

The Impact of Direct Reading Strategy Instruction on Student Academic Achievement

by Maria Bolander

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Education

July 2014

Graduate Programs in Education
Goucher College

Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
List of Figures	ii
Abstract	iii
I. Introduction	1
Overview	1
Statement of Problem	2
Statement of Hypothesis	2
Operational Definitions	2
II. Review of the Literature	4
The Importance of Reading in Schools	4
Characteristics of a Good Reader	7
Interventions for Improving Reading Comprehension	9
Summary	12
III. Methods	13
Design of Study	13
Participants	13
Instrument	14
Procedure	15
IV. Results	19
V. Discussion	22
Threats to Validity	22
Implications of Results	23

Comparisons to Previous Research	24
Implications for Future Research	25
Summary	25
References	27

List of Tables

1. Performance of Treatment and Control Groups on the Qualitative Reading Inventory 5	19
2. Pretest/Posttest comparison of Treatment and Control Groups: An Analysis of Covariance	21

List of Figures

1. Performance of Treatment and Control Groups on the Qualitative Reading Inventory 5 (Pre- and Post-Assessments)	20
---	----

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of teaching select reading strategies on academic achievement of fifth grade students in the area of reading comprehension. For this quasi-experimental study, students in a fifth grade reading class were randomly assigned to a treatment group who received traditional comprehension instruction with additional reading strategy instruction, or assigned to a control group which received the traditional comprehension instruction only. A pre- and post--assessment design was used in this study. The analysis of this study suggested significant improvement in reading performance for students provided with direct instruction in reading. The promising results and other research suggest that direct reading strategy instruction can improve reading comprehension scores in fifth grade students. Implications of the results and future research are discussed within the paper.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Education in the United States and reading in particular, is of the utmost importance if our society is going to flourish and grow exponentially in the future. Reading is a lifelong skill that needs constant practice in order for students to become contributing members of society and college and career ready. Students need to be taught how to read through explicit comprehension strategy instruction rather than through practicing with worksheets. Comprehension strategies are well thought-out plans that include purposeful steps that good readers use to make sense of a text, and become active readers who are in control of their own reading.

Effectively learning the strategies will ultimately enhance the students' ability to monitor and gauge their own abilities, making them more successful in reading comprehension. The National Reading Panel, formed in 1997, stated that reading comprehension is important to the development of children and their overall development. Those in education are facing a great deal of pressure to ensure the success of all students on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) that is being piloted this year.

The researcher teaches in a school that is labeled "Tier 5," which means that the school did not meet the necessary standards on the MSA and it is critical that the students fully understand how to read and comprehend texts. Therefore, the researcher decided that it would benefit the students and the school if teachers could spend some time directly teaching the reading comprehension strategies to the students in the class. With this explicit instruction, the

students should increase their knowledge of reading and perform in a much more successful manner on assessments.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of the study was to determine how direct reading instruction in reading strategies (higher level questioning, making inferences, determining the importance of text, summarizing, and synthesizing) affects the reading comprehension of students in a fifth grade reading class.

Statement of Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of fifth graders who receive direct instruction in reading strategies along with regular classroom instruction in reading, compared to similar students who do receive regular classroom instruction only.

Operational Definitions

Reading comprehension is defined as performance on the Qualitative Reading Inventory 5 (QRI) that requires students to read a passage designed for fifth graders and to answer a few questions without looking back at the text. The questions require the students to use reading comprehension strategies to help them better understand the text they are reading, so they can fully comprehend the complexities of the text and understand what the questions are asking of them. The number of correct answers given by a student will ultimately help the teacher determine if the student can read and comprehend selections at an independent level, an instructional level, or at frustration level.

The independent variable in this study was the additional reading strategy instruction. The experimental group of students received both the reading instruction program by Baltimore

County Public Schools and additional instruction in selected reading strategies (questioning, inferring, determining importance of text, summarizing, and synthesizing) during small group. The group met with the teacher two to three times a week for an additional 30 minutes over six weeks. The control group of students received the normal reading instruction prescribed by Baltimore County Public Schools. This instruction included a whole group shared learning experience, independent work, and instruction of the writing process. The entire instructional block of time consisted of two hours of learning. The dependent variable is the reading comprehension.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review addresses the concept of the impact of reading comprehension and academic success for students. Section one will provide an overview of the importance of reading and comprehension in schools. Section two encompasses the characteristics of good readers. The final section of this literature review will describe interventions for improving reading comprehension and the ways that direct instruction will improve overall academic achievement.

The Importance of Reading in Schools

Comprehension instruction is an integral component of reading. One of the most important things children can accomplish in elementary schools is learning to read. It is the basic foundation for most of their future academic endeavors. McLaughlin (2012) tells us that reading comprehension is, “The construction of meaning of a written or spoken communication through reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message in a particular communicative context” (p.2). Meaning is basically constructed when the readers are able to make meaningful connections between what they know (prior knowledge) and what they are reading through the complex text. When the student truly is engaged in the reading process, learning occurs because the information is integrated with their prior knowledge and experiences. Essentially the more connections and experiences that can be made for the reader, the easier it will be for him or her to comprehend the text and speak on the topic as well.

Reading is the transformation of not only the words and the written structure, but the world itself (Freire, 1983). All students need to be exposed to complex text and grammatically correct writing in order to be engaged in rich discussions as well as to speak logically and

responsibly on the topic at hand. This knowledge of the world is not simply reading the words, but rather it is the understanding that is grasped by the critical reading of complex text and understanding the relationship between the text and how it is used (Freire, 1983). Reading is important as it provides the basic structure for communication within the world. People are able to re-create and re-live moments in their lives through their reading and writing. This reenactment will ultimately enable the reader to experience new and exciting moments while making some connections. The full understanding of reading comprehension will depend on many instinctive and strategically planned cognitive processes and will become a very complex task (Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004).

Not only is it a complex task for students, but reading comprehension is a complex process that involves several components that will make the reading experience more memorable and complete for the reader (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Students need to have the knowledge of several texts and to be able to apply their particular reading experiences to solidify their reading experience. As the student is reading, it is imperative for the teacher to explicitly model the parameters of thinking. There are several ways for the students to learn how to think, such as: literal, inferential, and evaluative thinking. With each type of thinking, the students' understanding and practice of such will enable their true understanding and application of reading to occur. A successful reading comprehension program includes ample time for the students to actually read and comprehend complex texts. If students are afforded this opportunity, then they are more apt to make the connections necessary to comprehend and speak logically on the topic. Not only is it important for the students to have the time to read, they will need opportunities for collaborative learning and the availability in which to speak with their peers and teacher about their reading responses. This exposure to speaking on the subject at

hand will open the mind to advance thinking and reasoning as well as to apply their knowledge of comprehension. There is a strong correlation between prior knowledge and readers and their reading. A student must have those experiences and apply them to comprehension skills in order to be well-rounded and become a contributing member of society.

In order for the students to have full comprehension, it is necessary for the teachers to engage them in a balanced literacy program which includes reading, writing, listening, and speaking, with fidelity and consistency. This would also include instruction that is literature based as well as skill based. This combination will allow the students to engage in meaningful discussions and better share their comprehension of texts at a higher level with questioning. Students need to be provided explicit direct instruction on how to comprehend a text and should be provided sufficient opportunities in which to do so (Paris & Cross, 1984). This direct instruction and strategy practice will help to ensure academic success for students. Strategy knowledge and practice will allow the students to stimulate their understanding and be better prepared to be a contributing member of society. Once the students realize that reading comprehension is of the utmost importance then they are well on their way to becoming good readers. Feiker Hollenbeck (2013) believes that direct instruction and modeling for students should help to speed up the process of reading comprehension and connections for the students, thus making good readers. Teachers need to directly teach the strategies and use organizers in order to help solidify students' understanding and application. If students have a sense of accomplishment as good readers, then they will be able to help others excel and the reading will continue to occur. Good readers will be prevalent in society and then the norm will be good reading, which is the key for success in all aspects of life.

Characteristics of a Good Reader

Good readers are those who are actively engaged and can constructively make meaning as they are reading complex text (Taylor & Francis, 2011). These students are self-motivated, self-directed, and can monitor their own comprehension of text using several strategies. This self-monitoring is a skill that has been explicitly taught by teachers and practiced and reviewed by students on an on-going basis. Good readers engage in the reading of narrative and expository text of equal balance. They know to generate higher level questions as they are reading the text while taking comprehensive relevant notes pertaining to the details of the text. As good readers are reading, they create their own graphic organizers and process the information they are reading as they place details in specific sections of their note taking organizer. Good readers read widely, monitor and clarify their understanding of the text, and make meaning from the text they are reading (McLaughlin, 2012).

Good readers are those who are intrinsically motivated to continue their learning while they make meaning from the words on a page. Breaking down the words that are difficult to read is a common practice of good readers. They, in turn, will read on and use contextual clues to discern the meaning of certain words. Good readers who are competent will reread text and change the pacing of their reading if necessary in order to make constructive meaning of the text. They are often problem solvers who have the natural ability to search and discover new information on their own (McLaughlin, 2012). This new-found knowledge will help to solidify their learning and will spark new interest in other readings. The belief in one's self and one's ability to reach one's fullest potential are genuine characteristics of a good reader. Good readers are able to use the higher level questioning skills to make independent contributions to overall meaning of the text and any language that could be more challenging. Classroom behavior and

higher achievement in class are indicative of good readers (Wasson, Wasson, & Beare, 2001). This high level of classroom focus and behavior enables the good reader to make inferences and use their memory skills to enhance the overall reading experience. Using the working memory, reading comprehension and the higher level language skills are excellent characteristics of a good reader in today's society (Cain et al., 2004). They continue to synthesize all components and establish themselves as good readers. Good readers are fully able to use well-established verbal skills to make meaning from the text.

Good readers are able to apply skills and strategies learned as they apply knowledge of text organization and the author's purpose for writing a selection. This is important for students so they are able to "dig in" and dissect the purpose for reading while making those meaningful connections. Many readers fail to realize that good reading means asking questions and thinking about ideas while reading, and good readers do this instinctively. Using a KWL chart for summarizing and comprehension are strategies that tend to work for good readers. Good readers automatically incorporate reading strategies into their reading and comprehension of complex text. Children in the classroom must be a part of the reading strategies modeled and thus be provided ample opportunities in which to engage in partner work and independent work. This constant practice will enable the students to solidify their learning and thus strengthen their understanding of the strategies and text being presented. Mapping and summarization are excellent tools that readers add to the KWL chart because of the writing and restructuring that enable good readers to process information more readily (Carr & Ogle, 1987).

Good readers are more apt to discover the relationships between and among ideas, concepts, events, and characters while reading. This is just another aspect of good readers in today's society. Not only can they uncover the relationships, they are able to explicitly give

relevant details on the author's purpose using the specific text details and evidence. It is this well-roundedness that enables good readers to keep on questioning while using their prior knowledge, new knowledge, and text details to synthesize the details. These types of readers are able to change their questioning as they listen to classmates in small group discussions (Pearson, 1985). Readjusting thinking and questioning are excellent strategies for good readers to have as they progress to secondary school and beyond. As readers are reading, they internally establish new goals for their learning, check understanding of the text by paraphrasing the author's words, summarize the text with relevant details, evaluate the ideas in the text with their own understanding of the text, and are able to apply the ideas learned to various situations that may ultimately arise.

In order to be a good reader, one must fully be able to comprehend complex text. This comprehension requires constant practice using various strategies, conferencing with the teacher, and feedback on the positives and challenges of such.

Interventions for Improving Reading Comprehension

Children must experience the modeling of strategies in order to make meaning out of reading. Additionally, it would be beneficial to provide explicit strategy instruction to our struggling readers (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005). The reader must be fully alert to the strategies and the practice of these in order to make meaning and fully comprehend the text. In order to make connections with complex text, the readers must make connections to the text, activate their prior knowledge, ask those higher level questions, visualize, make concrete inferences, determine what's important to the text, summarize the author's purpose of the text, and ultimately synthesize the reading. It is like a runner who runs a marathon, as there are many

prerequisites that must happen prior to the success of the mission. In this case, the mission is correlated with increased academic achievement due to intensive learning.

Reciprocal teaching is used frequently as a strategy to help in reading comprehension. Reciprocal teaching is based on the belief that students can be taught to internalize the rules for comprehending material over a period of time (McLaughlin, 2012). This type of teaching uses the strategies of predicting and clarifying, questioning, and summarizing the text in order to increase comprehension and overall academic achievement.

When students predict before reading, they are able to recheck their understanding as they check their predictions during reading. They often are able to stop and clarify the unknown words or ideas during reading while the teacher helps to clarify their understanding of the text. As students are making predictions, the teacher is able to explicitly model her inner conversation based on the text so that the class can gauge what they should be doing.

It is the teacher's responsibility to encourage student thinking as modeling, guided practice, and independent practice is prevalent throughout each and every lesson. Teachers explicitly model and revise their teaching as they demonstrate how to use these strategies by following three specific points by the teacher (Stricklin, 2011). It is also the responsibility of the teacher to activate students' prior knowledge before reading and to monitor, guide, and encourage the students during reading and after reading. This encouragement and delving into the text can occur in small group instruction with intensified instruction and feedback to the students. This constructive feedback is of the utmost importance in order to improve the understanding of the students. This type of teaching works well with fiction and non-fiction texts and helps to better prepare the students for the many standardized tests that they are going

to take in the near future. It is also beneficial as it encourages all students to strive to reach their fullest potential while internal reflection on their comprehension is utilized.

The teacher needs to engage in the gradual release of responsibility as a systematic approach to effectively teaching comprehension (Taylor & Francis, 2011). The teacher needs to establish the clear and concise purpose for the lesson, model with complex text, provide guided instructional practice, allow the students to engage in meaningful group work, and ultimately demonstrate their full understanding with meaningful independent work and practice. It has been proven through studies at Johns Hopkins University that cooperative learning and direct teacher instruction is beneficial as students learn to comprehend the text (Stevens, Slavin, & Farnish, 1991). Students who are actively engaged in learning and direct instruction of the strategies of reading are more likely to have an increase in academic achievement in reading as compared to their peers with no direct instruction. Working cooperatively with peers and the teacher will enable higher level questioning and ultimately increase the academic achievement of the students. It is imperative for the students to work in cooperative groups and discuss the text they are reading. This discussion will promote higher level questioning with the teacher and among peers.

Building on the concepts learned through explicit instruction will make the learning experience more meaningful for all of the students while helping to solidify learning. This knowledge will increase the academic achievement of the students. The power of cooperative learning will increase the self-esteem while they are working together for a shared goal. The students will be able to seek positive outcomes that are beneficial to all members of the group (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). There is a constant emphasis on continual improvement of the quality of assignments, learning, and the team approach. Teachers need to be actively engaged

and motivated for the students to learn and ultimately succeed. It is up to the teachers and the use of explicit instruction of strategies for the students to increase their academic achievement in reading comprehension.

Summary

Comprehension is crucial to the development of the whole child in today's society. Various concepts have been identified in this literature review regarding the direct teaching of reading strategies in order to improve academic achievement in fifth grade students. Through this direct teaching, modeling explicitly, small group instruction, and gradual release, the students are eventually able to make connections with the text and promote academic success within them. It is my hope that this direct instruction of strategies and positivity in the classroom will have a great impact with the students and increase overall academic achievement.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of direct instruction in reading strategies upon the reading comprehension of the students in a fifth grade reading class.

Design of Study

For this quasi-experimental study, students in a fifth grade reading classroom were randomly assigned to a treatment group who received traditional comprehension instruction with an extra half hour of additional reading strategy instruction in small group over a six week period, or assigned to a control group which received the traditional comprehension instruction. The researcher used a pre and post-assessment design.

Participants

The participants of this study included 17 fifth-grade students from a public elementary school in the northwest area of Baltimore County, Maryland. The students in this study were between ten and eleven years old. The school consists of 375 students: 60% White, 28% African American, 4% Hispanic, 4% Two or More Races, 4% Asian, and 0% American Indian or Alaskan Native. During the 2012-2013 academic school year, the students in grades three to five participated in the Maryland State Assessment. The results of the assessment were as follows: 47.2% of the students scored in the advanced category, 36.4% of students scored in the proficient category, and 16.4% of the students scored in the basic category.

The experimental group included six girls and two boys: two African Americans, one Hispanic, one Indian American, and four Caucasians. Within the experimental group, one student currently has an Individualized Education Plan with reading goals, and two students have

504 Plans for various accommodations. All students in this group scored proficient or advanced on the 2012-2013 Maryland State Assessment.

The control group included three boys and five girls; two were African American and the remaining students were Caucasian. There were two students who currently have 504 Plans and nearly 90% of the students in the control group scored proficient or better on the Maryland State Assessment.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the Qualitative Reading Inventory-5 (QRI-5), published in 2010 by Allyn & Bacon, Incorporated. This instrument is an individually administered informal reading inventory designed to provide information about the student's ability to identify words and comprehend text successfully. All participants in the study were randomly selected from the researcher's class of students and given the pre- and post-assessment of the Qualitative Reading Inventory-5; both of the assessments were designed for fifth grade students and were of the same level of difficulty. The students were given a passage to read and were instructed to answer the eight comprehension questions based on the passage without looking back into the text. Based upon the number of correct answers, the student was categorized as being at an independent level (8 correct), instructional level (6 -7 correct), or frustration level (0 -5 correct).

The QRI 5 results are scored by different individuals; therefore, inter-scorer reliability may become an issue for the research. But reliability of scoring the answers to comprehension questions was 98% for all items. The reliability of comprehension scores on two passages within the same genre were used and the degree of consistency was always above .80, and 75% were above .90. Over 70% of the time, the same instructional level would be obtained given the same

genre of the passage. Correlations between the two measures were all positive and statistically significant. There were positive and statistically significant correlations between the QRI and other measures such as the Woodcock Reading Test, The Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Measures of Academic Progress as stated in the QRI. Therefore, there are developmental and individual differences in the various factors that influence students' comprehension scores.

Procedure

In February 2014, the researcher refined the action research project and identified her fifth grade reading class to participate in the research. The class was heterogeneous and consisted of 17 students, although only eight students were a part of the experimental group. The additional reading strategy instruction took place during the reading instructional block of the day where the experimental group received an additional 30 minutes of strategy instruction and practice with the teacher. During a six week period of time, the students met between two and three times each week, depending on the school's calendar of events; the researcher used a calendar of strategy instruction form to monitor instruction and attendance. The researcher utilized resources from the Comprehension Toolkit which, according to Baltimore County Public Schools, is an excellent resource to reinforce comprehension strategies using non-fiction texts, the reading for comprehension series, which focuses on discreet strategies, and various workbooks with the designated strategies.

Five strategies were reintroduced and reviewed with the students: asking meaningful questions, inferring the meaning, determining the importance, summarizing, and synthesizing. These strategies are extremely important for the development of a well-rounded reader who fully is able to comprehend higher level texts. Since questions are at the center of learning and teaching, they open the doors that enable readers to better understand the world around them,

making this strategy one of the utmost importance in learning. Students need to constantly ask questions before, during, and after they read as this is an indication that they are interacting with the text in order to construct meaning. This strategy was taught to “train” the students to constantly listen to their inner conversation while reading and monitoring their comprehension. Additionally, the reasons for questioning were reviewed and practiced with the students. Beginning the questioning process, categorizing questions to promote understanding, and differentiating between thick and thin questions (thin questions are questions that are found easily in the text and thick questions are those questions that require a student to use the clues in the text and infer) were a focus. Furthermore, reading to answer specific questions, taking notes in order to answer questions, and making meaning through the use of questioning were reviewed.

Inferring the meaning involves merging background knowledge with the various clues from the text in order to come up with an idea that is not explicitly stated in the text. It is important to teach the students that when they infer the meaning, they are in fact drawing conclusions or making some predictions. Making inferences requires the readers to use the context clues from the text and make some meaning out of unfamiliar words or even the actions of characters. Inferential thinking could be thought of as the overall umbrella and underneath the umbrella are some prerequisite skills that must be present for students to make an inference.

When students determine the importance of a text, they often infer the meaning of the big idea or of the central message of the story. When students determined the importance of a non-fiction text, the researcher reinforced the importance of finding the important information and discriminating between the key topics and supporting details, which can be a tricky task to accomplish. Most students believe that all details in the text are important when many of them are, in fact, irrelevant to the overall meaning of the text. The researcher believes that creating a

tool encouraging the students to list the facts, ask questions, and then write a response after reading will inevitably help the students discern between importance to the text and irrelevance to the text. In order for the students to be highly effective with their thinking, it is necessary for them to constantly explore their thinking which will make a positive difference in their understanding

When students summarize a text, they are asked to extract the relevant details along with the main idea and put it into their own words in order to make sense of the information and remember it. All of these details add to the overall meaning of the text and the students' understanding. When students synthesize, they take the information and integrate it with their own knowledge in order to best understand it. This synthesizing process is the most challenging for students to grasp, given they are trying to use evidence from the text and merge their thinking to come up with responses that are both personal and factual. Students can certainly synthesize their understanding and teach it to others through a variety of projects and presentations.

The strategy lessons were developed in order to foster a sense of independence and a positive self-concept within each student. The researcher ensured that proper vocabulary was used in order to maintain consistency and overall equity amongst the students. The following procedures were followed for strategy instruction:

- ✓ The researcher built some background knowledge and played a quick “What do you know game” about the strategy which allowed the researcher to pre-assess them and make adjustments to the lesson. White boards and flashcards were utilized to create excitement for the students.
- ✓ The researcher clarified any immediate misconceptions and the students read the objective of the day, which was written on a dry erase easel. The students utilized reading

response journals and Post-It-notes during the lesson to take notes and accomplish the necessary work.

- ✓ The researcher modeled the strategy and her inner conversation with the strategy. Then the students engaged in think-pair-share with their partners to practice the strategy. This allowed the teacher to listen and gain a better understanding to which students needed some additional practice with the strategy.
- ✓ The researcher regrouped the students and they shared their thinking while clarifications were made. Anchor charts and small passages were posted in the small group area as a point of reference for all students.
- ✓ At the conclusion of the lesson, the students were provided with their independent work which reinforced the strategy focus of the day. They were rewarded for their participation and diligence while in small group.

At the conclusion of the six weeks, all members of the class were given the post-assessment and the data was analyzed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to determine how direct reading instruction in reading strategies (higher level questioning, making inferences, determining the importance of text, summarizing, and synthesizing) affects the reading comprehension of students in a fifth grade reading class. Results of pre- and post-testing a treatment group, who received the instruction, and a control group, who received ordinary classroom instruction, indicated that with the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the treatment group and the control group is rejected.

Participants' mean score on the pre-test was 4.56, although after six weeks of direct reading instruction, the mean score significantly increased to 6.12 on the post-test. The standard deviation on the post-assessment for the treatment group was .11 greater than that of the control group. As Table 1 shows, the treatment group students' mean scores on the pretest were 4.56, and increased to 6.12 on the posttest. The control group students averaged 5.37 on the pretest and increased to 5.50 on the posttest. This table presents the descriptive statistics for the two groups.

Table 1

Performance of Treatment and Control Groups on the Qualitative Reading Inventory 5.

Descriptor	Treatment	Control
Number of Participants	8	8
Pretest Mean	4.56	5.37
Pretest Standard Deviation	2.07	1.68
Posttest Mean	6.12	5.50

Posttest Standard Deviation	1.80	1.69
Difference Between Pretest and Posttest	+1.56	+1.13

Figure 1 displays visually the pretest and posttest scores for treatment and control groups. The figure displays the results of the analysis of Covariance, which demonstrates to the reader that the pretest results were different, but more importantly, that the posttest results were significantly different.

Figure 1

Performance of Treatment and Control Groups on the Qualitative Reading Inventory 5 (Pre-and Post-Assessments)

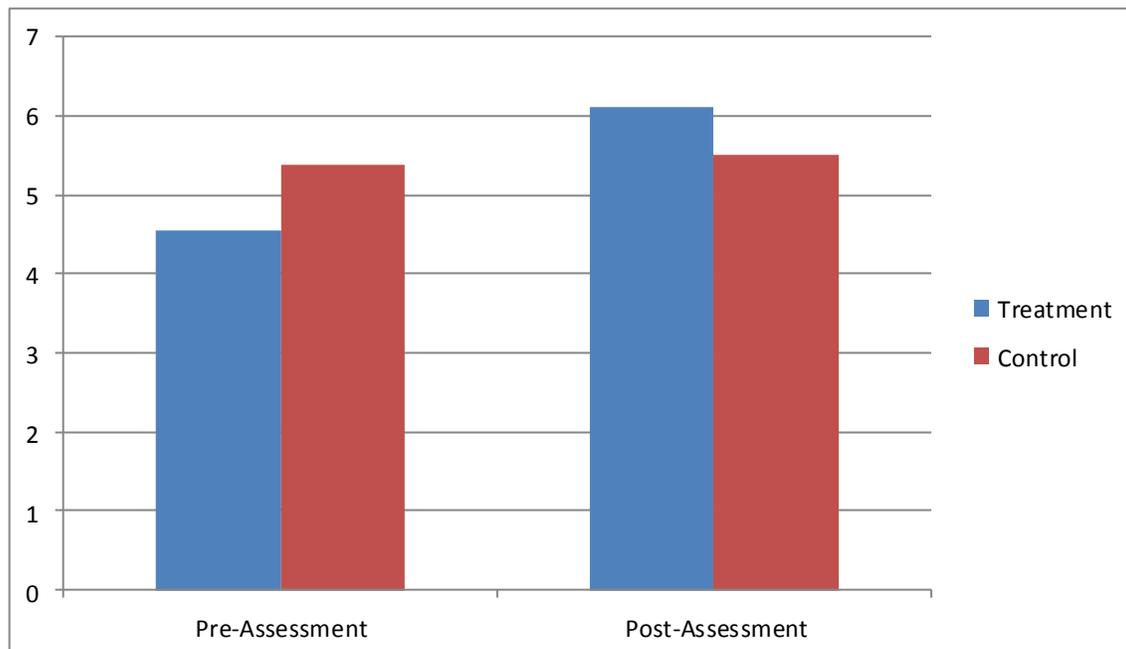


Table 2 displays results of an analysis of covariance performed on the scores. This analysis compares posttest scores for the treatment and control groups, controlling for differences in pretest performance. As Table 2 indicates, there was no significant difference in pretest scores ($F= 83.06, p < .000$), in this case favoring the control group. When those pretest differences were taken into account, posttest scores were significantly different ($F= 16.06, p < .001$), favoring the treatment group.

Table 2

Pretest/Posttest Comparison of Treatment and Control Groups: An Analysis of Covariance

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df.	Mean Squares	F.	Sig.
Pretest	37.07	1.	37.04	83.06	P. less than.000
Posttest	7.17	1.	7.17	16.06	P. less than.001

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The null hypothesis that the reading skills of fifth grade students who receive direct instruction in reading strategies will not exceed the skills of similar students who receive only ordinary classroom instruction was rejected.

Threats to Validity

There were a few threats to the validity of this study. The initial threat was the amount of time the treatment was administered and the time of year that it was presented to the students. The researcher selected various reading strategies and instructed the students two to three times each week, during a six week period, for an additional 30 minutes of time during the reading instructional block. The students were not able to take full ownership of this learning as they were only receiving this additional instruction two to three times a week, depending on the school calendar and demands. They were not able to fully infuse this learning into the other aspects of reading as it was reviewed in isolation. Moreover, there were several snow days, shortened classes due to the late openings, and other missed opportunities such as mandatory MSA review and practice, and MSA itself.

Another threat to validity was the amount of time the researcher designated to teach the specific strategy. The researcher thought that the reading strategy could be fully taught with ample opportunities for partner and independent practice within the constraints of two to three times a week; however, there were several lessons that needed more time for clarification of concepts and student practice. Therefore, some of the other strategies were shortened due to this unforeseen circumstance. After reflection, the researcher determined that lessons should have

been taught in one hour increments at least two to three times a week to increase their effectiveness.

The consistency of student participation and distractibility were threats to the validity of this study. The fact that instruction took place at the back of the room during regular reading class was distracting to the participants because their peers were making noises, faces, and other distractible gestures. In addition, some of the students were not as comfortable speaking in front of their small group peers due to the possibility of being embarrassed by their peers.

Finally, the measurement used could have negatively impacted the validity of this study. The Qualitative Reading Inventory 5 (QRI) is used throughout Baltimore County Public Schools as an acceptable measure for reading comprehension, but there has not been documented research testing the reliability and validity of this measure. Moreover, the scoring is very subjective as it provides sample responses and the responses are not either right or wrong; they are subjective in nature. One teacher could have higher expectations for written responses than another and graded differently.

Implications of Results

The analysis of this study suggested significant improvement in reading performance for students provided with direct instruction in reading over a brief (six-week) period. This finding is in keeping with similar research. Even though the treatment was short in its duration, the researcher found a significant difference in comprehension skills for students who received the instruction. The researcher also noticed that some members of the treatment group were applying to their regular classwork the skills they were taught during the treatment sessions. For example, the students were using Post-It-notes, taking detailed notes when reading, and making

concrete inferences using specific details from the text. This was an eye opener for the researcher, who found that instruction had enabled the students to take ownership of their independent work and that they were more intrinsically motivated for success.

Comparisons to Previous Research

The findings of this study are consistent with other research showing benefits for students when strategy instruction is used. For instance, results were similar to those reported by Carnine, Kameenui, and Woolfson (1982). In this case, students were explicitly taught to draw inferences based on relevant information and were demonstrating gains within the classroom. The teachers explicitly modeled using direct questioning and partner work was provided afterwards so that students could efficiently practice the skill. Strategy usage was scaffolded by the teachers in preparation for eventual gradual release of responsibility and strategy practice. By the end of the study, students demonstrated gains in reading comprehension.

Harvey and Goudvis (2005) stated there were studies in the National Reading Panel (2000) as well as other notable research that have provided concrete evidence that explicit reading strategy instruction improves the students' understanding of what was read in schools. Teachers who explicitly model and revise their thinking as they demonstrate how to use strategies such as modeling, guided practice, and independent practice have noted gains in student comprehension (Stricklin, 2011). It is also stated that explicit strategy instruction has a positive effect on the students' general comprehension and self-concept. One must keep in mind that comprehension tools are used to help students construct meaning from the text. They are "a means to an end, not an end in themselves" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005, p.14).

Implications for Future Research

The researcher reflected upon the study and has made a few recommendations regarding the effective use of strategy instruction in order to increase overall reading comprehension. The promising results achieved from this study persuaded the researcher that additional time spent on strategy instruction would be highly beneficial. The researcher believes that more time is needed to effectively instruct the selected reading strategies, and that this time would be beneficial for the students so that they can properly practice using the strategies. Thus, the researcher suggests that future research be conducted throughout the year, with one hour sessions, two times a week. This additional time will allow for the proper modeling, guided practice, student practice, independent practice, and station “fun” practice so that student learning can be solidified.

The researcher also believes that limiting the number of strategies taught throughout the year in this small group would benefit future research and the students. The researcher felt rushed when teaching the strategies and wholeheartedly believes that in depth instruction could occur with practice with a smaller number of strategies. The researcher would like the students to be fully engaged while taking full ownership of the strategy taught, and implemented within regular daily instruction.

Summary

In summary, results from the study offer support for the effectiveness of direct strategy instruction as an effective tool for improving reading comprehension for fifth grade students. Evidence from the study suggests that direct reading strategy instruction should be implemented in all classrooms. Further, ample practice should be provided so that all students receive the benefit of modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and fun station practice. This instruction should be an integral component of all reading lessons although reading strategy

instruction is not the means to the end for reading comprehension. Students may still struggle, but these tools will enable students to reach their full potential and make sense of reading. In conclusion, using an effective reading program while implementing reading strategies and practice, providing appropriate and engaging texts, and engaging all learners will benefit all learners and ensure their success.

References

- Cain, K., Oakhill, J., & Bryant, P. (2004). Children's reading comprehension ability: Concurrent prediction by working memory, verbal ability, and component skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 96*(1), 31–42.
- Carnine, D., Kameenui, E.J., & Woolfson, N. (1982). Training of Textual Dimensions Related to Text-Based Inferences. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 14*(3), 335–340.
- Carr, E., & Ogle, D. (1987). K-W-L Plus: A strategy for comprehension and summarization. *Journal of Reading, 30*(7), 626–631.
- Fielding, L.G., & Pearson, P. D. (1994). Reading comprehension: What works. *Educational Leadership, 51*(5), 62–67.
- Freire, P. (1983). The importance of the act of reading. *The Journal of Education, 165* (1), 5–11.
- Feiker Hollenback, A. R. (2013). Beyond talking about books: Implications of the reading comprehension instruction and pedagogical beliefs of a special educator perceived as effective. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 36*(2), 112–125.
- Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2005). *The comprehension toolkit: Language and Lessons for active literacy, grades 3–6*. Markham Ontario: Pembroke Pines Limited.
- Johnson, D., & Johnson, R. (1999). What makes cooperative learning work. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1477225>
- McLaughlin, M. (2012). *Reading comprehension, what every teacher needs to know*. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002>
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *The report of the national reading panel: Teaching children to Read*. Washington DC: National Reading Panel.
- Paris, S.G., & Cross, D.R. (1984). Informed strategies for learning: A program to improve

- children's reading awareness and comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76-(6), 1239–1252.
- Pearson, P.D. (1985). Changing the face of reading comprehension instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 38(8), 724–738.
- Stevens, R.J., Slavin, R.E., & Farnish, A.M. (1991). The effects of cooperative learning and direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies on main idea identification. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83(1), 8–16.
- Stricklin, K. (2011). Hands-on reciprocal teaching: a comprehension technique. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(8), 620–625.
- Wasson, J.B., Wasson, B.B., & Beare, P.L. (1990). Classroom behavior of good and poor readers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 83(3), 162–166.