both in qualitative and quantitative form. The results are laid out in two main parts. Section 4.3 concerns results related to the teachers' perceptions and explanations of the reasons why students fail the main idea comprehension examination at the end of Grade 6. Research Question 1 therefore serves as an important backdrop to the observational data. The following sections related to Research Question 2 deal with the nature of reading comprehension instruction in Grades 5 and 6, the first part of which is a general overview of the 27 lessons observed, then more detailed results from a sample of 16 lessons (Section 4.4). The section that deals with the nature of reading comprehension instruction in the random sample of 16 observed lessons is analysed in three parts. Section 4.5 deals with the types of reading comprehension strategies taught in Grades 5 and 6 (Research Question 2A). Section 4.6 deals with the quality of the reading comprehension instruction (Research Question 2B), and the third section, 4.7, presents comparative data on the nature of the reading

comprehension instruction between Grades 5 and 6 (Research Question 2C). In presenting the results, the quotes from the interviews and lesson transcripts will be followed by codes to indicate where the data can be found (see Appendix G).

4.2 Data Analysis

The data from the 27 lessons and four interviews were analyzed by using the constant comparison and analytic induction methods to identify emerging common themes throughout the lessons and across the participants. A personal coding system was established by the researcher with initial emerging themes until final dominant themes were decided upon. To be considered a final theme, a theme had to be one which was significantly addressed in the literature and raised by at least half of the participants. A similar analysis procedure was adopted by Garrahy and Cothran (2005) as they attempted to agree on dominant themes in their interview data.

The data from the observed lessons were reduced to pre-existing categories from the observation schedule. For example, the type of comprehension strategy taught is one category. Other categories such as the elements of the direct instruction model and the nature of the questions in the questioning strategy served as major categories for judging the quality of the lessons. The duration of instruction was also analyzed to judge the quality of the strategy instruction. This was specific to the amount of time spent on direct instruction such as teacher explanation or modelling in relation to the total class time.

4.3 Factors that Teachers Perceive Contribute to Failure in Main Idea Test

This initial section provides a backdrop or serves as a setting to what was actually seen during the observation of the reading comprehension lessons, by referring to excerpts from individual semi-structured interviews, conducted with teacher participants. The teachers' perceptions or explanations as to why students fail the Grade 6 comprehension examination on the main idea are presented, and serve as a springboard into the descriptions and examination of their reading comprehension lessons (Research Question 1).

In order to identify the factors that contribute to students' failure in the main idea reading comprehension test at the end of Grade 6, participants responded in detail to the following question:

What do you think accounts for the students' failure in the main idea comprehension exam at the Common Entrance Examination?

Results of the interview data reveal that teachers perceive that there are numerous possible reasons why students fail the main idea section of the Common Entrance Examination, at the end of Grade 6. Teachers' attribution to failure has been categorized into four areas: the teacher, the students, the exam, and the materials used.

4.3.1 The Teachers' Inability to Teach Main Idea

Interestingly, 3 of the 4 participants attribute the failure of students in the main idea section of the Common Entrance Examination, to the teacher. Both Grade 5 teachers believe that teachers are unable to teach students how to get the gist from their readings. Miss S of Grade 5 believes that the teachers themselves have problems with comprehension as a result of their own inadequate learning experiences and are

consequently unable to teach reading comprehension. She expresses that the problem is:

> …the teaching ability. A lot of teachers also have problems with comprehension themselves because they were just like students…it stayed with them even if they are adults …so therefore it will be a problem to teach, because you cannot teach something that you do not understand [S5, p. 5].

Similarly, Miss P, blamed teachers solely for the students' failure. She adamantly expressed, "I think number one, the teachers don't teach main idea" [P5, p. 12]. She explained that it was not a one shot activity where a student simply reads a passage and identifies the main point. Identifying the main idea necessitates having prerequisites before a student expresses it in writing. Miss P gave an example of teachers' inability to teach the main idea by recounting a conflicting experience with a lessons teacher, which is a teacher who gives extra tutoring to students after school hours. She recounts, "I remember when I was teaching Grade 6, I had this um, competition with a special lessons teacher…" [P5, p. 18]. Miss P's students, who were part of that lessons group, were confusing the main idea statement with a topic sentence as they learnt during their after school lessons. The situation had become so sensitive that Miss P admits, "I even had to call in some parents to tell them and I gave them some guidelines" [P5, p. 18]. Miss P reiterated her position on the issue by stating that she is not afraid to blame teachers. She posits, "I am not afraid. I know some teachers who just don't teach!" [P5, p. 20].

Miss A of Grade 6 also held teachers accountable for students' comprehension failure. Her sentiment is that, "some teachers have not quite understood the teaching of main idea." She adds that, "everybody has a different way of what is the main

idea" [A6, p. 12]. Miss A also extends the fault to teacher coordinators and workshop facilitators whom she claims, "have their own versions of how to find the main idea" [A6, p. 12].

Interview data from the four effective Grade 5 and 6 teachers in this study, indicated that the participants perceived that it is teachers' inability to teach the main idea that contributed to students' failure in that component of the Common Entrance Examination.

4.3.2 The Students' Reading Abilities

Apart from the teacher being responsible for the students' failure in the main idea, one Grade 5 teacher also believes that it is because of the students' overall weakness in reading comprehension. Miss S thinks that, "the children have a lot of problems with comprehension that is one, and if you cannot comprehend then you will fail" [S5, p. 5].

To elicit more information about the students' reading abilities, teachers were probed to give insights into the decoding and comprehension abilities of their students. In the absence of standardized measures to determine the students' reading levels, the teachers described their students abilities based on their achievements on formative and summative assessments such as teacher made tests and their observations of the students. A description of students decoding and comprehension abilities has been presented in Section 3.3.3.

The interview data thus shows that the 4 effective teachers of Grade 5 and 6 also attribute students' failure on the main idea test to the students' own poor decoding and comprehension abilities which are evident when the reach the Grade 5 and 6 classes.

4.3.3 The Main Idea Examination

While the participants attributed poor performance on the main idea to persons, that is, the teacher and the student, they have also pointed a finger to the exam itself. Miss A of Grade 6 who reports having the privilege of correcting the main idea papers of both the Grade 4 Minimum Standards Exam and the Grade 6 Common Entrance Mock Exams, believes that the weakness lies in the construction of the reading comprehension passages that are administered for the exam. She states, "I think the construction of the passage has a lot to do with it because sometimes there are too many elements in that paragraph which has more than one idea" [A6, p. 10]. She elaborates on this point by explaining that students are required in the exam, to synthesise the main idea into one sentence, however, because of the passage construction, that one sentence may not be a simple sentence but a complex sentence which renders the task more difficult for the students who sometimes write more than one sentence for the main idea. Miss A states, "Some of them they write two sentences….and they will always take the first sentence. In fact wherever there is a full stop that is" [A6, p. 11]. Miss A refers to the markers or the examiners who will only correct the students' sentence up to the full stop and totally disregard any information that may be written after that point.

The test item is not the only factor in the exam but also the mark scheme. While one the participants identified this as a possible reason for students' failure, Miss A of Grade 6 who also uses the mark scheme as a reference and a teaching tool to prepare her students for the exam, insists that there is disproportion in the allocation of marks to certain criteria (see Appendix H, for a sample of the main idea mark scheme). Miss A expresses, "I think too many marks are allotted to certain

areas…so to me if they rearrange the mark scheme, I think that will do…the marking alone will help them" [A6, p. 10].

The results of the interview indicate that the teacher-participants also perceive that the poor construction of the Main Idea Test is in part responsible for the Grade 6 students' poor performance on that area of reading comprehension.

4.3.4 Teaching Materials for Main Idea Comprehension

Reference materials or practice books were also identified by 2 of the 4 teacher-participants, both of Grade 6, as sources of confusion for the students. Miss A explains that there are some text books which teach that the main idea of a passage must be identified as a topic and not a complete sentence. She exemplifies her point by saying, "For example the answer will be: *How a canoe is made,* instead of, *We use lumber to make a cano*e" [A6, p. 11]. She informs that when students write the main idea a topic, "the child will get zero" [A6, p. 11].

With regard to practice exercises, Mr. L draws attention to an abundance of objective type activities or multiple choice exercises, which limit the amount of writing practice that the students get in constructing their own main idea sentence. Mr. L says, "I think we need to go back to basics, that will help the children…..use the passage and answer the questions …write it in their own words it will help them…" [L6, p. 9].

The teaching materials or resources used in the teaching of the main idea strategy are also perceived by the effective Grade 5 and 6 teachers in the study as a cause of the poor performance on the main idea exam. The materials are identified by the participants as either confusing or mainly of an objective type, which the participants believe to be restrictive.

4.3.5 Summary of Research Question 1

The question on what accounts for students failure in reading comprehension with specific reference to the main idea test, yielded four categories of responses. The teachers perceive that blame should be attributed to the teachers' inability to teach the strategy, the students poor decoding and comprehension abilities, the construction and scoring of the test item, and the types of inadequate materials used for practice. However, 3 out of 4 of these teachers believe that it is the teacher's inability to instruct in this strategy that accounts for the students' failure in that comprehension exam.

4.4 The Nature of Reading Comprehension Instruction in Grades 5 and 6

To respond to the second research question on the nature of reading comprehension instruction (Research Question 2) three areas will be examined. The first section deals with the types of strategies that are taught in Grades 5 and 6 (Question 2A) and the second section concerns the quality of direct instruction in the reading comprehension lessons in Grades 5 and 6 (Research Question 2B). A third area of analysis pulls together data from sections of Research Question 2A and 2B and compares the nature of reading comprehension instruction between Grades 5 and 6 (Research Question 2C).

4.4.1 General Pattern of the Reading Comprehension Lessons

Initially, in describing the nature of reading comprehension instruction (Research Question 2) a general overview of the 27 lessons will be presented. This overview serves as a means of showing the commonalities and/or differences that

exist in the teaching of reading comprehension strategies across the two grades and the two schools in Saint Lucia.

A thorough review of the field notes of the 27 lessons observed, which were subdivided into teacher and student activity indicates clear trends in the delivery of the comprehension lessons at both grade levels (see Appendix D). While a model of direct instruction was used to assess the quality of the comprehension lessons (see Appendix C) other features were apparent and constant throughout all the 27 lessons. Some of these features included: comprehension preparation, where the teacher identified the objective of the lesson, oral reading or fluency practice by students or guided by the teacher, written work, comprehension assessment through questioning, independent seat work, monitoring, and corrective feedback. There was therefore always a clear pattern in the lessons which can be further classified as the lesson introduction, the developmental activities, and the conclusion or evaluation. The lessons also involved some degree of interruption or non-instruction which was either related to disciplinary matters, comprehension assessment, or in the case of Miss S's Lesson 3, the preparation of the students for role play.

4.4.2 Results from Observations of Random Sample and Interviews

From the pool of 27 lessons, four lessons were randomly selected for each teacher making a total of 16 randomly selected lessons. These 16 lessons, eight from Grade 5 and eight from Grade 6 were transcribed for in-depth scrutiny and analysis. This provides a more detailed descriptive analysis of the reading lessons. The rational for this reduction was due to the similarities that were observed in the entire cohort of lessons. This decision was supported by interview data which confirmed consistency in the lessons' structure and the repetition and emphasis on particular skills or

strategies. When asked whether teachers would have done anything differently than what was observed, the participants responded similarly. In Grade 5, Miss P said, "Um not really, because I have, I have done all these things already, so it was like a repetition for me" [P5, p. 2]. Miss S also of Grade 5 responded in this way to a similarly phased question.

> Researcher: Would you say that your lessons were representative of other lessons that you normally do?
>
> Miss S: I would say basically yes. They were representative of them, in terms of getting the students involvement in the lesson… [S5, p. 1].

Owing to the fact that it was the final term of the school year and students were nearing their Common Entrance Examination, Mr. L informed that, "most of the lessons were kind of a revision nature" [L6, p. 1]. Miss A also a Grade 6 teacher also indicated that it was a period of reinforcement for her students as they were preparing for exams.

These confirmations from the participants provided the evidence to justify a reduction in the number of lessons analyzed for this study. This sample of 16 randomly selected lessons facilitates an equal and fair balance of lessons per teacher-participant.

The observation results will be combined with results from the interviews with participants to address Research Question 2.

4.5 Comprehension Strategies taught in Grade 5 and 6 Classes in Saint Lucia

Research Question 2A deals specifically with the types of comprehension strategies that the teachers taught to facilitate learning in their class and to achieve their lessons' objectives. Specifically, Research Question 2A is: What comprehension

strategies are taught by effective Grade 5 and Grade 6 Saint Lucian teachers? Each grade level will be dealt with in turn.

4.5.1 Strategies taught in Grade 5

The transcripts of the eight randomly chosen Grade 5 lessons revealed that a variety of comprehension strategies were taught by both teachers, Miss P and Miss S. Of the 11 strategies identified on the observational checklist (see Appendix C) only one strategy was not apparent in the lessons. That strategy was cooperative learning. Nine strategies were taught explicitly by the teachers. Data in Table 3 shows that question answering was the most popular strategy. It was also the dominant strategy in 5 of the 8 lessons. The dominant strategy is identified as the one which was mainly emphasized in the lesson and also identified by the teacher as the objective of the reading lesson. The second most frequently taught strategy was related to vocabulary instruction which was noted in three lessons between the participants. In two of the lessons it was identified as the main strategy, one in Miss P's class the other in Miss S's.

Activation of prior knowledge was also evident in two lessons. It was obvious at times where teachers encouraged students to connect text to self and to the rest of the world in an attempt to understand particular concepts. For example in Miss P's Lesson 7, in one activity on the text structure strategy, students had to complete cause and effect sentences with missing causes. The following extract shows how connections were made in order to complete the sentences.

Teacher: Ok, last one, "*The entire building came tumbling down*…."

Maysay, You all have the answer already?

Whole class: Yes Miss! (Shouting excitedly)

Student: Because it was hit by a plane

Teacher: Because it was hit by a plane. She remembered 911 [PA5-7, p. 9].

Students were very excited and eager to respond in this lesson as they were able to suggest causes based on their experiences or those of others.

Table 3

Comprehension Strategies taught in Grade 5 Classes

	Miss P				Miss S				
Comprehension Strategy	Lesson 2	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Lesson 7	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 6	Total
Question Answering	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	8
Question Generating	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	1
Cooperative Learning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Activation of Prior Knowledge	X	X	√	√	X	X	X	X	2
Summarization	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	1
Mental Imagery/ Visualization	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	1
Use of Text Structures	X	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	1
Vocabulary Instruction	√	X	X	X	√	X	√	X	3
Graphic Organizers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	1
Comprehension Monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	1
Multiple Strategies	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	7

Note. √ =Observed √ = Dominant strategy in lesson X = Not Observed

Visualizing or mental imagery was a strategy only observed in one lesson, which was Miss S's Lesson 3, where students were retelling the story though role plays. After much practice with their fluency and working on understanding the difficult vocabulary in the story of *The Hen and the Vulture,* (see Appendix I), Miss S had her students create a visual representation by acting out the story. Miss S explained to her students:

> This is a very important exercise because it helps us to understand what the story is about. It gives us an idea. Ok. When you are acting it out, I have a picture of what the story is about….Ok. …increase our understanding our comprehension. Ok? [SB5-3, p. 1].

Summarization was taught in one of Miss P's lessons where the focus was teaching the main idea. In Lesson 5, the teacher worked together with the students, providing much scaffolding as she tried to have them make the correct inference from the passage and write in their own words. In helping the students to get the correct gist, this is how Miss P proceeds:

> Student: Mervin was excited and impatient because he could not wait for his video game.
>
> Teacher: Now there is a phrase there that means the same as *impatient,* hidden in the sentence. What phrase means the same as *impatient* in the sentence we have here?
>
> Students: He could not wait
>
> Teacher…so you have redundancy…Let's see how it sounds
>
> Students: Mervin was excited and impatient on receiving his video game.
>
> Teacher: Very good [PA5-5, p. 3-4].

Table 3 shows that the use of graphic organizers, question generating and comprehension monitoring each appeared once in the entire sample of eight lessons. However, they were used altogether in one lesson conducted by Miss S. This lesson lent itself to the use of these strategies including question answering, as the teacher was showing students how to use the KWL strategy. This information was recorded in a table and this practice essentially encouraged students to question themselves on the topic of *Transportation*, before reading the passage.

Many comprehension strategies were evident in the Grade 5 lessons. While some appeared only in one lesson, Table 3 shows that 7 out of the 8 Grade 5 lessons relied on multiple strategies in the teaching of reading comprehension. Some strategies were also identified as dominant strategies because they occupied most of the instructional time or they were the objectives of the lesson identified by the class teachers, during the introduction of each reading comprehension lesson. For example while Lesson 4 in Miss S's class involved a number of strategies because she was introducing the students to the QAR, the strategy that was emphasised was question answering.

4.5.2 Strategies taught in Grade 6

In the Grade 6 classes, 8 out of the 11 strategies identified on the observation checklist were observed in the reading comprehension lessons. The strategies that were not observed were question generating, comprehension monitoring, and graphic organizers. The three strategies that were commonly used in both Grade 6 classes were question answering, cooperative learning, and summarization. Question answering was the most popular strategy as it was present in all the eight lessons, however, it was the dominant strategy taught only in Miss A's Lesson 3 (see Table 4).

The second most commonly taught strategy was summarization, which was seen in the 6 out of 8 lessons on the main idea. It was also identified as the main comprehension strategy taught in these six lessons as the objective of these lessons was for students to identify the implicit main idea in paragraphs, to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant details and to identify the supporting details for main idea statements. In Miss A's Lesson 8, she informs her students:

> In our reading comprehension lesson this morning, we will go one step further than we did for the last lesson. Remember in our last lesson I gave you a list of sentences to identify the main idea and also a list of sentences to pick out the details which support the main idea. This morning you will be required to write the main idea and also to go over the paragraph and select the details which support the main idea [AA6-8, p. 1].

In Mr. L's classes where all the lessons focused on the main idea, Mr. L emphasised how necessary it was to practise this strategy for the upcoming Common Entrance Exam. At the beginning of Lesson 1, Mr. L who had already written a paragraph on the blackboard informed his students, "Basically what we are doing here, we are trying as much as possible to give ourselves all the necessary practice that we need so we can answer the main idea" [LB6-1, p. 1].

Table 4

Comprehension Strategies taught in Grade 6 Classes

	Miss A				Mr L				
Comprehension Strategy	Lesson 3	Lesson 6	Lesson 7	Lesson 8	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Total
Question Answering	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	8
Question Generating	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Cooperative Learning	X	√	√	√	X	√	X	X	4
Activation of Prior Knowledge	X	X	X	X	X	√	√	X	2
Summarization	X	√	**X**	√	√	√	√	√	6
Mental Imagery/ Visualization	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	1
Use of Text Structures	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	1
Vocabulary Instruction	X	X	X	X	√	X	√	X	2
Graphic Organizers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Comprehension Monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
Multiple Strategies	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	7

Note. √ = Observed, √ = Dominant strategy, X= Not Observed

Cooperative learning or collaborative reasoning was evident in 4 out of the 8 lessons, but more commonly used by Miss A, most of whose lessons involved group work. Irrespective of the strategy focus, Miss A arranged her classroom for her students to engage in small group discussions or to reason out situations

collaboratively. It was only in this classroom that such a physical arrangement was observed. A preference for this strategy was confirmed in the interview with Miss A, where she explained that one of the reasons is to allow the slow students to have a voice and participate in the lesson. She states:

> They're a very slow class….what you do is take short interesting stories and you do these group discussions. They are able to say their answers. They are able to participate fully in the lesson….I think it helps slow children a lot because it gives every child an opportunity to discuss among her peers. Whereby she may, might be shy in a large group, or to raise her hand to answer a question, but among her group she will be able to be more vocal and express herself [A6, p. 29-30].

Another rationale submitted by Miss A for her predominant use of cooperative learning is because of the competitive atmosphere that it encourages. She explains:

> So they meet in their groups and they sometimes, they are given questions and they discuss the questions among themselves…and then now they come together and sometimes the groups compete to find out who, which group have the correct answer. As you saw even when you came [A6, p. 29].

In Mr. L's Lesson 2 there was evidence of students working collaboratively but not in small groups as seen in Miss A's class. In that lesson, Mr. L's entire class had to decide whether certain main idea statements submitted by their classmates were correct. This reasoning was a collaborative effort and was therefore identified as a cooperative learning strategy.

Activation of prior knowledge was only observed in two lessons conducted by Mr. L and not at all observed in Miss A's lessons. In Lesson 2 where students worked with a passage about an untidy classroom, the teacher encouraged them to make connections between the text and self in order to infer the main idea. In Lesson 4 the strategy is even more apparent as Mr. L explains the concept of 'marinating' in a paragraph on the main idea (see Appendix J, passage number 22). The following is a brief excerpt of Mr. L's Lesson 4. Mr. L wanted to activate his students' schema on a barbecue in order to understand the meaning of the word *marinating*.

Teacher: Good, um there is another word there um…the word ***marinating.*** What does that word mean? Anybody? Read the sentence, read the sentence

Students: ***The chicken has been seasoned and left marinating.***

Teacher: Ok, the chicken had been seasoned… I am sure everyone has been involved in some kind of barbecue.

Students: Yes Sir!

Teacher: You have seen it, or you have been involved in it, ok, good… What is happening to the chicken here that was left marinating? Raise your hand, yes.

Student: Sir… Absorb the seasoning

Teacher: You used a word a while ago… They left the chicken there to something…You said the word…To what

Student: Absorb

Teacher: Absorb. Ok, Good…and what is happening? The chicken is left to absorb the seasoning. Ok, so that when you taste the meat, you will taste the seasoning in it. That is what the word marinating

> means…marinating. That is what is happening to the chicken. So whatever seasoning that was there, when you turn that, when you turn that piece of chicken, it will be very tasty. That is why we call it tasty and delicious, because it was marinated properly, properly seasoned. Ok? [LB6-4, p. 3].

In that same lesson, Mr. L concentrated on having his students understand important vocabulary before writing the main idea statement. The word 'marinating' again was the word of focus and through questioning and schema activation, students finally conceptualized its meaning. A similar situation is observed in Lesson 1 where Mr. L refers to his own experiences to explain to his students what wasps are. He starts recounting in this way, "Now the reason why I underline this word, it is because um, when I grew up in …we had a lot of these wasps. We call them in patois '*Jeppes*'. The English word, they call it Jack spinners, ok?" [LB6-1, p. 2]. This emphasis on vocabulary to enable comprehension was what placed these lessons under the strategy category of vocabulary instruction.

The teaching of text structure presented itself in 1 of the 8 lessons. This was a lesson in which the objective was that of identifying cause and effect relationship. Miss A explained to her students at the start of that lesson:

> By the end of this lesson you should be able to read a story, read a sentence in a newspaper, in a story book and to be able to identify what caused the problem and the effect; what happened because of the problem [AA6-8, p. 1].

To exemplify how the lesson proceeded, this is a short extract of Miss A's interaction with her students.

Teacher: Listen to another one. "Johnny studied very hard so he passed his exam. Johnny studied very hard so he passed his exam." What happened?

Students: (inaudible)

Teacher: What happened?

Students: He passed his exam

Teacher: He passed his exam. What caused him to pass his exam?

Students: Miss, he studied hard.

Teacher: He studied hard. Very good [AA6-7, p. 1].

In that lesson on text structure, the teacher was heard constantly interchanging the words *result* and *effect*, to ensure that the students understood that they meant the same. Here is a lesson sample.

Teacher: In the above paragraph, what caused the father to be late?

Students: (Inaudible)

Teacher: What resulted or what was the effect?

Students: The heavy traffic jam

Teacher: What resulted, or what was the effect of the heavy traffic jam? Let me hear you [AA6-7, p. 2].

Mental imagery was observed only once, that is in Mr. L's Lesson 2. Mr. L initiated the lesson by asking the students to read a passage on the blackboard. While doing so he wanted them to visualize and place themselves in the situation. He guided his students in this manner, "The first time you read keep an open mind. The

second time you visualize, you can picture what is happening in the passage. Place yourself in the situation" [LB6-1, p. 1].

In 7 of the 8 Grade 6 lessons more than one strategy was taught (see Table 4). While question answering was present in all the lessons, it was taught in combination with other strategies. It was only in Miss A's Lesson 3 that question answering was taught exclusively. However, it is the summarization strategy through the teaching of the main idea that was the dominant strategy taught in 6 of the 8 lessons in Grade 6.

4.5.3 Summary of Research Question 2A

In the entire cohort of 16 randomly sampled lessons, eight in Grade 5 and eight in Grade 6, teachers were observed teaching a variety of comprehension strategies to enhance their students' comprehension abilities. Figure 1 shows the total number and range of strategies taught in both grades. Question answering was the most common strategy observed, whereas in Grade 6 in particular the emphasis was also on summarization. While question answering appears in all the 16 lessons, it is a dominant strategy in more than a quarter of the entire sample that is in 6 of the 16 lessons among the two grades. Summarization is taught as a main strategy in 7 of the 16 lessons. Lessons emphasizing vocabulary instruction took the third place in frequency with a total of 5 lessons across the two grades. This was followed by cooperative learning and the activation of prior knowledge.

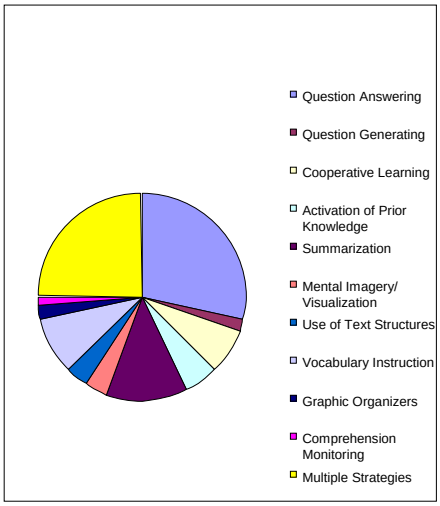

Figure 1. Strategies observed in16 lessons

4.6 The Quality of the Reading Comprehension Instruction

Research Question 2B is concerned with the quality of the teachers' explicit instruction in their reading comprehension lessons. To judge the quality of the lessons, three areas have been analyzed. The first is the application of the Direct Instruction Model adapted from Pearson and Dole (1987) to the 16 lessons in the sample. The second way in which the quality of the instruction is assessed is by an analysing of the nature of the questions asked. This is to determine whether the questions are related to instruction or assessment. The third factor related to the quality of the reading comprehension instruction is the specific amount of time allotted to the teaching of the comprehension strategies. The ratings or evaluation of the 16 randomly selected lessons will be presented in concert with comments from individual teacher interviews in order to answer Research Question 2B.

4.6.1 Procedure for Scoring Reading Comprehension Lessons

The lessons in this study were rated based on the presence or absence of elements in the Direct Instruction Model adapted from Pearson and Dole (1987). This model suggests that explicit or direct instruction should include these four elements: (1) modelling or teacher explanation, (2) scaffolding, (3) independent practice, and (4) guided practice. This model, also referred to as an explicit comprehension instruction model, was adapted from Pearson and Dole (1987) because it shares common features with other models of strategy instruction such as Palincsar and Brown's (1984) reciprocal teaching, Pressley et al., (1992) transactional strategy instruction model, El-Dinary and Schuder (1993) SAIL programme, and Baumann's 5-step procedure for teaching main idea comprehension. All these models consist of elements of teacher demonstration or modelling, and scaffolding, after which the teacher cedes responsibility to the learner by providing independent practice or application of the comprehension strategy. Hence, using a 4 point rating scale, each lesson was rated accordingly. For each element of the model that was present in the lesson one point was awarded. A lesson rated one point would therefore be considered as having minimum direct instruction while one which scored four points would be judged as 'excellent' because all elements of the model were present. These elements are presented in Table 5.

A preliminary scoring of the lessons took place during the actual observation of the lessons. Subsequent to that period of observation, inter-rater scoring was carried out with a Doctoral student who specialised in English Language Assessment. One lesson was randomly selected from the pool of lessons and served as the standardization sample. First, the elements of the framework were discussed along with clarifications about the distinction between scaffolded assistance and guided

practice. Using the Direct Instruction Framework from Pearson and Dole (1987) both scorers independently scored one randomly selected lesson from each participant (a total of four lessons). After this stage was complete, the scorers met to discuss the results and to come to consensus on the rating of the lessons. This process of standardization and consensus led to the final moderation of all the lessons that were initially scored during the actual observation period. The inter-rater reliability score that was obtained was 0.81.

Table 5

Scoring Guide of Reading Comprehension Lessons

Number of Elements	Score(points)	Quality of Instruction
Any 1 element	1	Minimum
Any 2 elements	2	Good
Any 3 elements	3	Very good
All 4 elements	4	Excellent

4.6.2 Ratings of Reading Comprehension Lessons

Grade 5. Data shown in Table 6 reveals that in Miss P's Grade 5 class, 3 out of the 4 lessons included all the four elements of the explicit instruction model. Consequently, these three lessons (Lessons 4, 5 and 7) were rated 'excellent'. Lesson 2 was judged 'good' because only two elements were present. There was neither evidence of independent nor guided practice. However, this lesson was noted as having a heavy emphasis on scaffolding, as the teacher worked together with the students on oral exercises to determine the meanings of words in context. This type

of assistance is confirmed in Miss P's statement to the students. "We're going to number 2. I will read for you" [PA5-2, p. 2].

Table 6 also reveals that 2 out of 4 of Miss S's Grade 5 lessons were 'excellent' in quality while the two other lessons were rated 'very good'. Lesson 3 did not receive a perfect rating because there was no evidence of scaffolding during that lesson. The lesson was primarily student-centred. Students were engaged in the retelling of a story though role play, for which they had received much practice in reading and assistance from their teacher in the previous lesson. Therefore, while scaffolding was not evident during that lesson, it had been received in the previous lessons. In Lesson 4 there was an absence of students working independently as the focus of the lesson was whole class oral questioning based on the QAR Strategy. The teacher mainly guided the students and provided scaffolding by reading orally along with the students.

At the Grade 5 level, 5 out of the 8 lessons in reading comprehension were rated 'excellent', based on their completeness in having the teacher explain, assist and guide students to the point of independence or self regulation. No lesson was rated below two points. They all ranged from 'good' to 'excellent' in instruction.

Table 6

Rating of Reading Comprehension Lessons

	Grade 5								Grade 6								
Teacher	P	P	P	P	S	S	S	S	A	A	A	A	L	L	L	L	Total
Lesson #	2	4	5	7	2	3	4	6	3	6	7	8	1	2	4	5	
Modelling/Explanation/ Demonstration	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	16
Scaffolded Assistance	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	√	13
Independent Practice	-	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	14
Guided Practice	-	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	15
Overall Rating	2	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	

Note. √= Observed, - = Not Observed

Grade 6. In Grade 6 Miss A's Lesson 3 which was focused on the strategy making inferences was rated 'excellent' (i.e. all elements identified by Pearson and Dole (1987) were present). This lesson was initiated with a guessing game called 'Who Am I'. The teacher gave some cues or described something and the students had to infer what was being described based on the evidence given. The lesson proceeded in this way:

> Teacher: I give you strong bones and teeth, very rich in milk and also repair your tissue. What am I?
>
> Students: Protein
>
> Teacher: Protein. Very good
>
> Teacher: Another one. "I am the longest line of latitude. I am marked zero degrees
>
> Students: The equator [AA6-3, p. 1].

This activity allowed the teacher to provide much explanation and demonstration of the strategy. For example:

Teacher: Ok, now, someone will tell you something without coming right out and saying it. I did not tell you equator, I did not tell you Tourist, but I gave you information. And what did you do with that information?

Student: Put it all together

Teacher: Ok you put it all together and then what happen after?

You reason out and then you try to find out what it is. Listen to that. When I gave you all the information, I did not come straight out and say equator, or tourist or breadfruit, But I *implied* it and then you *infer.* INFER. (Teacher spells the word). You inferred. That's the word we use [AA6-3, p. 2].

Teacher explanation was observed in this lesson as the teacher tried to ensure that her students understood the strategy as well as its purpose. At one point she reminded them, "This is a skill you have to learn when you are doing reading and for your exams" [AA6-3, p. 3].

After explaining, the teacher did an example with her students. This aspect of the lesson is identified as scaffolding. She gradually moved them to an independent activity by stating, "Now get ready to write some answers…" [AA6-3, p. 4]. While students worked individually, the teacher provided guidance as she monitored their responses. This guided period was extended to a feedback session where they

discussed their answers. It was time to do so when the teacher ordered, "Most of you are finished. Stop writing! Let us read the …number 1" [AA6-3, p. 4].

Miss A's Lesson 6 also contained all four elements of the Direct Instruction Model. After receiving much assistance and explanations, the students were directed to their independent practice. She instructed them saying, "You have 10 minutes to do this exercise…On your paper you write the sentence which says the main idea for number1 and number 2, you write the sentences which support the main idea" [AA6-6, p. 9].

Lesson 7 in which the objective was to identify *cause* and *effect* relationships was no different from the other two lessons as all the components of explicit instruction were observed. There were very clear points of teacher explanation in this text structure strategy. For example:

> Ok, now let me explain something to you. I want your attention. When you want to find the *effect,* you have to ask yourself what happened. And when you want to find the *cause,* you have to ask yourself, why did this thing happen? [AA6-7, p. 4].

As with all Miss A's other lessons there was always opportunity for students to practise on their own. After explaining the importance of the strategy, Miss A directed her students to independent practice by stating:

> …so you have to be able to do that very well. Now we are going to see how well you have understood the lesson. I want you to make two columns on your paper. Write *Cause* here and *Effect* and divide your paper in half… [AA6-7, p. 4].

Miss A's Lesson 8 on the main idea was also rated 'excellent', that is 4 out of the 4 elements prescribed by Pearson and Dole (1987) were present. Before students were assigned to the task of identifying the main idea and supporting details, the teacher ensured that they read the paragraph orally together and got the needed assistance. Here is how she proceeded:

Teacher: Let us read that paragraph together

Students: Ants are…

Teacher: Wait, you have to wait. We have to do it together. Let us read [AA6-8, p. 1].

From Table 6, it can therefore be seen that all four of Miss A's lessons received ratings of 4 out of 4 and were therefore evaluated as being 'excellent' in quality. Each lesson involved to varying degrees some aspect of teacher explanation, scaffolding, and guided practice while students worked independently.

Table 6 shows that in the other Grade 6 class, two of Mr. L's lessons were rated 'excellent' in quality and the other two were rated 'very good'. Mr. L's first lesson received a full score of 4 out of 4. This lesson focused on the same main idea objective as Miss A's Lesson 8 and followed a similar pattern in terms of the teacher first working along with the students before allowing them to actually write the main idea statement on their own. To provide the necessary assistance for his students Mr. L questions his students to help them to first identify the subject of the paragraph and then what is said about the subject or the relevant details. He assists his students in the following way.

Teacher: Good so we have established our 'subject'. Now remember what we are doing. First of all, we have identified our subject. Then let us look

at what is said about them. What happened? Straight from the passage. Let us highlight some of the things …. Relevant details, said about the 2 boys.

Observation: Teacher writes a heading on the board: THE BOYS

Teacher: The boys…Julian. Ok, let us try and put that in sequence. What is the first thing? Let us go in order

Student: Planned to raid the tree

Teacher: Ok, anything else. We want what is relevant in the passage…relevant information from the passage [LB6-1, p. 9].

Mr. L's Lesson 2 received an overall rating of 3 out of 4 because scaffolding was not observed. However, what seemed overriding in this lesson was a lot of guided practice as students worked on their own to determine the main idea of their given passage. As Mr. L moved around the class to each student he was heard giving guidance and making these comments:

Teacher: Isn't that a repetition?

We talked about... your sentence, grammar

Look at what you have there. The class were, the class were.

Now you will be penalized for this [LB6-2, p.].

Mr. L's Lesson 4 on the teaching of the main idea and supporting details received a score of 3 out of 4 because of the absence of scaffolding, which is that point where the teacher is seen actually doing an example with the students. However, what is observed is the teacher immediately directing the students to a period of independent practice, where they have to write the main idea individually as

well as the supporting details. This happened after the students read the passage orally and the teacher briefly explained the concept of marinating, by also activating their background knowledge. While this bit of vocabulary instruction was recorded as teacher explanation, there was no demonstration or modelling of the main idea strategy which was the objective of that lesson. As in the other lessons, there is a lot of guidance and feedback from Mr. L while his students work on their own. In that lesson, Mr. L is heard making the following comments as he passes individual students:

> Teacher: Look at the sentence. What is happening there?
>
> Remember what we spoke about in writing the sentence, subject verb agreement
>
> Be more specific and say who is doing the preparation [LB6-4, p. 3].

Mr. L's lessons aimed at having the students revise and apply the strategies that had already been taught prior to the observation period. This is the possible reason for scaffolding not being observed. In his interview he confirmed the nature of the lessons when he submitted, "Most of the lessons were kind of a revision nature" [L6, p. 1].

Lesson 5 with Mr. L is another lesson on the same strategy. This time the paragraph being used is about *zoo animals showcased in natural surroundings*, a passage from the past Common Entrance Exams (see Appendix J, passage number 23). All elements of the Direct Instruction Model (Pearson & Dole, 1987) were evident including scaffolding which was not observed in the two previous lessons. This scaffolding was observed when the teacher worked together with the students to determine whether they had written the correct main idea statement for their

homework assignment. While this could easily be categorized as corrective feedback, the students were taken through the passage with such strategic questioning by the teacher that it was clear that he was providing them with props or scaffolds before moving on to another paragraph. Mr. L pauses at one point and says:

Teacher: Now before I take any more sentences from you people, let us look at the passage. What is the passage talking about? Let us answer some questions there now…

Teacher: Ok, yes we're talking about a zoo and animals being kept there. What is it.. What is the passage telling you about the zoo? What do you know about zoos, class…

Student: A place where animals are kept

Teacher….ok, how are these animals placed or where are these animals placed when they are in the zoo?

Student: In a cage

Teacher: Ok, is the passage talking about the animals being kept in a zoo, in a cage there? [LB6, p. 2].

It was that kind of assistance that helped the students to arrive at the correct inference which on the blackboard was: *Animals are kept in zoos (places) that are similar to their natural surroundings (environment).*

However, although there was a bit of teacher explanation, it was at a minimum. As in other lessons, Mr. L began Lesson 5 by letting his students know what they would be doing in the lesson. He informed them:

We will be doing two things. Get out your assignments; we will be looking at it. We'll be writing the main idea on the blackboard and the sentences that you have identified…the supporting sentences. To help you write out the main

idea we're going to write it on the black board. After this we are going to look at the next paragraph that you have on the paper and you are going to write out the main idea… [LB6-5, p. 1].

This lesson received a rating of 4 out of 4 as it did have all the four elements of the model being applied, to varying extents and duration.

4.6.3 Procedure for Analysing the Nature of the Questions

Questioning answering was used in all the lessons observed in this study. As a comprehension strategy, it was either juxtaposed with other comprehension strategies or used exclusively in the reading comprehension lesson. In the latter case, teachers asked questions to advance students' comprehension abilities. For example, wrong answers submitted by students were discussed and students were allowed to justify their answers. This was done sometimes collaboratively with the teacher. These questions were identified as relating to strategy instruction. At other times there was no provision for clarification. Teachers asked questions and simply said whether the answers were correct or wrong. In such situations the questioning was identified as assessment of students' comprehension and not instructional.

4.6.4 The Nature of Questions in Question Answering Strategy

In this section, findings related to the nature and purpose of the question answering strategy during the reading comprehension lessons, will be presented. The results will show whether the questions asked were related to instruction or comprehension assessment. Questions asked by each teacher participant in one of their randomly selected lessons will be examined. This analysis of the nature of these

questions will contribute to the findings on the quality of the reading comprehension instruction (Research Question 2B).

At the Grade 5 level, Miss P's Lesson 2 on context clues was randomly chosen and analysed in terms of questions used. This lesson which was rated 2 out of 4 on the Direct Instruction Scale (Pearson & Dole, 1987), was noted for a heavy emphasis on scaffolding, during which many questions were asked, followed by teacher explanations. Miss P questioned her students orally on the meanings of words in context, either from individual sentences or short paragraphs. An examination of the teachers' questions and feedback reveal that her interrogation was mainly instructional as she always explained why the answers given were appropriate and which words were better suited than others. In one sentence with the word 'grade,' students were questioned on the meaning in context. Here is a brief excerpt which illustrates how the teacher explains.

> Teacher: I will read for you: He could not climb the steep grade because the load was too heavy…Is the meaning the same?
>
> Class: No Miss
>
> Student: Hill
>
> Student: Level
>
> Student: Mountain
>
> Student: Step
>
> Teacher: Ok, some of you have hill, mountain, step. Step, depending on how the step is, Ok, How high the step is, it could be a grade. But I think the closest answer is Hill….Mountain can pass….Anything steep? So you see here this grade talks about hill, a mountain and here we talk about a class [PA5-2, p. 2-3].

The teacher also had students back up their answers. For example in one instance, the students had to select from a few options the meaning of the word 'merge' in the following context: "About five miles from here, the two rivers merge to form a larger river." Very excitedly the whole class shouted the word "meet." The extract which follows, clarifies that the teacher did not simply accept their answers but encouraged them to give evidence.

Teacher: What's the answer?

Whole class: Meet

Teacher: Meet, very good. The answer is meet. Now which part of the sentence helped you to say the answer was meet? [PA5-2, p. 4].

In other situations where students answered incorrectly, apart from having them justify the response, the whole class was questioned on that person's answer. For example one student chose "sensible" as the meaning of the word *amiable* in this sentence: "Joseph is an <u>amiable</u> person. He has many friends." This is how the teacher reacted to his response.

Student: Sensible

Teacher: Sensible? Which word? Which phrase there gives you the idea that amiable means sensible? Which words?

Student: Has many friends

Teacher: Is he correct?

Whole class: Yes Miss

Teacher: How many of you say yes? Stand up! [PA5-2, p. 5].

From this lesson it was evident that most of the questions asked by Miss P were beyond assessing whether the students knew the answers. The question answering could therefore be described as comprehension instruction.

In the other Grade 5 class, Miss S's Lesson 4 on the QAR was also scrutinized to determine the nature of the questions.

Teacher: Let me ask you a question. Hold on. *What do you think happened to the razor?*

Student: It got lost

Teacher: Hold on. Would you find the answer in the book?

Students: No Miss

Teacher: Ah?

Student: No

Teacher: Is it in the book?

Students: No, yes

Teacher: Somebody said yes. Did they tell us what happened to the razor in the book?

Students: No

Teacher: But what do you think?... you have to get it on your own. What do you think happened to the razor?

Student: It got lost.

Teacher: Yes, somebody said the razor got lost… yes, am…let me see…Shanil tell me what you think happened to the razor?

Class: Maysay

Teacher: Hold on, hold on, let's hear him

Student: Maybe one of the chicks was playing with it and they lost it.

Teacher: One of the chicks,…

Student: (Inaudible)

Teacher: Ok he said maybe one of the chicks played with it and they lost it. Ok, a good answer. Would we give it to him wrong in answering the question?

Students: No Miss

Teacher: Why not?

Students: Because it's his opinion

Teacher: What do you think, exactly… So it is what you think would happen somebody else, yes Edward

Student: The razor just disappeared

Teacher: The razor just magically disappeared, ok? Yes Royston

Student: Somebody stole it

Teacher: Somebody might have stolen the razor, yes

Student: (inaudible)

Teacher: Let's hear what she is saying

Student: Maybe when the hen??? Maybe the neighbour went a take it

Teacher: Maybe the neighbour…past tense children…maybe the neighbour took the razor because the neighbours thought she was fussing over her chicks Ok Yes Preston

Teacher: Ok. You see you all have a good imagination, very good… so there are many reasons. Ok Verlinda wants to say something. Yes Verlinda, give us another reason

Student: Maybe one of the neighbours stole it

Teacher: Maybe one of the neighbours stole it. That's what Shanika said. Ok so there are many reasons why…many things that could have happened to the razor, alright [SB5-4, p. 10-11].

This lesson which was predominantly guided practice though oral questioning aimed at teaching the students the QAR strategy and where to find answers to comprehension questions. The sample question in this extract serves to justify that the questions asked were not for the purpose of assessment but to instruct the students in the use of the strategy.

At the Grade 6 level in Lesson 1, Mr. L relies on the questioning strategy to engage his students in recalling important information when writing the main idea statement. This is an extract from his lesson to exemplify the nature of his questioning.

Teacher: …. What are some of the things you are not suppose to write for the main idea?

Student: A phrase

Teacher: You are not suppose to write a phrase, ok…and we know what's a phrase

Student: (Inaudible)

Teacher: We must not? We must not do what?

Student: (Inaudible)

Teacher: So in other words we must not write a sentence from the passage …that's what you want to tell me, ok you must not write a sentence from the passage…yes

Student: We must not write a question

Teacher: We must not write a question

Student: (inaudible)

Teacher: Ok, important, we must not begin: The main idea is…

Student: we must not write a title

Teacher: We must not write a title. Anything else we must not write?

Student: A topic

Teacher: A topic, a title, they are the same thing…you must not write?

Student: A list of things

Teacher: A list of things…

Student: We must not write more than one sentence

Teacher: We must not write more than one sentence, that's very good …

Student: Who or what the passage is about

Teacher: Who or what the passage is about...You have identified your *who*, you have identified your *what,* you know what is it you want to say about your *who* and your *what.* Ok? You have done all that. Now you are ready to write your sentence. Ok? You are with me?

Students: Yes, Sir

Teacher: What is it you must pay attention to whiles you are writing the sentence? Whiles you are writing the sentence, you have identified your *who* or your *what*. Ok. You have written down or you have identified what was said, everything that was said about the *who* or *what*…and you say to yourself what is it they really want me to write or to know about the who or the what. Now you are ready to write that sentence. What is it… write that sentence? Yes Annie

Student: Begin with a capital letter

Teacher: Good, that's important. You begin your sentence with a capital letter, very important, Yes, Lisa

Student: The person's name with a capital letter

Teacher: Ok if you are writing somebody's name we use capital letter for that person's name…Yes… [LB6-1, p. 3-4].

The questions in this part of Mr. L's lesson also elicited recall information about the mechanics of writing proper sentences such as punctuation, and capitalization. As seen in the excerpt above, Mr. L merely repeats the students' responses and at times expands on them. This aspect of the lesson was not necessarily instructing in the strategy but was rather for the purpose of testing, or for activating the knowledge which they has already learnt with regard to what they must and must not include in the main idea sentence.

In Miss A's Grade 6 class, Lesson 8 was randomly selected and analysed in terms of the questions asked. This lesson also relied on questioning as part of the instruction. At one point in the lesson the teacher questions the students to allow them to identify the main idea of a passage about *Arawaks*. This was for the purpose of testing or assessing their comprehension as they had already done a similar exercise previous to this task. The excerpt which follows will show that as students shared their answers there was no instruction taking place.

Student: The Arawaks did many things to make themselves look beautiful.
Student: Miss, my turn. The Arawaks were very creative people who loved decorating themselves to look beautiful.
Student: The Arawaks loved to look pretty and also loved flowers.
Student: Arawaks were people who loved to make themselves look beautiful.
Student: The Arawaks loved to make themselves look beautiful.
Student: The Arawaks did not like to look ugly for once.
Teacher: Anybody here?

Student: The Arawaks liked wearing flowers on their bodies and make themselves beautiful.

Teacher: Anybody?

Student: The Arawaks liked to make themselves beautiful.

Student: The Arawaks liked to beautify their bodies.

Student: The Arawaks liked to make themselves beautiful.

Teacher: Ok very Good, Very interesting

And I am passing around for the supporting details. When I pass around, you will read one supporting detail. Let me hear you [AA6-8, p. 6].

This random selection of one lesson from each participant reveals that questioning was used both as a strategy for direct instruction and as means of assessing students' comprehension.

4.6.5 Time Spent on Instruction in the Reading Comprehension Lessons

Using the Pearson and Dole (1987) model of Direct Instruction a further piece of quantitative data was derived to address Research Question 2B, regarding the quality of reading comprehension instruction among the 4 effective teachers in the study. The issue that was examined was the amount of time that was spent on direct instruction of comprehension strategies. The 16 reading comprehension lessons were timed to determine the actual time spent on each area of the Direct Instruction Model.

4.6.6 Procedure for Timing the Reading Comprehension Lessons

Initially, each lesson transcript was examined to identify and segment the four elements of the model: teacher explanation/modelling/demonstration, scaffolding, guided practice, and independent practice. Non-instructional areas were also highlighted. After segmenting these areas on the transcripts, the corresponding segments were located on the audio tapes and were timed using a stop watch. Verifications of the time were also made by referring to the observational field notes which were also timed at particular intervals during the observations of the lessons. The time was recorded in seconds then rounded off to the nearest minute. This activity was repeated for each lesson after which the time for each section of the lesson was converted to percentages of the total time. The percentages were rounded off to the nearest whole number due to the small size of the sample and the short duration of the lessons. It must be noted that in the timing of the lessons the period identified as independent practice sometimes occurred simultaneously with guided practice as the teacher would move around to monitor and give feedback to the students. Hence there is an overlap in the time with these two categories.

Grade 5. At the Grade 5 level a total of 89 minutes were observed in Miss P's class across four lessons. Table 7 shows that Miss P spent 80 minutes of the total time observed on instruction. Her non-instructional time was spent on activities such as writing on the board or assessing the students' comprehension. Table 7 shows that almost half of Miss P's instructional time was spent providing scaffolded assistance to her students. In Lesson 2 for example on the topic of Context Clues, Miss P spent 22 out of a total 25 minutes doing examples with the students (see Appendix K for an

analysis of time spent on each lesson). The least period of instruction was allotted to demonstration or explanation of the comprehension strategy.

Table 7

Time Spent on each Area of Direct Instruction in Miss Ps Grade 5 Class

Direct Instruction Elements	Total Time (89 minutes)	Percentage of Time
Teacher Demonstration/Explanation	9	10
Scaffolding	39	44
Independent Practice	18	20
Guided Practice	25*	28
Total Direct Instruction	80	90
Non Instruction	9	10

Note.* Represents time overlap with Guided and Independent Practice

In the other Grade 5 class a total of 169 minutes were observed in 4 reading comprehension lessons taught by Miss S. Table 8 shows that 153 minutes of that total time was spent on direct instruction which is 91 % of the total time. With regard to the individual elements of the instruction, Table 8 shows that Miss S spent the most time guiding the students and proving them with corrective feedback. Fifteen minutes or 9 % of the total time was spent on explanation or demonstration of the strategies. Teacher demonstration or explanation was therefore the category which was allotted the least time by Miss S.

Table 8

Time Spent on each Area of Direct Instruction in Miss S's Grade 5 Class

Direct Instruction Elements	Total Time (169 minutes)	Percentage of time
Teacher Demonstration/Explanation	15	9
Scaffolding	39	23
Independent Practice	65	38
Guided Practice	69*	41
Total Direct Instruction	153	91
Non Instruction	16	9

Note.* Represents time overlap with Guided and Independent Practice

At the Grade 5 level a total of 258 minutes were observed across the eight reading comprehension lessons analysed. Table 9 highlights that 90 % of that time was spent on strategy instruction. The least time was spent on teacher explanation with increasingly more time being allocated to scaffolding, independent practice, and guided practice. At least 30 % of the time is spread throughout these remaining three categories.

Table 9

Percentage of Time Spent on Direct Instruction in all the Eight Grade 5 Classes

Direct Instruction Categories	Minutes (258)	Percentage of Time
Teacher Demonstration /Explanation	24	9
Scaffolding	78	30
Independent Practice	83	32
Guided Practice	94	36*
Total Direct Instruction	233	90
Non Instruction	25	10

Note.* Represents time overlap with Guided and Independent Practice

Grade 6. At the Grade 6 level, a total of 150 minutes was observed in Miss A's class across the four lessons analysed, of which 125 minutes were spent in strategy instruction, which is 83 % of the total time. Of the 25 minutes for non-instruction, 17 minutes was spent on assessing the students' comprehension (see Appendix K for time analysis of individual lessons). Table 10 shows that the least amount of time was spent on scaffolding while both independent and guided practice took the highest slot of 29 % each of the total time.

Table 10

Time Spent on each Area of Direct Instruction in Miss A's Grade 6 Class

Direct Instruction Elements	Total Time (150 minutes)	Percentage of time
Teacher Demonstration/Explanation	31	21
Scaffolding	29	19
Independent Practice	44	29
Guided Practice	44*	29
Total	125	83
Non Instruction	25	17

Note.* Represents time overlap with Guided and Independent Practice

The total time observed in Mr. L's class amounted to 161 minutes across four lessons, of which 154 minutes was assigned to the direct instruction of the students in comprehension strategies. Table 11 shows that only 4 % of Mr. L's reading lessons were non-instructional. With regard to individual elements of the direct instruction model, 50 % of the total time was spent on guided practice. The second highest portion of time was allotted to independent practice followed by teacher explanation and then scaffolding.

Table 11

Time Spent on each Area of Direct Instruction in Mr L's Grade 6 Class

Direct Instruction Elements	Total Time (161minutes)	Percentage of time
Teacher Demonstration/Explanation	21	13
Scaffolding	17	11
Independent Practice	60	37
Guided Practice	80*	50
Total	154	96
Non Instruction	7	4

Note.* Represents time overlap with Guided and Independent Practice

The combined observational period in the Grade 6 classes amounted to 311 minutes over the eight lessons analysed. Of that time, 90% was observed as instruction time in comprehension strategies. Table 12 shows that the greatest part of the time (40%) was spent on guided practice. This was a period of time when teachers either provided feedback to students while they worked independently or in groups or as a whole class when the teacher used guiding questions to enable students to make an inference or to instruct them in the meaning of a particular word or concept. Independent practice was that other area of strategy instruction that was emphasised to a great extent in the Grade 6 classes. It accounted for the second highest portion of time (33%) in the lessons. As the activity suggests this was the time when the students worked on their own, practising or applying a strategy that

was taught or reinforced. Scaffolding received the lowest percentage of the total time, which is 17 % (see Appendix K), perhaps because it was absent in two of Mr. L's lessons. Scaffolding refers to time when the teacher works along with students, or does an example together with them before allowing them to apply the strategy on their own. This period was signalled by cue words such us *Let us* and *we.* Notably, less than a quarter of the total time was also spent on teacher demonstration or explanation and scaffolding.

Table 12

Percentage of Time Spent on Direct Instruction in the Eight Grade 6 Classes

Direct Instruction Categories	Minutes (311)	Percentage of Time
Teacher Demonstration /Explanation	52	17
Scaffolding	46	15
Independent Practice	104	33
Guided Practice	124	40
Total Direct Instruction	279	90
Non Instruction	32	10

Table 13 computes the total time for the 16 reading comprehension lessons observed across the four classes and provides a summary of the individual aspects of the instructional time. Overall, this summation shows that time spent on direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies totals 90 % of the teaching time while

non-instruction which is a combination of comprehension assessment and other non-instructional activities like time spent writing on the blackboard totalled 57 minutes of the total 569 minutes, which is 10 % of the total time. With regard to the individual aspect of the Direct Instruction Model, (Pearson & Dole,1987) an accumulation of the minutes shows that there was a steady increase in the percentage of time spent on all areas ranging from teacher explanation to guided practice.

Table 13

Time Spent on Strategy Instruction in all 16 Lessons

Direct Instruction Elements	Total Time 569 minutes	Percentage of Time
Teacher Demonstration/Explanation	76	13
Scaffolding	124	22
Independent Practice	187	33
Guided Practice	218*	38
Total	512	90
Non Instruction	57	10

Note.* Represents time overlap with Guided and Independent Practice

4.6.7 Summary of Research Question 2B

The question concerning how well the reading comprehension lessons were taught by the four effective teachers in this study was answered using three types of data. The first data set dealt with the rating of the lessons based on the Pearson and Dole (1987) Model of Direct Instruction, and showed that out of the sample of 16 lessons, 11 lessons received full scores of 4 out of 4, indicating that all elements of

direct instruction were present. These elements are: teacher explanation or modelling, scaffolded assistance, guided practice, and independent practice. The other data set was on the nature of the questioning during the lessons which revealed that questions were asked both for instruction in the strategy and for comprehension assessment. The matter of instructional time was the third data set used to assess the of quality of the lessons and thus showed that 90 % of a total of 569 minutes observed across the 16 lessons conducted by the 4 effective teachers was allotted to direct instruction of strategies, the greatest part thereof allotted to instruction in guided practice.

4.7 Comparing Reading Comprehension Instruction across the Two Grades

Research question 2C facilitates a comparison of what transpires at the two grade levels in the study, therefore providing more analysis and interpretations of the data on reading comprehension instruction of effective Grade 5 and 6 teachers in Saint Lucia. The specific question to be answered is: *What is the difference in reading comprehension instruction between Grades 5 and 6?* The first level of comparison is with regard to the strategies taught in Grade 5 and 6. The second level of comparison is with the quality of instruction which examines the ratings of the reading comprehension lessons and the amount of time spent on direct instruction at each grade level.

4.7.1 Comparing Strategies across the Two Grades

The most striking result to emerge from the data in Table 14 which compares the two grades is that the question answering comprehension strategy was equally present in all the lessons in both grades. Question answering was a dominant strategy in 6 of the 16 lessons in the sample. Every strategy identified on the observation

checklist was observed at least once in the sample of 16 lessons, with the majority of these strategies observed in Grade 5. Table 14 shows that cooperative learning was the strategy not at all observed in Grade 5.

The summarization strategy which primarily involved identifying the implicit main idea and giving supporting details was observed mainly in Grade 6; that is, in 6 out of a total of 7 lessons where it appeared. There was less emphasis on this strategy in Grade 5. In all the 7 lessons it was the main strategy taught.

Multiple strategies has been added to Table 14 to illustrate that the lessons involved more than one strategy, some being dominant while others receiving minimum attention in the lesson. Nonetheless, of the 16 lessons across the two grades, 14 involved more than one strategy.

Table 14

Types of Comprehension Strategies taught across the Grades

Type of comprehension Strategy	Grade 5	Grade 6	Total
Question Answering	8	8	16
Question Generating	1	N.O	1
Cooperative Learning	N.O	4	4
Activation of Prior Knowledge	2	2	4
Summarization	1	6	7
Mental Imagery/ Visualization	1	1	2
Use of Text Structures	1	1	2
Vocabulary Instruction	3	2	5
Graphic Organizers	1	N.O	1
Comprehension Monitoring	1	N.O	1
Multiple Strategies	7	7	14

Note. N.O = Not Observed

4.7.2 Comparing the Quality of Instruction across the Grades

Of the 16 lessons rated in this study 11 lessons were rated 'excellent', using Pearson and Dole's (1987) Direct Instruction Model, because they showed evidence of thorough direct instruction in the comprehension strategies, from teacher explanation to independent practice or application of the strategy (see Table 6). Six of these lessons were observed in Grade 5 and the other five lessons were in Grade 6.

Four lessons in the total sample were categorized as very good lessons. An equal number was observed at both grade levels. This meant that these four lessons only lacked one element of the model. One lesson in Grade 5 was judged good and no lesson in the entire sample scored below one, which represented minimum instruction. Figure 2 presents this data comparison and summary graphically.

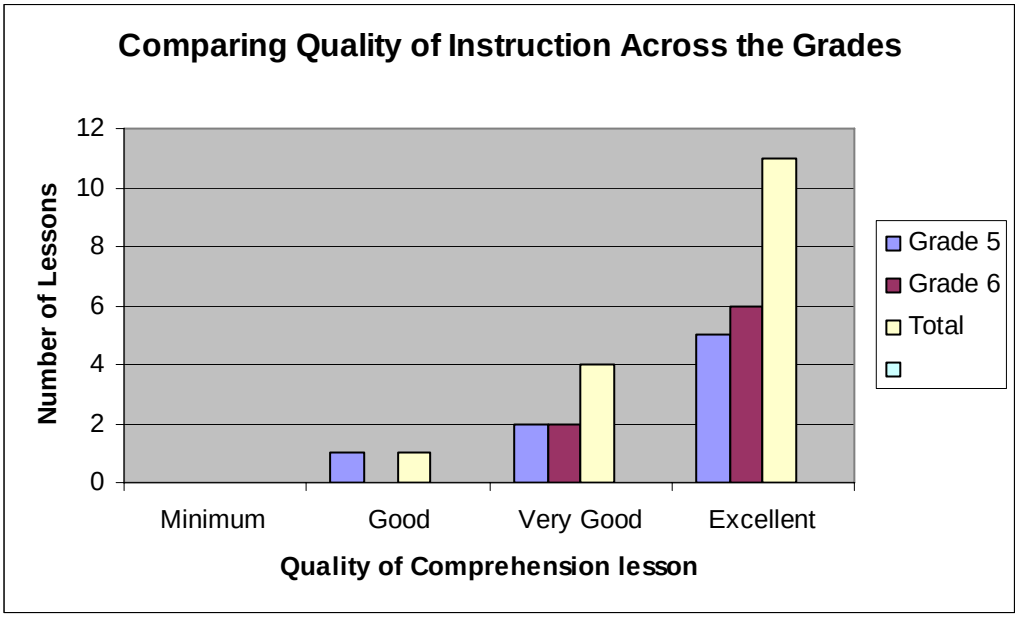

Figure 2. The Quality of Comprehension Instruction across the Grades.

4.7.3 Comparing Instructional Time in Both Grades 5 and 6

A comparison of Grades 5 and 6 reveals that at least 90 % of the reading comprehension period was spent instructing the students in the comprehension strategies while a maximum of 10 % of the total time was spent on non-instructional activities. Table 15 also shows that teacher demonstration or explanation received the least amount of time in Grade 5. However, there was a substantial difference in the time spent on teacher demonstration in the two grades. A greater percentage of time was given to teacher demonstration in Grade 6 as opposed to Grade 5. In Grade 5, the

time spent on scaffolding was double the time of Grade 6. In both grades at least one third of the time was allotted to independent practice as well as guided practice.

Table 15

Comparing Percentage of Time Spent on Direct Instruction in Grades 5 and 6

Direct Instruction Elements	% Grade 5 (258 minutes)	% Grade 6 (311 minutes)
Teacher Demonstration/Explanation	9	17
Scaffolding	30	15
Independent Practice	32	33
Guided Practice	36*	40*
Total	90	92
Non Instruction	10	8

Note.* Represents time overlap with Guided and Independent Practice

4.7.4 Summary of Research Question 2C

A comparison of the nature of instruction at both grade levels shows that there are similarities in the types of strategies that are taught and a predominance of the use of question answering at both grade levels. However, the difference lies with the substantial difference in the greater number of lessons on the summarization or main idea strategy at the Grade 6 level. With regard to the quality of instruction most of the lessons at both grade levels are rated similarly. However there was a difference in the percentage of time allotted to teacher demonstration and scaffolding in favour of the

Grade 6 classes. Nonetheless, the instructional time at both grades is at or above 90% of the total teaching time.

4.8 Conclusion

Data from semi-structured interviews with the 4 teacher participants was used to answer Research Question 1. The effective Grade 5 and 6 teachers attributed the students' failure in comprehension (with regard to the main idea test) to teachers' inability to effectively instruct in comprehension strategy, the students' poor decoding and comprehension abilities, the nature of the exam, and the materials available for the teaching of the main idea. Results from classroom observations married with interview data show that at the Grade 5 and 6 levels in Saint Lucia, teachers directly instruct a variety of reading comprehension strategies. The question answering strategy is used in all the lessons either as the main strategy or in conjunction with another strategy (Research Question 2A).

The ratings of the lessons using the adaptation of Pearson and Dole's (1987) direct comprehension instruction model indicate that in 11 of the 16 lessons sampled, there is evidence of all the following elements: teacher explanation, scaffolding, independent and guided practice (see Figure 2). An assessment of the nature of the questions asked during the reading comprehension lessons show that though some lessons relied on questions both for the purpose of instruction and comprehension assessment, questioning was mainly served an instructional purpose. Quantitative results from the timing of these lessons also show that 90 % of the time observed in these reading comprehension lessons was allotted to direct instruction of strategies. Of the four elements identified, it was guided practice that was allocated the greatest amount of time (38%) with the least amount of time being spent on teacher

explanation (13%) (Research Question 2B). A comparison of reading comprehension instruction in Grade 5 and 6 shows that similar strategies are taught in both grades but at the Grade 6 level, as also seen in the general cohort of 27 lessons, the emphasis is on summarization as seen in the many lessons on teaching students to identify the implicit main idea of paragraphs. The quality of teaching with regard to the elements identified on the model of Direct Instruction (Pearson & Dole,1987), also shows similarities in the rating of the lessons however with regard to time allocation more time was allotted to scaffolding in the Grade 5 classes as opposed to Grade 6 (Research Question 2C).

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the results of this study in light of the literature introduced in Chapter 2 (Section 5.2). Recommendations will be made for change, suggestions will be made for further research, and some conclusions will be drawn.

5.2 Discussion

The discussion of findings from this study will be presented in two parts: First with regard to Research Question 1 (5.2.1) and then with respect to Research Question 2 (5.2.2).

5.2.1 Factors Contributing to Failure in Reading Comprehension/ Main Idea Test

The question of why Saint Lucian students continue to experience failure in the main idea test of the Common Entrance Examination even in the classes of effective teachers has served as the catalyst for this research project and is undeniably the question on the mind of upper grade teachers, who prepare students for this exam. The participants of this study had an opportunity to submit their explanations and share their perceptions on this educational issue.

Some common explanations or attributions for blame were forwarded by the sample of effective Grade 5 and 6 teachers. The teachers' perceived factors contributing to students' failure fell under four categories: the teacher, the students,

the exam, and the curriculum materials. A similar study on teachers' explanation of literacy failure by Henderson (2002) showed that teachers' narratives were identified in three groups: blaming families, blaming children and moving beyond these groups to focus on the teacher. Interestingly, the participants of the current study did not attribute blame for reading comprehension failure to the students' families nor their background.

The factor that was most commonly echoed by teachers as contributing to failure in reading comprehension was the teacher or teaching. Three of the 4 participants believe that teachers are unable to teach students how to identify the main idea. Miss P blamed teachers solely, by stating, "I think number one teachers don't teach main idea" [P5, p. 12]. This comment was clarified as teachers avoiding the teaching of the main idea strategy because they did not feel competent to do so [P5]. This notion of teachers not being able to teach comprehension is also voiced by Pressley (2006b) who states, "I am not optimistic that everyone can become effective comprehension strategies teacher" (p. 18). Pressley (2006b) adds that the only way to find out if teachers can do it or not is to have them try. He also believes that teachers need professional support in order to learn how to model, explain and scaffold strategy use (Pressley, 2006b). Henderson (2002) agrees that the focus is now the teachers' actions with regard to literacy failure, and that the answer to children's difficulties lies in creating a better instructional or learning environment.

Another factor identified by the participants was students' reading abilities. With regard to blaming students' poor decoding and comprehension abilities, teachers explained the difficulties with which students come into their upper primary classes. One participant expressly blamed the students' poor comprehension skills for their inability to pass this main idea comprehension test. This accusation led to further

descriptions of the decoding and comprehension abilities of students in the participating classes. In the absence of any standardized forms of measuring or assessing students' reading abilities and reading ages, the teachers in this study were only able to talk about their students' abilities in terms of how the students responded to regular classroom reading activities and other teacher made tests.

At the Grade 5 level, the 2 participating teachers perceived that their students were good decoders. However, with regard to their comprehension abilities it was only Miss S who did not comment positively about her students' comprehension skills. A possible explanation for Miss S's students' poor comprehension abilities is lack of self regulation. This inference is supported by the teacher's comment about her students being very dependent learners. She explained that, "if we do a passage in class they will do it well because I go through everything with them, but if I give them an exam..." [S5, p. 4]. Pressley (2006a) endorses that students must be taught comprehension strategies to the point of self regulation which essentially is the goal of comprehension instruction. Prior studies by Pressley et al. (1998) also noted the absence of direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies in the fifth-grade classes that were observed.

Unlike the Grade 5 teachers, at Grade 6, both teachers reported observing major decoding skill problems among their students, which also translated into spelling problems. Grade 6 teachers also reported that their students experienced difficulty comprehending. Torgesen (2002) claims that there are two general types of skills and knowledge that are required for good reading comprehension: that is general language comprehension skills and the ability to accurately and fluently identify individual words in print. This view is consistent with Gough and Tunmer's (1986) 'simple view' of reading and the work of other researchers who emphasise the

complementary role of decoding and listening comprehension in the meaning making process (Dymock, 1991; Juel, 1988).

A weakness in the main idea part of the Common Entrance Exam itself is also identified as one of the factors that may render failure. One Grade 6 teacher hinted at the difficulty of the main idea passages that are used, and claims that while the students are required to express the main idea in one statement, the paragraph may not lend itself to one sentence. Miss A also believes that the marking scheme may be faulty as too many marks are allotted to certain areas (see Appendix H for a copy of the mark scheme).

Two of the 4 participants perceived that the problem lies also with the types of materials used to instruct students in main idea identification. One Grade 6 teacher explains that some of the materials used in the classroom instruct students to write the main idea as a title whereas it should be written as a complete sentence. They claim that when students make that error of writing a title in the exam, they are likely to fail, based on the arrangement of the mark scheme. My personal experience as a marker of the Common Entrance Exam supports the claim made by these teachers, that markers and moderators of the exam are advised by supervisors not to accept or mark as correct a main idea expressed as a topic or a title. Common Entrance supervisors emphasise emphatically that the main idea must be expressed as a sentence.

5.2.2 The Nature of Reading Comprehension Instruction in Grades 5 and 6 Saint Lucian Classrooms

Teachers play a vital role in helping students become good readers. Consequently, effective instruction in reading comprehension is a powerful means of promoting and preventing reading comprehension problems (RAND, 2002).

Preliminary discussion around Research Question 2 will focus on the general pattern observed in the first cohort of 27 lessons). The discussion will then narrow down to the random sample of 16 lessons and the specific questions which emerged with regard to the range of direct instruction of reading comprehension strategies taught in the classrooms of the 4effective Saint Lucian teachers. (Research Question 2A). Discussion around the quality of the direct instruction also pertains to the question of how well the comprehension lessons were taught (Research Question 2B). The discussion is further supported by comparative results of findings related to Grades 5 and 6 (Research Question 2C).

General Pattern of the Reading Comprehension Lessons

The general structure of the reading lessons revealed that teachers followed a similar pattern of first introducing the topic or the lesson's objective to the students followed by developmental activities and a conclusion which was either a summary of the lesson, or an evaluation exercise. In the four classes, teachers initiated the lessons with oral readings either together with the students or by having them do repeated readings as a whole class, or individually. It was therefore evident that teachers provided scaffolding for their students by reading together with them to direct the reading pace. In many instances this joint activity was cued by the expression, "Let us." This finding is contrary to what Biscette (2003) found in her observational study of Grade 5 reading comprehension lessons. Biscette (2003) reported that teachers did not provide students with scaffolded support during the initial teaching stages. This difference in findings may be because the teachers in the present study were nominated as effective teachers. In the current study, reading was modelled to the students to demonstrate prosodic reading. As one participant explains, "I like to read

it for the students first…for them to hear the tone of the story…and then individually, I'll ask other children to read various paragraphs" [P6, p. 14].

The evidence of repeated readings and oral recitations suggests a value placed on fluency instruction to enable comprehension. One participant confirmed in an interview that oral practice is heavily emphasized in their teaching. Miss A is noted as saying, "we do a lot of oral work with the children before we start writing" [A6, p. 4]. That oral work, which is extended to whole class discussions with the teacher, is confirmed also by Miss P. "I would ask them to write the main idea but most times it is done orally first, for a good time" [P5, p. 10].

This pattern of beginning a comprehension lesson with oral work is similar to what Hoffman (1987) describes as the Oral Recitation Lesson (ORL) which is a substitute for traditional basal reading lessons. In the ORL, the teacher initiates the lesson by expressively reading the assigned passage to the students, followed by a discussion that leads to the construction of a story map and a summary of the story. Studies based on oral recitations have reported positive results (Hoffman, 1987; Morris & Nelson, 1992; Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993).

In a similar study on what reading instruction looks like in the upper primary grades, Woolacott (2002) found that the structure and content of the reading lessons in those grades incorporated what she describes as a skill dimension, which is the practice of reading aloud. Woolacott (2002) also observed that the comprehension of texts was attacked on two levels: first via questions and discussions about the text; and then through the development of vocabulary. The questions posed by the teacher were discussed either orally in group situations or through individual written responses. These findings are comparable to what was observed in the Saint Lucian classes in this study.

Reading Comprehension Strategies taught in Grades 5 and 6

Comprehension strategies instruction has become an important concern for reading researchers (National Reading Panel, 2000; Parker & Hurry, 2007; Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, & Brown, 1992). In this study, 4 effective teachers in the Saint Lucian context were observed teaching a variety of strategies. These strategies which have been identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as strategies which good comprehenders use include: question answering, question generating, cooperative learning, activating prior knowledge, creating mental imagery, use of text structures, graphic organizers, comprehension monitoring, creating summaries with main ideas, and vocabulary instruction.

In his study of elementary teachers, Pressley (2006a) found that there was no evidence of children being taught comprehension strategies even in the classrooms of effective teachers. Conversely, the present study of effective teachers' reading comprehension lessons in Saint Lucia showed otherwise. While there seemed to be a preference and emphasis on certain strategies like questioning and summarisation/main idea, these strategies were taught to varying degrees of success according to the Pearson and Dole (1987) Model of Direct Instruction.

At the Grade 5 level, of all the strategies identified on the checklist (see Appendix C), nine were observed being taught either exclusively or in conjunction with another. The strategy that was not observed in Grade 5 was cooperative learning. At the Grade 6 level, three strategies were not observed. They were: question generation, graphic organizers and comprehension monitoring. Each of these strategies will be discussed in turn.

Questioning

Question answering instruction was apparent in all the Grade 5 and 6 lessons. It was the main strategy used in 6 of the randomly selected and transcribed 16 lessons; however, it was taught more explicitly in two lessons, one on the KWL and the other on the QAR. For example, in Lesson 4 on the QAR where the teacher aimed to have the students answer questions about the source of their answer before actually answering a question, Miss S paused the oral reading to ask, "*What did the hen ask the vulture?"* [SB5-4, p. 2]. Before students volunteered to answer, she allowed them to think of where they would get that answer by asking them again, *"First of all, I want you to tell me, is that answer found in the book?"* [SB5-4, p. 2]. The National Reading Panel (2000) recognises that teaching students to look back in the text when they cannot answer a question, facilitates their learning. They also suggest that teachers ask students to analyze questions with respect to whether the question is tapping literal information covered in the text, or information from the reader's prior experiences (National Reading Panel, 2000). This is consistent with what was observed in that lesson on the QAR, as, at another interval, Miss S moved beyond the literal type of questions and asked, "*Why did the hen feel fearful?"* [SB5-4, p. 9]. After students gave many possible explanations, Miss S probed her students to find out how they arrived at their responses.

Studies conducted with elementary students on the Question Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy show that training in this strategy renders improvements in students' reading comprehension performance (Ezell et al., 1997; Graham & Wong, 1993; Raphael & Pearson, 1985; Raphael & Wonnacott, 1985). Raphael and Au (2005) also believe that the QAR can provide a framework for comprehension instruction with the potential of closing the gap on literacy achievement.

Notably, only one lesson in the entire cohort of 16 lessons aimed to teach students how to generate their own questions. This was observed in Miss S's Grade 5 lesson on the KWL strategy. The National Reading Panel (2000) found that question generating instruction allows readers to engage in texts by making queries that lead to the construction of better memory representations and also allows them to become active and independent readers.

A study by Parker and Hurry (2007) conducted with 51 Key Stage 2 classrooms also found a similar reliance on the questioning strategy. The researchers' interviews with teachers showed that direct teacher questioning was considered an important strategy for teaching comprehension. However, they found that children's questioning of text did not have a comparable priority. This is similar to the findings of the present study because while the observations reveal a reliance on question answering in all of the 16 lessons, it was only in two lessons in Grade 5 that children were actually allowed to question the text on their own or to generate questions. Parker and Hurry (2007) found that 70 % of the teaching behaviour in 12 comprehension sessions was in the form of direct questioning from the teacher to the children, about the text.

Interestingly, when asked about the strategies they preferred, 3 of the 4 participants in the present study admitted to having a preference for questioning. This confirms the findings from the observations that direct oral questioning is a preferred comprehension strategy in the upper primary grades in Saint Lucia.

While the questioning strategies seem to be popular for many teachers in this study and others like Durkin's (1978-1979), there are important differences. Durkin's classical work found that teachers relied on traditional comprehension questions and worksheets, and though teachers spoke about teaching comprehension skills they were

'exercising' them. Durkin's (1978-1979) study also found that questioning was mainly for the purpose of assessment and not instruction. In contrast, the observation of teaching reading comprehension in this study shows that teachers' use of questioning was mainly instructional. While there were 3 lessons out of the 16 whose questions were for assessing comprehension (see appendix K), all the other lessons showed evidence of the teachers using questions to guide or provide scaffolded support. Parker and Hurry (2007) also found that the teachers in their study went beyond the literal level of questioning to the use of inferential questioning in the classroom. In the current study, different levels of questioning were evident. Students responded to questions of recall, evaluation, and questions at the inferential level. Teachers often required students to infer in order to identify implicitly stated main ideas in paragraphs.

Summarization/Main Idea

The second most frequently observed strategy was summarization. This was seen through the teaching of the main idea. In the seven lessons where it appeared, it was the focus of the lesson. Notably, it was the strategy taught in 6 of the 8 lessons observed in Grade 6. A possible explanation for an emphasis on teaching the main idea is due to the fact that it is at the end of the Grade 6 year that students sit the Common Entrance Examination, which comprises the sub-test on the main idea. Teachers would therefore provide as much reinforcement and practice as possible in that strategy to prepare students for the exam. Another possible explanation for an emphasis on main idea teaching is that it is considered a difficult reading task. Afflerbach (1990) agrees with this assumption as he claims that students have more difficulty when the main idea is implicit. Other studies have also confirmed the

difficulty that students have in identifying the main idea (Baumann, 1983,1986a, 1986b; Taylor, 1980; Winograd, 1984).

In the current study, during the lessons on the main idea, teachers were observed providing much guidance and opportunity for application and independent practice of this strategy. Mr. L's Grade 6 lessons, all on this strategy, typically involved constant monitoring and corrective feedback. This is consistent with a direct instruction paradigm for the teaching of the main idea (Baumann, 1984). Baumann (1984) recommends that the teacher be responsible for the sequencing of the content, pupil engagement, monitoring, and corrective feedback. More importantly, Baumann (1984) advises that there must be a gradual shift of responsibility from the teacher to the students as the lessons progressed. In the seven lessons on the main idea, 15 to 60% of the instructional time was allotted to independent practice (see Appendix K).

In Baumann's (1984) experimental study with Grade 6 students, those who received intensive main idea instruction, according to his 5-step procedure, significantly outperformed the control group when assessed on varying aspects of main idea comprehension. Baumann's (1984) study provides much support for the effectiveness of direct instruction in main idea comprehension, as was commonly observed in the current study.

Attending to Text Structure

Comprehension Research has shown that, awareness of text structure aids readers' comprehension (Armbuster et al., 1987; Baumann & Bergerson, 1993; Idol, 1987). In this study, text structure strategy instruction was observed in two lessons- one in Miss P's Grade 5 class and the other in Miss A's Grade 6 class.

In teaching students to identify the main idea Armbuster et al. (1987) explored the effect of text structure instruction on 82 middle-grade students. The students who were assigned to the structure training group, and received direct instruction in recognising and summarising a conventional problem-solution text structure, improved their comprehension skills. Similarly, in the current study, the objective of two lessons was to train students in identifying cause and effect relationships. The teachers also provided direct instruction in both lessons as there was evidence of modelling or teacher explanation and scaffolding, followed by guided and eventually independent practice.

Vocabulary Comprehension Relationship

Another important finding with regard to the nature of the 16 observed reading comprehension lessons was the connection between vocabulary instruction and comprehension. In 5 of 16 lessons observed, vocabulary instruction occupied an important position in enabling the students to understand the passages being read. The National Reading Panel (2000) acknowledges the relationship between vocabulary and comprehension by asserting that, "reading vocabulary is crucial to the comprehension processes of a skilled reader" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 4-3). A study by McKeown et al. (1985) on vocabulary instruction with fourth-grade students also showed the value of having an emphasis on extended /rich vocabulary instruction.

At the Grade 6 level, in the present study, vocabulary learning was incorporated into two lessons which were primarily on the teaching of the main idea. Mr. L ensured that his Grade 6 students knew the meanings of certain words before they identified the implicit main idea of the passages read. The pre-teaching of

vocabulary prior to reading is reported as being effective in facilitating both vocabulary acquisition and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

At the Grade 5 level, 3 lessons were observed with vocabulary instruction. Two of these lessons aimed at teaching students how to use context clues to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words and the third lesson which was on the QAR, combined vocabulary teaching as a multiple strategy approach. The observation of the teaching of vocabulary in the context of real reading was in tandem with the holistic and integrated approach which the teachers described in their interviews. This assumption is captured in a statement made by one of the participants who said:

> I approach it holistically, in that we work through all the different aspects of reading and comprehension, the decoding, the context clues, the um vocabulary, the meaning aspect… [S5, p. 2].

Cooperative Learning

Another important observation from the present study is the evidence of the cooperative learning strategy in 4 out of 16 lessons observed. This was only noted in the Grade 6 classes and was commonplace in Miss A's instruction. However, cooperative learning was taught not as a main strategy but was used in combination with other strategies like the teaching of the main idea.

Stevens, Slavin, and Farnish (1991) carried out an investigation with third and fourth-grade students on the effects of cooperative learning and direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies for identifying the main idea of paragraphs. The study revealed that students in the instructional treatments which incorporated direct instruction on main idea strategies, performed significantly better than those in the

control group (Stevens et al., 1991).

In the present study, the rationale submitted by one of the teacher-participants in interviews for a reliance on this strategy was that it encouraged a spirit of competition which motivates the students, and importantly, helps the slower learners by allowing every child an opportunity to discuss with peers [A6]. This idea of students being able to better communicate with their peers, and assisting in the instruction of reading comprehension is supported by Judy et al. (1988).

The results of a study on cooperative learning with Grade 6 students showed that peer tutoring had positive effects on the receiver; that is; those who received the peer tutoring did much better at solving analogy problems than those who had no peer tutoring (Judy et al., 1988). Judy et al.'s (1988) study shows strong support for the use of peer tutoring or cooperative learning as an effective comprehension strategy.

The success of this strategy in the teaching of reading comprehension has also been documented in several other studies (Fuchs, Fuchs, Kazdan, & Allen, 1999; 1987; Gutherie, Anderson, Alao, & Rinehart, 1999; Judy, Alexander, Kulikowich, & Wilson, 1988; Pressley, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, & Brown, 1992; Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987).

Activation of Prior Knowledge

Activation of prior knowledge received a small amount of attention in 4 of the 16 lessons analysed. It was not the focus strategy but was used in three lessons on main idea instruction and another on cause and effect relationship. Activation of prior knowledge therefore combined with these strategies as part of a multiple strategy approach.

Pressley (2002) validates that the activation of prior knowledge is a strategy

that is effective in improving comprehension in students in Grades 4 through 8. This strategy involves teaching students to compare their lives with situations in the text or to make predictions based on prior knowledge about what might happen in the text.

Dole et al. (1991) conducted a study with fifth-graders with strategies based on schema theory and found that students who were in the teacher-led strategy group scored higher on comprehension measures than those in the control group. Stevens' (1980) findings also support that existing schema is pivotal to text comprehension and that teachers have to build students' prior knowledge to maximize their comprehension of texts. This connection of text to self was clearly observed in one Grade 5 lesson on cause and effect relationships and another in Grade 6 where Mr. L was discussing the concept of "marinating' and the whole experience of preparing for a barbeque.

Mental Imagery

Studies have shown that students need scaffolding to be able to effectively use mental imagery as a comprehension strategy (Gambrell & Bales, 1986; Pressley, 1976). Block and Pressley (2002) also submit that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that mental imagery facilitates reading comprehension in both children and adults.

Minimum attention was given to the strategy of mental imagery or visualization in the 16 lessons analysed in this study. It was only seen in one lesson at each grade level. Interestingly, it was the dominant strategy in Miss S's lesson on retelling the story of *The Hen and the Vulture.* She had her students prepare a role play in groups which they presented to the class. This activity encouraged the students to picture that story through the readings of the individual character roles,

and the accompanying actions. They used their voices, their intonations, and their expressions to create that mental scene for their audience and themselves. In one of Mr. L's main idea lessons, he also instructs his students to see the story as it is taking place though their mind's eye. Mr. L explicitly states, "The first time you read keep an open mind. The second time you visualize, you can picture what is happening in the passage. Place yourself in the situation" [LB6-1, p. 1]. Mr. L's instruction to his students is similar to that given to the students in the treatment group, in the study by Gambrell and Bales (1986) where the students were directed to make pictures in their mind in order to remember and understand what they read. The results of that study also showed that students who were trained in the use of mental imagery outperformed students who received general instruction (Gambrell & Bales, 1986).

Strategies not Observed

The strategies which were not substantially observed, yet were identified in the literature as promoting reading comprehension were question generating, graphic organizers, and comprehension monitoring. Only one of the Grade 5 lessons incorporated these three strategies using the KWL method. Nonetheless, in that one lesson, it was obvious that the teacher was directly instructing students how to generate questions as well as how to monitor what they already knew or did not know on the topic of 'Transportation.' Macek (1999) highlights the multifaceted nature of the KWL strategy by explaining that it is an excellent tool not only for generating questions but as a graphic organizer. Kamil (2004) agrees that the KWL strategy can be used independently or as part of a multiple strategy instruction as in reciprocal teaching.

Quality of Direct Instruction

"That teachers can teach comprehension strategies, does not always mean that their attempts at comprehension strategies instruction are always successful" (Hilden & Pressley, 2007, p. 52). With regard to the nature of reading comprehension instruction, one must also consider the extent to which teachers were successful in instructing in the strategies which they aimed to teach, that is, it is important to assess the quality of the instruction in terms of completeness and how much time was in fact allotted to various component of strategies instruction. To enable such a judgement, this study relied on a model of Direct Instruction adapted from Pearson and Dole (1987). Pearson and Dole (1987) posit that direct instruction of strategies should include a number of salient elements such as teacher modelling or explanation, scaffolding, guided practice and independent practice or application of the strategy. Baumann (1986) designed a similar 5-step model for teaching Grade 3 students to comprehend anaphoric relationships. The results of Baumann's (1986a) study showed that the students in the strategy group out-performed those in the basal and control group. These results are inferred as support for the efficacy of a direct instructional model for teaching reading comprehension to elementary school children. The instructional procedure used by Baumann (1986) was also found to be effective in teaching sixth-grade students to comprehend main ideas in a prior study (Baumann, 1984).

In the results of this study, 11 of the 16 lessons observed, showed evidence of all four elements on the Direct Instruction Model adapted from Pearson and Dole (1987). They were therefore rated- 'excellent' in terms of the quality of instruction. This meant that teachers did not simply allow students to practice or do related

exercises on their own, rather they took their students through a process where they provided explanations, scaffolding them by working on examples with them and while they practiced, the teachers continued to monitor and provide feedback. The other 5 lessons were judged 'very good' and 'good' as they had two or three of the four elements. This scenario was quite the opposite to what Durkin (1978-1979) observed in her classical work where she observed elementary school teachers teaching reading comprehension. She actually described what the teachers in her study were doing as 'exercising' and merely assessing instead of teaching them how to use the strategies (Durkin, 1978-1979).

A possible explanation for the high ratings of the majority of the reading comprehension lessons in the current study is that the model which was used to evaluate the instruction was very simple in that the scorer was only required to identify the presence of absence of each of the four elements such as teacher demonstration or guided practice. It did not matter how much time was spent on that particular aspect of instruction. The timing of the individual 16 lessons showed that an element such as teacher demonstration ranged from one minute to 11 minutes in the sample of lessons observed (see Appendix I for timing of individual components of lessons). Therefore based on the guidelines for scoring, a lesson observed with one minute of teacher demonstration could be rated as excellent if the other three elements of direct instruction were present. Miss P's Lesson 5 is an example of such a case. While this may be viewed as a limitation of the model it must be acknowledged that the four elements which were identified (teacher demonstration or modelling, scaffolding, guided practice, and independent practice) are recognised as necessary procedures in helping readers reach the point of self regulation where they can eventually have confidence in choosing from a repertoire of strategies as they read

(Baumann,1984,1986; El-Dinary & Schuder, 1993; Gambrell & Bales, 1986; Palincsar & Brown,1984; Pressley et al., 1992).

In the current study, an analysis of the time spent on all areas of instruction also corroborates the findings from the ratings of the lessons. Only 10% (32 minutes) of the total instructional time was identified as non-instruction, a part of which was taken up with assessing students' comprehension.

In contrast, in Durkin's (1978-1979) study, she found that large amounts of time were spent on non-instructional activities. In both Durkin's (1978-1979) and the present study, non-instructional activities were defined in a similar manner as they involved activities such as chastising students, writing on the board, waiting for children to do assignments, talking about things that had no academic value, and assessment. Durkin (1978-1979) also found that in the 24 fourth-grade classes she observed, from a total of 4,469 minutes only 1% (28 minutes) went to comprehension instruction. The current study shows that from a total of 311 minutes combined for the 16 lessons observed in Grades 5 and 6, 90 % (279 minutes) of that time was used for comprehension instruction.

Looking individually at the different components of the strategy instruction in the four Saint Lucian classrooms, it is noted that sizeable amounts of time went to independent practice and guided practice (33% and 40% respectively). It is also worth noting that while students worked independently, they were not left alone. They were constantly monitored and received either whole class or individual feedback. Teacher explanation or modelling of strategies occupied 17 % (52 minutes) of the total time while scaffolding received the least attention that is 15 % (46 minutes). There is not a substantial difference between the two latter categories; however, it was noticed that 30 minutes of that time for scaffolding was observed in Grade 5,

suggesting that the Grade 5 teachers spent a bit more time scaffolding than the Grade 6 teachers.

Comparing the area of teacher modelling and explanation, the reverse occurs as the Grade 6 teachers were observed spending more time (17%) explaining while their Grade 5 counterparts spent 9 % of the total time actually demonstrating or modelling.

Parker and Hurry's (2007) study of how explicitly comprehension strategies were being taught in Key Stage 2 classrooms, found that teacher modelling represented 22% of the observed teaching behaviour and that there was a rich and varied use of good comprehension strategies such as summarization being modelled by the teachers. This is comparable to what was observed in the current study.

Overall, the quality of the reading comprehension lessons, in the four Saint Lucian classrooms, was high, and there were no substantial differences in time allocation at the two grade levels. Grades 5 and 6 were therefore quite comparable in the quality of instruction that was observed at each level, that is both in the ratings of their instruction and the time allotted to instruction of comprehension strategies.

5.2.3 Summary

In this study, 4 effective teachers of Grades 5 and 6 were observed teaching a variety of comprehension strategies. These strategies have been identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as strategies which promote effective reading comprehension: question answering, question generating, cooperative learning, activating prior knowledge, creating mental imagery, use of text structures, graphic organizers, comprehension monitoring, creating summaries with main ideas, and vocabulary instruction. Of these strategies observed, question answering was present

in all 16 lessons. It was explicitly and exclusively taught in two lessons and was used in conjunction with other strategy instruction in the other 14 lessons. The teaching of the main idea as part of the summarization strategy took precedence over the instruction of other strategies in Grade 6, but overall it was the main strategy taught in almost half the entire cohort of lessons.

With regard to the quality of instruction in the sample of 16 reading lessons, almost three quarters of the lessons, that is 11 out of 16, were rated 'excellent' in quality. This is because of the way they were evaluated using a Model of Direct Instruction that identified elements such a teacher explanation/ modelling, scaffolding, guided practice, and independent practice (Pearson & Dole, 1987). Another major finding was that 90 % of these lessons were dedicated to instruction, the largest part of which went to guided practice followed by independent practice of the strategy that was taught. As has been previously stated, the goal of reading instruction is for students to become self-regulated learners. This was certainly the aim of the 4 effective teachers in the 16 lessons analysed. It therefore appears that the 4 effective Saint Lucian teachers taught a rich range of reading comprehension strategies which the literature has shown to be effective, but the question of why that success and quality of instruction is not reflected in the students' comprehension performance in the main idea section of the Saint Lucia Common Entrance Exam still remains.

5.3 Recommendations

The results of this study suggest that effective teachers in Grades 5 and 6 in Saint Lucia are explicitly instructing students to use a number of reading comprehension strategies, and that the instruction is mainly of excellent quality. In

light of these favourable results from the classroom observations, it is recommended that teachers continue in that vein and that education officials ensure that similar practices are being used in other Saint Lucian classrooms. However, it is also advised that teachers focus on the other strategies that were least addressed but which research has shown to be successful. These strategies are: comprehension monitoring, question generating and the use of graphic organizers. Recommendations are also made on the basis of the factors which the participants in this study have identified as contributing to the students' poor performance on the main idea test of the Common Entrance Examination.

With teachers blaming teachers for their inability to help students comprehend, it is recommended that teacher training be more responsive to the needs of teachers and the schools. Reading programmes should therefore emphasise the knowledge and skills that will allow teachers to deliver quality reading instruction in all strategies including summarization or main idea which is obviously a mandatory component of the national exam. Nonetheless, teacher training should not be restricted to the one teacher training institution on the island but also be the effort of the individual schools, the Curriculum Department for Language Arts and overall the Ministry of Education, through regular in-service training and professional development sessions in the teaching of reading.

If the practice of teachers in Saint Lucia follows strategies instruction similar to those found in the 4 effective teachers in this study, then the poor reading comprehension results evident in the main idea section of the Common Entrance Exam may be due to the poor decoding skills brought to Grades 5 and 6 by the students. This is a possible explanation as the effective teachers in this study also admitted that some students from their classes also performed poorly on the main idea

test in the Common Entrance Examination. During interviews the effective teachers also identified decoding as an area of concern. Hence it is suggested that a number of structures and policies be put in place at various levels of the school system, filtering from the level of the Ministry of Education in Saint Lucia to the individual primary school to sufficiently address the problem of Grade 5 and particularly Grade 6 students' inability to decode and comprehend when they enter these upper primary grades. Schools should ensure that classroom instruction from kindergarten to Grade 6 is skilfully delivered with a balanced emphasis on word level and reading comprehension. Torgesen (2002) agrees that such an approach from the onset of formal schooling can prevent reading difficulties in children. The National Reading Panel (2000) backs up this position by identifying the critical components of early reading instruction to include explicit teaching to develop phonemic awareness, fluency in word recognition and text processes, reading comprehension strategies, oral language vocabulary, spelling and writing skills.

Another recommendation is to have procedures in place to accurately identify children who fall behind in reading even when they are provided with good classroom instruction. This also means that there should be various forms of assessment in reading: summative, formative and diagnostic. Schools should therefore be provided with standardized measures to assess students' reading abilities at strategic stages during the primary grades. This will also necessitate remedial assistance for students who are identified as struggling readers. At-risk readers must therefore be provided with reading instruction which is more intensive, more explicit and more supportive than that obtained in regular classrooms of 30 plus students. Systematic assessment for early identification must therefore be an integral part of a school's programme or curriculum.

With regard to the main idea test which participants identified as a contributing factor to students' poor performance, it is recommended that testing and measurement experts examine closely this test item and its mark scheme, to determine its suitability for testing reading comprehension abilities of Grade 6 students.

Resource materials for the teaching and practice of the main idea strategy are also identified by the participants as inadequate and confusing to teachers. It is therefore recommended the Curriculum Department for Language Arts in the Ministry of Education provide teachers and schools with a range of materials for teaching reading comprehension that are clear and unambiguous.

The recommendations are by no means finite nor a panacea for poor reading comprehension. However, they serve as a guide and a way forward in realistically addressing the situation observed in the Saint Lucian context of reading instruction. As Duffy (2002) postulates, "Sometimes direct explanation is appropriate: sometimes something else is" (p. 38). He inserts that it is not a question of whether direct explanation is a "best practice"; rather it is a question of authorizing teachers to make pedagogical choices depending on what an instructional situation warrants.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

In light of the findings, showing that comprehension strategies are being taught in primary grades by teachers nominated as effective in Saint Lucia, it is suggested that future studies of a similar nature aim to include a more representative range of teachers from Saint Lucia. That means attempts should be made to include not only effective teachers but all types of teachers with varying experiences, so that the results may reflect a true representative sample of the teaching population.

It is also suggested that further research be done in the area of decoding at the Grade 5 and 6 levels, as well as other areas of reading such as testing and measurement, to determine whether assessment factors contribute in anyway to the Grade 6 students' failure in the main idea component of the Common Entrance Examination. An in-depth analysis of the actual test item is also suggested to determine its validity, level of suitability, and level of difficulty of the main idea sub test for students at that age level.

5.5 Limitations

This kind of observational study, while highly valuable due to the rich descriptions of reading comprehension lessons always has limitations. Firstly, because the lessons were observed during the third and final term of the school year and that observations were concurrent with regularly scheduled periods, a limited number of observations had to suffice for some participants. Secondly, teachers were at the revision stage of their instruction and owing to the upcoming Common Entrance Examination for Grade 6, the lessons observed were mainly of a practice nature and did not necessarily reflect the extent of the strategy instruction that could have taken place earlier in the school year. The quality of the sample (i.e. effective teachers), can also be considered a limitation to this study as well as the model that was used to examine the quality of the reading comprehension instruction. Nonetheless, given these limitations, this study confirms the presence of direct instruction of strategies, to varying degrees, in both the Grade 5 and Grade 6 classes of effective teachers in Saint Lucia.

5.6 Conclusion

The intention of this study was to examine the perceptions of a total of 4 effective Grade 5 and 6 teachers in Saint Lucia with regard to the factors influencing the poor performance of Saint Lucian Grade 6 students on the main idea subsection of the Common Entrance Examination, and then to examine their reading lessons to determine the nature of their reading comprehension instruction.

Although the teachers perceived that primary students have difficulty in reading they did not blame students' failure in reading solely on the students' inability to decode or comprehend. Some of the factors identified were- the main idea reading comprehension test, and the teachers' inability to instruct. It is certain that what must be done to substantially reduce reading failure in the primary grades is to focus on the quality of reading instruction and to ensure that students acquire a repertoire of strategies which they can use independently. An analysis of the four upper primary grades in Saint Lucia in the present study reveals a mismatch in what teachers do and the actual outcome in the exam at the end of Grade 6. There is evidence of direct instruction in the strategies taught by the 4 effective Saint Lucian teachers, and at least 90 % of the reading period is spent on instruction. The question which the situation begs is: Why is there not a positive correlation between the excellent work that teachers do in their reading lessons, and the Common Entrance results in the main idea comprehension? Areas suggested for further investigation include examining the decoding skills of Grade 5 and 6 students, examining the materials used to teach reading comprehension, and closely analysing the main idea section and mark scheme of the Common Entrance Examination. The story has been told through a total of 27 lessons and the voices of 4 effective teachers of Grade 5 and 6. Comprehension strategies are being taught explicitly by effective Grade 5 and 6 Saint Lucian teachers.

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APPENDIX A

Sample of Main Idea Test Item

COMPREHENSION

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage carefully. Using your OWN words, write the MAIN IDEA in ONE (1) sentence.

It is said that many young people think that their grandparents are old fashioned and so seldom take their advice. They are of the opinion that these people belong to another age that has nothing to do with today's youth and so can't teach them anything. Grandparents often make fun of young people's hairstyles, their way of dress, their music and often criticize other things that young people do. However, grandparents do have a lot to offer. It is unfortunate that more young people do not take time to listen to these older folk who have so much to offer in the way of advice.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(10 marks

1

_____

Source: Ministry of Education, Saint Lucia (2006)

APPENDIX B

Information letter for the Principals of the Participating Schools

Department of Arts and Language Education
School of Education
Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4298
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2007-03-07

Dear Sir/Madam

As a follow up to our telephone conversation with regard to my proposed research in St Lucia, I wish to provide you with more details of my project.

I am currently enrolled for a four paper Master's thesis with the School of Education, at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I have been an English Language teacher in St. Lucia for 17 years, and my recent tenure was at the Division of Teacher Education and Educational Administration of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, where I was an Assistant Lecturer in the Language Department. I have also been a marker and moderator of the English Language paper in the Common Entrance Examination. Hence, I am researching the topic of reading comprehension instruction, as it relates specifically to main idea identification. As you are aware, this is an area of concern to all of us in St. Lucia because of our students' continued poor performance in the Common Entrance Examination. My aim therefore is to observe, or gain a "snapshot" of the instructional practices of effective teachers, or the strategies with which they equip students in order for these

students to comprehend. Important to this observation is also the timing of teachers' instructional activities during the reading comprehension lessons.

The teachers needed to participate in this study are those of grade 5 and 6, who are more likely to be emphasising comprehension instruction as the national exam approaches in July 2007. I would therefore appreciate it if you would nominate two of your outstanding teachers to participate in this project: one from Grade 5 and one from Grade 6. The participants will be observed during eight (8) of their regular time -tabled Reading Comprehension lessons, during the period May – June, 2007. Each of the sessions observed will be audio- tape recorded and this will also be followed by a semi-structured interview session with the teacher, which will last no longer than one hour during a non contact period. This interview will simply facilitate clarifications and allow for consensus on the data that was colleted.

Be assured that the observation will be unobtrusive in nature and the equipment used for recording and timing will not interfere with the normal proceedings of the lesson.

Every effort will also be made to ensure that the participating teacher is at ease and feels safe and comfortable during the process. This will be ensured during a briefing session prior to each lesson. Anonymity will also be ensured to avoid any potential harm to the participants.

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the School of Education in the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. If you have any concerns of an ethical nature regarding the study, please address them to Dr Sue Dymock or Dr Nicola Daly, University of Waikato (07 838 4500).

I look forward to meeting and discussing this project with you and your teachers.

Thank you for your kind cooperation and prior consent for access to your school.

Yours Sincerely,

…….

Lisa Sargusingh-Terrance

APPENDIX C

A. Observational checklist

Date: ----------
School: ----------
Grade : ----------
Participant: ----------
Lesson Number: ----------

(A) Reading Comprehension Instructional Strategies

			Lesson Rating				
Type of Strategy Instruction	No	Yes	Minimum 1	Good 2	Very good 3	Excellent 4	Comments
Question Answering							
Question Generating							
Cooperative Learning/Collaborative Reasoning							
Comprehension Monitoring/Metacognitive Teaching							
Prior Knowledge							
Mental Imagery/Visualising							
Use of Text Structures							
Graphic Organisers							
Summarization							
Vocabulary Instruction							
Multiple Strategies							

Note: Place a check mark in the appropriate column

Notes:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

(B) Instructional Time

	Minutes	Comments
Instruction in Reading Comprehension i.e. direct teaching, use of strategies, modelling etc		
Other classroom activities		

Notes:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

(C). Rating the Quality of the Lessons

Elements of Direct Instruction Model (Pearson & Dole, 1987)					
	Teacher Explanation/ Modelling	**Scaffolding**	**Independent Practice**	**Guided Practice**	**Total Score**
Lesson Number					

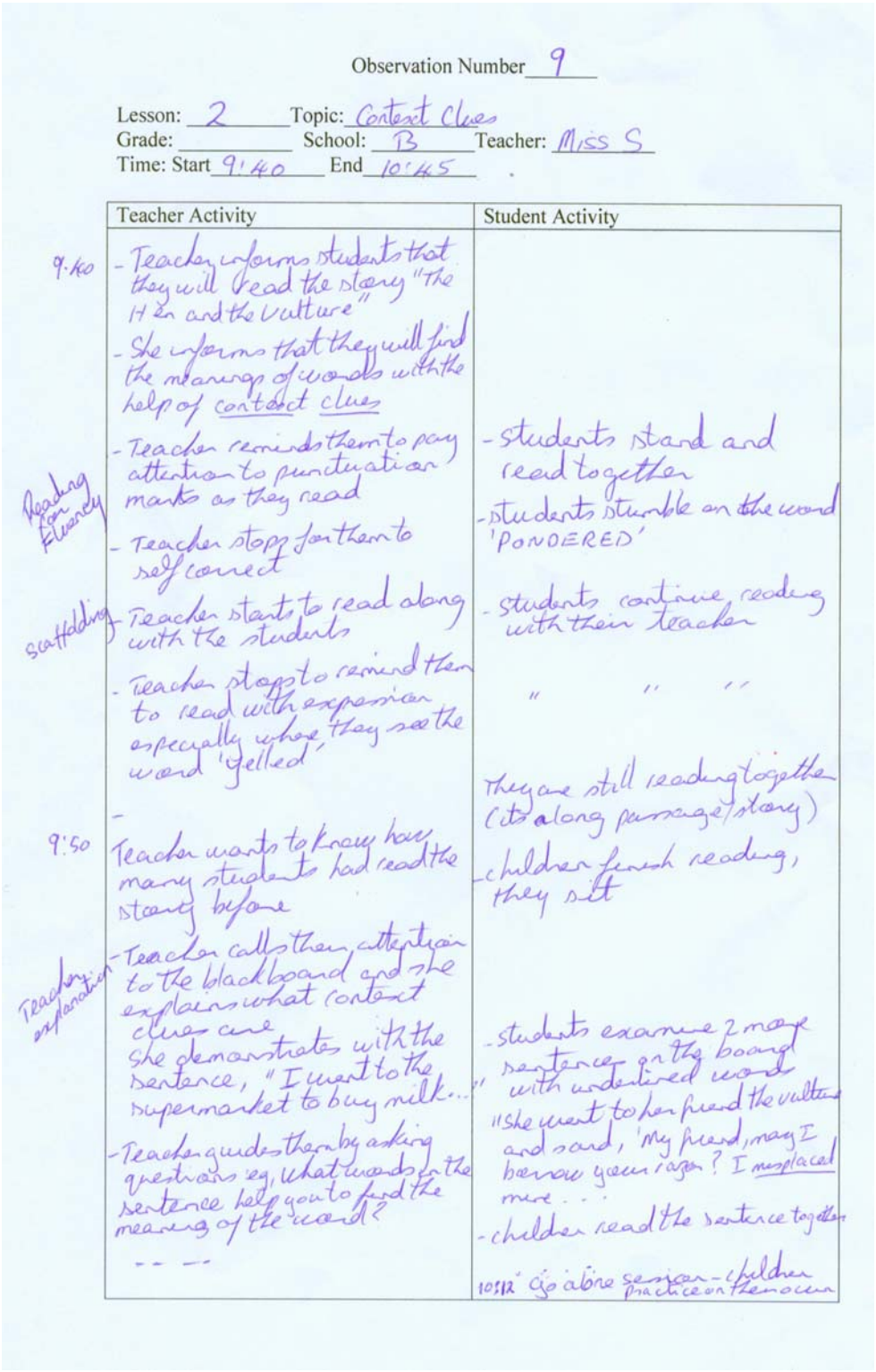
Note. Place a check mark in the appropriated box
Allocate 1 mark for each element of the model that is present in the lesson

Quality of Instruction

1= minimum comprehension instruction (1 feature of framework)
2 = good comprehension instruction (2 features)
3 = very good comprehension instruction (3 features)
4 = excellent comprehension instruction (all 4features)

APPENDIX D

Sample of Field Notes



Observation Number 9

Lesson: 2 Topic: Context Clues
Grade: _____ School: B Teacher: Miss S
Time: Start 9'40 End 10'45

	Teacher Activity	Student Activity
9:40	- Teacher informs students that they will read the story "The Hen and the Vulture"	
	- She informs that they will find the meanings of words with the help of context clues	
Reading for Fluency	- Teacher reminds them to pay attention to punctuation marks as they read	- students stand and read together
	- Teacher stops for them to self correct	- students stumble on the word 'PONDERED'
scaffolding	- Teacher starts to read along with the students	- students continue reading with their teacher
	- Teacher stops to remind them to read with expression especially when they see the word 'yelled'	" " "
	-	They are still reading together (it's a long passage/story)
9:50	Teacher wants to know how many students had read the story before	- children finish reading, they sit
Teacher's explanation	- Teacher calls them attention to the blackboard and she explains what context clues are she demonstrates with the sentence, "I went to the supermarket to buy milk..."	- students examine 2 more sentence on the board with underlined word "She went to her friend the vulture and said, 'My friend, may I borrow your razor? I misplaced mine..."
	- Teacher guides them by asking questions eg, what words in the sentence help you to find the meaning of the word?	- children read the sentence together
	- - -	10:12 Group session - children practice on the new words

APPENDIX E

Semi-structured Interview Schedule
Post Observation Interview

Date: ----------
Time: ----------
School: ----------
Grade: ----------

Guiding Questions

Question 1

How did you feel about your reading lesson?

Question 2

Were the lessons representative of your other reading comprehension lessons?

Question 3

How would you describe your approach to teaching reading comprehension?

Question 4

Which reading comprehension strategies are you most comfortable teaching?

Teachers' Perceptions

Question 5

What do you think accounts for the students' failure in the main idea comprehension at the Common Entrance Exam?

Question 6

Tell me about the reading abilities of your students

- Decoding abilities
- Comprehension abilities

APPENDIX F

Information Letter to the Participating Teachers

Department of Arts and Language Education
School of Education
Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4298
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2007-03-07

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am currently enrolled for a four paper Master's thesis with the School of Education, at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I have been an English language teacher in St Lucia for 17 years, and my recent tenure was at the Division of Teacher Education and Educational Administration of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, where I was an Assistant Lecturer in the Language Department. I have also been a marker and moderator of the English language paper in the Common Entrance Examination. Hence, I am researching the topic of reading comprehension instruction, as it relates specifically to Main Idea identification. As you are aware, this is an area of grave concern to all of us in St Lucia because of our students' continued poor performance in the Common Entrance Examination. My aim therefore is to observe, or gain a "snapshot" of the instructional practices of teachers, and the strategies with which they equip students in order for these students to construct meaning from texts. Important to this observation is also the timing of teachers' instructional time during the reading comprehension lessons.

The teachers whom I would like to participate in this study are outstanding teachers of grade 5 and 6, who are more likely to be emphasising reading comprehension instruction as the national exam approaches in July 2007. Your principal has nominated you as an effective teacher. If you agree to participate in this research, you will be observed during eight (8) of your regular time-tabled reading comprehension lessons, during May and June, 2007. Each of the sessions observed will be audio-tape recorded and this will also be followed by a semi structured interview session for approximately one hour during non –contact periods at a time convenient to you. This interview will simply facilitate clarifications and allow for consensus on the data that was colleted.

Be assured that the observation will be unobtrusive in nature and the equipment used for recording and timing will not interfere with the normal proceedings of the lesson.

I will make every effort to ensure that you are comfortable and free of any potential harm that is likely to occur in any research undertaking. This is neither a personal evaluation nor practicum, and your identity will not at any point be revealed. Confidentiality will also be ensured at all stages of this process. Your participation is very valuable in enabling all other teachers and educational stakeholders to arrive at answers to the many questions we ask about teaching Main Idea Comprehension. Hence, the results from this study may be used to develop curriculum material for the teaching of Reading Comprehension. It may also be published in academic journals and be presented at conferences. This is all in an effort to enhance our educational practices teachers and develop the reading abilities of our students.

If you would like to know more or meet with me to discuss the project before making a decision, please feel free to call me. I will be very happy to elaborate and clarify any of your concerns.

My contact details are:

Home phone Number, New Zealand: 07 85 84 928

Home: Phone Number, St Lucia: 4521822

Cell Number: 021 037 4238

Email: Ls109@waikato.ac.nz

Lisasargusingh@hotmail.com

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Education at the University of Waikato. If you have any concerns of an ethical nature regarding the study, please address them to my research supervisors Dr Sue Dymock or Dr Nicola Daly, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand (07 838 4500).

I look forward to meeting and discussing this project with you and your teachers.

Thank you for your kind cooperation and willingness to participate in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

……

APPENDIX G

Codes for Interview and Lesson Transcripts

Table G1

Codes for Interview Transcripts

Participant's Name	Grade level	Interview Code
Miss. P	5	P5
Miss W	5	W5
Miss A	6	A6
Mr. L	6	L6

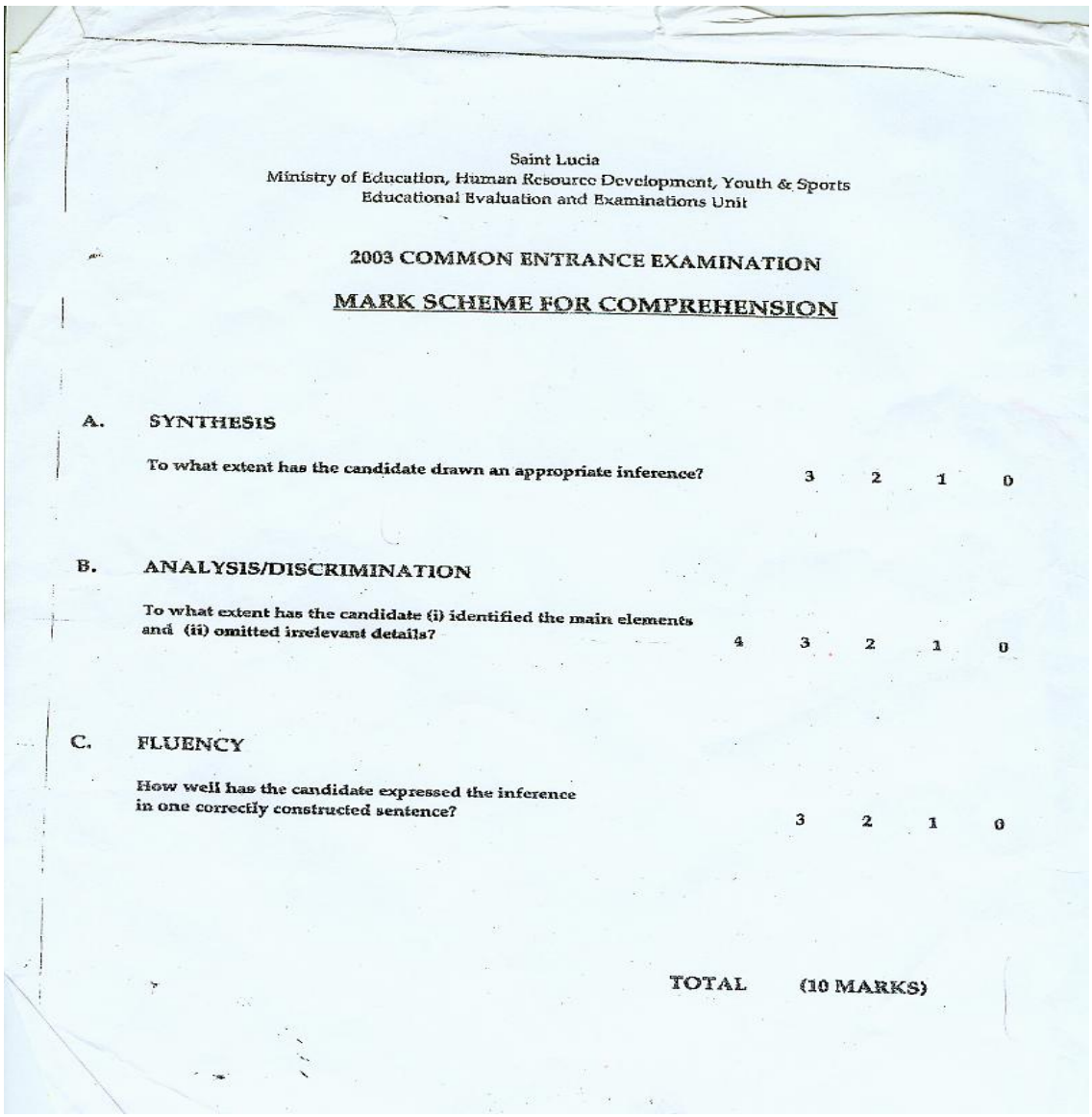
Table G2

Codes for Lesson Transcripts

Participant's Name	School	Grade	Lesson Number	Lesson Code Sample
Miss P	A	5	2, 4, 5, 7	PA5-2
Miss S	B	5	1, 3, 4, 6,	SB5-1
Miss A	A	6	3, 6, 7, 8	AA6-3
Mr. L	B	6	1, 2, 4, 5	LB6-1

APPENDIX H

Sample of Main Idea Mark Scheme



Saint Lucia
Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Youth & Sports
Educational Evaluation and Examinations Unit

2003 COMMON ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

MARK SCHEME FOR COMPREHENSION

A. SYNTHESIS

To what extent has the candidate drawn an appropriate inference? 3 2 1 0

B. ANALYSIS/DISCRIMINATION

To what extent has the candidate (i) identified the main elements and (ii) omitted irrelevant details? 4 3 2 1 0

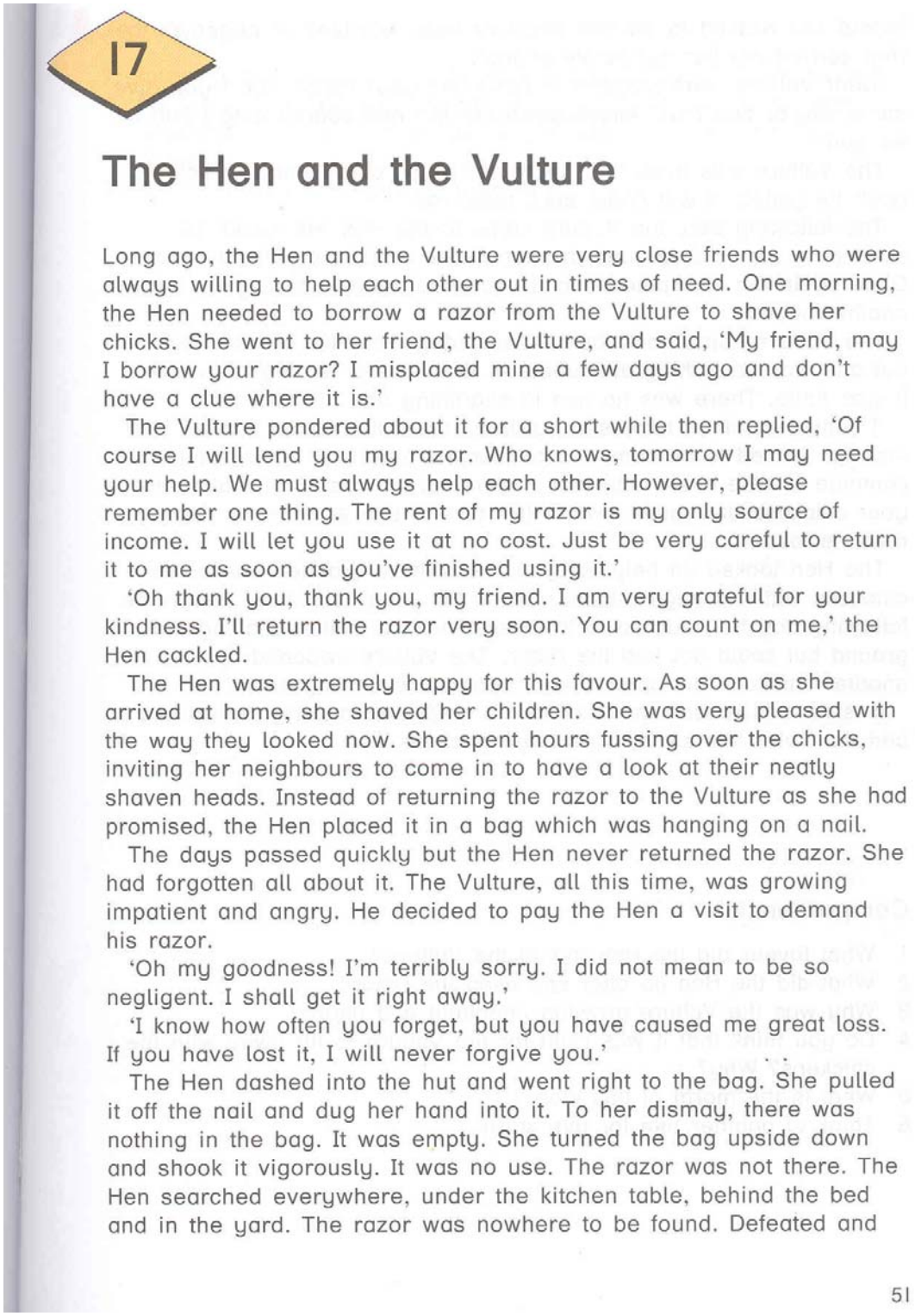
C. FLUENCY

How well has the candidate expressed the inference in one correctly constructed sentence? 3 2 1 0

TOTAL (10 MARKS)

APPENDIX I

Story used in Miss S's Lesson: *The Hen and the Vulture*



17

The Hen and the Vulture

Long ago, the Hen and the Vulture were very close friends who were always willing to help each other out in times of need. One morning, the Hen needed to borrow a razor from the Vulture to shave her chicks. She went to her friend, the Vulture, and said, 'My friend, may I borrow your razor? I misplaced mine a few days ago and don't have a clue where it is.'

The Vulture pondered about it for a short while then replied, 'Of course I will lend you my razor. Who knows, tomorrow I may need your help. We must always help each other. However, please remember one thing. The rent of my razor is my only source of income. I will let you use it at no cost. Just be very careful to return it to me as soon as you've finished using it.'

'Oh thank you, thank you, my friend. I am very grateful for your kindness. I'll return the razor very soon. You can count on me,' the Hen cackled.

The Hen was extremely happy for this favour. As soon as she arrived at home, she shaved her children. She was very pleased with the way they looked now. She spent hours fussing over the chicks, inviting her neighbours to come in to have a look at their neatly shaven heads. Instead of returning the razor to the Vulture as she had promised, the Hen placed it in a bag which was hanging on a nail.

The days passed quickly but the Hen never returned the razor. She had forgotten all about it. The Vulture, all this time, was growing impatient and angry. He decided to pay the Hen a visit to demand his razor.

'Oh my goodness! I'm terribly sorry. I did not mean to be so negligent. I shall get it right away.'

'I know how often you forget, but you have caused me great loss. If you have lost it, I will never forgive you.'

The Hen dashed into the hut and went right to the bag. She pulled it off the nail and dug her hand into it. To her dismay, there was nothing in the bag. It was empty. She turned the bag upside down and shook it vigorously. It was no use. The razor was not there. The Hen searched everywhere, under the kitchen table, behind the bed and in the yard. The razor was nowhere to be found. Defeated and

51

fearful she walked to Vulture who had been seething in anger as the Hen carried out her desperate search.

'Dear Vulture,' she pleaded, 'I can't find your razor, but if you give me a day or two I will knock down my hut and search until I find it for you.'

The Vulture was livid. 'You promised to be careful and I trusted you!' he yelled. 'I will come back tomorrow.'

The following day, the Vulture came to the Hen. He found her scratching the earth around the hut. There was no sign of the razor. Once again the Hen pleaded and once again the Vulture gave her another chance.

The Vulture came back the following day. The Hen demolished the hut and was scratching the rubble in the hope of finding the razor. It was futile. There was no use in searching any further.

'I cannot continue to waste my time,' the Vulture said rather sternly. 'I need to be compensated for the time and money that I continue to lose every day that I come here. Today I will take one of your chickens and tomorrow I will return to see whether or not my razor is found.'

The Hen looked on helplessly as the Vulture grabbed one of the chickens with his huge talons, opened his wings and flew away. The following day he returned to the Hen. She was still scratching the ground but could not find the razor. The Vulture swooped upon another chicken. The same thing happened each day after that.

It is for this reason that the Hen is always scratching the ground and the Vulture is swooping on her chickens.

Comprehension

1 What favour did the Hen ask of the Vulture?
2 What did the Hen do after she used the razor?
3 Why was the Vulture growing impatient and angry?
4 Do you think that it was right for the Vulture to fly away with the chickens? Why?
5 What is the moral of this story?
6 Think of another title for this story.

52

Source: Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Youth and Sports. (2000). *Caribbean Language Arts Project, Grade 5 Reader: Reading and Writing every day*. Between Towns Road, Oxford: MacMillan Caribbean.

APPENDIX J

Sample of Paragraphs used in Mr. L's Lesson

22. Today is Christine's birthday, and everyone is excited about the surprise party. Daddy has gone to buy some charcoal for the barbecue. The chicken has been seasoned and left marinating. Mother is laying the huge table. There are many goodies to put on it. She also has to finish frosting the cake. Her friends, Mary, Tammy and Sharon are decorating the grounds. What a wonderful sight to behold! Jerry is selecting some of ~~Julie~~ Christine's favourite music. He is the disc jockey for the afternoon. Soon ~~Julie~~ Christine will arrive and the party will commence.

23. In a zoo, animals are no longer showcased only in cages. Instead many different animals of varying species are displayed in natural environments. A special effort is made to make the surroundings of the animals similar to what exists in the wild. Some of the animals are kept in large spaces surrounded by trees, ponds, rocks and logs. These natural settings make viewing the animals more interesting, and they also ensure that the animals do not lose their natural instincts.

24. Brad went on a bus trip with his uncle. As the bus went over the bridge, Brad looked down at the river. There were many sailboats of all sizes down the river. Alongside the river was a pretty park and some people were having a picnic on the grass. Brad noticed a man fishing from the riverbank. Not after the bus had crossed the bridge, Brad saw a white farm house and a red barn. There were a few cows and horses in the meadow. All around the meadow was a stone wall. Growing around the stone wall were beautiful flowers.

25. Cherisse told everyone that she felt fine. But she looked sick and her stomach felt awful. When her father heard her cough he knew that she was not well. "Cherisse" he said, "You are going to bed now."

APPENDIX K

Tables of Timed Reading Comprehension Lessons

Grade 5

Table K1
Percentage of Time Spent on Comprehension Instruction during Miss P's Reading Period

Lesson # and Duration	Elements of Direct Instruction	Time spent in minutes	Percentage of total class time
2	Teacher demonstration/explanation	2	8
(25 minutes)	Scaffolding	22	88
	Independent Practice	0	0
	Guided Practice	0	0
	Total	**24**	**96**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	**1**	**4**
	Total		
4	Teacher demonstration/explanation	4	18
(22 minutes)	Scaffolding	3	13
	Independent Practice	4	18
	Guided Practice	5	22
	Total	**16**	**72**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	3	13
	Other	3	13
	Total	**6**	**27**
5	Teacher demonstration/explanation	1	5
(20 minutes)	Scaffolding	6	30
	Independent Practice	3	15
	Guided Practice	9	45
	Total	**19**	**95**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	1	5
	Total	**1**	**5**
7	Teacher demonstration/explanation	2	9
(22minutes)	Scaffolding	8	36
	Independent Practice	11	50
	Guided Practice	11*	50
	Total	**21**	**95**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	1	5
Total (89 minutes)	**Total**	**1**	**5**

Note. Because of the small sample size, percentages have been rounded off to the nearest whole number

Table K2
Percentage of Time Spent on Comprehension Instruction during Miss S's Reading Period

Lesson # and Duration	Elements of Direct Instruction	Time spent in minutes	Percentage of total class time
Lesson 2	Teacher demonstration/explanation	5	8
(65 minutes)	Scaffolding	21	32
	Independent Practice	25	38
	Guided Practice	10+25 overlap=35	54
	Total	**61**	**94**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	4	6
	Total	**4**	**6**
Lesson 3	Teacher demonstration/explanation	1	3
(36 minutes)	Scaffolding	0	0
	Independent Practice	27	75
	Guided practice	1	3
	Total	**29**	**81**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	7	19
	Total	**7**	**19**
Lesson 4	Teacher demonstration/explanation	3	8
(36 minutes)	Scaffolding	7	19
	Independent Practice	0	0
	Guided Practice	23	64
	Total	**33**	**92**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	3	8
	Total	**3**	**8**
Lesson 6	Teacher demonstration/explanation	6	19
(32 minutes)	Scaffolding	11	34
	Independent Practice	13	41
	Guided Practice	10	31
	Total	**30**	**94**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	2	6
Total minutes 169	**Total**	**2**	**6**

Grade 6

Table K3
Percentage of Time Spent on Comprehension Instruction during Miss A's Reading Period

Lesson # and Duration	Elements of Direct Instruction	Time spent in minutes	Percentage of total class time
3 (34 minutes)	Teacher demonstration/explanation	4	12
	Scaffolding	7	21
	Independent Practice	7	21
	Guided Practice	5	15
	Total	**18**	**53**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	11	32
	Other	5	15
	Total	**16**	**47**
6 (40 minutes)	Teacher demonstration/explanation	7	18
	Scaffolding	12	30
	Independent Practice	12	30
	Guided Practice	8	20
	Total	**39**	**98**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	1	2
	Total	**1**	**2**
7 (34minutes)	Teacher demonstration/explanation	9	26
	Scaffolding	6	18
	Independent Practice	9	26
	Guided Practice	9+7 overlap=16	47
	Total	**33**	**97**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	1	3
	Total	**1**	**3**
8 (42 minutes)	Teacher demonstration/explanation	11	26
	Scaffolding	4	10
	Independent Practice	16	38
	Guided Practice	4+11 overlap=15	36
	Total	**35**	**83**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	6	14
	Other	1	2
Total 150 minutes	**Total**	**7**	**17**

Table K4
Percentage of Time Spent on Comprehension Instruction during Mr. L's Reading Period

Lesson # and Duration	Elements of Direct Instruction	Time spent in minutes	Percentage of total class time
1 (49minutes)	Teacher demonstration/explanation	5	10
	Scaffolding	12	24
	Independent Practice	11	22
	Guided Practice	18	37
	Total	**46**	**94**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	3	6
	Total	**3**	**6**
2 (39 minutes)	Teacher demonstration/explanation	7	17
	Scaffolding	0	0
	Independent Practice	15	
	Guided Practice	15+9 overlap=24	62
	Total	**37**	**95**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	2	5
	Total	**2**	**5**
4 (40 minutes)	Teacher demonstration/explanation	5	13
	Scaffolding	0	0
	Independent Practice	24	60
	Guided Practice	10=15overlap=25	63
	Total	**39**	**98**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	1	2
	Total	**1**	**2**
5 (33 minutes)	Teacher demonstration/explanation	4	12
	Scaffolding	5	15
	Independent Practice	10	30
	Guided Practice	13	39
	Total	**32**	**97**
	Non Instruction		
	Comprehension Assessment	0	0
	Other	1	3
Total 161 minutes	**Total**	**1**	**3**