A MULTI-CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE PRACTICES OF FOURTH- AND FIFTH-GRADE TEACHERS IN TITLE 1 SCHOOLS WHO USE SPECIFIC READING STRATEGIES TO TEACH THE COMPREHENSION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXT

by

Candice Maureen Smith

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multi-case study was to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. One theory that guided this study was Vygotsky's sociocultural theory focusing on the zone of proximal development as it applies to what a learner can do with and without help, and his concept of learning and development, whereby a child does not develop independently of his or her environment. In addition, Bandura's social cognitive theory served as a guiding theory for this study. The design was a multiple case study of 11 teacher participants in Grades 4 and 5 from various Title 1 schools. Data collection included individual interviews, teacher focus groups, and document analysis. Data were analyzed directly through the interpretation of cases embedded within each data type across cases using Stake's multiple case analysis methods. Trustworthiness was established by the triangulation of data, expert review of data analysis, and member checks. The study found that teachers use a variety of informational text strategies currently found in the literature. The findings also revealed that teachers use several strategies, such as modeling and think aloud, within the close reading strategy. Teachers also reported using writing to help students understand text organization and questioning to determine background knowledge of topics.

Keywords: reading comprehension strategies, informational text, scaffolding, narrative text

Dedication

I dedicate this degree to my late mother, Staggie LoveJoy Veney. She was very committed to education but met with many barriers that prevented her from obtaining a college degree. She insisted that I pursue the highest degree possible and to never give up on my dream. My mother would often say, “When one door closes, go into the next open one. Just keep walking through the doors God has opened for you.” I have done just that.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my sons. Darin, Irvin, and Landen have been by “Mommy’s” side the entire step of the way. They practiced on football fields while watching me work on my manuscript nearby. They understood when I couldn’t “hang” with them on the weekend because I had an assignment to finish. They didn’t even ask why I was crying while typing. They knew I had a goal. May my sons accomplish all of their goals in life.

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First of all, I thank God above for allowing me to accomplish my personal goal of obtaining a doctoral degree. On the many days that I felt discouraged and wanted to give up, I heard God's still quiet voice say, "Go on." Without him, this dissertation would not have been possible.

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I'm extending many thanks to all my participants for their time and willingness to contribute to this study. Your participation brought life to this study.

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List of Abbreviations

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

English Language Arts (ELA)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Question-Answer Relationship (QAR)

Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R)

Think before reading, Think while reading, Think after reading (TWA)

What Do I think I Know? What Do I Want to Learn? What Did I Learn? (KWL)

Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Within the past decade, there has been an increased emphasis on the reading of informational text in content area subjects and in English language arts (McCown & Thomason, 2014). A balanced literacy program consists of the teaching of both narrative and informational text. Narrative text refers to text that is fiction and includes characters, settings, problems, events, and solutions (Mullis et al., 2016). Informational text includes a variety of different genres, such as procedural text, biographies, and informative/explanatory texts, and each genre has a different specific purpose, regularities in features, and similar processes used to read and write the texts (Watanabe Kganetso, 2017). Informational texts also place unique demands on readers in terms of content, vocabulary, text structures, and comprehension processes (Liebfreund & Conradi, 2016).

The increased emphasis on the reading of informational text has had profound influence on research and provided great challenges to teachers and students alike in terms of comprehension instruction and learning. Many students lack the ability to read and comprehend informational text. This difficulty with comprehension is evident in low reading test scores. In the United States, Title 1 schools receive federal funding to help improve academic achievement for disadvantaged students (Hirn et al., 2018). Many of these students are from families in poverty and are at risk for academic failure in the areas of reading and math. Despite the funding provided by No Child Left Behind to support schools in poverty, the achievement gap continues to widen (Reardon, 2013). Research has shown that teachers can have a positive impact on student achievement (Hirn et al., 2018), yet there is a lack of discussion about the analysis of

teaching practices inside the walls of the classroom (Hirn et al., 2018). The focus of reading instruction in the early elementary grades differs from instruction in fourth and fifth grade.

Prior to fourth grade, most of the focus of reading instruction is on decoding, fluency, and comprehension of familiar topics and vocabulary. When students reach the fourth grade, learning transitions from a focus on "learning to read" to a focus on "reading to learn" (Warner-Griffin et al., 2017). Children are expected to uncover the meaning of many technical, content area words, deal with unfamiliar topics, non-narrative text structures, and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills. Without exposing students to a rich curriculum, they may not have the opportunity to develop the academic vocabulary necessary to comprehend informational texts (Schugar & Dreher, 2017). This chapter includes the overview, background, problem statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, and definitions.

Background

Research indicates that narrative texts remain in the majority for read-alouds, classroom libraries, and instruction, thus limiting children's opportunities to experience the demands of informational text (Dreher & Kletzien, 2016). Americans today learned to read primarily using narrative text (Young & Goering, 2018). Children are interested in learning about the world around them, to include such things as trees, animals, cars and trucks, people, machines, and construction sites. The language of thought, foundational vocabulary, and the understanding of content-related topics are characteristics of informational text that help readers understand the world around them (Santoro et al., 2016). When student actively engage with complex text, growth in vocabulary, language, knowledge acquisition, and thinking takes place (Santoro et al., 2016). Explicit vocabulary instruction in word learning and gradual release of responsibility to students supports vocabulary learning and engagement (Gallagher & Anderson, 2016). Children

benefit from repeated exposure to words and, with carefully taught instruction in the use of comprehension strategies, these children will build opportunities to become successful readers. Historically, there have been several attempts to create meaning from text.

Historical Context of Reading Comprehension

The history of reading comprehension dates back to two approaches: skills-based comprehension and text-focused comprehension. The earliest attempts to teach comprehension skills did not focus on the reader and how they construct meaning from text. With today's shift to increased reading instruction involving non-fiction text, it is imperative that the reader's role in constructed meaning is understood.

Earlier attempts at constructing meaning from text neglected the role the reader plays in this process. The skill-based concept of reading was developed several decades ago, and according to Pearson (2009), this concept did not involve constructing meaning from text because the goal of reading was to achieve oral capacity and text memorization; these were common literary practices of European literacy from the 17th to 19th centuries (Pearson, 2009). During this time, most commoners did not have access to printed materials and were illiterate. The elite group that had access to text focused on reciting ancient Greek and Latin works as a reading goal. Furthermore, a commonly held belief during that time was that "if one decoded the words on a page, comprehension would follow" (Duffy et al., 2010, p. 58).

With the influx of immigrants after World War II, a new emphasis was placed on reading comprehension and testing (Pearson, 2009). Further, the goal of reading comprehension was to acquire a set of subskills that would aid in decoding words and transfer the literal meaning from the text to their reception. This text-focused view of reading comprehension did not take into consideration the active role of the reader in the reading process. Even today, despite years of

research on reading and practice, such skill-based and text-focused understanding and instruction of comprehension is still quite common in today's elementary classrooms (Davis et al., 2015).

Anderson (1978) applied schema to reading and language. Schemas can be thought of as mental filing cabinets that allow individuals to process, encode, organize, and retrieve information. Comprehension results from the activation of schemas, which provide a framework for explaining objects and events within a text (Anderson, 1978). Anderson's thesis asserted that "the knowledge a person already possesses has a potent influence on what he or she will learn or remember from exposure to discourse" (p. 67). According to Anderson, a reader's prior knowledge played an important role in understanding the text at hand. Readers recognize the constructive and interactive nature of reading, thus giving them an active role in the reading process. Anderson defined schematic units as of personal experiences on which a reader can draw upon to aid comprehension. In terms of reading comprehension, schema allows the reader to make contributions and connections in the reading process and help his or her own meaning making (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015). Schemata also provide ideational scaffolding for assimilating text information (Pearson, 2009).

Social Context

Preparing students to survive in an ever-increasing global society means making sure they are able to read and write with proficiency. Being proficient in independently reading and writing complex informational text has become a need for college and career readiness (Li et al., 2018). The need to meet higher reading expectations requires significant curricular and instructional shifts (Fisher & Frey, 2016). Teachers can model reading and rereading complex informational text to students during guided reading instruction. Additionally, teachers can help elementary students benefit most from this type of text by exposing them to multiple levels of

difficulty (Wixson & Valencia, 2014). The role of the teacher in teaching children to read and understand complex informational text is an essential part of preparing them to succeed in high school and college.

Theoretical Context

The sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978) is based on the notion that a child does not develop independently of his or her environment; instead, children participate in some type of activity and there is interaction between the child and the environment. This interaction between child and the environment is where learning takes place, resulting in independent development. The study of informational text comprehension strategies used in fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms is most applicable to the sociocultural theory, which builds upon the concept that people develop knowledge and derive meaning from their own experiences that are dependent upon the interaction between people, primarily the student and teacher (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978). The knowledge developed through these interactions builds upon previous knowledge, and it is this integration of new and previous knowledge that leads to true learning (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978).

In addition, cognitive development is a major tenet of the sociocultural theory and applicable to the learning of reading comprehension strategies. Vygotsky (1978) stated that "learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions" (p. 90). Learning is embedded in culture and precedes development. Therefore, it is necessary for the interactions between teacher and student to be meaningful. Vygotsky (1978) advised teachers to create a context that is rich with social interactions and that allows students to discuss their thoughts and ideas with each other.

The role of the teacher is to extend the child's thinking within the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978). Vygotsky (1934/1986) refers to the ZPD as "the discrepancy between the child's actual mental age and the level he reaches in solving problems with assistance" (p. 187). With assistance from an expert, primarily the teacher, the student is able to reach higher mental functions. For example, when reading informational text, students construct the meaning of the text using their own experiences. Working within a child's ZPD is critical because it stretches the child's academic capabilities.

Albert Bandura's (1971) social cognitive theory also added to the framework for this study. According to Bandura, humans are social beings and gain knowledge through social interactions. Learning can occur through witnessed behaviors which does not rely totally on mimicry (Bandura, 2011). One premise of social cognitive theory is that of modeling. According to Bandura (1971), "Most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (p. 5). Many complex behaviors such as speech and computing with numbers can be attributed to modeling from a competent peer (Bandura, 1971). This concept of modeling frames this study on informational text comprehension strategies as students who struggle with understanding the complex nature of informational text may benefit from adequate modeling by a more capable peer.

The concept of self-efficacy is also grounded in social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy is developed from external experiences, which influence the outcome of events (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy is a person's beliefs about his or her capability to exercise control over events affecting his or her life (Bandura, 1989). Individuals that exhibit high self-efficacy and believe they will perform well are more likely to take on the challenge of difficult tasks rather than avoid them. Therefore, educators who have built their philosophy on teaching informational text

comprehension skills around the concept of self-efficacy develop teacher self-efficacy and are able to promote learning environments that foster social experiences.

Situation to Self

I was motivated to conduct this study after several years of observing students who were able to read but had difficulty applying appropriate informational text comprehension strategies that would aid in their understanding of the text. My educational background includes 18 years of teaching both general and special education students with a wide range of reading abilities. I noticed that professional development workshops for reading comprehension seem to focus on small group reading instruction using leveled texts that are packaged with the commercial reading curriculum purchased by the district. I also noticed that while these texts have been quite useful for teaching sight words, decoding, and fluency, there were very few complex informational texts from which teachers could choose. In addition, with leveled texts, the students are matched with books according to a reading formula that does not exceed their instructional levels. My belief is that children must be presented with complex informational text for instructional purposes during guided reading.

I taught third grade for the past several years, and each year I noted the amount of complex informational reading passages on the end-of-year assessments, as compared to the amount of narrative text. I began to ask myself questions such as this: "If Keisha can read and understand text structures such as main idea, why is she unable to pass a standardized test that measures this skill?" My answer is that while Keisha may be able to determine the main idea of a paragraph, other questions may require a closer and deeper understanding of the text through several rereadings to understand complex vocabulary, tone, and other big ideas. I believe students are not reading enough complex informational text that will require them to think deeper

about the meaning of the text and to discover new ways in which to elaborate on what the author is saying. Furthermore, teachers must be in the position to model through think-alouds the types of questions students should ask themselves as they actively engage with the text. As a Christian educator with a biblical worldview, it is my mandate to ensure that all students I serve receive instruction in reading that will enable them to become literate citizens in a global society. My constructivist view guided my individual philosophical assumptions.

Ontological Assumption

An ontological assumption brings awareness to the researcher that there are multiple realities as seen through the participants' eyes (Moustakas, 1994). This awareness allowed me to see that my participants brought varying descriptions of the informational text reading strategies they use. By using the quotations and themes of the participants, I was able to provide evidence of the different strategies. I recorded each participants' use of informational text strategies using multiple forms of evidence to reveal themes among the participants. I used findings from the multiple data sources to reveal the participants' experiences with using informational text reading strategies (Creswell, 2013).

Epistemological Assumption

An epistemological assumption means that researchers attempt to get as close to the participants as possible (Creswell, 2013). My goal as the researcher for this study was to gather as much real fieldwork experience from the participants as possible. Due to the pandemic, I was unable to conduct personal face-to-face interviews, but I was able to enhance my closeness to the participants by using multiple data sources and gathering sufficient data. This data helped me form an accurate picture of the participants' use of informational text reading strategies. As a researcher, I sought to gain first-hand knowledge from the participants that helped me understand

what they know about teaching informational text comprehension strategies to fourth- and fifth-grade students.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions are based on values, and in qualitative study, researchers admit the value-laden nature of studies (Creswell, 2013). As a researcher, I acknowledge that my research is value-laden, and biases are present (Creswell, 2013). What I value in the teaching of reading as an educator will help inform my interpretation of the data collected during this study. I was careful to bracket out my biases as an educator since my values guide my thinking and actions. Grounded in God's word, I value the individuality of people uniquely created in his image. As a Christian teacher teaching in a public-school district, I realize that some of my participants may not hold a Christian worldview. When conducting interviews and leading focus groups, I kept this in mind to prevent skewing the data. This assumption was aligned with the participants' experiences to bring about a deeper analysis of the study.

Methodological Assumption

The methodology of qualitative research is characterized as inductive, merging, and shaped by the researcher's experience collecting and analyzing data (Creswell, 2013). This data formed a general principal or theme. While coding data, I identified and noted common ideas of participants' use of informational text reading strategies. From these common uses, I looked for themes that emerged that described how participants perceive the teaching of informational text comprehension strategies. These themes provide insight to other teachers that teach students how to comprehend informational text.

Research Paradigm

The paradigm that I used to guide my research was social constructivism because I

desired to better understand the world around me. More specifically, I desired to understand the educational system in which I teach. Rather than approach this study with limited views, I developed an objective meaning of the phenomenon studied through interviews and focus group discussions, as well as through interactions with the participants. By remaining objective about teachers' use of informational text reading strategies, I desired to gain more insight on how teachers can improve their instruction involving the use of informational text.

Problem Statement

The use of informational text in the elementary grades provides a context for helping students develop content understanding and domain knowledge across a wide range of subject matter (Santoro et al., 2016). When students reach the fourth grade, they are increasingly expected to uncover meaning of many technical, content area words, deal with unfamiliar topics and non-narrative text structures, and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills (Schugar & Dreher, 2017). Upper elementary students in fourth grade and above in the U.S. performed significantly lower on measures of informational reading than measures of narrative text on a recent international assessment (Schugar & Dreher, 2017). On the 2011 fourth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment, there was a 26-point gap (on a 500-point scale) between low-income students and middle to upper-income peers in public schools for literary reading and a 28-point gap between low-income students and middle to upper income students for informational reading (Schugar & Dreher, 2017). Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers face great challenges in teaching the comprehension of informational text (Pao & Williams, 2015; Walters, 2013).

Results from the NAEP revealed the performance of fourth-grade low-socioeconomic students in the area of informational reading, and factors associated with these students' reading

achievement. This study considered factors associated within the school setting as well as out of school reading achievement. Two factors associated within school reading achievement related to the role of the teacher's classroom practices and students' ability to employ a variety of comprehension strategies (Schugar & Dreher, 2017). Yet, little research exists that addresses the informational text reading strategies teachers use to teach low-socioeconomic students how to comprehend informational text and how these students use these strategies to read and comprehend complex informational text. Teachers' skills and theoretical knowledge are important factors in the reading development of children (Sandberg et al., 2015). Teachers with extensive knowledge of the most effective reading strategies can succeed only to the extent that their students are motivated to learn and use those strategies (Wigfield et al., 2016). Appropriate literacy instruction can help improve student comprehension of informational text (Duke & Martin, 2015). The problem is that the complex vocabulary and text structures associated with informational text present challenges for fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools. Although fourth- and fifth-grade teachers may be familiar with some reading strategies in the literature, not enough is known about the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools and the specific reading strategies they use to teach the comprehension of informational text.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multi-case study was to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. These strategies are used to help upper elementary students read and understand complex informational text and to answer questions beyond the literal type. Informational text comprehension strategies are those reading strategies that help students

understand nonfiction text that teaches about the natural and social world. The theories that guided this study are Vygotsky's (1934/1986, 1978) sociocultural theory and Albert Bandura's (1971) social cognitive theory as they relate to the use of informational text comprehension strategies.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to further the research on the use of informational text comprehension strategies in fourth- and fifth -grade classrooms. Research on the use of informational text in the classroom has traditionally focused on secondary teachers' use of informational text (Strukel, 2018), as well secondary use of informational text in science (Fenty, 2019) and social studies (Altieri, 2017). The research to date does not address upper elementary teachers and the informational text reading strategies they use to help their students understand this complex genre. An earlier study conducted by Fisher and Frey (2014) on teacher perceptions confirmed that teachers are enthusiastic about teaching more complex texts to their students; however, a significant gap exists in the research on the informational text reading strategies used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools. This study sought to reveal common themes of how various uses of strategies develop so that teachers and administrators may better understand and address the best approaches for teaching explicit informational text strategy instruction. This study also has empirical and theoretical implications.

Empirical Significance

Research studies conducted on upper elementary students' informational text comprehension identify factors associated with informational reading achievement; however, teachers' use of informational text reading strategies is unclear (Schugar & Dreher, 2017). A recent study indicated that text structure instruction is effective for improving reading

comprehension of informational text (Roehling et al., 2017), yet whether or not teachers use this and other comprehension strategy instruction is unknown. Research studies have been conducted on interventions to improve fifth-grade students' ability to comprehend informational text (Ritchey et al., 2017). For example, Ritchey et al. (2017) conducted a study on the effects of an informational text reading comprehension intervention on the academic performance of fifth-grade students. The findings provided support for the efficacy of a reading comprehension intervention that may inform short-term interventions; however, educators need to consider ongoing instruction that supports the development of students' sensitivity to informational text (Jones et al., 2016). Li et al. (2018) conducted a study to investigate the relationship of reading informational text and students' reading performance in fourth grade based on PIRLS 2011 data through multilevel modeling. This study looked at the frequency of reading informational text on reading achievement, yet frequency of reading or practice reading may not equate to reading comprehension. While these studies are significant to researchers and educators, there is no research examining practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. This topic deserved significant attention, and this research attempted to fill the gap in the literature.

Theoretical Significance

Informational text comprehension strategy instruction typically entails teaching students a procedure, such as summarizing or predicting, or a set of procedures that allow students to extract meaning from text (Elleman et al., 2017). This study on examining the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers and the specific reading strategies they use to teach the comprehension of informational text brought a greater understanding to the theories guiding this research and attempted to fill the gap in the literature in the field of informational text.

Bandura's (2000) social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of teacher modeling, a method used for teaching comprehension of informational text. Attention is directed to specific aspects of this reading strategy, with emphasis on student replication (Sperling et al., 2016). Activating students' prior knowledge is an important reading comprehension strategy. One tenet of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is that prior knowledge impacts the learning process. The merging of existing and new knowledge may help students discover what they already know. Researchers have conducted studies on various comprehension strategies that are significant to both the sociocultural and social cognitive theories. Elleman et al. (2017) conducted a study on the use of comprehension strategy instruction on the academic performance of struggling elementary readers in an attempt to see if reading comprehension would be enhanced. Pilten (2016) conducted a study on the reciprocal teaching strategy. Teachers modeled how to use this strategy to extract meaning from text and gradually faded the support given to students to encourage them to use the strategy independently (Elleman et al., 2017). The results suggested this strategy improved fourth-grade students' comprehension of informational text. While there is support in the research on informational text comprehension for the work of Vygotsky and Bandura, there is no research that examines the informational text reading strategies used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools. This study extended and supported the sociocultural and social cognitive theories by addressing students in this population.

Practical Significance

Many students in the fourth grade have acquired decoding skills but lack comprehension skills to make sense of what they read (Etmanskie et al., 2016). This study may help teachers in Title 1 schools and classroom teachers as they assist students who struggle to comprehend

informational text. This study may benefit the district by providing information on the key reading strategies that prove to be most successful when teaching students how to comprehend informational text. Administrators may use the findings for this study to plan training to support teachers who teach reading. As a researcher, the findings from this study allowed me to hone my own skills in teaching reading. I was able to put new practices into place and build upon an existing knowledge base. One goal that I have after this study is completed is to create a manual of the findings to share with colleagues during staff development and through district-wide professional development workshops. Such a guidance manual could assist both special and general education teachers in creating engaging lessons that teach the use of informational text comprehension strategies. Principals and assistant principals will find the results of this study beneficial as they will be able to look for and note the use of certain reading strategies in reviewing lesson plans and during walk through observations.

Research Questions

The following central research question and sub-questions guided this study as they related to the informational text reading strategies used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools. Teachers use these strategies to help students read and understand complex informational text. The theories of Vygotsky and Bandura provided the theoretical context for the research questions as they relate to student and teacher interactions and learning.

The central research question was as follows:

> What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text?

The sub-questions for this study included the following:

1. What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach students how to identify text structures found in informational text?

Comprehending informational text requires students to identify text structures such as compare and contrast, description, cause and effect, and sequencing. Several strategies may be used to accomplish this. Close reading utilizes several strategies to help readers think more critically about a text (S. F. Baker & McEnery, 2017). Students who can look closer, delve deeper, and think more critically about text are equipped with the tools to function within their ZPD more readily (Vygotsky, 1978).

2. Which reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational text topic?

Sociocultural framework regards learning as a social process and holds that culture provides tools and resources to mediate thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this framework, approaches include eliciting students' prior knowledge through questioning and through culturally relevant texts, modeling, coaching, and providing feedback, as well as student-centered metacognitive approaches, including self-reflection and self-monitoring.

3. To what extent do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools implement reading strategies that help students construct meaning from vocabulary presented in informational text?

Reading informational text provides students with the language of thought, foundational vocabulary that can be connected to other words, and technical content or subject area understanding that frames how readers see themselves and the world (Santoro et al., 2016). One challenge many students face when reading informational text is complex vocabulary not encountered in narrative text. Complex vocabulary is technical in nature and often unknown to

students because these words are not part of their listening and speaking vocabulary. Many students face a large deficit in English vocabulary knowledge and this deficit represents a major obstacle to academic achievement in critical areas such as reading comprehension (Ash & Baumann, 2017). Vygotsky's (1978) theory of constructivism is an important framework for this research question as constructivism is based on the idea that children actively construct knowledge by interacting with their environments; learners are active participants.

Definitions

1. *Complex informational text* – Complex informational text teaches about the physical, biological, or social world (Fisher & Frey, 2014).
2. *Reading comprehension strategy* – "A cognitive or behavioral action that is enacted under particular contextual conditions, with the goal of improving some aspect of comprehension" (Graesser, 2007, p. 7).
3. *Scaffolding* – A process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his or her unassisted efforts (Wood et al., 1976).
4. *Zone of proximal development* –The difference between what a learner can do with help and without help; it is the point at which a learner needs help (Vygotsky, 1978).

Summary

With an increased emphasis on the reading of complex informational text, students are expected to read a wide variety of nonfiction texts, most of which are above their independent reading level. Students are also expected to discuss this type of text and answer higher-level text-dependent questions. Many students struggle with this task because they lack the necessary reading strategies to synthesize and make meaning from complex informational text on their

own. Teachers can provide the supports students need to understand text features, rich vocabulary, author's purpose, and other features of informational text. This study sought to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The importance of informational texts in the elementary grades is receiving increased attention (Jones et al., 2016). The ability to read and analyze informational text is an important 21st-century skill. This chapter discusses Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. This chapter also reviews the literature on informational text comprehension strategies and gaps in the literature. The literature review section is organized into the following sections: (a) models of strategy instruction; (b) comprehension strategies for narrative text; (c) comprehension strategies for informational text; and (d) characteristics of effective comprehension instruction.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is largely drawn from the works of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. Constructivism provides the framework for understanding how knowledge is gained. Reading comprehension is a constructivist process, and students create knowledge by connecting the new information they read with what they already know. They also interact with one another and share their opinions and ideas about the text. Vygotsky believed that social interaction was an essential component of learning.

Sociocultural Theory

The sociocultural theory is an appropriate framework for this study because it builds upon the concept that people develop knowledge and derive meaning from their own experiences that are dependent upon interaction between people, namely the student, teacher, and other students (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978). This is most appropriate in the acquisition of knowledge

of informational text comprehension strategies during reading. The social constructivist theory also relies on the principle that all knowledge builds upon previous knowledge, and it is the integration of all knowledge that equates to true learning (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978).

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory also operates on the basis of cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that "learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions" (p. 90). This is applicable to the teaching and learning of informational text comprehension strategies because teachers must model strategies to be learned, and the interaction between the classroom teacher and student is crucial for cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) also advised teachers to create a context that is rich with social interactions and provide time for students to discuss their thoughts and ideas with others. This social framework supports learners by using their strengths and current set of skills to acquire new skills and information. In reading informational text, students can converse with the teacher and other students while processing the text. To ensure the student reaches maximum development, a teacher should provide support that extends the range of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). There should be a gradual release of support as students become more independent with applying reading skills. This gradual release of responsibility ties in with the zone of proximal development.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher's responsibility is to extend the child's thinking within the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Reading and comprehending informational text requires upper elementary students to grasp higher mental functions. With the assistance of a teacher, these

students can grasp the higher mental functions. Working within a child's ZPD is crucial to the learning of informational text comprehension strategies because it pushes the child beyond their current development. If learning "makes no new demands on him [the student] and does not stimulate his intellect by providing a sequence of new goals, his thinking fails to reach the highest stages, or reaches them with great delay" (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 108).

When students read text that they are most comfortable with, namely narrative text, chances are they are engaging in basic thinking. Most narrative text does not require the higher-order thinking associated with complex informational text. According to Vygotsky (1978), humans are different from other animals in that they are able to create stimuli that he called signs, products of culture and nature. It is these signs that lead to higher-order mental functions in humans. Learning "awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). Higher-order functioning results when a child learns something through external means which in turn leads to gradual mastery. According to the work of Bandura (1971), students also learn through social interactions.

Social Cognitive Theory

The social cognitive theory is grounded in the work of Albert Bandura. The premise of this theory is that humans are social beings and gain knowledge through social interactions (Bandura, 1971). Social cognitive learning also supports the premise that learning is influenced through modeling and "most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (Bandura, 1971, p. 5). Social cognitive theory has a positive influence on this research on informational text in several ways.

First, new modes of learning can develop through observation of a competent model in the event of a mistake, eliminating the need for repetitive and unnecessary models (Bandura, 1971). With adequate and proficient modeling, students are able to learn and move on to new tasks. When teaching students how to read and comprehend complex informational text, teachers who are knowledgeable of informational text reading strategies can serve as competent models. Second, complex behaviors, such as speech, are required by children through adequate modeling (Bandura, 1971). Part of what makes informational text more complex than narrative text is the advanced language used by authors. Teachers can model the use of this advanced language or speech through the use of modeling during read alouds. Third, modeling shortens the process of acquiring a new concept for the learner (Bandura, 1971). Social cognitive theory also stresses that the influence of learning through observation of an adequate example is dependent upon the degree to which the learner is able to retain the information.

Related Literature

The literature on reading comprehension for both fiction and nonfiction is rich and suggests several ways in which students can learn to navigate through text to answer comprehension questions. Narrative and informational text differ in that narrative text is more predictive in its story elements, while informational text contains more complex vocabulary, requires the reader to make inferences, and use other higher-order processing skills to synthesize the text. The related literature that follows details strategies that are most appropriate for use when teaching students how to comprehend informational text.

Comprehension Strategy Models

According to Pressley and Allington (2015), reading strategy instruction prior to the 1970s was, practically speaking, all “study skills instruction” (p. 325), which entailed relating to

prior knowledge and rereading difficult parts of text, but did not work effectively to increase student reading comprehension. This led researchers to develop several instructional models to effectively promote reading comprehension. Of these models, the three most commonly researched are reciprocal teaching, collaborative strategic reading, and transactional strategies instruction (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012).

Reciprocal Teaching Model

Research and literature are strongly supportive of reciprocal teaching as an effective practice for teaching comprehension skills (McAllum, 2014). Reciprocal teaching is an instructional practice identified as a way of improving reading comprehension through explicit teaching of skills needed for metacognition. It is an amalgamation of reading strategies that are believed to be used by effective readers and follows a dialectic process to enable metacognitive thinking and to empower students to take ownership of their learning in a systematic and purposeful process (McAllum, 2014). Reciprocal teaching focuses on four thinking strategies: predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing (McAllum, 2014, p. 26). The first step is predicting. Here students make predictions related to the main and supporting ideas. Students make predictions about what can happened in the text making use of their previous knowledge and experiences (Pilten, 2016). As students read, they also find opportunities to confirm and revise their predictions. The next step is clarifying—students make connections in the text, rather than skipping words or ideas they do not understand (Tarchi & Pinto, 2016). With questioning, students need to read and understand the material to ask their peers relevant questions. In the last step, summarizing, students need to focus on the main idea and supporting details of the text (Tarchi & Pinto, 2016, p. 522).

Summarizing, clarifying, predicting, and questioning, the four components of the reciprocal teaching strategy, are also known as self-monitoring strategies. The combination of reading comprehension and self-monitoring provides many opportunities for teaching. Not only do students monitor their own comprehension; they also become active participants in their learning and learn from others in the process (Pilten, 2016). During reciprocal teaching lessons, teacher and students use prior knowledge and dialogue to construct a shared understanding of the text and to build reading comprehension. Teachers monitor the discussion and provide cognitive scaffolding through a shared language related to the four strategies mentioned above (McAllum, 2014). Dialogue happens in reciprocal conversations, which take place in small groups of learners with teacher and students taking turns at leading the discussion. Initially, the expert (teacher) models, paraphrases, and questions, then gradually students assume the roles as dialogue leaders (McAllum, 2014). Reciprocal teaching is supported by Vygotsky's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) linked dialogue and metacognition in explaining how individuals develop understanding of concepts. Through dialogue the learner is able to shape current knowledge (schemas) to construct new ideas and understanding. The process is supported by scaffolds which provide timely and needs-based support, allowing the learner to move from one space of understanding to another across the ZPD (Kozulin, 1986). With reciprocal teaching, students learn thinking strategies for deeper levels of comprehension at their own rate in the presence of the experts and more-able peers (McAllum, 2014).

Collaborative Strategic Reading Model

The Collaborative Strategic Reading Model (CSR) is a multiple strategy reading program that consists of four metacognitive and cognitive strategies (McCown & Thomason, 2014). Working in student-led cooperative groups, students use before, during, and after reading

strategies during CSR to access challenging text. CSR consists of four parts: preview, click and clunk, get the gist, and wrap it up. The preview component of CSR occurs before reading; the teacher leads a short preview of the text, introducing new vocabulary, stating the topic, building background knowledge, and setting a purpose for reading. During click and clunk, students monitor their understanding while reading the text aloud in small groups, stopping to identify words and ideas they do not understand and using context clues and morphemic analysis to figure out word meanings. During get the gist, students identify a brief main idea to share with group members, and during wrap it up, students ask and answer each other's questions, write a short review, and discuss the importance of their ideas (Boardman et al., 2016).

McCown and Thomason (2014) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of CSR on informational text comprehension and metacognitive awareness of a heterogeneous group of fifth-grade students, to include general education students, gifted students, students with learning disabilities, and English learners. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group research design was used in the study. The independent variable was the CSR method of reading instruction. The dependent variables were the reading comprehension scores on the QRI-5 and the Georgia CRCT, the state's standardized assessment. The results of the study indicated a statistically significant difference in informational text comprehension on the QRI between the experimental group and control groups, suggesting that CSR strategies can significantly impact reading comprehension of informational text (McCown & Thomason, 2014).

Transactional Strategies Instruction Model

Pressley and Allington (2015) explained that the transactional model is transactional from three different perspectives: First, students were encouraged to use strategies "to create personalized interpretations and understanding of text" (p. 336), corresponding to Rosenblatt's

reader response theory that reading was a transactional process between reader and text. Second, transactional also referred to teachers and students actively interacting in the instructional context, in which teachers' actions and reactions were largely determined by the reactions of the students: student progress or confusion in any part of the reading would dictate the teacher to react accordingly, maybe providing more modeling or prompting the student to try a different strategy. Third, students worked in groups and generated a group dynamic, understanding, and solutions that differed from individual students.

According to the transactional strategy instruction approach, in order for students to successfully learn strategies, they must be explicitly taught what the strategy is, why the strategy is effective, and how and when to use the strategy (Sperling et al., 2016). Extensive, contextualized practice is optimal to facilitate transfer and support independent strategy use. Strategy instruction is often time consuming and practice with each strategy is required. Therefore, teachers and students would likely benefit from a focus on research-supported strategies that are known to be effective (Sperling et al., 2016). Pressley and Allington (2015) identified and investigated strategies within the transactional strategy instruction model that include summarization, prediction, visualization, thinking aloud, story grammar analysis, text structure analysis (e.g., webbing), prior knowledge activation, and self-questioning.

Comprehension Strategies for Narrative Text

Narrative text differs from informational text in its structure, content, and intent. This type of text tells a story and does not require as much background knowledge as its counterpart. Narrative text tends to follow a sequence, with story plot, conflict, and a resolution, and is much more predictable than informational text. This is the type of text upper elementary students are more used to reading. There is less synthesis of information as the vocabulary in narrative text is

oftentimes not as rich as the vocabulary in informational text; still there are research-based strategies that should be taught to help students understand narratives. The top reading strategies include making predictions, questioning, visual imagery, evaluating, summarizing, monitoring, text structure, rereading, and think-aloud.

Teacher Think-Aloud Strategy

The cognitive processes involved in reading can be challenging for students who struggle to understand informational text. The teacher think-aloud strategy is a cognitive tool that teachers can model while reading to help improve students' academic performance when comprehension is difficult (Sönmez & Sulak, 2018). During the teacher think-aloud, teachers open their minds while reading aloud. Students are silent as they focus on how the teacher is explaining the text. A teacher think-aloud of text includes making predictions from the title, a description of pictures that may accompany the text, making connections (text to self, text to world, text to text), the verbalization of a part of the text that may be confusing, and demonstrating fix up strategies. The purpose of the teacher think-aloud is to lead to students thinking aloud about the informational text they are reading as well as the reading process. Students can be asked questions to think about by the teacher during reading, and students' thoughts can be observed. The goal of the teacher think-aloud strategy is to ensure that students are aware of their own thought processes while reading.

Sönmez and Sulak (2018) conducted a quasi-experimental study that examined the effect of the thinking-aloud strategy on the reading comprehension skills of fourth-grade students. The researchers analyzed pre- and posttest scores of an experimental group of students who were taught the teacher think-aloud reading comprehension strategy and the control group. Results of the study found that there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and

posttest scores of the control group students, suggesting that teaching the strategy of thinking-aloud has a significant effect on the reading comprehension ability of the students.

Questioning

To help facilitate the selection of important information from passages, students can learn to ask themselves guiding questions. These questions should help students focus on the structure-related elements of the text. For example, students who are taught to focus on comparing and contrasting information can ask themselves, What objects, concepts, or categories are being compared? How are they the same? How are they different? What features are being compared? (Roehling et al., 2017). Similarly, to focus on problem and solution, students may ask such questions as, What were the difficulties or questions? What were the attempts or possible actions to solve them? How was it or might it be solved? What were the consequences of the options? What was the result of the actions? (Roehling et al., 2017).

Teacher Questioning

To help students comprehend informational text, it is important to ask questions that encourage deep thinking. Literature on teacher questioning outlines a continuum of questioning complexity. Level 1 is word-level decoding. Teachers prompt students to use various decoding strategies. Level 2 is word-level vocabulary. At this level, teachers ask students to use a particular vocabulary strategy to define a word. At Level 3, the sentence-level comprehension, students are asked factual level comprehension questions which do not require going deep into the text. Level 4 questioning, cumulative comprehension, involves asking students to summarize what they have read so far to determine if they have constructed meaning from the text. Level 5 questioning is critical consideration. Teachers ask students to delve deeper into the text by analyzing and critiquing what they read. Lastly, Level 6 is discerning greater meaning; teachers

ask students to think about how the text fits within the larger world around them (Degener & Berne, 2017).

Comprehension Strategies for Informational Text

There are many methods for improving reading comprehension. Reading comprehension does not occur naturally for all students; teachers must make a concerted effort to help their students understand what they read (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). Informational text differs greatly from narrative text in its content, structure, and vocabulary. Compared to narrative text, which tells a story, informational text, also referred to as expository text, presents factual information that is not necessarily organized in a linear fashion (Pao & Williams, 2015). Because of the different nature of informational and narrative texts, not all comprehension strategies that are effective in teaching the reading of narrative texts are readily applicable to informational texts (Duke & Martin, 2015). The National Reading Panel (2000) recommended the following comprehension strategies, which are based on scientific research: summarizing, activating prior knowledge, questioning, concept mapping, and monitoring.

Summarizing

Summarizing is one of the most important and effective reading strategies (Susar Kirmizi & Akkaya, 2011). This strategy activates the thinking process. Summarizing is a skill that must be explicitly taught and modeled because most textbooks teach summarizing as an isolated skill and do not provide sufficient practice. Students often have difficulty comprehending text because they are unable to locate the main idea and supporting details; teaching students how to locate this information in text helps improve reading comprehension (Boudah, 2014).

Teaching students to recognize text structures in informational text can help them find the main idea and summarize. Informational text structures include sequence, compare and contrast,

cause and effect, description, and problem and solution. Recognizing specific text structures may help readers comprehend and remember what they have read. Students need to be taught the relationships among structures, main ideas, and supporting details in order to understand what they are reading and think about the author's main points (Boudah, 2014; Ng et al., 2013). Summarizing requires higher-level thinking skills, and many students have not yet developed cognitive skills to summarize. They tend to copy word-for-word from the text rather than put the summary into their own words (Susar Kirmizi & Akkaya, 2011).

Activating Prior Knowledge

Activating prior knowledge is important to student learning (Hattan et al., 2015). Students may not be familiar with the complex vocabulary they see when first reading informational text. It is important that teachers anticipate this unfamiliarity and activate students' prior knowledge. Before reading a new informational passage, teachers activate students' prior knowledge to find out what their students already know about a topic. There is evidence to suggest that instructors' efforts to activate students' knowledge should take into consideration how much relevant knowledge students may have available, and it may be necessary to alter a prior knowledge activation technique based on students' existing knowledge levels (Hattan et al., 2015).

There have been few studies that have systematically addressed the extent to which instructional manuals support teachers in the action of their students' prior knowledge, or the extent to which and ways in which teachers activate students' prior knowledge in classroom context. In addition, prior research did not address whether or not activating students' prior knowledge differed when using fiction text versus non-fiction text. Differences may occur since activating prior knowledge while reading fiction may help students make connections to

characters and situations in text, while possessing general world knowledge may help students with comprehending non-fiction texts (Hattan et al., 2015). Students in the elementary grades may benefit from having their teachers activate prior knowledge. The students at this stage are still honing their strategic skills and are less likely to activate their relevant prior knowledge.

In a two-part study that reviewed upper elementary teachers' instructional manuals to examine how prior knowledge activation is supported in instructional resources, Hattan et al. (2015) found that teachers activated students' prior knowledge a total of 36 times in fiction texts and 32 times in nonfiction texts, with the remaining 8% of the time being spent activating prior knowledge when introducing unit themes. Results from this study also suggested that instructional resources infrequently prompted teachers to activate their students' prior knowledge, and most of those prompts occurred before students were engaged in reading. Lastly, the authors were concerned that results from the study showed that prior knowledge activation did not play a more prominent role during the targeted reading lesson, and teachers in the study relied heavily on activating students' knowledge from previous lessons versus asking about their previous personal experiences. Results from this study suggest that teachers should not rely solely on commercial instructional texts to provide opportunities to activate students' prior knowledge. This is especially true for scripted programs that only ask teachers to tap into students' prior knowledge about a topic before reading. Teachers should also find opportunities to stop during and after reading to activate students' knowledge of the topic, especially when reading more complex informational text.

Making Inferences

Skill in generating inferences is critical to the reading comprehension of students in the upper elementary grades (Hall & Barnes, 2017). If readers do not generate inferences that are

necessary for making sense of the text, then comprehension will suffer; the reader may understand individual sentences but will not be able to derive the overall meaning of the text. A reader makes inferences by establishing appropriate, meaningful connections between separate pieces of information literally stated in the text (i.e., "text-connecting" inferences) and between information literally stated in the text and the reader's background knowledge (i.e., "knowledge-based" or "gap-filling" inferences). A text-connecting inference might connect a pronoun with the person or thing it refers to. A knowledge-based inference might draw on what the reader knows about people's motivations to infer why a character performed a given task. Students who read fluently may still have problems answering comprehension questions, especially those questions with answers that are not directly stated in the text. These are not literal questions. Many students with sufficient decoding and fluency skills lack the ability to make inferences. This strategy must be explicitly taught by teachers.

There are two types of inferences. Teachers often ask students to infer what will happen next based on clues in the text. This is called predictive or forward inferencing. Text-connecting inferences require students to connect two separate pieces of information literally stated in the text. There are three types of text-connecting inferences: anaphoric, lexical, and inferential. Anaphoric inferencing requires students to connect a noun or noun phrase to which it refers. Readers make lexical inferencing in order to comprehend the following sentence: "While Cathy was riding her bike in the park, dark clouds began to gather, and it started to storm. The rain ruined her beautiful sweater" (Stafura & Perfetti, 2015, p. 20). Students must associate the word "storm" with the words "dark clouds." Inferential inferencing requires readers to make text-connecting inferences to determine word meanings from context. Text often contains words that are not part of the students' oral language vocabulary (Hall & Barnes, 2017).

Non-predictive knowledge-based inferences require the reader to go beyond the text and draw on background knowledge. Teachers can show students how to activate prior knowledge and integrate this knowledge with information in text in order to generate inferences as they read. This can be as simple as asking students questions about their previous experiences with an important idea in a story prior to reading. Students can be encouraged to hypothesize about what might happen under similar circumstances in the story they are about to read. Students are not making predictions about the text, but rather building, activating, and integrating relevant background knowledge with knowledge in the text. Effective inference instruction helps students to identify clues or key words in the texts and use these key words to furnish answers to inferential questions, activate background knowledge and interweave this knowledge with information in the text during reading, and generate or answer inferential questions as a way of identifying gaps in text, confirming tentative inferences, and/or improving the automaticity of inference generation (Hall, 2016).

Concept Mapping

Concept maps reflect the linkage of concepts or facts within a text (Tajeddin & Tabatabaei, 2016). Concept maps represent a visual form of knowledge to make it meaningful to the learner. Concept mapping is a learning strategy that can be used to improve students' ability to learn autonomously and helps them become independent learners. It can be used as a pre-task, during task, and post-task activity. Meaningful learning is facilitated through concept mapping because it shows the relationship among concepts in a network in a hierarchical form (Tajeddin & Tabatabaei, 2016). Research supports the use of concept maps as an effective strategy for organizing and representing knowledge, which may help students comprehend informational text (Tajeddin & Tabatabaei, 2016).

Explicit Comprehension Strategy Instruction

Explicit instruction is a group of research-supported instructional behaviors used to design and deliver instruction that provides needed supports for successful learning through clarity of language and purpose and reduction of cognitive load. It promotes active student engagement by requiring frequent and varied responses followed by appropriate affirmative and corrective feedback and assists long-term retention through use of purposeful practice strategies (Hughes et al., 2017). Most recently, explicit instruction was identified as one of 22 "High-Leverage Practices" in special education by the Council for Exceptional Children (McLeskey et al., 2017). Teachers scaffold, guide, and release responsibility for strategy use gradually to the student while giving them timely feedback in explicit instruction. The essential elements of explicit instruction include direct explanation, modeling, guided practice, independent practice, feedback, and discussion (Reutzel et al., 2014). Instruction that is more scripted and organized is referred to as direct instruction.

Direct Instruction differs from explicit instruction in that it includes scripted lessons and displays very highly organized and carefully sequenced progression through curriculum content. More specifically, Direct Instruction includes what to teach (the curriculum) and how to teach (instruction), whereas explicit instruction focuses primarily on how to teach (Hughes et al., 2017). Direct instruction (written without the capital D and I) does not involve scripted lessons but instead focuses on what effective teachers do when they teach. Direct instruction and explicit instruction have oftentimes been used interchangeably (Hughes et al., 2017). Both require the careful use of scaffolding.

The concept of scaffolding was developed by psychologist Jerome Bruner. Bruner emphasized the social aspect of learning and believed others should help a child develop skills

through scaffolding. According to Bruner (1978), "[Scaffolding] refers to the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring" (p. 19). Scaffolding was first mentioned in the literature in "The Role of Tutoring in Problem-Solving*"* (Wood et al., 1976). Bruner linked scaffolded instruction to Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD (Ciullo & Dimino, 2017). Scaffolding serves as the support that allows learners to successfully complete a task within their ZPD. Since informational text is often more complex to understand than its fictional counterpart, it is important that teachers provide the appropriate amount of scaffolding.

Scaffolding is an important component of the reading instructional day (Fisher & Frey, 2013). The scaffolds teachers provide in reading instruction are similar to the scaffolds provided by building workers when erecting a new construction. The scaffolds hold the building frame in place during the construction of the building, then are removed when the building is complete. Once the scaffold is removed, the building is able to stand on its own. In teaching students to read and understand informational text, instructional scaffolds provided by the teacher, such as modeling and teacher think-alouds, are temporarily used to help and guide the students to learn and practice skills on their own (Salem, 2013). Scaffolding ends once students are able to perform the tasks which were at first beyond their capability. Teachers' comments and feedback provide students with the desire to take responsibility of their learning and to create independence from their teacher's guidance (Salem, 2013).

Teachers scaffold instruction to assist students in cultivating metacognition (Ciullo & Dimino, 2017). In scaffolded instruction, the teacher initially provides substantial support and modeling. Explicit scaffolded instruction has often been referred to as "I do, we do, you do" and has been used in numerous studies to teach the metacognitive skills required to comprehend

expository text (Swanson et al., 2014). During the modeling "I do" phase, teachers model the cognitive processes that are used to implement the strategy by thinking aloud. For example, when modeling the main idea, each step of the strategy is explained. Teachers make their thought processes public through the think-aloud strategy. The next step of scaffolded instruction is guided practice, or the "we do" phase. During this phase, the teacher becomes a facilitator, assisting students as they become more comfortable with demonstrating the strategy. Teachers then move to the "you do" phase where students demonstrate that they are able to use the strategy with minimal assistance. With explicit scaffolded instruction, students move through the phases at their own pace. Teachers recognize when students may not be ready to move on and reteach concepts with which students had difficulty (Swanson et al., 2014). The following informational text reading comprehension strategies employ the use of direct and explicit instruction, along with teacher scaffolding.

There is little research that exists that supports scaffolding of complex texts above students' reading levels (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Current literature distinguishes between interactional scaffolding and planned scaffolding. Interactional scaffolding involves face-to-face scaffolds between the student and teacher, whereas planned scaffolding refers to scaffolds that are predetermined before the start of a lesson, based on learners' needs. Interactional scaffolding can include planned scaffolds. Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) conducted a study to determine if there was a link between student reading comprehension and reading tutors' use of a variety of interactional scaffolds embedded within the current curriculum's planned scaffolds. The findings of the study suggested that low-performing readers benefited from interactional scaffolding (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016).

Modeling

Teacher modeling has widely been recognized as an effective tool for building student proficiency and skill (Fisher & Frey, 2015). The authors suggested two teacher behaviors that are crucial in the area of modeling. The first is the use of "I" statements. When teachers use these types of statements, they alert listeners to an internal process of the speaker. They also invite the learner into the speaker's thinking without requiring the learner to perform a particular task. Second, modeling should include metacognition. When modeling, students deserve to hear the because, why, or how of the thinking. If they only hear the example, even using an "I" statement, they are likely to have a good idea of what the teacher is thinking but not how the teacher came to that understanding. In other words, teachers need to provide students the examples and the thinking behind the examples so that they can develop the habit that the teacher is modeling (Fisher & Frey, 2015, p. 68). With informational text comprehension strategies, the habit is the strategy the teacher wants the student to learn.

A key characteristic of modeling is that while modeling, the teacher is doing most of the work. The students are not sitting idly by. Instead, students should be thinking as the teacher shares his or her thinking. Students should also be anticipating what the teacher will do, and the teacher should pause periodically to encourage students to try on what they have experienced by talking with a partner. Teachers should consider ways in which comprehension strategies can be used to guide students' thinking about informational text (Fisher & Frey, 2015).

Almost every child will sit and listen to an engaging fiction book. Story elements such as character and plot seem to come to life. Students who struggle with reading or have limited vocabulary may find it challenging to read informational text on their own, and teacher read-alouds provide the perfect opportunity for teachers to help students understand this type of text.

To manage instructional obstacles posed by complex, informational text, special education teachers can use read-alouds to provide a context for engaging, motivating topics and provide visual mental models of the comprehension process for elementary grade students who struggle with reading or those identified with a learning disability (S. K. Baker et al., 2013). Santora et al. (2016) conducted a study in which read-alouds were structured with before-, during-, and after-reading comprehension instruction to helps students engage with complex, challenging texts that they could not manage successfully on their own because they had not yet developed the necessary reading skills. The read-alouds used by Santora et al. included the integration of highly purposeful and explicit comprehension instruction within the context of the read-aloud experience, and teacher think-alouds were used to help frame the comprehension process. To help students comprehend informational text, Santora et al. used a "What Do I think I Know? -What Do I Want to Learn? -What Did I Learn?" (KWL) conceptual framework (Klingner et al., 2015).

Students in the intervention group received small-group read-aloud instruction. Students in the control group had opportunities to listen to the same read-aloud texts used by the intervention group at listening centers and to complete content-related activity sheets. Results from this study indicated that students who received small-group read-aloud instruction reliably outperformed their controls on vocabulary assessments and expository retells, which proves promising support that small-group read-alouds appear to enhance the vocabulary knowledge and expository retelling of students identified with low vocabulary and language skills (Santoro et al., 2016).

Interactive read-alouds differ from the traditional read-aloud in that with the interactive read-aloud, the teacher and the students have conversations about the text throughout the reading

rather than saving conversations until after the entire text has been read (McClure & Fullerton, 2017). Through interactive read-alouds, teachers can demonstrate how readers use multiple reading strategies simultaneously. As teachers share how they are thinking about the informational text through think-alouds, they are also sharing what strategies can be used to read the text, providing students with insight into the *because*, *why*, or *how* of strategic reading (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Additionally, teachers frame questions and talk in such a way that promotes thinking beyond and about the text in an effort to extend students' thinking (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). Before beginning an interactive lesson using informational text, careful consideration must be given to the type of informational text used. The text must offer ample opportunities for the teacher to model strategic thinking and to engage students in scaffolded strategic instruction (McClure & Fullerton, 2017). These opportunities include making inferences, synthesizing, analyzing, and critiquing information presented in the text. Strategically preplanning think-alouds and student interactions at specific points in the text is vital to successful, targeted, supportive, interactive read-alouds (McClure & Fullerton, 2017). Teacher modeling is key to these types of interactions.

While listening to an interactive read-aloud, students also interact with each other. The teacher may select various stopping points to give the students an opportunity to turn and talk to each other about the text. This turn and talk interaction between students provide students opportunities to hear differing opinions about the text and opportunities to practice the strategies being taught. When students share their unique ideas in group discussions and actively listen to the ideas of others, they are able to understand multiple perspectives and interpretations of a text (McClure & Fullerton, 2017).

Whole class discussions about the text after the interactive read-aloud provide opportunities for students to hear the views and thoughts of their peers (McClure & Fullerton, 2017). It is also during this time that students are able to make text-to-text, text-to-world, and text-to-self connections, or compare the informational text they just heard with another nonfiction story or passage. If students have been required to keep a reader's notebook, they could look over notes they may have made while listening to the story to help collect their thoughts. When students listen to their ideas and the ideas of others, this helps shape their world and the world around them. According to Vygotsky (1978), "The mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture" (p. 7).

Question-Answer Relationship

Oftentimes very capable readers have difficulty answering text-dependent questions because the answers aren't stated directly in the text. The Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) is one strategy many teachers use to help students locate information in order to answer questions (Green, 2016). This strategy was developed by Raphael and Pearson (1985). QAR is a strategy whereby students must understand the question type in order to locate the information to answer the question (Green, 2016). QAR questions are categorized according to where the answers can be found. "In the book" questions are literal because the answers can be found right there in the text. "In my head" questions are inferential because the answers are not contained in the text. There are four types of question-answer relationships: Right There—the answer can be found in one place in the text; Think and Search—the answer can be found in a few places in the text; Author and You: The answer cannot be found in the text. The reader must use information in the text and find the answer in their head; and On My Own—the answer cannot be found in the text. The answer is developed from the reader's background knowledge (Green, 2016).

Green (2016) conducted an 8-week intervention whereby third-grade students were taught the QAR strategy during minilessons. The teacher projected a nonfiction book and introduced the students to the two main categories—In the Book and In My Head. Next, the teacher modeled the Right There, Think and Search, and Author and You question-answer-relationships which required the students to think at a higher level. At the end of this 8-week assessment, the author conducted an analysis of the pre- and posttest scores of the 25 students who participated in the intervention. The percentage of students who passed the end-of-grade test increased from 39% on the practice test to 69% on the end-of-grade test. The author stated that the group of students who benefited the most were the average readers; those benefiting the least were the low, struggling readers, most of who were special education students (Green, 2016).

Close Reading

Due to its complexity, nonfiction reading lends itself to close reading. Close reading is a strategy that can be used when reading challenging text. This strategy requires teachers to provide scaffolding and create opportunities for think-alouds and rereading of text in order to help students become active readers who focus on finding text-based support for their answers (Saccomano, 2014). Delving deeper into the text allows student to determine items such as author's purpose, inferences, opinions, and argument. Close reading requires both the teacher and the student to analyze a reading passage and examine it for details, some of which include understanding how the text works and the author's message, providing text evidence to support thoughts and predictions the reader is developing, and making connections between the reader and the text itself (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

Students typically enjoy rereading fiction passages because of the engaging plot and pictures. With nonfiction, rereading is a necessity because students often struggle with the meaning of more complex informational text. For instance, when students are reading a passage about spelunking for the first time, they may struggle with vocabulary, especially if the word spelunking is not in their speaking and listening vocabularies. A passage on spelunking for a child who is unfamiliar with cave exploration will require both the student and teacher to analyze the reading passage and examine it for details, some of which may include understanding how the text works and the author's message (Frey & Fisher, 2013).

Teachers must use their knowledge and judgement when selecting text for a close read. In close reading, the focus is not on the amount of text students are reading but the difficulty of the text (Saccomano, 2014). Teachers also focus on helping students read carefully to draw knowledge and evidence from the text (Saccomano, 2014). Support is provided through scaffolded instruction (Vygotsky, 1978) as well as think-alouds to help students extract meaning from the text. The goal of close reading is to give students the responsibility to be active participants in constructing meaning of the text they are reading, formulating new ideas and asking different questions each time the text is read. New vocabulary words that may be encountered repeatedly are also stressed (Lapp et al., 2012). Teachers must model and use close reading techniques in order to provide students with a solid foundation in understanding informational text.

According to Saccomano (2014), one technique for the teaching of close reading is the "I do, we do, you do" model, a theoretical instructional model that demonstrates the gradual release of responsibility and is proven effective for improving literary achievement (Vygotsky, 1978).

First, teachers model the "I do" component of the lesson by providing direct instruction on how to attack the reading, explaining how "I do" the reading. Teachers think aloud and make notations on the passage that allows students to see how the teacher is processing the text. Next, the teacher works alongside the students ("we do") during close reading. Students practice what the teacher has modeled for them using their own thought processes about the text under the watchful eye of the teacher. Both the teacher and the students work together to construct meaning of the text, and reteaching may be necessary. Students also work with peers to discuss the text. During the "you do" component of the close reading lesson, students may work independently, showing what they have learned about processing informational text. The teacher watches as the student takes responsibility for their own understanding of the text.

Coding

Another strategy that is useful when teaching students how to read closely is that of coding text (Saccomano, 2014). When students code text, they underline and circle with a purpose, highlight or use sticky notes to flag ideas. Students cannot merely underline text, as they are often told to do during reading, as they are not looking for the specifics in the text. According to Saccomano (2014), it is important to direct students' attention to the text so that they will learn how to code very specific items, with an emphasis on what is to be taken away from the text. It is helpful for teachers to use pre-taught symbols. For example, students can place a check mark beside something they already know and a question mark beside something that may raise a question. When teachers teach students how to code text with a purpose, they are helping them focus on parts of the text that are more specific than just the important information (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

Coding text can also include taking notes in the margins. This technique must be modeled. Students cannot simply be told to write in the margins. Instead, they should be specifically told what to annotate. One way to do this is by telling the students to answer a question from a particular paragraph in the left margin. The right margin can be used to summarize a part of the passage using key words.

The primary goal of close reading is for students to read and comprehend complex informational text so that they can answer text-dependent questions. Text-dependent questions are questions that can be answered by taking evidence directly from the text rather than solely relying on outside sources (Boyles, 2013). The key is to ask questions that force the students to take a critical look at the text. Teachers must develop questions that allow the students to move beyond the general gist of the passage to focus on a more in-depth understanding (Saccomano, 2014). Asking only literal questions will result in the students skimming the surface of the passage to locate answers. However, when teachers ask questions that will require students to synthesize information from different sources to arrive at a conclusion, then they must do a close read of the text (Saccomano, 2014, p. 145). Questions developed should allow the reader to:

- Return to the passage to find supporting evidence for their thinking.
- Locate details required for understanding the text. These details should build toward the essential understanding of the passage as a whole.
- Examine the text structure of sentences throughout the passage. The structure of these sentences will give the reader a better understanding of the author's message if they understand how the sentences is constructed (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

The current empirical research yields few studies on close reading. Six qualitative studies and one quantitative study confirmed that the specific components of close reading can

be learned in elementary classrooms. The empirical studies specifically focused on the components of rereading, annotations, text-dependent questions, and modeling (Welsh et al., 2019). The findings of these studies suggested that intentional planning of instruction and adjustments are needed by the teacher in order for students to meet academic success (Welsh et al., 2019). Teachers need additional research on closely reading informational text in order to shape their instruction. At present, the research base at the elementary level is lacking (Welsh et al., 2019).

Literature Circles

Literature circles have traditionally focused on narrative text, but more recently, teachers have explored ways in which students can connect with informational text using literature circles. Barone and Barone (2016) agreed with earlier studies that supported the use of literature circles to support close reading of informational text and student dialogue. When using literature circles, students are given defined roles; they respond to the text using these roles. In their study, teachers used the role of director, inventor, mapper, word wizard, nonfiction fact finder, and visual viewer (Barone & Barone, 2016). After performing their roles, the students shared with the group. The benefits of using literature circles to explore informational text were numerous. First, students were able to collaboratively talk about their findings. Second, the individual roles assigned allowed students to stay grounded in the text. Third, the roles highlighted the importance of multimodal understandings. Fourth, students enjoyed studying informational text in a collaborative setting. Fifth, students increased their vocabulary through the reading of informational text. The Word Wizard, one of the roles assigned during literature circles, shared two new words per day from the text (Barone & Barone, 2016).

SQ3R

SQ3R is one of the oldest and most common reading strategies (Bulut, 2017). This strategy consists of four stages: survey, question, read, recite, and review. The stages are broken up into before, during, and after reading activities. During the survey stage, students skim the tile, subtitles, and visuals to get a basic idea of the text. During the questions stage, the titles and subtitles that the student skimmed in the preview stage become questions. The text is then read to answer the questions. During the recite stage, students try to recall what they have read and answer the questions in their own sentences. During the last stage, students review information they cannot recall.

A study was conducted to determine if the reading comprehension scores of fourth-grade students performing below grade level improved after receiving the SQ3R intervention. The 10-week intervention took place for 3 hours each day for 3 days each week. Results of the study revealed that the SQ3R reading intervention increased students' reading comprehension skills (Bulut, 2017). The SQ3R reading strategy may be helpful when teaching students to read and comprehend informational text. Other strategies may be necessary to use as well, such as modeling for students who may have difficulty recalling information during the review stage, and the teacher think-aloud during the preview stage.

Self-Monitoring

When students read complex informational text, they often lose track of the meaning of the text or are thrown off by unfamiliar vocabulary terms. Students must be able to self-monitor when they read—noticing what they do and do not understand and then repairing meaning when it breaks down (Cummins, 2013). Students need to learn how to independently read a text closely, answering questions that relate to the main idea and supporting details (Boyles, 2013).

Student self-monitoring of informational text involves closely rereading a passage, thinking critically about the text as they read. When teaching students how to self-monitor as they read, it may be helpful to identify some reading strategies that are not examples of self-monitoring. These examples include skipping over difficult vocabulary, looking at pictures or photos for their aesthetic appeal and not realizing that the pictures or photos help capture the meaning of the text or extend the author's central ideas, or being unsure of how to figure out a difficult vocabulary word or idiom (Cummins, 2013). The strategies of teacher modeling and coding using sticky notes help students self-monitor while reading.

Think before Reading, Think while Reading, Think after Reading

Many teachers encourage book talk before reading by asking students to make predictions about what they are about to read. Students can make, confirm, and revise predictions about text. One strategy that assists students with understanding informational text is the think before reading, think while reading, think after reading (TWA) strategy. Research suggests that TWA is associated with improved reading performance (Ciullo & Dimino, 2017). For example, one study with fourth-grade struggling readers compared the effects of TWA instruction vs. guided reading. Struggling students receiving small-group TWA instruction made statistically significant gains compared to the guided reading and control condition (Mason et al., 2013). Explicit, scaffolded TWA instruction uses mnemonic prompts to engage students in a metacognitive activity. For example, the T (Think) stage encourages students to consider the author's purpose for writing, what they know about the topic, and what they would like to learn (Ciullo & Dimino, 2017). Teachers would use the think-aloud technique to model how to use this element. In the second stage, (W – Think While Reading), teachers model proper reading speed and fluency while linking previous knowledge with current knowledge. Teachers may

also reread parts of the text that were confusing. Lastly, during the A stage (after reading), the teacher models how to identify the main idea and how to summarize what was read.

Text Structure Identification

Teaching students to identify text structure in informational text, what clues to look for that will reveal each structure, and what questions to ask in order to further understand its contents has been shown to increase the comprehension of text (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). Readers who are aware of the text's structure organize the information into thought units that are more readily stored and recalled later (Jones et al., 2016). The five text structures that appear most frequently in informational text are description, compare and contrast, sequence, cause and effect, and problem and solution (Bohaty, 2015). Herbert et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis on text structure instruction. The results of the study concluded that teaching text structure is an effective way to improve expository reading comprehension.

Learning to recognize text structure within a passage may help students focus on the important points and also allow students to answer text-dependent questions during and after reading. There are several strategies that teachers can use to help students identify the text structure of the passage they read. Teachers can introduce the concept of structures without reading materials. Examples include asking students to describe how their classroom looks to somebody who has never visited (description), explaining how to tie shoelaces (sequence), and asking students for reasons why someone might be late to school and what might happen if someone is late for school (cause/effect; Roehling et al., 2017). After facilitating a class discussion on student ideas, teachers may introduce text structure terms and point out examples of text structures in passages.

Another example of teaching text structure is through the teaching of signal words. As their name implies, signal words are words that signal the text structure to the reader. Signal words may also be referred to as *clue words*, *cue words*, or *keywords*. Students may use highlighters to identify signal words in a passage. Students must be aware that a signal identified in a passage may not refer to the text structure of the passage. Also, teachers must ensure that students do not pay so much attention to signal words that they lose the overall meaning of the passage. The goal of teaching signal words is to help students identify the structure of the text.

The complexity of informational text may require studying more than one text structure at a time. This is referred to as discrimination training. For example, struggling fourth- and fifth-graders were introduced to the simple description and compare-and-contrast text structures in the same lesson (Bohaty, 2015). After reading a passage, students were asked to determine which text structure was being used. One advantage to introducing two text structure features simultaneously is that teachers can highlight the elements that distinguish each text structure from the others, which may help students discriminate among them (Bohaty, 2015).

Teachers may also use graphic organizers to help students select important information from the text and to record structure-related information from the passage. This selection of information can help students visually see how information is organized in a meaningful way. Teachers can provide the students with blank graphic organizers to fill in, or students may be taught how to make their own (Roehling et al., 2017). The boxes, circles, and arrows that are typically found in graphic organizers may be strategically arranged based on the text-structure being studied. For example, the sequence text structure lends itself well to a graphic organizer that uses arrows to indicate the direction of the sequence, while a graphic organizer for a

problem-and-solution passage would depict the problems in a box on the left side of the graphic organizer and the solutions on the right.

Summary

The literature suggests several reading strategies that are useful in teaching informational text. Quantitative studies have suggested the benefits of using certain strategies. Qualitative literature has not pointed out the strategies that prove most beneficial in the teaching of informational text to fourth- and fifth-grade Title 1 students. Qualitative studies on the teaching of informational text have either focused on early elementary or secondary students. Several states that had previously adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010 met with a mandate that called for increased use of informational text in the classrooms. Virginia is one of four states that did not adopt the CCSS; however, Virginia's end-of-year assessment, the Standards of Learning (SOL) in reading contains both fiction and informational text passages at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels.

Research indicates that narrative text remains in the majority for read-alouds, classroom libraries, and instruction (Dreher & Kletzien, 2016). While there has been an increase in the use of informational text in elementary classrooms, there continues to be discrepancies between narrative text and informational text instruction (Duke & Martin, 2015). Most recently, Barone and Barone (2016) suggested using literacy circles, which have traditionally focused on fiction, as a vehicle for exploring informational text with students.

These authors suggested that literature circles could be used to support close reading, a widely used reading strategy that uses repeated readings and coding to help students navigate and understand complex informational text. This chapter outlined key reading strategies in the

literature that support the teaching of informational text. Informational text reading strategies used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools were also addressed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this multi-case study was to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. The findings of this study was generated from participants using a recruitment flyer that was approved by Liberty University's IRB (Appendix A). This chapter details the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, role of the researcher, data collection, interview questions, focus group questions, data analysis, trustworthiness, credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability. Ethical considerations are also explained in this chapter.

Design

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study what is in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The final written report of a qualitative research study includes the voice of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (Creswell, 2013). This study focused on teachers in four Title 1 elementary schools and the informational text reading strategies they use. By examining the informational text reading strategies used by these fourth- and fifth-grade teachers, the research focused on interpreting the phenomenon in a natural setting, the classrooms.

A case study allows investigators to focus on a "case" and retain a holistic and real-world perspective, such as in studying individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and

managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries (Yin, 2014). With multi-case study and its strong interest in the quintain, the interest in the case will primarily be quintain (Stake, 2006). Stake (2006) defined a case by the word "quintain," which he characterizes as an "object of phenomenon or condition to be studied" (p. 6). For this case study, the cases were the four Title 1 elementary schools. At each school, I examined the phenomenon of the informational text reading strategies used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. Stake (2006) also referred to case studies with more than one case as multiple case studies.

For case study research, the niche is when the "how" or "why" question is being answered about a contemporary set of events, or which a researcher has little or no control (Yin, 2014). In a bounded system, such as a school building, a case study might seek to understand how physical education teachers adapt their lesson for students with severe physical disabilities. Case study research involves careful planning and preparation, coupled with the development of systematic implementation structure (Stewart, 2014). The case study design method was appropriate for this study because the bounded system was the schools. The multi-case study was most appropriate for this study because I studied multiple schools to see if the specified strategies in the literature were being followed in the classroom. Stake (2006) reported that in a multi-site case study, the researcher must "study what is similar and what is different about each case in order to understand the quintain better" (p. 6). I examined the cases at each of the four sites individually to explore the generalizations that emerged. I was interested in cases, not the methods of investigation, making the case study the most logical design method as well. Crucial to case study research are not the methods of investigation, but that the object of study and is a case (Stake, 1998).

Research Questions

The central research question was as follows:

> What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text?

The sub-questions were as follows:

1. What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach students how to identify text structures found in informational text?
2. Which reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational text topic?
3. To what extent do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools implement reading strategies that help students construct meaning from vocabulary presented in informational text?

Setting

The setting for this study was Acorn City Public Schools (ACPS, pseudonym), a school district located in Virginia. ACPS serves approximately 24,000 students for the 2020–2021 school year. According to the district website, ACPS consists of 51 schools that include five pre-school centers, 25 elementary schools and one charter elementary school, seven middle schools, five comprehensive high schools, and three special schools. Each school in ACPS is a part of the state's accountability system; therefore, students at various grades must participate in end-of-year assessment. The four schools in this study were exempt from end-of-year assessments for the previous school year.

This study used four elementary schools from ACPS; the school names are pseudonyms. The schools are Creek Run Elementary School, Lake Hawk Elementary School, South Park

Elementary School, and Big Run Elementary School. Each of the elementary schools in this study are identified with pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. The schools were selected based on their Title 1 status. There are slight differences in SES and student demographics in the schools; however, each school has an important feature that relates to the present study.

Site 1: Creek Run Elementary School

Creek Run Elementary School is an urban elementary school located in Acorn County (pseudonym). This school first opened in 1872 as a school for students with disabilities and as a vocational school. It opened under its current name in 1907. Creek Run currently houses 230 students in Grades PreK–5 for the 2020–2021 school year. The student population of Creek Run Elementary is comprised of 62.2 % economically disadvantaged students, 2.6% English Learners, and 11.3% students with disabilities. Creek Run Elementary also has a predominately Black student population (see Table 1), with Hispanic, Asian, White, and multiple races rounding out the total student population.

In the area of academics, the school offers instruction in the content areas of reading, math, science, and social studies, as well as library, art, music, and physical education (P.E.). There are general education classes, as well as special education classes, one English as a Second Language (ESL) class, and one gifted class. The faculty of Creek Run Elementary School consists of 28 certified teachers currently employed in a teaching role, including one reading coach. The administration of the school consisted of one principal and one associate principal. Assessment data for the previous school year are not available, due to the closure of schools in the district and the cancellation of state assessments. According to assessment data for the 2018–2019 school year, 60% of fourth-grade students passed the end-of-year English reading assessment, and 64% of fifth-grade students passed the end-of-year English reading assessment.

All instruction was delivered virtually for the 20202021 school year. I chose Creek Run Elementary School because it is among the few public schools in the state to receive a distinguished Great Schools Rating of 8 out of 10. Additionally, for the 2021–2022 school year, Creek Run Elementary School will become a STEAM school.

Site 2: Lake Hawk Elementary School

Lake Hawk Elementary School is an urban elementary school in Acorn County. Lake Hawk Elementary School first opened its doors in 1914. In 2013, a new school was constructed. This facility currently houses 609 students in Grades PreK–5 for the 20202021 school year. Lake's economically disadvantaged students comprise 77.3% of the student population, and 12.8% of the student body are English Learners. Students with disabilities comprise 13.6% of the student population. Lake Hawk Elementary School has a predominately Black population (see Table 1), with Hispanic, White, Asian, and multiple races rounding out the total student population.

In the area of academics, the school offers instruction in the content areas of reading, math, science, and social studies, as well as library, art, music, and P.E. There are general education classes, as well as special education classes, one ESL class, and one gifted class. The faculty at Lake Hawk Elementary School consisted of 31 certified teachers employed in a teaching role, including one reading specialist. Assessment data for the previous school year are not available, due to the closure of for the 2020–2021 school year. Assessment data for the 2018–2019 school year indicated that 52% of fourth-grade students passed the end-of-year English reading assessment, and 54% of fifth-grade students passed the English reading assessment. I chose this site because it lists student achievement as their school's motto, and to help fulfill this motto, the school offers a Lit Limo, a library on wheels that makes stops in

neighborhoods surrounding the school, offering the students a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction books to read and keep.

Site 3: South Park Elementary School

South Park Elementary School is the third site for this study. This school opened in 1951 and currently houses 400 students in Grades PreK–5 for the 2020–2021 school year. This Title 1 elementary school located in Acorn County has an economically disadvantaged student population of 57.7 %. English Learners comprise 31.5% of the student body, and students with disabilities make up 8.7% of the student enrollment. Similar to Creek Run and Lake Hawk Elementary Schools but lower in percentage, South Park Elementary School has a predominately Black student population (see Table 1), with Hispanic, White, Asian, and multiple races rounding out the total student population.

In the area of academics, the school offers instruction in the content areas of reading, math, science, and social studies, as well as library, art, music, P.E., and Spanish. There are general education classes, as well as special education classes, two ESL classes, and one gifted class. The faculty at South Park Elementary School consists of 32 certified teachers currently employed in a teaching role. The school also employs one Title 1 Reading Specialist. Assessment data for the previous school year are not available due to the closure of schools in the district and the cancellation of state assessment. The most recent assessment results from the 2018–2019 school year indicated that 32% of fourth-grade students passed the end-of-year English reading assessment and 63% of fifth-grade students passed the end-of-year English reading assessment. All instruction was provided virtually for the 2020–2021 school year. I chose this site because it offers two ESL classes and offers an after school reading program during a regular school year.

Site 4: Big Run Elementary School

Big Run Elementary School is an urban elementary school located in the ACPS district. The school was established in 1913 and built at its present site in 1954. The school houses 226 students in Grades PreK–5. Big Run's economically disadvantaged students comprise 48.7% of the entire student population, and English Learners and students with disabilities comprise 7.5% and 15.5% respectively. Like the other schools in this study, Big Run has predominately Black population (see Table 1), with Hispanic, White, Asian, and multiple races rounding out the total student population.

In the area of academics, the school offers instruction in the content areas of reading, math, science, and social studies, as well as library, art, music, P.E., and STEAM. There are general education classes, as well as special education classes, one ESL class, and one gifted class. The school also has one reading specialist. The faculty at Big Run Elementary School consists of 20 certified teachers currently employed in a teaching role. The school also employs one Reading Specialist. The administration of the school currently consists of one principal and one dean. Assessment data for the previous school year are not available due to the closure of schools in the district and the cancellation of state assessments. Assessment data for the 2018–2019 school year indicated that 71% of fourth-grade students passed the end-of-year English reading assessment, and 75% of fifth-grade students passed the end-of-year English reading assessment. I chose this site for two reasons. First, Big Run Elementary School is a NASA Explorer School. As students learn more about science and technology, they are encouraged to read informational books on these topics. The school also offers a reading mentor program for male students.

Table 1

Student Demographics—Percentage of Participating Students

Ethnicity	Site 1: Creek Run	Site 2: Lake Hawk	Site 3: South Park	Site 4: Big Run
Hispanic	3.9%	19.0%	35.3%	11.5%
Asian	0.9%	1.5%	1.3%	1.3%
Black	87.8%	75.5%	50.8%	62.4%
White	4.8%	2.3%	11.5%	18.6%
Multiple Races	2.6%	1.6%	1.3%	6.2%

Participants

The participants of this multi-case study were a purposeful sample of teachers from each of the four elementary schools. According to Merriam (2009), "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling means "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the phenomenon" (p. 156). This study consisted of criterion sampling. Criterion sampling refers to the process of selecting participants who fit a certain criterion that pertains to the research study (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the selection criterion for participants was that they were general or special education fourth- and fifth-grade teachers who teach reading in Title 1 schools. The participants also had a minimum of two years of experience teaching reading at the elementary level and held the elementary education or special education K–12 certifications or equivalent. The sample size for this study was 11 fourth- and fifth-grade teachers selected from four sites and who teach reading.

Procedures

The first procedure in my research was to obtain IRB approval. The IRB exemption letter is in Appendix A. A pilot study was conducted immediately following IRB approval. Yin (2014) recommended a pilot test to refine data collection plans and develop relevant lines of questions. I field-tested the semi-structured interview questions and focus group questions with two fourth- and fifth-grade general and special educations teachers who were knowledgeable of the teaching of informational text comprehension strategies. These individuals were not among the study participants. This was to ensure the clarity of questioning and ambiguity of interpretations by participants (Yin, 2014). The findings from the pilot study revealed that teachers are aware of some of the strategies in the literature that are used to teach the comprehension of informational text. After conducting the pilot study and interpreting the preliminary data, I determined that the interview questions and method were appropriate for this study.

After I completed the pilot study, I began the process of recruiting participants by posting a recruitment flyer on two teacher social media sites (Appendix C). I recruited 11 fourth- and fifth-grade teacher participants and sent them the recruitment letter (Appendix B). The recruitment letter and flyer both contained a link to the screening survey (Appendix D). After reviewing the screening survey from the potential participants, I emailed those individuals that I had selected as participants to let them know they have been selected (Appendix E). I sent each participant the consent form (Appendix F) and asked them to sign this using Docusign. All 11 teachers who were initially recruited agreed to participate in this study.

I scheduled the interviews and focus groups within two weeks of receiving consent forms. All interviews and focus groups were conducted virtually using the Google Meet Video

Conferencing. Since it was important to ensure I was collecting the participant's exact words, I recorded the interview and focus group conversations using the Google Meet recording feature. I then saved and download all recordings onto my computer, as well as saved the recordings onto a password-protected flash drive. To ensure accurate transcription, I used a small tape recorder as a backup recording device.

I used Otter.ai to obtain a transcription of all interviews and focus group recordings. All transcriptions were saved to the password-protected drive. To ensure the accuracy of my transcriptions and to enlist member checks, I sent each participant a copy of the transcription of their interview and their part of the focus group, making note of any revisions made.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher is considered an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). All data collected were mediated through me. I have been employed as a general and special education teacher; however, I do not have any direct oversight for the teachers involved in this study. I was drawn to this study and its findings largely because of my involvement with students who are proficient with decoding yet struggle to comprehend informational text. I collected data for this study solely on my own and served as the sole interviewer.

This study was conducted using epistemological, ontological, axiological, and methodological assumptions with an attempt to gather objective evidence through collaboration with the participants (Creswell, 2013). The collaboration among focus group participants allowed me to compile evidence regarding the effective use of informational text reading strategies. I sought to identify themes that emerged and made generalized assumptions based on those themes. Eleven participants were included in this study. I have taught informational text reading skills to both fourth- and fifth- grade students in Title 1 schools; however, for the

purpose of this study, I bracketed my own bias and assumptions through the use of a reflexive journal (Appendix I) that allowed me to give my full attention "to the instance of the phenomenon that is currently appearing" (Patton, 2015, p. 117).

Data Collection

To ensure triangulation of the data, data for this study were collected using three different methods. Triangulation is a process when "researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). The research included interviews, focus groups, and document analysis.

Interviews

The first method of data collection for this study was participant interviews. Case study research typically involves the collection of data through observations and interviews (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2014) suggested that interviews are the most important part of the data collection process for the case study design. Suggestions for conducting interviews include deciding on the research questions that will be answered by the interviews, identifying interviewees who can best answer these questions based on purposeful sampling, using adequate recording procedures, determining the place for conducting the interviews, designing and using an interview protocol, and using good interview procedures (Creswell, 2013). For the purpose of this study, I interviewed 11 teachers at four sites. The interviews and focus groups were conducted virtually using the Google Meet video conferencing platform and were held in an area where the participants were able to ensure privacy of the conversations. I recorded the interview process which helped later with transcriptions and analysis (Creswell, 2013). During the interview process, I asked standardized open-ended questions that made the interview more conversational. Below are the interview questions I asked teachers.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions (Appendix G)

1. Please introduce yourself by including your name, educational background, years of teaching experience, and years of teaching at this current site.
2. What is your philosophy about the teaching of reading, particularly informational text, at your grade level?
3. What type of training have you received to teach students how to comprehend informational text?
4. Describe the reading instruction that is typically included in your reading block?
5. Do you teach informational text differently than you teach fictional text? If so, how?
6. Do you select text to use in your instruction, and, if so, give examples of the informational text you use in class?
7. What opportunities do your students have to read informational text and to practice the skills they have learned?
8. How often do you use informational text as your read-aloud book, and what types of text do you choose?
9. What types of leveled informational text are you using with your guided reading groups, and how often?
10. How do you prepare your students to read and comprehend informational text?
11. How do you activate students' prior knowledge of informational text topics before the target reading lesson?
12. What informational text structures do you teach at your grade level, and how do you teach them?

13. In your opinion, is it more effective to teach single strategies separately to students, or several strategies together? Why?
14. What are the challenges in teaching informational text comprehension strategies?

Question 1 was included as an opening background question because some teachers will obviously have more experience teaching reading than others, based on the number of years they have been teaching. This may impact how they answer questions pertaining to how they teach reading and the strategies they are familiar with.

Question 2 was asked because educators are typically told that there is no one "right" way to teach reading. The reading block can be expected to look different from one classroom to the next; however, evidenced-based research does suggest key components of literacy. For example, the teaching of vocabulary is an important component of the literacy block. Interactive read-alouds of informational text are an authentic way to help students develop word knowledge to support reading comprehension (Wright, 2014).

Question 3 related to the training and professional development fourth- and fifth-grade teachers receive to help them teach informational text comprehension skills in Title 1 schools. In the United States, federal funding is provided to schools to improve academic achievement for disadvantaged students (Hirn et al., 2018). Title 1 students remain the most challenging population for achieving significant gains in academic performance. There is an ever-increasing imperative to increase the impact of professional development (Shaha et al., 2015). To meet the needs of so many disadvantaged students, best programs will need to rely upon training teachers to be more effective in promoting student achievement (Shaha et al., 2015).

Question 4 related to how teachers teach during the reading block. Good reading instruction consists of a balanced literacy approach. Students become proficient readers and

writers when teachers balance instruction during the reading block. This occurs during the intentional planning of instructional materials that consist of not just narrative text, but informational text as well. Balanced literacy instruction also includes instruction in foundational skills that include phonemic awareness and phonics, as well as comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and writing (Fisher et al., 2019).

Question 5 related to how teachers teach informational text. I chose this question because it was the backbone of my study. I asked a follow up question about fictional text because I wanted to see if the participants knew that there is a distinction between fictional and informational text, and, due to its complex vocabulary and structure, informational text is usually more difficult to understand. This question revealed a number of strategies teachers use to teach informational text. Reading strategies are divided into three groups: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading strategies (Bulut, 2017). As teachers consider how they will teach informational text, they should ask themselves the following questions: Which of the text structure learning objectives are most appropriate for my students, and where might I get the necessary reading material for text structure instruction? (Roehling et al., 2017, p. 72).

Question 6 focused on text selection. Teachers are used to providing instruction in narrative texts with predictable formats; however, there is a greater calling for students to spend more time reading informational text. With this greater emphasis on the use of informational text for instruction, it is important for teachers to engage students in socially and culturally relevant texts that are critical to learning in all disciplines (Colwell, 2019).

Question 7 asked participants about their students being afforded opportunities to read informational text on their own. Students will gravitate to nonfiction topics that capture their attention. This is an excellent time to have students practice the informational text

comprehension strategies they have learned. Readers need expert instruction in complex texts and opportunities to read widely (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Wide reading ensures that students read enough to build background knowledge and vocabulary. Teachers should identify topically appropriate informational texts and then provide students with class time for reading those texts. Students should also have time built into each day to read, which will build their stamina and reading habits (Frey & Fisher, 2013).

Question 8 related to the types of text used in class, particularly nonfiction text during the read-aloud. My goal in asking these questions was to find out how often, if at all, teachers are teaching with informational text and if they use informational text during their interactive read-aloud. Too often teachers, especially those who teach in a testing grade, find it difficult to carve out time during the day to read aloud to their students. They believe it is more important to teach whole group test taking skills. Interactive read-alouds are not lengthy lessons, but with careful planning, they can be beneficial to teaching informational text. Even though interactive read-alouds take up a short amount of the school day, with a few considerations and precise planning, this brief time can provide multiple opportunities for students to collaboratively engage in productive literary practices (McClure & Fullerton, 2017). Selecting the right text for the interactive read-aloud is critical to success. Teachers should select informational text that provides multiple opportunities for modeling strategic thinking and engaging students in scaffolded strategic thinking.

Question 9 related to the teachers' use of leveled informational text during guided reading. During the guided reading block, students typically read aloud from books that have been leveled to match their instructional needs. Informational texts used during this time may not be complex if students have difficulty decoding. As a result of this, some students progress

through school lacking opportunities to engage with challenging text appropriate to their age and cognitive level (Hastings, 2016). According to Fisher and Frey (2014), studies suggest that students learn more when taught with texts that are above their instructional level, and further, they examined the existing research related to guided reading and leveled texts and "could not find any compelling studies suggesting that leveled texts beyond the primary years resulted in significant gains in achievement" (p. 348). Teachers should provide students opportunities to read complex informational text during guided reading.

Question 10 sought to discover how teachers prepare students to comprehend the vocabulary they will encounter in informational text. The vocabulary in informational text is more complex in nature than that of narrative text, and students may not be familiar with many informational text topics. Therefore, students must help these students build text before reading by introducing and defining key vocabulary in the text. Teachers should explicitly teach students the meanings of new words, choosing words that are central to the text they are reading (Gallagher & Anderson, 2016).

Question 11 related to a students' prior knowledge of a topic. Teachers can prepare students to read text by activating prior knowledge before reading, or determining what students already know about a topic. Activating prior knowledge serves as a framework for establishing the relationship between the knowledge students already possess and the new information provided to them (Kostens & van der Werf, 2015).

Question 12 asked teachers to discuss the text structures they focus on when teaching informational text comprehension skills and how they teach them. Text structure refers to how authors organize text. Common text features that consistently appear in the literature include compare and contrast, sequence, problem and solution, and simple description (Bohaty, 2015).

Knowing the structure of informational text may provide students with a mental framework for thinking about it (Roehling et al., 2017).

Question 13 asked participants to elaborate on the number of strategies taught at one time. I chose to ask this question because some informational text may lend itself to teaching more than one strategy at a time in order to aid comprehension. Discrimination training involves studying more than one text feature at a time (Roehling et al., 2017). For example, if students are reading an article about alligators and crocodiles, it may be necessary to teach the text structure of description alongside the more obvious text structure of compare and contrast.

Question 14 asked participants about the challenges or pitfalls in teaching informational text. As teachers, we must lead our students through the challenging terrain of informational text (Frey & Fisher, 2013). As students enter the upper elementary grades, text complexity increases because students are expected to read informational text that not only contains vocabulary the student may not have been exposed to, but text structures that are not as pronounced as they are in fictional texts. Also, teachers have the arduous task of showing students how to synthesize informational text and make meaning from abstract ideas. Teachers need to help students find access points that enable them to gain entry into complex informational text and then trek their way through to a successful conclusion (Frey & Fisher, 2013, p. 35).

Focus Groups

Yin (2014) defined a focus group as a convening of a small group of participants to discuss some aspect of the case study. Discussions during the focus group provided more insight into fourth- and fifth-grade teachers' practices and use of reading strategies. I hosted two virtual focus group sessions.

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions (Appendix H)

1. What informational text reading comprehension strategies were your students familiar with prior to your class, and how did they use them?
2. How do you prepare your students for the informational passages they will encounter on the Virginia Standards of Learning English Assessment?
3. How do you activate students' prior knowledge while reading informational text?
4. How do you integrate the use of graphic organizers and concept maps during the teaching of informational text comprehension?
5. How do you model how to locate information when answering text-dependent questions?
6. What scaffolds do you provide when teaching students how to locate answers to text-dependent questions during and after reading informational text?
7. How do you make your nonfiction read-alouds interactive?
8. What text structures do you feel are the most critical for students to be able to identify in informational text at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels?
9. What strategies do you use to teach your students how to identify text structures in informational text?
10. How do you teach the complex vocabulary encountered in informational text?
11. What steps do you take to model how to closely read an informational text passage?

Question 1 was designed to get a sense of the students' knowledge of informational text comprehension strategies as they enter the fourth and fifth grades. Most students are already familiar with summarizing and making predictions with narrative text, as well as determining problems and solutions, but may not have as much experience with monitoring their reading for understanding and knowing what to do when meaning breaks down when reading informational text. It is important for teachers to instruct students on how to add to their existing knowledge

base and prior experiences when reading. Teachers must enable students to be flexible and independent in applying a myriad of comprehension strategies (Ness, 2016).

Question 2 asked participants to specifically describe the strategies and lessons they will use to prepare their fourth and fifth graders for the end-of-year reading assessments. I chose this question to determine if participants at these grade levels were going beyond providing the students with test-taking strategies, such as eliminating the wrong choices. Teachers need to model a variety of reading strategies, giving the students numerous opportunities to practice the strategies and providing the necessary supports before releasing students to apply the strategies on their own. Teachers must move beyond teaching students to answer literal questions to teaching them how to answer questions that reflect the text (Boele, 2016). Text-dependent questions that reflect the text require students to synthesize information, determine what information is most important, determine what the author is trying to say in a sentence or paragraph, and identify information that supports the passages' theme. Reflecting informational text in this manner calls for greater attention to the text, which may result in increased comprehension.

Question 3 pointed out the fact that many commercial reading programs are scripted and only afford the teacher the opportunity to activate students' prior knowledge before reading informational text. Activating students' prior knowledge throughout the reading of informational text is important because it may help students understand the topic and content vocabulary. Teachers should also find opportunities to stop during and after reading to activate students' knowledge of the topic, especially when reading more complex informational text (Hattan et al., 2015).

Question 4 asked participants to elaborate on their use of graphic organizers and concept maps as strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. I chose this question because most teachers may already be familiar with the use of graphic organizers but may not have used them extensively in the teaching of informational text. A concept map may help students organize their thoughts and ideas and can be used as a pre-reading, during reading, and/or a post-reading activity (Berry et al., 2013). Blank concept maps or graphic organizers can be given to students to fill in, or they can be drawn by the students.

Questions 5 asked participants to discuss how they teach students to answer text-dependent questions. I chose this question because some teachers merely tell their students to read the text and "look back" to locate the answers. Text-dependent questions focus on information that can be found explicitly and directly in the text (Boele, 2016). Teachers must be careful not to ask too many literal questions that require a mere skimming of the text. Students should be required to look several places in the text for the answer, make inferences based on what the author states, and use their own background knowledge to answer text-dependent questions.

Question 6 asked participants about the types of scaffolds they use when teaching informational text. Learners need a host of experiences with rich informational texts and a sliding scale of scaffolds and supports to access the information contained within them (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Scaffolds serve as a gradual release of the text, allowing students to stretch themselves to access text that would otherwise be beyond their reach. The principle of scaffolding is at the heart of Vygotskian pedagogy.

Question 7 asked participants to further elaborate on how they conduct read-alouds in their classroom. I chose this question because a read-aloud is interactive only when there are

teacher-student discussions about the text throughout the reading, not just afterwards. A defining feature of the interactive read-aloud is that the teacher and the students have conversations about the text throughout the reading rather than saving the conversations until the entire text is read (McClure & Fullerton, 2017). Teacher talk during interactive read-alouds include teacher think-alouds about strategies that can be used to comprehend text. Students interact with each other during read-alouds as well, as teachers stop to have them turn-and-talk.

Questions 8 and 9 allowed the participants to further elaborate on their knowledge of informational text structure as well as their instructional practices. Structure refers to the way a text is organized (Roehling et al., 2017). The text structures that are most commonly seen in informational text are description, compare and contrast, cause and effect, sequence, and problem and solution. Readers who are aware of a text's structure organize the information in the text as they read, chunking the information into thought units that are more readily stored and recalled later (Jones et al., 2016).

Question 10 asked participants to describe their instructional practices when teaching informational text vocabulary. Researchers have argued that children encounter different vocabulary in informational text compared with fiction. Children with limited content vocabulary knowledge and limited early exposure to informational text are likely to struggle with comprehending these texts (Wright, 2014). Vocabulary becomes even more confusing when words take on more than one meaning. Teachers must provide content-rich vocabulary instruction in which new vocabulary words and new content are learned together.

Question 11 related specifically to that of close reading. I chose this question because it is my belief that teachers are engaging in instructional practices that they have not associated with close reading. One of the key indicators that students are engaged in closed reading is

repeated reading (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Teachers in the upper elementary grades will need to model certain steps while using the close reading strategy, such as coding. Through the use of a teacher think-aloud, they will also need to model how to synthesize informational text as well as how to read to make inferences and to understand the author's purpose.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was my final method of data collection. I conducted an analysis of documents that are pertinent to the study as they relate to participant responses during the interview process. The lesson plans gave me insight into the types of informational text strategies used by teachers. I collected these documents after the teacher interviews were conducted. I was able to access the lesson plans through a shared Google drive.

Yin (2014) stated that documents help "corroborate and augment data taken from other sources" (p. 106). For example, if the responses from the participants during the interviews and focus groups indicate that they have had experience leading professional development workshops on informational text comprehension strategies or collaborating with peers on designing lessons that teach these strategies, then a thorough analysis of the documents secured would serve to corroborate these findings. The evidence collected through the interviews was supported by the evidence collected during the document analysis.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2009), data analysis is "a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation" (p. 177). Creswell (2014) also stated that data analysis involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing data, and forming an interpretation of

them. Stake (2006) suggested that data analysis is categorical and involves aggregation as well as the direct interpretation of the data. For the purpose of this study, I used Stake's (2006) analytic procedure which involves individual and cross-analysis to interpret and generalize the findings of the study at multi-sites. According to Stake (2006), "Many readers look to what is common across the cases, not what is unique to each" (p. 39). This study sought to achieve this perspective, not to reveal the differences in each case. Stake (2006) defined a case as an entity, such as a national child-care program or a child-service agency. For the purpose of this study, each school was a separate case. A multi-case study is not "a design for comparing cases" because "the cases studied are a selected group of instances chosen for better understanding of the quintain" (Stake, 2006, p. 83).

Individual Case Analysis

Prior to beginning the data analysis, I performed a member check by returning the data to the participants to check for accuracy and alignment with their experiences. I then created a worksheet titled Worksheet One (Appendix J). This worksheet listed the themes of the study. The themes were the same as the research questions (Stake, 2006). Worksheet One was used to compare the themes to the research questions. I revisited Worksheet One throughout the study as information discovered related to each theme. To begin coding and the categorization of data from the interviews and focus groups, I created Worksheet Two (see Appendices K–N). Worksheet Two served as a descriptive overview of each site and as a report of the findings at each site that related to the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2014). Each case was analyzed separately; I used four separate worksheets, one for each site, at this stage in the data analysis.

During individual case analysis, I coded the transcribed the semi-structured interview responses from each of the participants. According to Merriam (2009), coding is "the process of

making notations next to bits of data that strike you as potentially relevant for answering your research questions" (p. 178). I labeled sections or parts of the transcript that identified interesting features and related to the themes of the study. Making note of words or phrases used by the participants, I looked for similarities in responses. I looked at each individual question and compared the responses per participants at each of the four sites. This step in the case analysis led to the findings that were the answers to the research questions, or themes in each case (Stake, 2006). Worksheets One and Two was used to view each case separately in order to gather information that supported answering each theme.

Cross-Case Analysis

For the purpose of this study, I used Stake's (2006) procedure of cross-case analysis to interpret and generalize the findings at each site. The goal during this stage was to identify recurring themes across cases, as well as to note similarities and differences. According to Stake (2006), cross-case analysis is an examination of "what is common across the cases not what is unique to each" (p. 39). As a researcher, I examined what was similar at each site, in order to better understand what Stake (2006) refers to as the quintain, or case. I looked at each interview question individually and then compared the responses of the participants, noting the similarities of each participant answer while also noting any significant differences that occurred in the answers. I wrote down the comments made by the participants as I read the transcripts and looked for similarities of the responses. I followed this procedure for the interviews and focus group. I also examined each document that was relevant to this study to find similarities among them.

Stake (2006) recommended using Worksheet Three (see Appendix O) to begin the cross-analysis. Worksheet Three was used to generate theme-based assertions from the individual

cases. Worksheet Three served as the matrix of cross-analysis and used information from Worksheet Two. Worksheet Three displayed the merged findings from the overall cases. An analysis of these overall findings was used as the basis for the formation of my focus groups.

At the beginning of each of the focus groups the participants received Worksheets One and Two from their prospective site, as well as Worksheet Three, which was my initial merged findings. These three Worksheets helped to facilitate a discussion at each focus group meeting. During the focus group meetings, the participants had an opportunity to add meaning to their thoughts, answer new questions, and clarify information previously discussed. The discussions held during these meetings served to enrich the data and elaborate on the study's topic. The focus group discussions also centered around the merged findings from the interviews. All discussions were recorded, and I took notes of participants' responses.

Focus Group Analysis

The focus group discussions revealed new data. At the conclusion of the focus groups, I reviewed the new data and use Worksheets Two and Three to reevaluate the new information. I added the focus groups' input to the existing data, which led to the formation of assertions, the final step in my data analysis. The focus group discussions helped to add creditability to this study, as well as serve as a form of member checking.

Document Analysis

As with the focus groups, analyzing the documents pertinent to this study revealed new data. I reviewed the new data using Worksheets Two and Three in a similar fashion to the focus groups, then reevaluated the new information. This new information from the document analysis was added to the existing data and helped to create assertions, along with the input from the focus groups.

Assertions

Stake (2006) defined assertions in a cross-case analysis as "findings about the quintain" (p. 42). To create the final assertions, I compiled the data collected from the focus group and compared it to the documents and interviews. I then reanalyzed the merged findings again by using a worksheet recommended by Stake (2006): Worksheet Four (see Appendix P). This is a worksheet that helped to create theme-based assertions from merged findings. To create theme-based assertions, I looked again at common themes across the cases (Stake, 2006). Next, I ranked the assertions in the order of importance and match to themes, or research questions. Once the assertions were matched and rated, I used Stake's (2006) Worksheet Five, which was a multi-case assertion worksheet listing the assertions, theme, and evidence from the site. This worksheet was used to create a final list of findings (see Appendix Q). I examined Worksheet Five to ensure the evidence was supported, because "the evidence that persuaded the researcher needs to accompany the assertions" and those assertions must have "logical persuasion" (Stake, 2006, p. 41). My final assertions were listed and numbered. For example, the first assertion was listed as assertion one. Each assertion was also be supported by evidence. The last step was to use the numbered, evidenced assertions to answer the research questions, or themes.

After the final analysis was complete, I emailed a copy of my data to two teachers at a selected site. I chose two participants who were not a part of this study to serve as peer reviewers. I selected one fourth-grade teacher and one fifth-grade teacher. They reviewed my data for any discrepancies and inaccuracies. I looked at any suggestions offered through the peer review and made sure my assertions corresponded with the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers' practices. At this point, I determined the final number of assertions that emerged from the study.

The last step in my cross-case analysis was to use the thematically matched assertions to explain the final research themes of the study (see Appendix R).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the term trustworthiness is used to describe the issues researchers must address in order to improve the quality of their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I included several steps to increase the quality of this study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness consists of four parts—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. I addressed each step below.

Credibility

In qualitative research, the research procedures, methodology, and results must be credible. According to Lincoln and Guba, certain criteria must be met. First, the researcher must conduct the inquiry in such a manner that greatly enhances the probability that the results or findings would be determined by others and the researcher to be credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, the researcher must obtain the approval of "constructors of the multiple realities being studied" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Multiple sources of data were collected from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to ensure triangulation of data. Member checks were incorporated to validate the participants' responses. The use of open-ended questions during the interviews and focus groups also allowed for credibility as the detailed answers to these questions helped guide the research and lead to the study's conclusion.

Data Triangulation

According to Creswell (2014), triangulation involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective. For the purpose of this study, the use of interviews, document analysis, and focus groups helped to establish credibility of the research.

Data triangulation was important because using at least three different data collection sources allows for saturation of the research. Merriam (2009) defined triangulation as "comparing and cross-checking data collected" (p. 216).

Member Checking

Member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). I also established credibility through member checking. Creswell (2013) identified member checks as a process in which a researcher seeks to provide findings that are authentic and original. In most qualitative studies, this approach involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 2014). I obtained feedback from each participant to check the accuracy of the interview notes and transcriptions. The participants had the opportunity to review the notes to ensure they were accurate based on their interviews. During the data analysis phase rich, thick descriptions also allowed me to establish credibility for this study. According to Creswell (2014) thick description means that the researcher provides details when describing a case or when writing about a theme.

Dependability and Confirmability

As a part of establishing trustworthiness with this research, I created the dependability and confirmability of the study with the use of participating teachers who teach reading to students in Grades 4 and 5. In qualitative research, dependability focuses on consistency with the outcome or findings. Findings or results revealed to one researcher should be consistent, or should reveal similar, "idiographic" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 38) results if performed by another researcher. Confirmability is concerned with how the findings of a study reflect the voices of the participants and are not influenced by researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

These teachers were invested in the learning of their students, particularly in the area of the comprehension of informational text. Also, my role as an elementary school educator and the vested interest I shared with the other teachers in a personal non-supervisory relationship served as dependability for this study. Notes reflecting upon the interviews were kept in a notebook—these notes captured any facial expressions or gestures made during the interviews. Lastly, dependability was established through the setting of the study. Participant schools are schools that are committed to student achievement in the area of informational text comprehension.

Transferability

Transferability is the usefulness of a study to people in other settings (Connelly, 2016). The audit trail (Appendix T) provided a timeline for the actions taken during this study. Establishing an audit trail with the data collection also served as transferability in this study. I maintained the dates and times of all interviews and transcriptions, to include transcriptions from the focus group interviews. In this study, I also established transferability through the use of rich data and the outlining of the steps in the data analysis so that another researcher may be able to replicate this study. The use of interviews, data analysis, and focus groups assisted the generalization of this collective case study to other settings. Transferability was addressed throughout the study and results were reported to allow the findings to be applied to other populations similar to the one studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were addressed throughout this study. First, I secured IRB approval before conducting research for this study. As a researcher, I planned on reporting findings that are true and accurate. I maintained the confidentiality of all the participants and the data collected from each of them. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names and places. Further, I ensured the

confidentiality of all data. Data were stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. The transcriptions of interviews were also stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Summary

This chapter detailed the procedures and methods to conduct this multi-case study which sought to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. This case study involved Stake's (2006) individual and cross-case analysis. The lived experiences of the participants were the basis for this qualitative design. The collective case study was appropriate as it explored the informational text reading strategies used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers from multiple case studies in order to provide different perspectives. There is an extensive amount of literature on the importance of using informational text to teach comprehension at the elementary level, but little attention has been given in the current literature to exactly what informational text reading strategies are being used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in lower-performing Title 1 schools. Understanding what strategies these teachers use will help improve the reading skills for upper elementary students.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. This chapter includes the results of the data analysis, the themes that emerged from the data analysis, and how these themes lead to a deeper understanding of the research questions.

Participants

The following section provides a description of the participants in this study. The descriptions include each participant's years of teaching experience, degree or certification, and years of teaching at their current school. Each participant description also includes previous grades taught.

Lily

Lily is certified in exceptional education and has 7 years of teaching experience. She began her career as an instructional assistant in a classroom for students with various exceptionalities. She is currently teaching fourth grade and is her school's Teacher of the Year. Her classroom includes students with Specific Learning Disabilities and Emotional Disturbance. She currently teaches fourth grade in the virtual school setting.

Petunia

Petunia is certified in exceptional education and has 21 years of teaching experience. She began her career in middle school. Her years of experience including teaching both elementary and secondary education. She has taught at the same school for the past 6 years. Her classroom

includes students with Other Health Impairments and Specific Learning Disabilities. She currently teaches fourth grade in the virtual school setting.

Violet

Violet is certified in elementary education PreK–6 and has 7 years of teaching experience. She began her teaching career as a substitute teacher before moving into a preschool position. She currently teaches fifth grade in the virtual setting.

Marigold

Marigold has been teaching for 4 years. She is certified in Elementary Education PreK–6 and began her teaching career in a city not far from her current school. Marigold holds an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and Communication Studies. Most recently, Marigold was accepted into the Yale University National Teaching Initiative where she will have the opportunity to create a curriculum unit she will use to teach her students. Marigold is currently teaching fourth grade online.

Zinnia

Zinnia is certified in elementary PreK–6 and has 5 years of teaching experience. She also holds a master's in teaching. She is a graduate of a teacher residency program which allows students to immerse themselves into one of the community schools for an entire school year while being coached by a master teacher. She is currently teaching fourth grade online.

Jasmine

Jasmine considers herself a veteran teacher, with 36 years of teaching experience. She is certified in both elementary and secondary education and has taught Grades 4–6. She has a bachelor's and master's degree in education, an undergraduate minor in reading, and is currently teaching fifth grade online.

Azalea

Azalea is certified in elementary education PreK–6 and holds a master's in special education. She has 15 years of teaching experience and previously held the position of director of residential schools. Her classroom currently consists of 12 students with learning disabilities and other health impairments. She has been teaching at her site for 4 years. She is currently teaching online.

Daisy

Daisy is certified in elementary education and has an undergraduate degree in sociology and history. She has been teaching for 3 years and is one of two teachers in this study who has completed a teacher residency program. She has been employed at her current site for 3 years and teaches both reading and science this year in her fifth-grade classroom. Daisy is teaching online.

Rose

Rose has been teaching for 23 years and is certified in exceptional education. She has taught in both the self-contained and resource classroom. Rose has taught kindergarten through fifth grade and currently teaches fifth grade. She has been teaching at her current site for 16 years and is teaching online.

Poppy

Poppy has been teaching for 11 years and is certified in special education. She is currently teaching fourth-grade reading in a resource setting and online due to COVID-19. She has been teaching at her current site for 11 years and began her career as an instructional assistant. Poppy is currently working towards an endorsement in administration and supervision.

Chrysanthemum

Chrysanthemum has been teaching for 14 years and in special education. She began her career in education as a reading tutor and is currently teaching fifth grade online due to COVID-19. She teaches in an inclusive classroom that is primarily made up of boys. Chrysanthemum has taught Grades K–5 and has an undergraduate degree in human resources management.

Results

The section that follows contains the results of the data analysis process. The results are organized by themes and according to the research questions. The results are broken down by the research questions and begin with the central research question, leading to the sub-questions. A further exploration of the findings is done by a thorough look at the results between the face-to-face interviews, focus group, and the examination of lesson plans.

Theme Development

The purpose of this case study was to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and the evaluation of lesson plans. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the codes were placed into themes. The data analysis consisted of individual case analysis and cross-case analysis. During the individual case analysis, the data were coded and placed into themes that related to the research questions. Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea (Creswell, 2013). Cross-case analysis was completed by reading the interviews and applying their findings to the research questions of the quintain (Stake, 2006). Reoccurring themes across cases were identified. The research questions guided this multi-case study (Stake, 2006). This

study also utilized modified versions of Stake's (2006) worksheets.

Table 2

Codes, Themes, & Sub-Themes

Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
Abstract thinking Higher level questions Multiple readings Sticky notes Number paragraphs Highlight text Chunking paragraphs Annotating symbols Key words Synthesize text Note taking Ask question in margin Graphic organizer Text features	Comprehension strategies	Close reading Summarizing Main idea Modeling Scaffolding Think-Aloud Drawing Conclusions/ Inferences
Description Sequence/chronological order Problem and solution Cause and effect Compare and contrast Proposition/support Modeling structures Explicit instruction Think aloud Ask questions	Identifying text structures	Text structure signal words Use of graphic organizers Sample writing model
Limited experiences Tie in previous learning Encourage dialogue Scan table of contents Graphic organizers Text to text Text to world Text to self Titles Headings Illustrations	Determine Prior Knowledge	Questioning Make connections Text features KWL chart
Roots/affixes Pre-teach vocabulary Visuals Higher level	Vocabulary meaning	Context clues Front loading Roots/affixes Frayer Model

Comprehension Strategies

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, several themes emerged that defined informational text reading practices and strategies used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools. In the individual semi-structured interviews, both general and special education teachers discussed the challenges that arise with teaching informational text and the specific reading strategies they use to help students navigate this type of complex text. An analysis of fourth- and fifth-grade lesson plans revealed several strategies and practices teachers use to help their students understand informational text. From the data collected and analyzed, four themes emerged that related to the core reading strategies used by the teachers in this study. These four themes, further defined by subthemes, afforded me the opportunity to frame a narrative understanding with quotations from individual teachers and supported by further focus group collaborations and the examination of lesson plans from each grade level: the four themes and subthemes are discussed below in detail.

Close Reading. A consistent theme that arose during the participant interviews was the use of close reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. Teachers at this grade level agreed that informational text is more challenging for their students and often requires several rereads to understand what the author is conveying. Poppy described close reading as "the only way they are going to understand what the text is about, because informational text is so difficult." Poppy further explained how she teaches her students the close reading strategy:

> Well, first, do the skimming of the paragraphs to look for words that stand out. We'll write these down on sticky notes. Then we apply our close reading strategies. So, the first read-aloud is when we go through and we break the paragraphs down, or chunk

> them. I have the students underline words they know and circle the ones they don't know. Then, when we are reading the passage for the second and third time, we can use the other words in the sentences to figure out what the circled words mean.

Poppy went on to state that it takes her students multiple times to read and understand the text because it has to be broken down into steps:

> We finally get around to answering the questions on the third read, and we go back into the text. We've chunked the text, did our underlining, and wrote questions and words in the margins. When the text is broken down like that, it's easier to comprehend.

During her interview, Lilly stressed the importance of having her students reread:

> I always have my students go back to the text more than once. I typically tell them at least three times. I have them highlight key words in informational text, to let them see that it is not like narrative text. When we are answering questions, I tell them to not just look back, but try to make a connection to the text and their answer. If there is no connection, chances are their answer is wrong.

Teachers also reported modeling close reading strategies so that students could practice independently on their own. Zinnia explained,

> We have close reading symbols that I modeled how to use at the beginning of the year. I model how to label evidence and answers and to ask questions in the margins and answer those questions. This is something we have been doing consistently throughout this virtual school year for reading. For homework, I will upload a passage in Class Kick, an online teaching platform, and have them practice using the symbols. This gives them more direct practice with annotating.

Teachers in the study agreed that the best text to use for teaching close reading strategies should be just above the students' grade level and challenging enough to require the students to think deeper about the text and to analyze the purpose. This may require the students to take notes as they read. Jasmine reported that her students use sticky notes so they can write down any questions they may want to ask as they are reading, or to jot down anything that seems surprising as they are reading. "If we were in person, I would have them go up to the whiteboard and put their sticky notes in the parking lot, and we would return to them once we were finished reading," said Jasmine. Chrysanthemum also reported having her students who were willing to take notes. "Nothing long and drawn out. Just some key points from each paragraph. We'll discuss what's on the notes after we read the passage a few times, and this really does help with comprehending what the text is about."

Chrysanthemum and Marigold planned lessons using content from science and social studies to teach their students how to closely read informational text. Their lesson plans indicated they modeled the first close read of the text for their students, then students read twice, highlighting words, placing exclamation marks beside text that surprised them, and writing questions on sticky notes. In fifth grade, teachers indicated in their lesson plans how to closely read informational text and to complete additional activities. In the lesson plan analyzed, Jasmin's students read an autobiography about Jackie Robinson and how he changed America. Jasmine said she modeled how to read a few pages in the book, then students closely read sections of the text and wrote down questions they had. They also had to identify two main points and cite evidence from the text that supported their claims.

Summarizing. After several reads of an informational text, teachers stated they have their students respond to the text. They usually do this by answering text-dependent

comprehension questions using complete sentences. Teachers also report having students summarize the text. "I teach special education and honestly, my kids don't read very well," said Petunia. "I have taught my students how to summarize text using the 5 w's, which is who, what, when, where, how, and why. We also use graphic organizers for summarizing informational text." During her interview Jasmine noted the importance of students really understanding the gist of the informational text.

> They won't be able to summarize if they don't know the gist or what the passage was all about. Summarization requires restating the most important ideas. It is not stated in the passage itself. This is not always easy for my students, especially with these longer, informational passages. I have to really walk them through this. Students really have to know the main idea to get this right.

Chrysanthemum said her students are often tempted to write or say everything from the text when asked to summarize:

> Some of them will just want to repeat the whole passage, word for word. I have to think aloud about how I would summarize the text. I do this by stating the main ideas contained in the paragraphs. This helps them see that I'm not retelling all of the text.

It was also noted in the interview the hierarchy of teaching comprehension strategies. Teachers felt that while it was certainly best for them to teach a single strategy at one time, some strategies needed to be introduced before others. Daisy commented further: "Summarizing sounds easy, but really, students need to know how to figure out the main idea of an informational text before they can summarize it because a good summary is closer to the main idea of the passage." Poppy, a fifth-grade special education teacher, includes lessons on summarization in her weekly

lesson plans. After reading, she instructs her students to summarize the passage by paraphrasing the main points.

Main Idea. Identifying the main idea and the supporting details is a skill teachers make sure their students are able to do when reading informational text. They identified various practices they used to effectively teach this strategy. Jasmine teaches the main idea using a hamburger style graphic organizer and tells her students there might be more than one main idea and it does not have to be just in the first sentence: "We look at the topic sentence, then we look at the details in the passage." Teachers agreed that while the main idea strategy may sound like one of the easier reading strategies to teach, it can be difficult for fourth- and fifth-grade students, especially when they are reading informational text. Teachers consistently said that their students have a tendency to focus on the details and not what the text is mostly about. "They are really good at listing details, but miss the big picture," said Chrysanthemum. During the focus group session, Chrysanthemum shared her strategy for helping students identify the main idea in informational text:

> I try to focus on their understanding of a paragraph and what the main idea is, as well as details that support the main idea. I try to segment or chunk the paragraphs and model the skill on just one paragraph as opposed to reading the entire passage and asking questions. We walk through each paragraph, and I ask them what the paragraph is mostly about, and how do we know. We use this information to answer the text-dependent questions at the end.

Violet stated that she teaches her students the practice of looking for words that may be repeated to help them identify the main idea. Once they have figured this out, she asks them to think about what the author wants them to know about the topic. "Every reading passage on the end-

of-year English Language Arts assessment asks a main idea question, so it's important that our students in fifth grade understand how to identify the main idea and supporting details in informational text."

Modeling. During the interviews it was made clear that teachers must model all strategies they teach to ensure students are able to effectively apply the strategies on their own. The teachers stated the importance of using the word "I" as they shared their thinking so students could relate to their thinking. During her interview, Zinnia shared how she begins her reading block:

> My reading block begins with me modeling a comprehension skill with a text we have been working with. I model the skill with the text, then continue reading. I ask students to apply what they have learned from my modeling and we do it together. Then, they are asked to apply the skill independently. With the new ELA curriculum this year, this is not always the case, but when we are back in the classroom, there will be many opportunities for students to have discourse about what they have read during the lessons. Virtually, it's a little difficult to turn and talk.

Another teacher stated that because of the complexity of informational text, modeling is a key strategy to use during instruction. Petunia explained that she must do quite a bit of modeling:

> Even the general education kids aren't as used to these longer passages. Informational text is so different from your cut and dry fiction. I have to model even the purpose of reading because the kids are often clueless. I also model the way the paragraphs are broken down and organized and I show them how to scan the text features, like headings and labels. I really have to model and think aloud how to answer question so that they can hear my thought process. I do this as I'm rereading aloud a chunk of text.

Violet stated she uses informational text in her guided reading groups more than fiction because her district purchased a new ELA curriculum which consists largely of informational reading and writing:

> The curriculum we are using online this year is mainly nonfiction. I don't use informational text for my read-aloud, but in my small groups, we do a book walk of our informational passages, and I model by thinking aloud and talking about the bold words in the text, headings, subheadings, and other text features. I model how to quickly scan the table of contents to get an idea of what they will be reading for this week. Modeling aloud as I read helps them hear what fluent reading sounds like and lets me show them how to set a purpose for reading. I really like to model skills, such as visualization, by closing my eyes and visualizing what the author is saying. It's important to do this so they will know what to do when they are released on their own. Modeling is like a scaffold for them.

An analysis of fourth- and fifth-grade lesson plans revealed that teachers plan the use of modeling in their lessons when introducing a new reading topic and skill.

Scaffolding. During their interviews, teachers reported giving students the opportunity to apply the skill learned on their own. This gradual release of responsibility allows the students to be accountable and take ownership of what they have learned. Azalea stated, "It's important to scaffold in the instruction,. Students need supports with reading informational text. They need lots of practice before they can be released to try the strategy on their own." Zinnia stated she uses the frontload strategy to introduce and teach new vocabulary but must be careful: "I sometimes frontload the vocabulary before we read the text, especially the vocabulary I know they have no clue about. I just have to be careful not to take all of the work out of it for them."

Daisy stated she uses the "I do, we do, you do" strategy to scaffold her reading instruction and to provide a gradual release of the work to the students: "I teach explicitly, using this strategy. They have time to independently practice the strategy, then we have reading stations." Rose also explained she uses lots of little passages to model the close reading strategy, then lets student practice on their own.

Think-Aloud. Teachers interviewed said they talked aloud while modeling reading strategies. The benefit of this strategy is that it allows students to hear the teacher's thought processes. Petunia said informational text is so different from cut and dry fiction, and she has to even model the purpose or reading it: "My kids are often clueless. Then I model scanning the text features, and the whole time I am talking aloud about why it's important to do this." Teachers think aloud while they are modeling a particular skill.

Drawing Conclusions/Making Inferences. Teachers in this study reported that making inferences and drawing conclusions were two of the most difficult reading skills taught in fourth and fifth grade. During the focus group discussions, the teachers agreed that students struggle with information that is not right there in the text and that requires them to make guesses to figure out what the author is saying. Jasmine further explained,

> Making inferences and drawing conclusions are two very abstract thinking processes. We are already asking them to read these very long passages with words they have never heard of, and now we want them to figure out answers that aren't directly stated in the text! This is where the modeling really comes in. I have to literally talk out loud the whole process. First, I have to break down the word infer for them by asking myself what I think the text is trying to say, or imply. I will use a yellow highlighter to highlight certain words that led me to believe that is what I thought the text was trying to say, then

based on those clues, or evidence, I will model or state aloud a conclusion to the article. This is not an easy task for my students and we practice with a lots of text.

One teacher in this study also reported that the skill of making inferences and drawing conclusions required the students to draw on their own background knowledge of the topic. Violet stated,

> I know the students don't always have background knowledge on the topic we are asking them to make an inference on; however, knowing something about the topic is helpful with this very difficult skill. This is why it is so important to talk about the text the whole time we are reading, to clear up any misconceptions about vocabulary, and to make sure we clearly understand what the author is directly stating in the text. We usually don't tackle this skill until we have figured out our purpose for reading and the main idea of the passage.

Zinnia plans reading lessons in which her students must make inferences and draw conclusions about a character's actions and how the character thinks and feel. Students must then cite evidence form the text.

Identifying Text Structures

During the interviews, it became very clear that teaching students how to identify text structures in informational text is very important. The teachers stated that by the time the student reaches the fourth grade, the passages on the state tests have increased in length and the students are not merely searching for the main idea and details. The questions asked that follow the passage require more than mere recall; students have to understand how the author has organized the text, or text structure, and know what to look for when trying to figure out which text structure, or structures, are being used. The teachers in this study had not all taught the same text

features this year, and some fourth-grade teachers taught features that others said were reserved for fifth grade. The teachers in this study agreed that description should be taught first, since it is fairly easy to understand. All teachers agreed that the following text features are either taught at the fourth- or fifth-grade level in their building: description, sequence/chronological order, problem/solution, cause/effect, compare/contrast, and proposition/support. Teachers described several ways they teach their students how to identify text structures in informational text.

Text Structure Signal Words. The teachers in this study agreed that the easiest way to teach their students how to identify text structure in complex text is to teach text structure signal words. These are words students should look for that gives clues to the text structure being used. Poppy explained,

> If it's a cause/effect paragraph, I pre-teach my students to look for words like "because," "effect," and "result." These words usually tell them they are reading a cause/effect paragraph. Or, if I'm teaching compare/contrast, I will model how to search for the words "but," "differs," or the phrase "in comparison to."

Sequence and chronological order appeared next on the teacher's list as an easier organizational skill to teach using text structure signal words. Lilly said she made a slide deck of signal words for her students to reference when answering questions about sequence:

> If I'm teaching sequencing or chronological order, I teach my students to look for the words "first," "then," "next," and "last." These words are sight words that are fairly easy for them to spot in the text, especially after we have marked off chunks of text.

During her individual interview, Daisy pointed out another way she teaches her students how to identify a text structure.

> In fifth grade, we focus more on chronological order, so I model how to skim a paragraph and to look for dates and even timelines. Since we are virtual, I share the passage on my screen and use the Kami tool to highlight the text structure signal words. I also tell them why I'm choosing these words and how they help me to identify the text structure.

Use of Graphic Organizers. Teachers in this study agreed that any type of visual is good for teaching students how to examine text structures in informational text. They stated that the use of graphic organizers helps reinforce the text structure every time they read and write. Marigold explained,

> I use graphic organizers to introduce the concept of text structures. Oftentimes, they will confuse a text structure with a text feature, and the use of the graphic organizer is a good visual for them to see how the text is written, or organized.

Several teachers pointed out the connection between reading and writing and stated that the graphic organizer was an excellent tool to do this. Lily said,

> As I'm teaching the text structure, I model the use of the graphic organizer. For example, if I'm teaching the compare and contrast text structure, I will draw a Venn diagram on my white board and model how to locate the similarities and differences in the text, and what is alike. I try to have the paragraph alongside the graphic organizer as I'm doing this, so the students can see exactly where in the text I am getting this information. It's also helpful to use different colored markers for each part of the graphic organizer.

Teachers also use graphic organizers for some of the easier text features, such as description. Azalea said that her students like to use the graphic organizers that have room for drawings:

> Description is pretty simple, however, I like to use a spider graphic organizer to reinforce this text structure and to give the students a mental picture. I teach the students how to

write the topic in the middle circle, and on the spider's legs, they will write and draw about what that something looks like, smells like, feels like, tastes like, sounds like, and examples. I'll let them help me feel out some of the spider's legs as we are sharing this activity. We'll practice a few times together, then I'll release them to do this activity independently.

Sample Writing Model. Teachers in this study reported finding it helpful to provide a model of a paragraph that has a specific text structure. They believe that providing a model helps the students see and internalize the knowledge about the text structure and to use this to enhance their comprehension. Daisy stated that she is really big on text structures in her fifth-grade classroom:

> I begin by using a writing model to introduce the text feature we will be studying. I try to begin with an easier text structure, but it really depends on where we are with pacing. While my students are watching, I will model writing a paragraph using a particular text structure and I describe what I'm doing as I'm writing. This takes a lot of modeling and thinking aloud on my part. Then I'll have the students write their own paragraph using a text structure paragraph frame as a template. When we are in the classroom, I usually write examples of each type of text feature on anchor chart paper and place these anchor charts around the room. Students can refer to these anchor charts as needed.

Petunia explained to her focus group participants how she used writing as a pre-reading strategy:

> Finding and identifying text structures in informational texts is tricky for my population of students, but we get it done. I have to give them an idea of what to even look for before we begin to read. I do this through writing. First, I show them an example of a

> paragraph that corresponds to, let's say, the cause and effect text feature. Then I tell them that we will be writing our own. I model writing a paragraph that shows cause and effect, making sure to use phrases like "led to" and "as a result." Of course, I have already pre-taught these text structure words. I'll have students practice writing a paragraph on their own that follows this particular text structure.

Determine Prior Knowledge

Teachers in this study stated that students' prior knowledge of an informational topic plays a vital role in their comprehension. Teachers also felt confident in their ability to activate their students' prior knowledge by asking questions, guiding students to make connections, using text features, and using charts. During the interviews, teachers expressed concern about students being reluctant to want to read informational text, due to its vocabulary and unfamiliar topics, and they must find other ways to make sure students are afforded opportunities to read about different informational topics. The following strategies were reported as being used by teachers to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational topic.

Questioning. The fourth-grade students in Petunia's class have been busily working on their Project Based Assessments this year that are being offered as an alternative to the state's history assessment. Petunia and the general education teacher have combined reading and writing for these projects on slavery and the Jim Crow laws:

> They didn't know anything about the Jim Crow laws and their knowledge on slavery was limited. One strategy I used to activate their prior knowledge is questioning. I asked them to tell me what they knew about slavery and have they heard or seen on the news of any unfair practices against certain groups of people. This led to a lot of discussions about civil rights and tied in with our projects.

Jasmine and Violet's lesson plans specify using the questioning strategy to ask questions about figurative language found in informational text, as well as well as the author's purpose.

Chrysanthemum uses questioning to find out what her students know about new topics she is about to introduce:

> Sometimes, I just ask them what they know about a topic of the informational passage we are about to read, just to see what they know. Sometimes this starts a dialogue among the students themselves, which is great because students learn from these social interactions. Sometimes, there are things they know that they don't remember they knew, and they'll become anxious to share this information.

Poppy shared a similar experience with using the questioning strategy to activate prior knowledge:

> Recently, we were about to read an informational text about the ocean floor, and as part of activating their prior knowledge, I asked the students what they already knew about the ocean. They said they didn't know anything about the floor of the ocean, so I went further and asked them if they had ever watched SpongeBob. All of the characters live on the floor of the ocean. The students could easily see they had some background knowledge because they were able to recall the ocean floor from the cartoon.

Making Connections. In addition to questioning, teachers interviewed reported helping students make connections between the new informational text topic and other books they may have read, to something they have experienced in their lives, or even to a world experience. Rose stated during her interview that she helps students make connections by asking them what books they have already read on the topic.

> It may very well be that the student has already studied the topic in science or social studies, so it's good to make that cross-curricular connection. That's probably the most relatable connection after personal experiences. Sometimes, it just may be a current event in the news that the student can relate the topic to. There is always a connection of some sort.

Azalea stated that she uses videos to help her students make connections and activate background knowledge.

> With my students, I may activate their prior knowledge by showing them a video about birds if we are about to read a text about birds. I may take them on a virtual field trip. They can usually make a connection with the birds they may have seen in their own backyard just by watching the video, plus videos are fun to watch. They don't even know they are learning.

Azalea, Marigold, and Chrysanthemum's lesson plans indicated they use a "I notice, I wonder" graphic organizers to guide students into determining their prior knowledge of a topic. Students also use graphic organizers to show connections between text.

Text Features. During the interviews, the teacher discussed the different uses of text features in informational text. One of these uses is to help students activate their prior knowledge before reading the text. Zinnia explained,

> We will do a walkthrough of the text before reading and talk about the text features. This walk through often sparks students' interest in the topic. They may be reminded of something else they know that is similar to the topic, have had an experience with the topic, or has seen the topic before. I like to use a KWL chart with a book walk because it

> allows us to fill out the first column (what we know), as well as the second column. We can return to the last column after reading to write a summary.

In her lesson plan, Daisy includes activities in which students must convey a sequence of events in informational text. In the beginning of the lesson, Daisy models how to search the text for transitional words and phrases that indicate a sequence of events.

Activating prior knowledge can also help when using other skills, such as making inferences. According to Daisy, a fifth-grade teacher, activating prior knowledge helps to

> clear up any misconceptions students may bring to the table about a topic. . . . It's better to know beforehand what they know and don't know rather than have the students start to apply a more abstract skill such as inferencing and draw on false knowledge.

Vocabulary Meaning

Teachers reported during the interviews that it is often the complex vocabulary that trips students up first, even during close reading. The fact that all teachers reported having students in their class who are reading below grade level only adds to the challenges of teaching students how to comprehend informational text. Still, teachers stated they use certain strategies to help students make meaning from the vocabulary they face in the text. Both fourth- and fifth-grade teachers indicate in their lesson plans activities that they allow students to construct meaning from vocabulary. Fifth-grade lesson plans include passages that contain words students might not be familiar with, such as "imperfections," "sustained," and "prejudice." Teachers model how to use a Frayer Model to display the word, it's definition, a sketch, and what the word is and is not. Fourth-grade teachers indicate they have their students preview the text before reading to locate new vocabulary.

Context Clues. Context clues was the strategy of choice for most of the teachers participating in this study. The teachers reported that students were taught context clues in the second and third grade and were already familiar with this strategy. Jasmine said it is still helpful to pull out this strategy to model and teach because students will not readily use context clues when they encounter an unfamiliar word: "I have my students underline the word that is unfamiliar to them," she said. "Then I model how to look at words around that word."

Front Load Vocabulary. During their interviews, Azalea, Chrysanthemum, and Violet said they front load vocabulary before having their students read informational text. Azalea explained, "I front load complex vocabulary prior to reading the text. We stop a lot and check for understanding." These teachers found it beneficial to read and define the vocabulary before reading, so students will not have to struggle sounding out words and losing meaning of the text. Chrysanthemum offered a word of caution during the focus group discussion:

> Front loading vocabulary is helpful, especially with students who are well below grade level, but teachers should leave some work for the students to do; they need to figure out something with the vocabulary. Teachers should not do all of the lifting during vocabulary instruction. There should be some type of scaffolding.

Violet stated the she also uses the front loading strategy for vocabulary instruction, but holds the students accountable for their learning.

> Context clues are great, but sometimes it's really helpful to just tell the students what the word mean up front. I'll ask the students to use the word in a sentence as well, to see if they truly understand the meaning of the word.

Roots and Affixes. Teachers stated that many of the words their fourth- and fifth-grade students encounter in informational text are multisyllabic and contain various affixes. Teachers

agreed that students who recognize root words and know their meanings and have a knowledge of affixes are more successful with reading and understanding the vocabulary in informational text. Zinnia described how her students handled the word *reconstruction* when they came across it in an informational history text: “

> They were not familiar with the word *reconstruction*, so we just had to pick the word apart. We talked about the root word, we talked about the prefix, and we talked about how different parts of the word change the meaning. So, I actually teach roots and affixes when I teach my students how to construct meaning from vocabulary.

Frayer Model. During the interviews, the teachers reported using an organizer as a visual of the word and as a way for students to extend their knowledge of vocabulary words. The graphic organizer several teachers said they use with their students is the Frayer Model. The teachers said this model helps to build knowledge across the content areas. Jasmine said she frequently teaches vocabulary using a Frayer Model as a guide: “We put the word in the middle and discuss what a kid-friendly definition might be. Then we list examples and non-examples, and finally we write and draw characteristics of the word.”

During the interview, Daisy shared that her grade level is departmentalized this year and teaches both reading and science, and she has ended up teaching a lot of science during the reading block, using the Frayer Model to introduce and teach vocabulary:

> The Frayer Model really helps when we are about to read a science-related article in reading and we have some difficult vocabulary we need to get through. Writing examples of what the word is and isn’t is important, even drawing a picture, because sometimes the students think they know a word and they don’t. The word may actually look like another word they are familiar with.

Research Question Responses

The following section outlines the responses to the research questions set forth in this study. The responses were based on the themes that emerged from the data collected from each participant. The participant responses to the interview questions were based on the strategies each teacher uses to teach the comprehension of informational text. The data from the responses helped to shape the themes in this study.

Central Question

What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text? The purpose of the central research question was to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. This question afforded each teacher the opportunity to provide their own input about the strategies they use with their students. During the interviews, the teachers discussed the challenges of teaching the comprehension of informational text. Poor reading levels, difficult vocabulary, and being virtual are some of the challenges teachers face, yet they were clear about comprehension strategies they find to be effective for their students. The themes that emerged from the data are discussed below.

The theme of comprehension strategies addressed the strategies teachers are currently using at their grade level to teach the comprehension of informational text. All 11 participants expressed using at least one of the following strategies with their students: close reading, summarizing, strategies to teach the skill of main idea and supporting details, modeling, think-aloud, questioning, scaffolding, Question-Answer Relationship (QAR), and strategies to teach the skills of making inferences and drawing conclusions. Eight out of the 11 teachers reported

using close reading strategies, even if they did not call the strategy close reading. Lily, a fourth-grade special education teacher, was the only teacher to report using the QAR strategy to help her students comprehend informational text. She models for her students how to determine if the answer to a question is right there in the text, or implied. Teachers also reported using the close reading strategy to build students' comprehension skills when reading informational text, as well as summarizing. Summarizing was cited as a skill taught after students closely read a passage up to three times. Petunia gave an example of using the 5 W's graphic organizer when teaching her students how to summarize text: "I also combined the 5 W's retelling with a KWL chart to help reinforce what they have learned." All 11 teachers reported using the modeling strategy along with thinking aloud.

Several teachers emphasized the skill of summarization as being foundational to informational text. Marigold stated,

> The whole point of reading at this grade level is reading for meaning, for comprehension. Summaries are not directly stated in text, and with informational text, I teach my students how to write a good summary that tells about the main idea of the reading selection, as well as the main idea contained in each of the paragraphs. So main idea and summarizing are related here.

Two reading strategies commonly referred to in the interviews for teaching the comprehension of informational text was making inferences and drawing conclusions. Teachers reported teaching these two strategies together, though when asked if it is better to teach strategies separately or more than one at a time, all 11 teachers stated that it is best to teach a single strategy at a time. Petunia said she teaches her students to make an inference in order to draw a conclusion and these are two different thought processes:

> I don't get into the whole thought process thing with them, but I often begin with simple examples to teach this strategy. I'll ask the students what they guessed happened to me if I ran into the classroom one morning with wrinkled clothes. If I ask them what they think is going on, they will say I'm late. If I ask them why they may infer that I overslept because my alarm didn't go off. I'll then explain to them that they can conclude that I'm late because my alarm didn't go off.

Marigold explained, "I try to teach students how to use details from the reading passage, as well as what they know from their own life, to draw a conclusion or make an inference."

Sub-question 1

What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach students how to identify text structures found in informational text? The teachers in this study all agreed that text structures are at the heart of informational text comprehension. Sub-question 1 allowed the teachers to tell what structures they were currently teaching or teach at their grade level and how they teach students to identify these structures in complex informational text. Through the interview process, teachers discussed the following text features: description, sequence/chronological order, problem/solution, cause/effect, and compare and contrast. Daisy mentioned proposition/support but did not elaborate on using this structure with her students.

Teachers in this study use text structure signal words, graphic organizers, and sample writing models as strategies for teaching students how to identify text structures found in informational text. One teacher discussed in her interview how she also used the main idea strategy to help identify the text feature being used. Rose said, "

> I teach text identification by tying it into something more familiar, such as main idea. I'll model how to examine the topic sentence, which is the first sentence of the paragraph and

> oftentimes contains the main idea. Topic sentences also tell us what specific text structure is being used. For instance, if the very sentence reads, "Some animals can be big, and some can be small," this more than likely indicates a text that will compare and contrast animal sizes. I try to get me students to make this type of connection as well.

Sub-question 2

Which reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational text? During the interview process, teachers reported using the strategies of questioning, making connections, text features, and graphic organizers to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational text. Jasmine said,

> It's very important to activate a student's prior knowledge. We are currently studying a novel about Jackie Robinson in our ELA block. Before reading, I asked the students about athletes they know who have helped change the world, socially. It's mainly about getting the background knowledge form the students, something they can relate the topic to.

Jasmine went on to say that the students are also reading others articles and chapter books that will help support the story about Jackie Robinson and how athletes have changed the world.

Rose stated that when she is introducing her students to a new informational topic, she has to quickly show them how to tie the topic to something they have previously learned or experienced, and even who they are as a person:

> Somehow, I have to have them see a connection to the text. We might be reading about the beach and the student can recall the time they walked on the beach barefoot. Or, if we are reading an autobiography about a person who overcame difficulties in life, I might ask them how they are like this person.

Sub-question 3

To what extent do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools implement reading strategies that help students construct meaning from vocabulary presented in informational text? According to the interview, teachers recognize the importance of constructing meaning from vocabulary. They cited the use of context clues, front loading, teaching roots and affixes, and the use of concept maps such as the Frayer Model as strategies to help students construct meaning from vocabulary. During the interviews, teachers who taught content area subjects in addition to reading, such as science and history, explained how they created assignments that allowed students to explore technical content through projects and writing. Fourth and fifth-grade teachers alike recognize the importance of allowing students the opportunity to construct meaning from vocabulary. Teachers in this study listed context clues as a way to think about a vocabulary word, how that word is situated and used within the text, and how the word aids in comprehension.

Poppy stated that front loading vocabulary is very beneficial:

> I teach in a collaborative classroom, and 95% of our students, including the general education students, are reading two or more years below grade level. It makes sense to front load vocabulary so they don't have to struggle with decoding and can get on with comprehension. The main struggle is with reading and there are other strategies they struggle with, like main idea and cause and effect.

Lily explained,

> I don't teach vocabulary words in isolation. I always tell my students that a word can have more than one meaning, and they need to see how the word is used in the sentence.

> This might require me giving a quick refresher on homophones, but this is necessary in order to help my students construct meaning from the vocabulary.

Both Poppy and Marigold said they also model how to read the sentence directly before and directly after the sentence containing the vocabulary to help them figure out the meaning of the word.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the participants involved in this study and the strategies they use to teach the comprehension of informational text to fourth- and fifth-grade students. The participant descriptions included grade level, years of teaching, and educational background. The chapter included the thematic development of the data collected as the data related to the central research question and sub-questions. The chapter further broke down the findings of the interviews, focus group, and analysis of lesson plans. The chapter examined the practices and strategies teachers use to teach informational text.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. This chapter includes a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings and the implications in light of the relevant literature and theory, methodological and practical implications, and delimitations and limitations. It also includes recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Three instruments were used for the data collection process. These included semi-structured virtual interviews, virtual focus group sessions, and lesson plans. Four themes emerged when analyzing data from the viewpoint of the teachers in this study. All teachers felt that teaching the comprehension of informational text to fourth and fifth graders is challenging. They felt that because of the complex nature of informational text, students in fourth and fifth grade need to be taught a repertoire of core reading strategies to help them with comprehension.

Teachers reported using the close reading strategy to help students comprehend and analyze informational text. They suggested choosing text that was just above the students' grade level. Teachers stated that for this strategy, they modeled how to chunk and number the paragraphs and read the text for overall comprehension, main idea, and for clarity of purpose. Teachers said they modeled how to annotate the text by making notes and marking in the text and margins as they read. Last, teachers modeled how to use the annotated passage to answer text-dependent questions, summarize, and draw conclusions. Interestingly, teachers reported using the close reading strategy to teach other comprehension strategies mentioned in this study.

Teachers found this strategy helpful because it requires the students to look back through the text more than once to find evidence to prove their answer.

Teachers also stated they teach the skill of summarization to their fourth- and fifth-grade students to help them comprehend informational text. One special education teacher said she taught her students to summarize a passage using the 5 W's. Others stated that it was important for students to understand the strategy of main idea first before attempting to summarize a text. Teachers also reported having to teach their students to distinguish between the main idea and the details of the passage, as well as retelling or restating the most important ideas in their own words.

Teachers of fourth- and fifth-grade students in Title 1 schools also felt that teaching students how to correctly identify the main idea and supporting details is an important strategy that leads to comprehending informational text. While it may appear to be easy, teachers reported identifying the main idea as being difficult because the main idea may not always be stated in the first and last sentences of a paragraph. It may be implied, and longer passages may have more than one main idea. One teacher said her students are good at stating details but often miss the big picture or main idea of the paragraph. Another teacher uses a close reading strategy of chunking paragraphs and modeling how to identify the main idea in one paragraph at a time. Teachers said that modeling is key with this strategy before having students answer text-dependent questions. Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers also stated that district and end-of-year assessments have questions that ask about the main idea in informational passages. Identifying main idea in informational text helps students summarize what they have read.

Teachers in this study agreed that all comprehension strategies must be modeled in order to be effective. Teachers reported modeling using a think-aloud so that students can hear their

thought processes. They said the longer informational text passages lend themselves to modeling because the students need to see how the paragraphs are broken down and organized. Teachers reported modeling how to scan text features like headings and labels and how to look back into the text to answer text-dependent questions.

Two strategies teachers said they use to teach the comprehension of informational text are making inferences and drawing conclusions. Teachers reported teaching single strategies in isolation as opposed to teaching multiple strategies at once; however, they teach inferences and drawing conclusions together because one can make an inference to draw a conclusion. They stated that making inferences and drawing conclusions are two of the most difficult strategies for fourth and fifth graders to grasp, primarily because they are abstract processes. Teachers used other strategies such as modeling and highlighting text to show students how to point out words that are clues to what the author might be implying.

Teachers reported teaching their students various strategies to identify text structures in informational text. Knowledge of text structures helps students fully understand and analyze informational texts. Teachers named the text structures commonly taught at their respective grade levels. These text structures include description, sequence/chronological order, problem/solution, cause/effect, and compare/contrast. One fifth grade teacher said her district had added proposition/support to the list of text structures fifth graders needed to know. Teachers agreed that there is a hierarchy to teaching text structures, and description and sequence and problem/solution should be taught before the more difficult structures such as cause and effect. Teachers stated that students are often confronted with text that has more than one text structure.

Teachers revealed that teaching their students text structure signal words that indicate the type of structure being used is helpful in identifying text structures in text. Teachers said they pre-teach such words as “because” and “result” and model how to search for these words in a paragraph. One fifth-grade teacher said her grade level emphasized chronological order and she teaches her students how to skim the text for dates and timelines.

The findings of this study also revealed that teachers show their students how to use graphic organizers to identify text structures in text. One teacher indicated that she uses text structure graphic organizers to introduce the text feature itself and to provide reinforcement. Teachers report that graphic structures serve as visuals for them to see how the text is organized, and they want students to see the connection between reading and writing. Teachers also report using sample writing models to assist students in identifying text structures. While modeling a think-aloud, teachers said that as their students watched, they wrote a paragraph that showed the text structure being studied. Teachers believe that providing a model and thinking aloud helps the students see how the text is organized.

Teachers use questioning, making connections, and text features to determine students’ prior knowledge of an informational topic. Teachers believe students can combine their life experiences and connections to other text and the world with new knowledge to comprehend informational text. Teachers reported asking questions before reading to determine students’ prior knowledge. Teachers said these questions are designed to find out what text the students may have read, places they have visited, or something they may have learned in another class. Two teachers who teach science and social studies in addition to reading said they try to create cross-curricular lessons so that students can tie in previously learned knowledge. Teachers also stated they teach their students how to scan text features. Students look at titles, headings,

subheadings, and illustrations to determine if they have any experiences with the topic. One teacher leads her students on a text feature hunt before reading the text to find out how much a student already knows. She noted that students can often read a heading or look at an illustration and determine what they already know about a topic.

Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in this study who taught in Title 1 schools teach their students strategies for how to use context clues and roots and affixes they have learned to construct meaning from vocabulary. They felt that seeing new vocabulary words in the context of the sentence and being able to look at words and sentences before and after the vocabulary word helped students with the meaning of the word. All teachers believed that poor decoding skills prevented some students from reading complex vocabulary, and it was necessary to front load the vocabulary before assigning students the text to read. One teacher emphasized the importance of teaching her students that words can have more than one meaning,

Teachers believe students' knowledge of word roots and affixes such as prefixes and suffixes help them construct meaning from vocabulary. One teacher indicated how she teaches her students to look at multisyllabic vocabulary words, the meaning of the root word, and any word parts. She also lets them know these word parts, or affixes, can change the meaning of the word. Teachers also use visual organizers to model for their students how to construct meaning from the vocabulary they encounter in informational text. One teacher emphasized her use of the Frayer Model as a teaching tool. She said she teaches her students how to use a graphic organizer to extend their knowledge of a vocabulary word by writing the definition and using words and pictures to describe what the word is and is not.

Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. Previous studies in the literature emphasized the comprehension of informational text in secondary classrooms; limited research has examined the strategies taught by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools. This qualitative study examined 11 fourth- and fifth-grade teachers who currently teach reading in Title 1 schools. The results of this study add to the existing studies discussed in Chapter Two regarding strategies for teaching the comprehension of informational text. Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who participated in this study used evidenced-based strategies to help foster comprehension. Teachers used reading strategies to teach common reading skills, such as main idea, drawing conclusions, and making inferences. Strategies used include close reading, modeling, think-aloud, QAR, scaffolds, and questioning. Teachers in this study used context clues and the teaching of root words and affixes along with graphic organizers such as the Frayer Model to help students construct meaning from vocabulary. Teachers in this study also used several strategies to help students understand how text is organized. These included locating text structure signal words, using graphic organizers specific to the text feature, and modeling writing that contained an example of the text feature. The discussion below focuses on the relationship between the findings in this study and the empirical and theoretical literature research.

Theoretical

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the concept that people develop knowledge and derive meaning from their own experiences that are dependent upon interaction between people, namely the student, teacher, and other students (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978). This

allows for a deeper understanding of content and is important when teaching the comprehension of informational text. Effective reading strategies provide the framework for understanding complex vocabulary and text structures found in informational text. Students interact with their teacher as he or she models how to annotate a paragraph during the close reading of a text and interact with their peers in small groups. This theory also relied on the principle that all knowledge builds upon previous knowledge, and it is the integration of all knowledge the equates to true learning (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978). Teachers determine students' background knowledge so they have experiences they can bring to new knowledge learned.

Teachers should provide the supports necessary to ensure students reaches their maximum development. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development stresses a gradual release to responsibility so that students can problem solve on their own and independently apply reading skills taught (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers model how to use informational text reading strategies that help students grasp higher mental functions and work beyond their current development.

Bandura's social cognitive theory supports the premise that learning is influenced by modeling and "most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (Bandura, 1971, p. 5). This is especially true when using strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. In fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms, the teacher provides the necessary modeling of the appropriate strategy to help students identify text structures in informational text, activate their prior knowledge of a topic, and construct meaning from vocabulary. With adequate and sufficient ways of modeling how to construct meaning from vocabulary, such as with the use of context clues, students learn and move on to new tasks. Modeling shortens the amount of time a student needs to learn a task.

The findings also revealed how the social cognitive theory was prevalent and necessary to teach the comprehension of informational text. Teachers modeled how to chunk and closely read long complex passages and to identify text structures within these passages. They also modeled how to use context clues to construct meaning from text and to summarize informational text using the main idea of each paragraph. This supports prior research that lists modeling as a widely recognized an effective tool for building student proficiency and skills (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in this study also relied on the use of modeling to determine their students' background knowledge of a topic by asking questions that helped students connect their previous life and learning experiences to the text.

This multi-case study sheds further light on the scaffolding of complex texts above the students' grade level. There is little research that supports scaffolding of complex text above students' reading levels (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Previous research focused on planned scaffolds or supports provided across settings but did not take the immediate needs of the learner into consideration in texts at the students' reading level (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). Prior studies found that scaffolding is beneficial to students, but more research was needed to better understand the concept of interactional scaffolding and how it is beneficial to help students comprehend informational text that is above their grade level. Teachers in this study provided face-to-face scaffolding between themselves and the students and took into consideration the learner's needs throughout the lesson. This type of interactional scaffolding adds and extends the research to include how teachers provide scaffolds when teaching informational text that is above the students' grade level.

Empirical

This study extends the previous research on the topic by focusing on what fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools feel are effective strategies for teaching the comprehension of informational text. These findings gave a voice to teachers and allowed them to share their experiences with teaching reading to their upper elementary students. This study diverges from previous research because it focuses on reading strategies for fourth- and fifth-grade students specifically in Title 1 schools. Previous empirical research is quantitative in nature and one qualitative study did not address the fourth- and fifth-grade students. At present, the research base at the elementary level is lacking (Welsh et al., 2019).

The findings also revealed how the social cognitive theory was prevalent and necessary to teach the comprehension of informational text. Teachers modeled how to chunk and closely read long complex passages and to identify text structures within these passages. They also modeled how to use context clues to construct meaning from text and to summarize informational using the main idea of each paragraph. This supports prior research that lists modeling as a widely recognized an effective tool for building student proficiency and skills (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in this study also relied on the use of modeling to determine their students' background knowledge of a topic by asking questions that helped students connect their previous life and learning experiences to the text.

The findings of this research study add to the prior research by focusing on two grades at the elementary level—fourth and fifth grades. Teachers reported that reading becomes increasingly difficult at this grade level due to longer passages, unfamiliar topics, and complex vocabulary. The findings of this research study shed light on specific reading strategies teachers in these grades use to help students understand the organization of informational text. Previous

research has not focused specifically on these two grade levels and the strategies teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text. By focusing specifically on these two grades, these findings bring about a new understanding of the practices of fourth- and-fifth grade teachers in Title 1 schools and the reading strategies they use.

Implications

The findings from this multi-case study revealed the reading strategies used by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who teach the comprehension of informational text and can benefit teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. The data from this study can shape the practices and the specific reading strategies of teachers and can lead to greater comprehension of informational text. This section discusses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications that emerged from this study.

Theoretical Implications

This study used Vygotsky's (1934/1986, 1978) sociocultural theory and Bandura's (1971) social cognitive theory as frameworks to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. The questions for this study were purposely designed to obtain knowledge specific to the teaching of informational text and to acquire strategies used to identify text structures, determine prior knowledge, and vocabulary meaning. The data gathered through the virtual semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant lesson plans revealed that, in spite of teaching in a virtual environment during 2020–2021 due to COVID-19, fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools use specific reading strategies when teaching the comprehension of informational text. An analysis of the data showed that the strategies teachers are using to teach informational text comprehension align with the theoretical knowledge of

scaffolding (Bruner, 1978), a gradual release of responsibility (Vygotsky, 1978) and modeling (Bandura, 1971).

According to Vygotsky, all knowledge builds upon previous knowledge, and it is the integration of all knowledge that equates to true learning (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978). Teachers' ability to ask deep questions to determine a student's prior knowledge confirms this tenet. Students are obtaining knowledge of informational text topics by combining existing knowledge with new knowledge. This social framework also supports learners by using their strengths and ideas and allows discussions with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

Bandura's (1971) theory supports the premise that learning is influenced through modeling and "most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (Bandura, 1971, p. 5). Data from participants related an understanding of this premise as shown through the use of modeling how to answer text-dependent questions related to main idea, making inferences, and drawing conclusions. Participants also modeled how to chunk and closely read informational text. Modeling of the use of anchor charts, graphic organizers, and writing samples depicting text structures was also used by participants. Other examples of modeling used by participants included breaking words apart to show roots and affixes, using context clues, and summarizing text.

Data collected also reflected a gradual release of skills as students became more independent with applying new reading skills. This gradual release of responsibility is correlated to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Participants shared how they allow students to help them apply a strategy, help each other apply a strategy, and finally apply the strategy independently. Due to the complexities of informational text, teachers felt it was

their responsibility to extend the students' thinking. The teacher's responsibility is to extend the students' thinking within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Empirical Implications

Many students attending schools eligible for Title 1 funding are from families in poverty and at risk for negative outcomes (Hirn et al., 2018). Previous studies on informational text comprehension strategies and elementary students do not focus on fourth- and fifth-grade students in Title 1 schools. This study extends the previous research by doing so. Data collected in this study from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of lesson plans confirm that \ many students in Grades 4 and 5 in Title 1 schools are reading well below grade level. Students' ability to identify text structures in informational text and construct meaning from vocabulary is important to teachers and was evident in their responses to the reading strategies they teach. The strategies and practices demonstrate that participants have an understanding of many of the strategies necessary to comprehend informational text. Teachers reported several strategies that include close reading, summarizing, main idea, making inferences and drawing conclusions, modeling, use of text structure signal words, questioning, making connections, using writing models, and graphic organizers. They also discussed using drawings to help construct meaning from vocabulary.

According to Fisher and Frey (2016), close reading is one of the instructional strategies that can be used effectively to help students meet the challenges of complex informational text. Close reading involves multiple reading of selected passages of texts with students delving deeper into the text to analyze vocabulary and meaning of the passages. This research highlights the importance of teaching close reading skills through evidence of students reading selected informational text several times, annotating the text through use of symbols, and summarizing

information in the margin to help in their comprehension and to answer text-dependent questions. The importance of this strategy is supported by the participants' implementation of it in their lessons.

This research also supports the importance of the use of questioning through collaborative conversations. Research suggests teacher questioning follows a continuum, starting with questions at the word level and advancing to questions that require more critical thinking that results in a cumulative comprehension of the text (Degener & Berne, 2017). Teachers in this study stressed the importance of asking questions as well as encouraging questions among students to help them in their understanding of informational text. Students ask questions during close reads and when summarizing text. Student-led questions can lead to rigorous textual analysis (Santori & Belfatti, 2017). Teachers ask questions to help determine a student's prior knowledge of a topic and to determine what scaffolds are needed for instruction. Questioning through collaborative conversations consolidates students' thinking (Fisher & Frey, 2016).

This study supported the importance of the use of text structure strategies in helping students understand complex informational text. Informational text is often difficult for fourth and fifth graders because of its technical vocabulary and unfamiliar content. Learning to recognize the structure in informational text may help students focus on important information in a particular passage (Roehling et al., 2017). Empirical research suggests teaching signal words as an effective strategy for helping students identify the structures in text. This helps provide a framework for understanding the text (Roehling et al., 2017). Teachers in this study stated they teach a variety of signal words and phrases to indicate whether a passage is cause and effect, compare and contrast, or sequence.

Graphic organizers are also used to record important information from text and illustrate how information can be organized in a meaningful way (Roehling et al., 2017). Teachers in this study modeled filling out empty graphic organizers alongside reading passages to show students the importance of this strategy in helping them comprehend their reading. Teachers reportedly use graphic organizers for organizing sequence passages and to show the relations between cause(s) and effect(s). In addition, previous empirical research suggests using writing strategies to help students identify text structures. Using these strategies may empower students in their understanding of the text. Teachers in this study reported showing models of informational text that contained the text feature being studied and writing sample paragraphs to illustrate a particular text feature. Evidence of these practices being used by teachers supports the importance of these strategies.

Current research indicates that informational text places unique demands on readers in terms of content, vocabulary, text structures, and comprehension processes (Liebfreund & Conradi, 2016). Children are expected to uncover the meaning of many technical, content area words, deal with unfamiliar topics and non-narrative text structures, and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills (Schugar & Dreher, 2017). Data collected during this study related to the literature as teachers shared similar concerns. During their interviews, several teachers discussed the challenges of teaching reading to students who were reading several grades below their current grade and experienced difficulty with the content vocabulary and organization of informational text. Teachers also reported during their focus group sessions that they had received limited ongoing professional development on effective reading strategies for comprehending informational text. While the strategies presented by the participants in this study are research based, school administrators could benefit from the data in this study to help

inform them about the need for professional development specifically targeted for upper elementary students in Title 1 schools. The study suggests that the reading strategies presented in the research and used by the teacher participants are necessary to help students comprehend complex informational text.

Practical Implications

This research study has practical implications that can benefit teachers, coaches, and administrators who are interested in reading achievement for students in Title 1 schools. The data in this study related to reading strategies teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text. The challenges students and teachers face include poor reading skills, increasingly complex text, and unfamiliar topics. Teacher interviews, discussions, and analysis of lesson plans revealed teachers help students meet these challenges by using evidenced-based strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. Administrators can use the results of this study to plan more effective professional development opportunities for teachers that address the comprehension of informational text. Teachers in other schools can use the strategies shared in this study to better inform their teaching practices. Title 1 reading coaches can share the strategies presented in this study with classroom teachers.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitation for this study is that I selected four different Title 1 schools within one school district. I chose four different schools to represent a sample of the Title 1 schools in the district. The location of this study was a limitation. The study was conducted based on a decision to select four Title 1 schools in one school district through online recruitment using a recruitment flyer. My intent was to interview teacher participants in person; however, due to COVID-19 restrictions, I conducted all semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews

online. I chose a multi-case design for this study because case study involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2014). The participants in this study were a limitation as they represented a small number of individuals who were willing to participate in this study. There were 11 participants who willingly shared with the researcher the reading strategies that they typically use to teach comprehension of informational text with their fourth- and fifth-grade students. Since the sample size was small and participants were recruited online, it may be difficult to generalize these findings to the experiences of all fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on strategies teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text to fourth- and fifth-grade students should be conducted in non-Title 1 schools. It would be useful to see the experiences of teachers who serve a different population of students. Also, it would be useful to see other reading programs used and to look at different lesson plans to determine how different teachers utilize the reading strategies presented in empirical research. Schools in rural communities are usually smaller than schools in urban areas and have smaller student-to-teacher ratios. The reading block in these schools may be structured differently.

Students with disabilities often struggle with reading comprehension. Further research on strategies teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text should involve differentiating which strategies work best for students with reading disabilities. Students with reading disabilities may benefit from many of the same strategies used by teachers in this study; however, it would be beneficial to know which strategies are most useful. Differentiating strategies for students with disabilities will allow teachers to plan explicit and meaningful instruction.

This study was also conducted at a time when schools across the nation were closed due to COVID-19. This study could be conducted at a time when schools are in session and teachers are providing reading instruction in a typical classroom under normal teaching conditions. In a classroom setting, researchers would be able to see teachers and students interacting with each other. Future studies could also employ the use of observation as a data collection method. Reading lesson plans could be followed and annotated as teachers facilitated instruction. Although this study provided insight into many of the research-based reading strategies fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text, additional strategies need to be studied to improve the educational outcomes of students in Title 1 schools. Research suggests that reciprocal teaching is also a strategy that can be used to increase the comprehension of informational text. Additional research needs to be done on the use of this strategy, as well as using the informational text read-aloud with this population of students.

This study focused on the specific reading strategies used by Title 1 teachers; future research could explore the effectiveness of these strategies from the students' perspective. This study needs to be replicated to examine the perspective of students and which strategies they feel are most helpful in understanding informational text. Future studies should also seek to understand how students at these grade levels use these strategies and how often during the reading block. Conducting student interviews will allow researchers to gather rich data on this phenomenon.

Summary

This study examined the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. Participants included 11 fourth- and fifth-grade teachers recruited with a participant flyer through

social media teacher groups. Data were collected through online semi-structured interviews, two online focus group sessions, and coded using Stake (2006) individual and cross-case analysis. Document analysis consisted of analyzing lesson plans. The findings indicated that fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use a variety of strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. Students can learn to navigate complex informational text when teachers use specific teaching strategies. Teachers use these strategies to help students summarize passages and answer text-dependent questions after reading. These strategies include close reading, questioning, and summarizing. Students do not normally gravitate towards informational text, and teachers must find ways to engage them and determine what they already know about a new topic. Despite the challenges of teaching online during a pandemic, teachers used evidence-based strategies effectively to help their students comprehend informational text.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 31, 2021

Candice Smith
Gail Collins

Re: Modification - IRB-FY20-21-516 A MULTI-CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE PRACTICES OF FOURTH-AND FIFTH-GRADE TEACHERS IN TITLE 1 SCHOOLS WHO USE SPECIFIC READING STRATEGIES TO TEACH THE COMPREHENSION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Dear Candice Smith, Gail Collins:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY20-21-516 A MULTI-CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE PRACTICES OF FOURTH-AND FIFTH-GRADE TEACHERS IN TITLE 1 SCHOOLS WHO USE SPECIFIC READING STRATEGIES TO TEACH THE COMPREHENSION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXT.

Decision: Exempt

Your request to recruit study participants by placing a flyer on four online teacher groups has been approved. Thank you for submitting your flyer for our review and documentation. A final version of your flyer can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Study Candidate:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you choose to participate, I will ask that you complete the following: participate in an interview and focus group session with other participants in the study. It should take approximately forty-five minutes to an hour to complete the face to face interview and one hour for the focus group. All interviews and focus groups will be conducted virtually using Zoom. The interview and focus group session will transpire over a two-month period. I am also asking that after the virtual interview, you provide one copy of a reading lesson plan whereby you used informational text for instruction. Your participation will be completely confidential, and no personal, identifying information will be included in any reports. I will replace all names in all reports with pseudonyms.

To participate, visit https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CSRZB7C to complete a short screening survey. I will use this survey as a means for you to let me know that you are interested in participating in the study and to ensure that you meet all of the criteria for participation in the study. If you are unable to access this survey for any reason or prefer a hard copy of the survey, you may contact me at the phone number or email listed below. Please have this survey completed no later than one week of receipt.

I will provide you with an informed consent document after you complete the screening survey and I have selected you for participation in the study. The informed consent document will contain additional information about my research, and I will ask that you complete it prior to the interview.

If you have any questions about the study or your participation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Candice M. Smith
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

A Multi-Case Study Examining the Practices of Fourth and Fifth-Grade Teachers in Title 1 Schools Who Use Specific Reading Strategies to Teach the Comprehension of Informational Text

- Are you a fourth or fifth grade teacher?
- Do you have a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience?
- Are you currently teaching general or special education?
- Do you hold an elementary education or special education K-12 certification or equivalent?
- Do you teach in a Title 1 school?

If you answered **yes** to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in this study.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text.

Participants will be asked to participate in a 45-minute interview and a one-hour focus group session using **Zoom**. Participants will also be asked to share a copy of a reading lesson plan.

Participants will not be compensated. Benefits to society include equipping fourth- and fifth-grade students with the strategies they need to read and understand informational text, prepare them for middle and high school, and ultimately college and the work force.

Your name will be collected as part of your participation, but your identity will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary.
Please complete the screening survey at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CSRZB7C if you would like to participate in this study.

Candice Smith, a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.
Please contact Candice Smith at [redacted] or cmbanks2@liberty.edu for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

Appendix D: Screening Survey

1. How many years have you been employed as a teacher?

- Less than 2 years
- 2-4 years
- 4 years or more

2. Do you currently teach general or special education?

- Yes
- No

3. Are you currently teaching fourth or fifth-grade students?

- Yes
- No

4. Do you currently hold an elementary education or K-12 special education certification or the equivalent?

- Yes
- No

5. Are you currently teaching in a Title 1 school?

- Yes
- No

6. What is your email address? _____

Appendix E: Accept/Reject Email

January 2, 2021
(Recipient)
(Title)
(Company)
(Address 1)
(Address 2)
(Address 3)

Dear (Recipient):

Thank you so much for completing the screening survey related to my study on examining the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. Based on the information you provided, you qualify as a participant in this study. Before beginning the research process, I will need you to review the consent form and let me know if you have any questions. Please sign the consent form and email the form to me before the interview and focus group session.

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study.

Candice Smith
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

January 2, 2021
(Recipient)
(Title)
(Company)
(Address 1)
(Address 2)
(Address 3)

Dear (Recipient):

Thank you for completing the screening survey related to my study on examining the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. Based on the information you provided, you do not qualify as a participant in this study.

Thank you for your time.

Candice Smith
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Appendix F: Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: A Multi-Case Study Examining the Practices of Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Teachers in Title 1 Schools Who Use Specific Reading Strategies to Teach the Comprehension of Informational Text.
Principal Investigator: Candice Smith, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be employed as a certified fourth or fifth-grade general or special education teacher in a Title 1 elementary school. You must also have been teaching for a minimum of two years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.
Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to examine the practices of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools who use specific reading strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview. The interview should last approximately forty-five minutes and will take place through the Zoom video conferencing platform. The interview will be recorded in order to create a verbatim transcript.
2. Participate in a focus group. The focus group should last approximately forty-five minutes and will take place through the Zoom video conferencing platform. The focus group will be recorded to create a verbatim transcript.
3. Provide one copy of a reading lesson plan. All names and other identifying information must be removed.
4. Data will be returned to participants to check for accuracy and alignment with their experiences.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive direct benefits for taking part in this study. However, participants who take part in the focus group may benefit from the collaborative discussions pertaining to informational text reading strategies. Benefits to society include students who are skilled in reading and comprehending text about the world around them and who graduate high school and are college and career ready.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- All participants will be assigned a pseudonym. The interviews will be conducted via Zoom. The researcher will be in a secure room where conversations are not easily heard.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- The confidentiality of the research will remain with the researcher. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

There are no costs to you to be a part of this study.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher does not have any conflicts of interest in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Henrico County Public Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you part from focus group data,] will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. [Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.]

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Candice M. Smith. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gail Collins, at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

Appendix G: Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself by including your name, educational background, years of teaching experience, and years of teaching at this site.

2. What is your philosophy about the teaching of reading, particularly informational text, at your grade level?

3. What type of training have you received to teach students how to comprehend informational text?

4. Describe the reading instruction that is typically included in your reading block?

5. Do you teach informational text differently than you teach fictional text? If so, how?

6. Do you select text to use in your instruction, and, if so, give examples of the informational text you use in class?

7. What opportunities do your students have to read informational text and to practice the skills they have learned?

8. How often do you use informational text as your read-aloud book, and what types of text do you choose?

9. What types of leveled informational text are you using with your guided reading groups, and how often?

10. How do you prepare your students to read and comprehend informational text?

11. How do you activate students' prior knowledge of informational text topics during the target reading lesson?

12. What informational text structures do you teach at your grade level, and how do you teach them?

13. In your opinion, is it more effective to teach single strategies separately to students, or several strategies together? Why?

14. What are the challenges in teaching informational text comprehension strategies?

Appendix H: Focus Group Questions

1. What informational text reading comprehension strategies were your students familiar with prior to your class, and how did they use them?

2. How do you prepare your students for the informational passages they will encounter on the Virginia Standards of Learning English Assessment?

3. How do you activate students' prior knowledge while reading informational text?

4. How do you integrate the use of graphic organizers and concept maps during the teaching of informational text comprehension?

5. How do you model how to locate information when answering text-dependent questions?

6. What scaffolds do you provide when teaching students how to locate answers to text-dependent questions during and after reading informational text?

7. How do you make your nonfiction read-alouds interactive?

8. What text structures do you feel are the most critical for students to be able to identify in informational text at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels?

9. What strategies do you use to teach your students how to identify text structure in informational text?

10. How do you teach the complex vocabulary encountered in informational text?

11. What steps do you take to model how to closely read an informational text passage?

Appendix I: Reflexive Journal

2/5/2019	Reflection on topic of study: I am currently teaching in a Title 1 school, and I have taught reading to upper-level elementary students in previous years; I have my own issues and concerns regarding the teaching of complex informational text to students in Title 1 schools.
2/23/2019	I am hoping I will hear back from the district I selected to hopefully interview their fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. Interested in finding out about their reading strategies.
4/1/2019	This district may not work. Lots of questions about chapter 3—especially the procedures section. Scheduled WebEx with chair.
5/20/2019	I have not been doing well in the program at this point and having family issues. SOE is requesting a copy of proposal to see where I am at. Currently not enrolled in the program. I still plan on looking into just using Title 1 schools for my study. Hopefully, this time off will allow me to brainstorm a few things.
8/28/2019	I will be out of the program for a bit. I am thinking I should have just stopped with the Education Specialist degree.
9/20/2019	While taking a break, I'm still trying to secure a district for approval.
9/30/2019	Just closed on a new house with husband! My spirits are lifted.
5/31/2020	I am back in the program and I'm really hoping I can do it this time.
7/2/2020	Husband and I separated; I am heartbroken; boys and I moved out.
10/15/20	I am working to make edits so that I can defend soon. I'd really like to defend by 2021. I want to end this year on a good note.
12/31/2020	Last day of the year and I met my defense date! Looking forward to final defense in 2021! Praise God. Beauty for ashes!

Appendix J: Worksheet One

Worksheet One: Themes

Theme 1 What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach the comprehension of informational text? The teachers in this study used a variety of evidence-based strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text, as outlined in the literature. They include close reading, modeling, think-aloud, questioning, and scaffolding. They also reported using strategies to teach main idea, identifying text structures in paragraphs, making inferences, and drawing conclusions.
Theme 2 What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach students how to identify text structures found in informational text? The teachers in this study reported using the following text structures: description, sequence/chronological order, problem/solution, cause/effect, compare/contrast and proposition/support. Teachers also reported modeling how to locate structure signal words to help students identify text structure in paragraphs, use graphic organizers, and writing models.
Theme 3 What reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational text topic? Teachers believe a students' prior knowledge on an informational topic plays a vital role in their comprehension of the text. During the interviews, teachers expressed some students' reluctancy to read the text because of the vocabulary and unfamiliar topic. Teachers reported using deep questioning to determine a students' prior knowledge of a topic. The also reported guiding the students into making connections. The connections were text to text, text to self, and text to world. Teachers also modeled how to scan the text features and do walkthroughs of a book or text to determine connections to the new topic.
Theme 4 To what extent do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools implement reading strategies that help students construct meaning from vocabulary presented in informational text? Teachers reported modeling how to use context clues to determine the meaning of words, front loading vocabulary, teaching word parts (roots/affixes), and graphic organizers such as the Frayer Model to help students construct meaning from vocabulary.

Note. Adapted from *Multiple Case Study Analysis* by Robert E. Stake, 2006, Worksheet 1, p. 5. Copyright 2006 by Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission of Guilford Press (see Appendix S).

Appendix K: Worksheet Two – Site 1

Worksheet Two Analysis Notes
Site 1

General Impression of the Case:

Marigold, Zinnia, Azalea, Lily, and Chrysanthemum are fourth-grade teachers who use specific reading strategies to teach informational text. They all agree that informational text is challenging for their students because of the complex vocabulary and text structures. Violet and Daisy are fifth-grade teachers and feel their students are not familiar with most informational topics introduced.

Findings of the Case:

Lily emphasized having her students reread the text. She also has them highlight key words in informational text. When answering questions, Lily also tells her students to make a connection between what they chose for their answer and what they read. If they can't make a connection, their answer is probably wrong. Zinnia reported modeling close reading strategies by showing her students how to annotate the text using symbols, label evidence and answers and ask and answer questions in the margins of the text. Chrysanthemum reported having her students take notes on the important parts of each paragraph, another close reading strategy. She and Daisy said they think aloud about how they would summarize a text, stating the main idea contained in each of the paragraphs. Violet went on to say when the main idea is implied and not stated, she models how to teach her students how to search for words that are repeated, which signal the main idea. All teachers use modeling to teach their students strategies. Violet stressed the importance of drawing on background knowledge to help students make inferences and draw conclusions. This helps clear up misconceptions about vocabulary and to focus on what the author is saying in the text.

Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers alike have taught the following text features: description, sequence/chronological order, problem/solution, cause/effect, compare/contrast and proposition/support. Teachers agreed that there is a hierarchy of complexity in teaching the text structures and they feel it's best to teach description first. Teachers described teaching text structure identification in a number of ways, including using text structure signal words, graphic organizers, and sample writing models. Lily uses a graphic organizer alongside the passage so students can see where she is getting the information. Azalea uses the graphic organizer tool as a gradual release; she models part of the graphic organizer and they work together before working independently. Daisy uses a writing model to introduce text features, and Petunia uses writing paragraphs with the specific text structure as a pre-reading strategy. Teachers at this site use questioning, studying text features, and making connection as strategies to determine a student's prior knowledge of a topic.

Azalea and Chrysanthemum use the strategy of front loading to help students construct meaning from unfamiliar vocabulary. Zinnia stressed the importance of teaching root words and affixes to help students construct meaning from vocabulary. The Frayer model is utilized by Daisy as a

strategy to help her students construct meaning from the science vocabulary they encounter when reading cross-curricular texts. Both fourth- and fifth-grade teachers at this site indicate the use of clos reading strategies in their lesson plans, as well as ways to construct meaning from text. Fourth grade teachers plan the use of graphic organizers to determine a students' prior knowledge of text.

Relevance to Themes:

Theme 1: x Theme 2: x Theme 3: x Theme 4: x

Uniqueness of Case:

Daisy teaches both reading and science. Zinnia and Daisy were also participants in a year-long teacher residency program where they were able to observe the reading skills of a veteran teacher. Chrysanthemum teaches in a collaborative classroom. All participants at this site taught online this year due to COVID-19 and school closures.

Commentary:

Chrysanthemum and Marigold teach alongside each other in an inclusion classroom. In the virtual setting, these teachers used sites such as Readworks.org, Epic, CommonLit, and Newsela to have the students practice and apply the reading strategies they had been taught. The students were able to use close reading symbols on the text using the Kami annotating tools. Zinnia uploaded informational text passages using Class Kick.

Appendix L: Worksheet Two – Site 2

Worksheet Two Analysis Notes
Site 2

General Impression of the Case:

Poppy and Petunia are both special education teachers. Petunia has 21 years of teaching experience and Petunia is working towards an endorsement in administration and supervision.

Findings of the Case:

Poppy stated modeling close reading strategies with her students was the only way to get them to understand informational text. She models how to skim the text and jot down words on sticky notes, chunk paragraphs and do several readings before asking text-dependent questions. Petunia says she uses the modeling strategy to help her students analyze longer passages by showing them how to scan headings, pictures, and labels in the text. She thinks aloud as she is rereading text. When identifying text structures in text, Poppy explained that she uses writing as a pre-reading strategy by showing her students examples of writings that contains specific text features. Poppy and Petunia both use the questioning strategy to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational topic. Petunia shared an example of modeling the use of a 5 W's graphic organizer to teach her students how to summarize text. Petunia uses simple examples to help her fourth graders understand inferences and drawing conclusions. To assist her students with constructing meaning from vocabulary, Poppy use the frontloading strategy because most of the students she teaches are reading well below grade level. Poppy also taught her students how to use context clues to construct meaning from unknown vocabulary. In their lesson plans, Poppy and Petunia indicate student reading of informational text and the application of close reading strategies.

Relevance to Themes:

Theme 1: x Theme 2: x Theme 3: x Theme 4: x

Uniqueness of Case:

Petunia teaches in a collaborative classroom. She and the general education teacher share roles in teaching reading. Both Petunia and Poppy have taught online this year due to COVID-19.

Commentary:

Poppy and Petunia felt that some of their students were distracted during reading this year, due to sitting at the computer for periods of time and reading from a screen.

Appendix M: Worksheet Two – Site 3

Worksheet Two Analysis Notes
Site 3

General Impression of the Case:

Rose uses various strategies to teach her students how to comprehend informational text. She feels her students can enjoy informational text, but often find it boring. Rose tries to find topics that relate to their everyday life.

Findings of the Case:

Rose teaches her students how to identify text structures by modeling how to examine the main idea of a paragraph. The first sentence, or topic sentence, often gives a clue as to what text structure is being used. She teaches students to connect their previous experiences and who they are to the text they are reading. In her lesson plan, Rose indicates she has her students complete a graphic organizer to help them determine the gist and meaning of unfamiliar word and phrases in informational text.

Relevance to Themes:

Theme 1: x Theme 2: x Theme 3: x Theme 4: ___

Uniqueness of Case:

Rose has an instructional assistant in her class. They each divide the students during reading stations. The students practice reading and applying strategies to informational text using online passages. Rose taught her students entirely online this year due to COVID-19 and school closures.

Commentary:

Rose says she must be animated with her students and bring as much life as possible to her lessons. Her students generally prefer narrative text, so she has to find various ways to engage them with informational readings. Rose says she also shows videos from Flocabulary to introduce new informational text topics.

Appendix N: Worksheet Two – Site 4

Worksheet Two Analysis Notes
Site 4

General Impression of the Case:

Jasmine models how to use close reading strategies with her students. Her students use sticky notes to write down questions they may want to ask before, during, and after reading. Jasmine feels it is important for students to be able to identify the main idea of a passage. She uses a hamburger graphic organizer to model main idea. She models how to break longer passages down when inferring and drawing conclusions because her students have difficulty with these two skills. She models how to use highlighters to highlight inference clues in the text. Jasmine teaches her students how to use context clues to construct meaning from vocabulary. She models how to underline unfamiliar words and to look at words around that word for help with meaning. Jasmine also teaches her students how to use a Frayer Model as a visual for students to extend their knowledge of vocabulary words. Jasmine asks her questions about what they are about to read or are reading to determine their knowledge of an informational topic. Making connections to other articles and text is also important.

Findings of the Case:

Jasmine teaches main idea, making inferences, and drawing conclusions to teach her students how to comprehend informational text. She also teaches her students how to closely read passages and use close reading annotations when reading longer passages and graphic organizers when teaching vocabulary. Jasmine also asks questions to determine her students' prior knowledge of an informational topic. She uses context clues to help her students construct meaning from unfamiliar vocabulary words. Her students use a Frayer Model to extend their knowledge of vocabulary.

Relevance to Themes:

Theme 1: x Theme 2: Theme 3: x Theme 4: x

Uniqueness of Case:

Jasmine taught virtually for the 2020–2021 school year due to COVID-19 and school closures.

Commentary:

Jasmine uses informational text from a site called Readwork.org. The site contains longer passages the students can annotate online.

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Appendix O: Worksheet Three

Worksheet Three—Merged Findings
A Guideline to Make Assertions for the Final Report

	THEMES			
Creek Run Elementary School	1	2	3	4
Finding 1 Strategies—teachers emphasized modeling strategy to closely read informational text. Rereading, highlighting, annotating, note-taking.	x			
Finding 2 Summarizing—Chrysanthemum and Daisy use think-aloud strategy to model summarizing and main idea; Violet helps students draw on their background knowledge to make inferences and draw conclusions	x			
Finding 3 Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers teach text feature identification and uses in several ways: description, sequence/chronological order, problem/solution/cause/effect, compare/contrast, and proposition/support. Teachers use text structure signal words and sample writing models to teach text structures		x		
Finding 4 Word Meaning: Azalea and Chrysanthemum front load vocabulary to help with constructing meaning from text; Zinnia teaches roots and affixes during vocabulary instruction; teachers use the Frayer Model with science related and other vocabulary.				x
Finding 5 Background knowledge: Teachers use the questioning strategy to determine background knowledge, study text features, and help students make connections	x	x		

Lake Hawk Elementary School	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
Finding 1 Strategies: Teachers model the close reading strategy; Poppy models how to chunk and skim text; sticky notes; analyze longer texts; scan pictures/labels in text; Teacher uses think-aloud strategy while rereading text; Teachers use the questioning strategy to determine prior knowledge of a topic; 5 W's graphic organizer to summarize text; Petunia models inference and drawing conclusions with examples	x			
Finding 2 Text Organization: Teachers use writing to show examples of text structures		x		
Finding 3 Word Meaning: Poppy: Front loading of vocabulary and use of context clues				x
South Park Elementary School				
Finding 1 Strategies: Identifying text structures by modeling how to examine main idea for clues	x	x		
Finding 2 Background Knowledge: Rose teaches students to connect previous experiences/who they are to text			x	
Finding 3 Word Meaning: Rose teaches the use of a graphic organizer to determine the gist of unfamiliar words/phrases				x

Big Run Elementary School	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
Finding 1 Strategies: Jasmine teaches main idea, inferences and drawing conclusions through modeling; models how to closely read a passage; annotation symbols, questions on sticky notes before, during, and after reading; questioning strategy to determine prior knowledge	x		x	
Finding 2 Word Meaning: use of context clues for unfamiliar vocabulary; models use of a Frayer Model to extend knowledge of vocabulary				x
Finding 3 Background Knowledge: Jasmine asks questions and helps students make connections to other text and articles to determine prior knowledge			x	

Appendix P: Worksheet Four

Theme Based Assertions Matrix
A Compilation of Merged Important Findings

Merged Findings	Site	Themes
Theme One: Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use close reading, modeling, think-aloud, questioning, main idea, making inferences, drawing conclusions, and summarizing strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. The teachers had varying levels of training teaching these skills using informational text.	1, 2, 3, 4	1
Theme Two: Two specific strategies teachers use to identify text structures in informational text is the use of text structure signal words and writing samples that model the type of text structure being studied. Another strategy used in the classroom is studying the main idea in the topic sentence to get an idea of how the text is organized. Teachers use graphic organizers specific to the text feature.	1, 2, 3	2
Theme Three: Teachers use the strategies of questioning and making connections to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational text topic. Teachers report students have more background knowledge they can realize. They often ask students to connect the new material to a text they have previously read, to themselves, or to the world.	1, 2, 3, 4	3
Theme 4: Teachers implement the teaching of context clues and the use of vocabulary graphic organizers to help students construct meaning from vocabulary presented in informational text. Teachers view vocabulary as one of the most challenging aspects of teaching the comprehension of informational text.	1, 2, 3, 4	4

Note. Adapted from *Multiple Case Study Analysis* by Robert E. Stake, 2006, Worksheet 5B, p. 59. Copyright 2006 by Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission of Guilford Press (see Appendix S).

Appendix Q: Worksheet Five

Multi-Case Assertions for the Final Report

Assertions	Related to Which Theme	Case Evidence
A.) All teachers interviewed believe it is important to teach reading strategies that help students comprehend informational text.	1	Use evidence from all
B.) Teaching vocabulary to students who were reading several grades below level was a challenge.	4	Jasmine, Chrysanthemum, Daisy, Petunia
C.) Informational text passages are taught better when broken down in smaller sections, or chunks.	1	Azalea, Poppy, Petunia, Chrysanthemum,
D.) Teachers model and stress the importance of closely reading informational text several times.	1	Poppy, Lily, Azalea, Jasmine, Rose,
E.) Reading strategies should not be taught in isolation.	1	Zinnia
F.) The ability to identify text structures in text helps make text easier to understand.	2	Poppy, Zinnia, Daisy, Rose, Marigold,
G.) Teachers use modeling as a key strategy for teaching the comprehension of informational text.	1	Use evidence from all
H.) Teachers help students connect new topics with their previous experiences in order to tap into their prior knowledge.	3	Petunia, Daisy, Zinnia, Chrysanthemum, Rose, Azalea, Jasmine
I.) The teachers scaffold the teaching of reading strategies.	1	Azalea, Zinnia, Daisy, Rose, Poppy
J.) Teachers' lesson plans support the use of graphic organizers with teaching informational text.	1	Use evidence from all

K.) Teachers model how to construct meaning from complex vocabulary.	4	Use evidence from all
L.) Teachers use writing as a strategy to teach text structure identification	2	Daisy, Marigold
M.) Students practice vocabulary skills during independent reading	4	Zinnia, Jasmine, Daisy, Rose,
N.) Teachers use visuals to determine prior knowledge	3	Rose, Chrysanthemum,
O.) Teachers model how to use text features to help with comprehension	1	Zinnia, Lily, Azalea, Petunia, Violet

Note. Adapted from *Multiple Case Study Analysis* by Robert E. Stake, 2006, Worksheet 6, p. 73. Copyright 2006 by Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission of Guilford Press (see Appendix S).

Appendix R: Worksheet One – Theme Conclusions

Theme 1 What informational text reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach comprehension of informational text? Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools use a variety of strategies to teach the comprehension of informational text. These strategies include close reading, summarizing, modeling, think-aloud, QAR, scaffolding, questioning, and strategies used to teach the skills of main idea, making inferences, and drawing conclusions.
Theme 2 What informational text reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to teach students how to identify the text structures found in informational text? Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers model how to identify text structure signal words in passages that indicate the text structure being used. Teachers also teach and model the use of graphic organizers that are specific to each text structure and model the writing text that depicts a particular text feature using the think-aloud strategy.
Theme 3 Which informational text reading strategies do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers use to determine students' prior knowledge of an informational text topic? Teachers use deep questioning to determine what a student already knows about an informational topic. They also use the strategy of making connections by guiding students to make text-to-text connections, text-to-self connections, and text-to-world connections, as well as use of graphic organizers such as the KWL graphic organizer. Teachers also model how to skim text features to help students determine what they might already know about a topic.
Theme 4 To what extend do fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in Title 1 schools implement reading strategies that help students construct meaning from vocabulary presented in informational texts? Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers model the use of context clues in sentences to help students construct meaning from vocabulary presented in informational text. Teachers also teach the use of graphic organizers, such as the Frayer Model, to extend knowledge of vocabulary, frontload vocabulary when necessary, and teach students roots and affixes to help understand word parts.

Appendix S: Permission To Use Robert E. Stake's Worksheets

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Appendix T: Audit Trail

Date	Entry
4/20/2020	Permission granted by Guilford Press to use Robert Stake's Worksheets.
6/15/2020	Received email that district of interest has put a hold on external research. Reached out to district #2—must wait until district decides how schools will reopen
7/28/2020	Proposal sent to SOE for Qualitative Director Review
8/27/2020	Applied to district #3
9/14/2020	Received approval from district #3
11/24/2020	Proposal approved by Dr. Park, SOE
12/10/2020	Proposal Defense
3/3/2021	IRB Approval
3/10/2021	18 email invites sent to 28 teachers in district #3
3/10/2021	Received 2 screening surveys from district #3
3/17/2021	Follow up email/consent form sent to two teachers that completed screening
3/26/2021	IRB Modification submitted
3/31/2021	IRB Modification approval
3/31/2021	Recruitment flyer posted online to 4 teacher social media sites
4/26/2021	Interview with Lily
4/28/2021	Interview with Violet
4/29/2021	Interview with Petunia
5/1/2003	Interview with Zinnia
5/3/2021	Interview with Marigold
5/3/2021	Interview with Jasmine
5/3/2021	Interview with Azalea
5/4/2021	Interview with Daisy
5/5/2021	Interview with Rose
5/6/2021	Transcript sent to Lily for member checking
5/8/2021	Transcript sent to Violet for member checking
5/11/2021	Transcript sent to Petunia for member checking

5/13/2021	Focus Group #1
5/14/2021	Transcript sent to Zinnia for member checking
5/17/2021	Transcript sent to Marigold for member checking
5/17/2021	Transcript sent to Daisy for member checking
5/17/2021	Interview with Chrysanthemum
5/18/2021	Interview with Poppy
5/18/2021	Focus Group #2
5/19/2021	Transcript sent to Jasmine for member checking
5/19/2021	Transcript sent to Rose for member checking
5/19/2021	Transcript sent to Azalea for member checking
5/21/2020	Focus Group #1 transcript sent for member checking
5/24/2021	Transcript sent to Chrysanthemum for member checking
5/26/2021	Transcript sent to Poppy for member checking
5/27/2021	Focus Group #2 transcript sent for member checking