THE INSTRUCTION OF READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES TO A GROUP OF SIXTH-GRADE ENGLISH-AS-A-FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL CONTEXT

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PEREIRA

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Trabajo de grado presentado como requisito parcial para obtener el título de Licenciado en la Enseñanza de la Lengua Inglesa

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Acknowledgements

At the end of this challenging thesis writing process, we are grateful to God for giving us the chance for better education. We realize that our professional training is only one of the numerous privileges we are blessed with.

Second of all, we would like to thank our parents and family for helping us and encouraging us to achieve a university degree. We also would like to thank Enrique Arias for being our first research teacher and advisor of the beginning stages of our project, and for staging the path of our project.

Third, we want to express thanks to Professor Maria Elisa Moorwood for her contribution and commitment to this project. Fourth, we want to also thank our professor Angela Maria Lopez who has been a brilliant mentor throughout the process of this study. Indeed, without her support we would not be here. That is why we would like to dedicate this research project to her especially who has been a delightful woman.

Resumen

En el presente estudio se diseñaron seis lecciones en las cuales se implementaron estrategias de lectura a estudiantes de sexto grado para mejorar su comprensión lectora en inglés. Nuestro estudio está enfocado en explorar la aplicación de seis estrategias a la lectura de historias cortas en inglés: lectura rápida del texto, escaneo del texto, lectura del título para formar predicciones, toma de notas, subrayado de palabras desconocidas, subrayado de información importante, y uso de imágenes para comprender el texto. El estudio se llevó a cabo en un colegio localizado en la ciudad de Pereira, Colombia. La recolección de datos se realizó a través de cuestionarios, entrevistas, y grabaciones de video. Los resultados de nuestro proyecto sugieren para la enseñanza de la lectura en inglés, los profesores deben tener un conocimiento profundo de las estrategias de lectura que van a enseñar, para así transferir ese conocimiento cognitivo a sus estudiantes de una manera efectiva. Otro resultado de nuestro proyecto sugiere que los profesores de inglés no deben menospreciar el papel del español en las clases de inglés por que la lengua materna de los estudiantes les servirá de ventaja y de apoyo para aprender y aplicar las estrategias de lectura que se les enseñen a los estudiantes. Por último, este estudio sugiere que los profesores de lengua inglesa siempre deben modelar primero a sus estudiantes como se debe aplicar una estrategia, para que así ellos sean capaces de comprenderla y de usarla de una manera más efectiva. Este documento ofrece la discusión de los resultados y las implicaciones para la enseñanza y para futuras investigaciones.

Abstract

In this study we designed and implemented reading comprehension strategy instruction to 6th-grade students in order to improve their English reading comprehension skills. Our study sought to explore the instructional application of six reading strategies to short stories: skimming text, scanning text, reading titles for predictions, taking notes, underlining unknown words, underlining important information, and using images to comprehend text. The study took place in a public school in the city of Pereira, Colombia. We collected our data through questionnaires, interviews, and video recordings of the instruction. Our findings suggest that when English teachers impart reading instruction, they first need to know how to identify and apply the reading strategies well themselves in order to effectively communicate that cognitive knowledge to the students. Another finding from our study suggests that English teachers must not disregard the role of Spanish in reading because the native language can support the students' leaning and application of reading strategies. Another suggestion from our findings is that English teachers always need to provide modeling for their students, so that students are able to comprehend and to use the strategy. The discussion of our findings, as well as the implications for instruction and research are addressed at the end of the study.

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Statement of the Problem

For English language learners in a second language context, reading English text with comprehension is a difficult skill to acquire. Olson & Land (2007) reported findings from Hakuta, Goto, Butler, & Witt (2000) to point out that English language learners in a second-language context need at least from six to ten years to be able to read and write to a level that guarantees their academic success. In traditional foreign language teaching, reading has been the most emphasized skill (Yao, 2006). Because developing reading in a second language is a challenging skill for any language learner, we focused our attention on reading in the present study. According to Yao (2006), reading is an important input for language, and is one of the most essential abilities for an EFL learner to acquire. Reading strategies are tools that enable learners to acquire high levels of text comprehension. Underwood & Person (2004) suggest that through cognitive strategies, students help themselves to construct an identity as capable learners, literate individuals who ultimately can "fend for themselves".

Today reading has been recognized as an essential skill in students´ education, whether for acquiring knowledge in their native language or foreign language. Reading in the native language is not an easy skill to develop because it entails complex cognitive processes that demand high levels of concentration and of thinking engagement from the reader. Grabe (1993) suggests that when reading, readers engage several components of reading such as automatic recognition skills, vocabulary and structural knowledge, knowledge of the structure of the text, background knowledge, synthesis and evaluation skills, and metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring. Studies with bilingual learners suggest that reading comprehension problems in the native language also affect the reading process in a foreign language (Langer, Bartolome, Vasquez, & Lucas, 1990), making reading a challenge to any learner. As Bernhard (2003) noted, "the literacy community must begin to understand the complexities of reading in languages other than English as well as the complexities of learning to read in a language when another literacy or another oral language exist in cognition" (p.116).

As the research on bilingual reading has suggested, to begin understanding the complexities of L2 reading, we must look at the skills of students in L1 reading comprehension. Latin-American students are not demonstrating high quality reading

performance compared to other countries. Tests such as the Program for International Assessment (PISA, 2006) have shown results from more than 400 fifteen-year-old school students from 57 countries in the world in different academic areas. In reading, Latin-American students´ scores were low. Countries such as Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina scored statistically significantly below the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. For instance, according to the PISA test, Chile was the Latin-American country leading in reading with a score 442 points, while Korea scored 556 points, a score that made this country the highest in the reading scale. After Chile, Uruguay scored 413, Mexico scored 410, Brazil 393, and Colombia 385, a score only five points higher than the lowest country in Latin America, Argentina (score 374). These scores suggest that in Latin America, particularly in Colombia, we need to pay attention to the reading comprehension levels of our school-age students if we want to improve their reading performance and turn Colombia into a more educationally competitive country worldwide.

While the reading situation about Colombia compared to Latino America and the world is not the best, inside the country students in the last grade of high school are not demonstrating great reading results either. The Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior (ICFES) test, taken by all Colombian high school graduates, show that "el 26,49% de la población se queda en el trabajo de la información explicita, que un 68,84% realiza lecturas mas relacionadas e inferenciales y que solo un 3,62% puede evaluar el texto de manera critica" (p.27). These reading scores indicate that most high school students can make connections and inferences when they read, but that a very small minority is able to raise questions and approach the text critically. A worrisome result from the ICFES test is that more than a quarter of the tested student population (26,49%) can only read superficially, without applying strategies to make sense of the test.

One factor that may account for the low reading skills among the school-age population in Colombia may derive from sociocultural practices of literacy in the country. Colombians may lack reading habits because reading does not seem to be a common feature in the lifestyle of Colombian people. Results from Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadisticas (DANE) show that in 2008, only 17,58% of Colombians who live in the larger cities read every day. Just 8,18% of this Colombian

population read one book in a year. That is, a very large percentage of the population in Colombia does not have regular reading habits. Moreover, statistics show that 59,18% Colombians have no interest in reading books. Statistics also reported that Colombians do not read because of lack of time (29,99%). Other statistics reported that only 6,62% of Colombians prefer to read newspapers, magazines, or comics instead of a book. These statistics make us wonder that if reading had a more significant presence in children´s lives, they would perform better in reading at school.

Poor reading comprehension abilities among Colombian students do not only affect the school-age population. Evidence from a study by Rincón (2000) who support ideas from Kalmanovitz (1989) suggests that many Colombian college graduates still have poor reading abilities. Kalmanovitz (1989) states that

> Los egresados que cuentan con estas habilidades de lectura y redacción tienen "éxito" en el mercado de trabajo, precisamente porque el nivel medio de los profesionales no cuenta con estas capacidades, con el agravante de que la incultura conduce a la pasividad, o sea, a la carencia de iniciativa para enfrentar y resolver problemas (p. 16).

Kalmanovitz´s (1989) findings show that even after graduating from the university, Colombians may have reading problems and consequently that issue affects their lives. The view of poor reading in Colombia is shared by other authors. For example, Guhl (1987) & Ocampo (1987) pointed out that Colombian students are not well prepared neither in school, nor at the university level. Reading problems are connected to writing issues. So, a poor reader may likely be a poor writer. Because most Colombian college students have reading problems, consequently their writing is also affected. As a result, not having strong literacy abilities may cause problems in students to think critically on their own.

The reading results presented here demonstrate that reading instruction aiming at deeper levels of text comprehension need to be emphasized in Colombian schools. When students have strong reading comprehension skills in the L1, these skills would possibly support the student´s L2 reading development. Cook (1992) states that all second language learners have access to their L1 while they are learning or processing the L2, thus receiving support from their skills in the L1. Cook (1992) and Upton & Thompson-Lee (2001) posit that reading in L2 is not a monolingual event. That is, when firstly acquiring a language, readers may access their L1 as they read in the L2. Thus,

many students use their L1 strategies to comprehend L2 text. In other words, second language learners do not seem to separate the knowledge they acquire in the L1 from the knowledge they build in the L2. Instead, learners consolidate the knowledge they acquire in both languages, thus being able to access information regardless of the language.

Likewise, when students do not have reading skills in the L1, it is unlikely that they can use them in the L2. When second language learners do not have reading strategies in their first language, they would probably have L2 reading comprehension problems. Thus, by acquiring reading strategies, language learners may figure out what it takes to become a good reader.

Research in English reading comprehension instruction is still sparse in Colombian EFL school contexts. Our study seeks to contribute to the understanding we need on how to serve young public school students in the area of reading comprehension.

Our Study

Our study sought to explore the reading strategy design and instruction imparted to a group of 6th – grade students in a public school in Colombia. As student-teachers, we challenged ourselves to design and implement 6 lessons that focused on teaching the children reading comprehension strategies.

The following research questions and subquestions guided the present study.

Research question:

Does the instructional application of a set of reading strategies to 6-grade public school EFL learners evidence growth in their reading comprehension?

Sub-questions:

1. What is the contribution of explicit reading strategy instruction in students´ process of reflection about reading?
2. What are the students' perceptions and awareness in relation to reading comprehension and strategy use?
3. What are the students´ attitudes towards reading in English and in Spanish?

We know that good readers use a wide variety of strategies to approach text. As MacNamara (2009) points out, reading strategies are essential, not only to successful comprehension, but to overcome reading problems. Studies on bilingual reading also show that proficient bilingual readers use a large number of strategies and are able to coordinate these strategies to reach reading comprehension in both languages. The studies by Jiménez, Garcia, & Pearson (1995, 1996) conducted with more and less proficient bilingual and monolingual students, reported that the effective readers (monolingual and bilingual) used strategies such as using context, monitoring, making inferences, invoking prior knowledge, and questioning.

The studies on bilingual reading show that there are differences between monolingual and bilingual proficient readers. Proficient bilingual readers pay more attention on unknown vocabulary in comparison to monolingual readers. Indeed, bilingual readers are capable of using a variety of techniques to construct working definitions in relation to unknown vocabulary such as using context, invoking relevant prior knowledge, inferencing, searching for cognates and translating. Proficient bilingual readers saw advantages to possessing two languages. For example, Jimenez et al. (1995) found out that Pamela, the proficient bilingual reader, used cognates in both languages to facilitate comprehension of her reading in both languages. The bilinguals who were less proficient saw their bilingualism as a hindrance. For instance, Catalina, the less proficient reader in the Jimenez et al.`s (1995) study, perceived that her knowledge of English reading facilitated her reading in Spanish but not the other way around, thus missing opportunities to use Spanish cognates to understand her English reading. She thought being bilingual "confused" her when reading, and did not take advantage of the knowledge she possessed in Spanish to address English text.

Vocabulary is a major concern among bilingual readers. The more and less proficient readers in the Jimenez et al.`s (1995, 1996) study showed a major focus on unknown words when reading text in both English and Spanish. However, the two kinds of readers approached the unknown words in different ways. Catalina's reading demonstrated that she noticed unknown words, but she did not use any strategy to unlock the meaning of the unknown vocabulary. Contrary to Catalina, Pamela showed more interest in vocabulary because she thought that learning new vocabulary was

helpful for her reading comprehension. She also used strategies such as cognate recognition, previous knowledge of Spanish, and morphological knowledge of words to uncover the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary.

By using Spanish and English languages students can improve their linguistic repertoire and their participation in all classroom activities given by the teacher. For example, Jiménez & Gámez (1996) conducted a study with approximately 14 7th-grade learners, and three students showed difficulties with literacy learning. Jiménez & Gámez (1996) designed language activities in which they included reading, writing, and English language grammar exercises. Thus, the instruction that Jiménez & Gámez (1996) designed was based on the students´ needs and language preferences. Jiménez & Gámez (1996) found that students' word recognition and reading fluency were rudimentary (at a 2 to 3rd-grade level) and their reading strategy implementation was very poor in English. Both researchers took advantage from the students´ prior knowledge and their Latino culture (e.g., their knowledge about typical Mexican food) to help the students realize that they could use their culture and knowledge as resources to support their comprehension of English readings. So, by realizing that their cultural knowledge was important when they read, and by using English & Spanish to interact with the students, the researchers realized that the students could improve their bilingual literacy. Jiménez & Gámez (1996) demonstrate that the use of both Spanish and English when interacting with the students around text was very helpful for Hispanic students´ bilingual literacy. Jiménez & Gámez (1996) suggest that bilingual interactions around text in the classroom may be beneficial for Hispanic students.

In several studies, researchers suggest that teaching reading strategies explicitly to students seems appropriate, since many students cannot spontaneously access a number of important reading strategies if they are not taught to them. As MacNamara (2009) noted

> Teaching strategies is one of the most effective means of helping students to overcome reading problems and become better readers. Strategies provide the means to tackle complex problems in more efficient ways and, with practice, the strategies lead to skills that become automatic and quick overtime. (p. 34).

A research study by Olson & Land (2007) has demonstrated that the instructional implementation of cognitive strategies to approach reading and writing in English secondary schools is efficient to help students to become analytical readers. These researchers conducted a quantitative eight-year study, which they called the Pathway Project, with a group of 94 secondary teachers in California. Olson and Land (2007) exposed teachers and students to an extensive set of cognitive strategies to expand their knowledge concerning reading and writing. The researchers implemented instruction based on a mental model tool kit that contained cognitive strategies approach to reading and writing instruction to approximately 2000 students per year. Olson and Land (2007) conducted the tool kit in order to help teachers to foster their students´ declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of cognitive strategies. The readers` and writers` tool kit had a variety of curricular approaches such as planning and goal setting, monitoring, tapping prior knowledge, revising meaning, asking questions and making predictions, reflecting and relating, constructing the gist, and evaluating.

The researcher's major goal with the previous cognitive strategies approach was that both teachers and students needed to internalize and apply them to become more competent readers and writers. The readers` and writers` tool kit model helped Pathway project teachers in relation to their meaning construction when reading and writing text. But, this first attempt at teaching reading and writing skills did not communicate well to their students. To help students, Olson & Land (2007) designed a more illustrative tool kit with words such as planning and goal setting, evaluating, analyzing author´s craft, forming interpretations, monitoring, visualizing, asking questions, making predictions, tapping prior knowledge, reflecting and relating, summarizing, clarifying, revising meaning, making connections, and adopting an alignment. The changes made to the tool kit seemed to connect more to the students` needs.

To introduce each of the previous thinking tools, Pathway teachers read a short story called, "the war of the wall" and modeled what the reader thinks by stopping at key points in the reading and thinking out loud. Then, their students needed to activate their prior knowledge by saying to themselves: "oh, I already know that" or "this reminds me of…". Finally, teachers created connections between the text and one specific strategy (prior knowledge) in order introduce a new strategy (making

predictions). Based on students´ input and responses the teacher can "recycle" the information presented to the students in class.

Olson & Land (2007) reported that through reading strategy instruction students learned how to use and give colors to each one of the parts of a short story. Another result was that color-coding helped students to distinguish a short plot summary from a supporting detail or a commentary in students´ analytical essays. The pre/post test differences in gain scores between Pathway and control students were statistically significant for seven consecutive years. This means that the instructional implementation of reading strategies was successful. Olson and Land (2007) analyzed 700 student logs and the twenty teachers´ written reflections and they found improvement in the students´ analytical essays and the teachers´ realizations that they were able to help the students enhance their literacy skills.

Our intention in the present study is to explore the instruction of a set of reading strategies to a group of 6th graders. The strategies in our study included skimming and scanning text, reading titles for prediction, taking notes, underlining known and unknown words, underlining important infortmation, and using images to comprehend text. Skimming the text is used to quickly identify the main ideas of a text such as newspapers, books, magazines, fables, and short stories. Readers also used skimming when they have great amounts of reading material to read in a limited time. Scanning is a technique that readers often use when searching key words or important concepts of a text. Reading titles for prediction is used for making predictions about the text. By predicting information from the text, readers can imagine what the reading is going to be about and can confirm and disconfirm the predictions as they read. Taking notes is a strategy that readers used for filtering, classifying, and organizing the information on the text. Another advantage that readers have with the note taking strategy is that they can jot down analytical and anecdotal notes aside related to the reading.

Underlining known and unknown words is a reading strategy that readers used to underline the words that are whether familiar or unfamiliar for them. Underlining important information is used to identify what readers think are relevant and inetresting in a reading. Readers also used the underlying strategy for locating words or sentences

they think might help them to remember key points about the reading. The last strategy that we implemented in the reading instruction was using images to comprehend a text which is used to make visualizations and to draw intrerpretations about the reading. Illustrations in a text also provide students motivation and desire to read most if laguage teachers are teaching reading for youngters.

Methodology

Type of Study

Our study has characteristic of a qualitative study. According to Smith (1983), qualitative research is a generic term for research methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Detailed data is gathered through observations, open ended interview questions that provide direct quotations from the participants, and from the analysis of documents. This approach to research differs from quantitative research which attempts to gather data by methods that provide information about relations, comparisons, and predictions.

Context

Our research setting was the Francis Pearson School1, a public K-11 high school located in Pereira, Risaralda. This school houses children from a mixture of working-class and middle class neighborhoods. The philosophy of the Francis Pearson School Mejia high school is based on the idea that students live in a world that is constantly changing and that they need to build skills to face those changes.

Participants

We chose a group of 6th-grade students whose English was at very basic level to conduct our study. The participants of our research project are the Francis Pearson School students in Pereira. We chose 5 students as focal participants from a group 28 students on which we apply reading strategy instruction, with the hope that each individual would provide a unique insight into the reading process. The age of the participants range between 10 to 15 years old approximately. We taught once a week during one month and a half approximately, for a total of 12 hours of instruction.

Role of the Researchers

Throughout the study, one of us (Jorge) was the active participant teacher and the one (Mauricio) was a passive participant observer. We wanted one of us to be a

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[1] Pseudonyms were used for institutions and people throughout this document.

participant observer because we wanted to interact with the learners to ask them about their problematic issues with reading, to see their performance, and to judge to what extent they applied the strategies we taught.

Our research project sought to give our students instruction in the use of reading strategies. We included the following strategies in our lessons: Skimming text, scanning text, reading titles for predictions, taking notes, underlining unknown words, underlining important information, and using images to comprehend text.

Our instruction was designed to teach 6 lessons for one month and a half approximately, each one introduced one or two strategies per class. In all our lessons, we started by presenting the topic for the day, the strategy to be studied, and the short story to practice the use of the strategy. For lesson 1, we selected the strategy *underlining known and unknown words and reading titles for prediction*. During that lesson, we gave every one of the students an English short text where they had the possibility to apply the strategy we taught. The students practiced the strategies on two texts: One general text about life in Colombia and the other one about Pereira. In lesson 2, we taught one more reading strategy: *Using images to comprehend texts*. In this lesson the students had the oportunity to apply the previous strategies to the short stories called "the little Red Hen" and "Toby the Tortoise and Max the Hare".After reading the short story, we gave each of the students an after reading questionnaire where they had to answer questions related to the story. We also video recorded the students' performances during the class when they were reading short stories, going to the board and when they all were interacting with their partners during group work. In the ensuing lessons, we introduced the students to other reading strategies. In lesson 3, we taught the students how to *skim* and *scan* through a text. We taught the students that skimming was used for acquiring a general overview of the text, and that scanning was used to search for words, new ideas and concepts about the reading. In this lesson the students had the opportunity to apply the skimming and scanning strategies in a short story called "The Fox and the Crow". In lesson 4, the teacher presented the students a story called "A fight between two brothers". In this lesson, the students had the opportunity to learn some moral values that they found in the reading such as respect, forgiveness and love.

In this class, we taught the students note taking and underlining important information strategy. But, the students prefered to use to underline known and unknown words and the underlining important information strategy during the class. Finally, in the last two lessons (5 and 6), we made a review about all the reading strategies that we taught to the students. The questionnaires proposed as methods in the study were applied during class times.

Data Collection

During our process of collecting data from 6th graders at Francis Pearson school we used three types of instruments: An interview (See Appendix 1), questionnaires (Appendix 2 & 3), and video recordings of classroom observations.

Interviews

The interviews lasted between 10 to 15 minutes per student. The interview consisted of ten questions about reading comprehension, reading strategies, reading purposes and reflection. One objective of the pre-interview was to figure out students´ awareness in reading. We recorded all the interviews and transcribed them for analysis.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaires was to collect information about the student's attitudes towards reading short stories and about strategy use. There were two questionnaires that we prepared for the students. One was an after-reading questionnaire in which students answered what they thought about the story, the time and space of the story, and the strategy applied to the text. The second one was a final questionnaire in which students had to write what reading strategies meant for them, if they learnt how to use a reading strategy during the instruction and to name the aspects that helped them after a reading instruction.

Video Recordings of Class Observations

We video-recorded four of the six lessons. The purpose of the videos was to get information about our students´ performance in the reading activities we proposed, for example, on whether when they were working alone or with their partners. The videos also supported our fieldnotes of the teacher`s instruction. By watching the video, we

could complement the fieldnotes collected in the classroom. The fieldnotes helped the observer (Mauricio) to collect and documented all the lessons with relevant notes and comments about the reading instruction given for the students.

An additional benefit of having videos of our lessons was that they helped us observe how the students behaved during classes. For instance, the videos we recorded helped us identify the students whose behavior was not always the good one. So, as soon as Jorge located the students who interrupted the classes he made some changes. He changed those students and told them always to sit in front of him (teacher), so that he can keep an eye on them. That is why Jorge also suggested the students to sit in a semi circle instead of in rows in order to keep their students` focused and concentrated.

Data Analysis

We finished collecting the data for this project on February 2009. The analysis of our data did not start until five months later. In our case, our analysis was not ongoing with the data collection (as we think now it should be) because we collected the data too soon before we were assigned an advisor. As a result, we collected the data the best way we could, without much guidance for an ongoing analysis.

To produce the findings for the present research project, we conducted a retrospective analysis of the instruction, interviews, and after reading questionnaires. Initially, we organized our data in the form of fieldnotes for the videos on the instruction, a chart for the interviews, and some analytical notes from the after- reading questionnaires.

To analyze the video recordings, we transcribed all the events and language from the teacher and from the students during the reading activities in each session. The video recordings also helped us to see the teacher`s (Jorge) instruction. The videos helped us realize the instructional issues and weaknesses at the moment of delivering the reading strategies for the students. For the analysis of the data from the interviews, we created a table with the students´ text preferences, reading frequencies, students´ favorite places for reading, types of text, students´ awareness of strategies, purpose for reading, students´ analysis of text and students´ reflection on text. For the students' interview at the end of the study, we created another table to organize our students´

answers about reading strategies, students' reading strategy preferences, the easiest or the hardest strategy for them, strategies applied to the text, their improvement in the application the strategies, comprehension, and reading instructions given by the teacher.

The analysis of the after-reading students´ questionnaires was guided by another chart, where we recorded the students´ reading purposes, reading strategies applied to the text, character recognition, time & space, main idea of the story, and students´ feelings after reading the story.

The in-depth analysis was done along with our advisor, with whom we read and reread each piece of data and engaged in discussions to confirm and disconfirm the analytical notes we initially wrote after our instruction was conducted. In the discussions with the advisor, we revised the analytical notes and discussed their accuracy when contrasting it against the data. Many times we had to go back to the original data pieces to revise the assertions we made about a specific student or about the instruction. For example, one of our initial assertions came from our interpretation from the students` responses in the interview. At first, we interpreted that their responses were dishonest because they answered a question affirmatively and then they contradicted themselves in the second question. When we revised this affirmation with the advisor, we went back to the data and considered other possibilities for our interpretation. We thought about the responses of the students again and we came up with other possible interpretations. For example, rather than only interpreting the students` contradictory responses as a sign of dishonesty, we considered the possibility that they did not understand the questions, or even, that in their responses they were trying to please the teacher. This example illustrates how in our process of data analysis we had to reconsider the initial affirmations we made when we found inconsistencies between the affirmation and the data.

In another stage of the analysis, and through the interactions with our advisor, we realized issues that were important in the data, and that we did not consider before. One example of an important finding that we initially disregarded had to do with a student named Diana, who submitted a report on the stories we taught where she wrote the stories in Spanish. We initially disregarded this data because we did not think that Diana was an interesting case, judging from her responses in the interview. However, when we analyzed with the advisor her performance in the assignment, we realized that Diana wrote the stories using her prior knowledge of oral story telling in Spanish, and

she emulated the display of the stories in English. As we looked at Diana`s work closely, we realized that her case was interesting because she was able to use her L1 (Spanish) as an advantage to comprehend English short stories.

From the discussions with the advisor, and the revisions of our initial analytical notes, we started identifying initial emerging themes from the data. The findings for this study are the result of several revisions of these initial emerging themes, which we constantly compared and contrasted (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) against the examples from the data to verify their accuracy. If the data did not fully support our emerging theme, then that theme did not become a finding. We kept the topic of the theme in mind to see if we could make a connection between that topic and another theme.

Findings

The Instructional Application of a Set of Reading Strategies

In this section, we will present findings deriving from the implementation of our instructional design and the retrospective reflection about our instruction of 6 reading strategies: skimming text, scanning text, reading titles for predictions, taking notes, underlining unknown words, underlining important information, and using images to comprehend text.

Instructional Weaknesses

Activity time management, fast pace, and little wait time. In the first class, Jorge taught two reading strategies (i.e., reading titles for prediction, underlying known & unknown words), while the other (Mauricio) observed and took notes. Jorge started the lesson by presenting the strategies individually. He used English first to present his instruction expecting that the students understood oral English, but soon he realized that the students were not understanding the instruction. Most children were puzzled and looked at each other as if they were trying to figure out what Jorge was saying. They kept yelling "teacher! En español!!!" indicating that the instructions were hard to understand in English. So, Jorge switched his instruction into Spanish. From then on, whenever Jorge provided instructions in English, he also provided the Spanish translation orally.

An additional weakness we identified the first class was that when presenting the class content, Jorge did not keep a slow pace and did not give enough time to the students. Jorge may have felt nervous the first time he taught and this may have influenced his instructional time management. When Jorge presented the strategy, he gave an example to the children, and then quickly moved on to presenting the next strategy. That day Jorge just presented two reading strategies for his students, and in the following lessons he presented other strategies. In his field notes, Mauricio reported that Jorge did not give the students enough time to internalize how to use the strategy presented. As a result, the children did not seem to comprehend the instruction about strategies in the first class. This is one of the observer´s comments taken from the observational rubric:

How are the strategies explained?

The instruction was quite superficial, it needs to give more explanation or examples about how to use it. The Teacher explained each strategy so fast and immediately continued with another strategy. Quite unclear, so the teacher needs to improve the reading strategies' explanation.

At the end of the first class, Mauricio pointed out to Jorge the issues with time management. Mauricio specifically suggested to dedicate more time to the explanation of each strategy and to allow more time for students to practice the application of the strategy. Jorge agreed with Mauricio´s comments and appreciated the feedback. Added to our nervousness, our lessons were constantly interrupted. In our field notes, we recorded that during our teaching, 2 or 3 school staff members entered the classroom to ask students for money for their photocopies. Jorge had been working hard on having the students focused on an activity, but the number of interruptions did not allow Jorge and the students to focus. Interruptions were common throughout our data collection.

In the second class, Jorge continued teaching by giving the reading strategies explanation without practice. Consequently, the instruction on reading strategies was not clear for most students. Although this time Jorge changed his pace for a slower one, Mauricio told him that the time to internalize the strategy was still not long enough for the students to complete the assigned tasks. Mauricio noticed that Jorge explained the strategy and how to apply it, but at the moment of practice time, the students were lost and did not know what to do. Mauricio interpreted that the students at first did not respond to Jorge´s invitation to work because Jorge did not rephrase the instructions. In later lessons, Jorge reinforced the explanation on the strategies and taught at a slower pace. Mauricio noticed that the children responded positively to Jorge´s lower instructional pace. For example, Mauricio noticed when one student was asking another one during the underlining strategy practice "conoces esta palabra?", indicating being on task.

After the first two lessons, Jorge realized that he planned a number of activities that he was not able to cover in one class. One factor for not finishing was that the students engaged in coloring the illustrations on a photocopy of a story that Jorge read to them. Jorge noticed that the students seemed to enjoy the time for coloring the pictures from the readings, and at first, he chose to let them color the illustrations, even if this meant that the students took extra time to do it. However, when Jorge realized

that coloring was too time consuming, he asked the students to complete the reading activity first and assigned the coloring as homework. After 6 lessons, Jorge´s time management improved significantly. He was able to accomplish all the activities previously planned, making his instruction more complete. In consequence, the last lessons were more successful compared to the first lessons. For instance, throughout the observations Mauricio noticed that Jorge´s explanation of the strategies became slower and more concrete, and that Jorge had enough time to develop all the activities planned. As a result, the students appeared to be more engaged in the reading activities. For example, Mauricio noticed that one student was taking notes and asked Jorge questions about the strategy he was teaching.

To support our data from the video Mauricio (observer) took some notes about Jorge´s lesson was shallow at the moment of giving explicit reading instruction. Below the observer´s comment:

> Instruction checking? "Teacher asked only to one student about if they understood the instructions; then one student said "¿Que fue lo que explico el profesor?""Students talked about the reading with the partner and they asked to each other if they understand the reading. Some students started to paint the pictures; and others were attentive to the activity, but others did not do it"

Shallow instruction of reading strategies. In retrospect, we reflected on the strategy instruction provided to the students, and we realized that we did not take full advantage of the text we used in our teaching because we did not seem to fully understand the reading strategies ourselves. The strategies we included in our lessons were accurate. However, our implementation of the strategies was not thorough. The transcription of video data evidenced examples of the lack of depth that characterized our strategy instruction.

To illustrate the issue of shallow instruction of reading strategies, we will refer to the following example. In our first class, we introduced the strategy of underlining known words before reading so that the students could build their vocabulary. We chose a text about Colombia because its content was culturally relevant for the students, and also because it was related to the topic that we taught as part of the school curriculum. To introduce the students to the instruction of the strategy, Jorge asked them to underline all the words they thought they knew from the text. The students then wrote

the words on the board. In the following excerpt, Jorge instructs the students on what to do. However, he does not take advantage of what the students know in order to understand the text, but rather to build word lists and feed their vocabulary:

> Jorge: entonces vamos a aplicar una estrategia de lectura para aprender a enfrentar a un texto, ¿listo? Primero vamos a leer una página que dice "Colombia", ok ¿que pueden reconocer de esa página?

> Estudiantes: Colombia, los carnavales, el territorio, personas continente, ah y también las imágenes.

> Jorge: ok, si también las imágenes. Miren que tenemos acá, [pero en ese caso los niños no miraban al profesor practicante sino que miraban sus hojas de trabajo.]Hay gente bailando ¿cierto? ¿y este que es? y ¿que representa esta imagen?

> Estudiantes: el café, el café de Colombia.

> Estudiante 2: Ah, ya es Juan Valdez!

> Estudiantes: un carnaval

> Jorge dice: no este.

> Estudiantes: ah, Colombia es pasión

> Jorge: Ok, ahorita vamos a pasar brevemente por el texto y vamos a identificar las palabras que conocemos, ¿listo? Colombia, entonces esas palabras las subrayamos con lapicero, con lápiz o con lo que ustedes quieran[…] y voy a llamar a cada uno al tablero a que me escriban las palabras conocidas acá.

> Estudiante (12): mire, copie "Colombia es un continente localizado en sur-América".

> Estudiante (13): Me, profe, yo ¿puedo escribir esta?

> Jorge: Now that we wrote the words that we know, las palabras que conoces. Ahora vamos a escribir las palabras que no conocemos, ¿ok? Listo, los que tengan diccionario se pueden ayudar con el buscando esas palabras, pero los que no han participado voy a sacar otros estudiantes que no han participado para que escriban las palabras que no conocen, ¿ok? Entonces vayan mirando cuales van a ser.

Notice that Jorge started the instruction of the strategy strongly. He provided opportunities to the students to engage in making predictions by asking them to guess what the text was about from looking at the pictures. We noticed that the children

engaged in the text, even before reading it. Jorge intended to take advantage of the words on the text that the students could recognize by asking the students to underline them and to then write them on the board. As a result, at the end of this part of the activity, the board had many words from the text that the students knew.

However, Jorge failed at taking advantage of the available list of known words. Instead of engaging the students into a whole-class discussion about possible connections between the words and the global meaning of the text, he moved right onto asking the students to identify the unknown words. Instead of focusing the students on exploiting the text and taking advantage of the students' prior knowledge on Colombia to comprehend the message of the English reading, the instruction focused the students on both the known and the unknown words, leaving comprehension out of question. A more effective way of teaching the underlining strategy with the goal of reading comprehension would have been to model to the students how readers can use the known words to guess the content of the text, and how readers can use the context to figure out unknown words. Jorge could have asked the students to use the known words to come up with sentences that could possibly be related to the topic on the reading. He could have asked the students to copy the sentences on the board, and then to confirm or disconfirm them after reading the text. In that way, students would have known how to thoroughly use the underlining known and unknown words strategy to figure out the meaning of the text. Thus, the children could predict, and also, be exposed to new words in context.

In another part of the video Jorge addressed to read silently by explaining to the children that they should look at the illustrations and predict what the story seemed to be about. When analyzing the video again, we realized that the instruction was mixed up in explaining the strategies of "reading silently" and "image description for prediction". In an attempt to give the students tools to comprehend the text, Jorge´s instructions on each strategy were not precise. Notice the language Jorge used for instruction in the following example:

> Jorge: [...] También, ustedes le pueden aplicar lectura silenciosa. Por ejemplo: ustedes cojen la hoja la miran y dicen: hay acá veo una gallina, oh acá veo un pato o aquí veo una tortuga, eso es una lectura silenciosa (leer mentalmente) o más o menos reconocer las imágenes y de que se trata el texto, ¿listo? La descripción de imágenes, ya como lo había

dicho antes observar que hay en el contexto, si hay un pan o un pato o
lo que ustedes quieran.

Notice that Jorge does not use precise instructions to explain to the students the two target strategies. For instance, when explaining the "reading silently" strategy, Jorge said to the students that they can use that strategy to figure out how the illustrations connect to the text. A more precise instruction to the students on the "reading silently" strategy could have referred to the benefits of reading silently. Jorge could have mentioned how silent reading allows readers to focus on meaning instead of on pronunciation, and how readers can quickly point out important information when skimming the text silently. Additionally, Jorge could have modeled to the students how a reader can read English text silently and take advantage of elements in the text for comprehension.

Another weakness evident in the example from the instruction has to do with the strategy "images description for predicting text". In the data, we notice that Jorge failed to take advantage of the images provided as illustrations for the story (the little Red Hen). Jorge merely mentioned to the students what they could do with the illustrations, but did not put the strategy into practice right away to prove to the students that the images on a text can help readers to predict what the text says. In other words, Jorge again failed to model the strategy to the students. As an alternative, Jorge could have invited his students to make more predictions by taking full advantage of the connections that the students could make with the available pictures.

Our analysis suggested that the instruction of other reading comprehension strategies also presented some weaknesses. Jorge taught the strategy called "note taking" in a way that was not adequate. Even though Jorge tried to invite his students to create connections with class ideas and the reading, he did not give the students enough information or opportunities to put the "taking notes" strategy into practice. The following video excerpt illustrates the actual instructions provided to the class:

Jorge: ya en la toma de notas, [...] si les parece importante algo acá en la lectura, entonces hacer algún comentario, eso se llama toma de notas or "note taking" in English y hacer un resumen de lo leído, ehhh, o podría ser anotar lo que se acordaran de la lectura, ok entonces ahorita entre todos podemos hacer eso por ejemplo cojen una hoja y anotan

todas las cosas que recuerden o que aprendieron o de lo que quieran, ¿yes or no? ¿Entendieron?

Estudiantes: Yes.

Jorge could have been more explicit with the instruction of this strategy by first finding out more about how the strategy works. For instance, knowing that note taking involves filtering, classifying and organizing the information on the text could have helped Jorge to give tips to the students about what to pay attention to while reading when we want to take notes. Therefore, students could have enhanced their thinking and their English vocabulary. Another possible practice to teach not-taking could have been asking students to go to the board and to write short sentences about what they remembered from the story.

Unlike Jorge, whose role was to design and implement the instruction for this work, Mauricio's role as an observer was to collect data on the instruction and to give feedback to Jorge about his teaching of reading strategies. As soon as every class ended, Mauricio and Jorge discussed Jorge's instructional weaknesses and strengths. By doing that, Jorge was more aware of the problematic issues of his instruction. The idea was that the feedback could support both Jorge and Mauricio in the development and implementation of the reading strategy instruction. As each lesson passed, Jorge realized his weaknesses and in the following class he took actions at the moment of giving the instruction to the children. For example, data from the observations illustrate that Jorge explained and made an improvement about teaching the skimming and scanning strategies. In the following notes, Mauricio jotted down on the observation format about the clarity of Jorge´s instruction and about the response to the instruction by the children:

> How strategies are explained? The explanation of the reading strategy "scanning" was very clear and comprehensible and so was "skimming". Jorge was more didactic and used more time when teaching. He allowed the students to practice this strategy.

> Instruction checking? The teacher asked about the explanation of the strategies taught to his students. They replied: "yes, teacher si comprendemos"

Weaknesses in the instruction were also due to issues related to classroom discipline management. For instance, the students chatted during instruction, some

arrived late to class, walked around the classroom during instruction, and did homework from other subjects during the English class. Actually, as a novice teacher Jorge did not establish ground rules at the beginning of the student-teacher practicum (i.e. come to class on time, remain in your seats unless you have permission to get up, talk only when allowed). So, students did not know what was and was not acceptable in this particular class. Students´ behaviors may have been acceptable by other teachers in other classes. However, these behaviors disturbed the process of English instruction in Jorge´s class. Indeed, discipline management would have been different if Jorge would have given the students clear rules about behavior in class. In one occasion, Jorge caught a student doing math homework in his class. Jorge asked her to put the homework away and to focus on the instruction. The student agreed and engaged in the English activity that was being developed at the moment.

Instruction Starts to Change: More Successful Teaching

In the following classes, Jorge tried to be more conscious about time management and allowed himself more time for instruction and the children more time for practice. In the third class Jorge taught other two reading strategies. They were skimming and scanning. Jorge explained that skimming was useful for reviewing information of a text. To explain scanning, Jorge taught the students that it was for searching for new concepts and principal ideas in a text. Also, during that class Jorge modeled the use of these two strategies with a text. He showed the students how he searched for important information on a sample English text by quickly sweeping information silently to locate the main ideas or details. He discussed with the students why the ideas he found through skimming and scanning were important. The students responded to the instruction positively. They asked questions such as "¿esta estrategia se usa solamente en estos textos en Ingles?", "¿voy bien profe?" "¿profe, se pueden utilizar todas las estrategias a una misma lectura?". Jorge answered the students´ questions and encouraged them to use these two strategies while reading texts for other subjects.

Starting from the fourth lesson, Jorge organized his instruction to make it more coherent and arranged the students to be able to manage the class to ensure the success of the sessions. For these lessons, Jorge reviewed all the reading strategies previously taught. He planned his instruction, so the students could have the opportunity to practice

the strategies one by one. For example, during the review class, the students practiced the strategies with the text called "The Fox and the Crow". First, Jorge asked the students to read the short story silently so that students could be familiarized with the content and with the vocabulary of the text. After the students read the text silently, Jorge read the story out loud and the students read along. By listening to the story from Jorge, as they read along, the students could hear the way that the words in the text were pronounced and how the text sounded overall. By hearing Jorge read, the students could practice their listening skills. Then, Jorge asked the students to practice the strategy of underlining known and unknown words from the story. In this particular strategy students could have the opportunity to code with colors the known and the unknown words, phrases, and expressions. After that, some students went to the board to write in a comparative table to classify the familiar and the unfamiliar words and phrases.

To figure out the meaning of unknown words and phrases pointed out by the students, Jorge helped the students by using body language and by orally explaining some of the words in the unknown phrases. For example, to explain the phrase "lovely shiny feathers", Jorge fluttered his arms and the students chimed in possible meanings of the action. Some students said "ahh un caldo de gallina doña, el de la propaganda", "alas de pollo" until they figured out the meaning of the phrases or the words. Jorge also made sounds of the animals in the reading in order to put his students into context. At the end of short story "the fox and the crow" Jorge started a discussion with the students by asking "what do you think about the story?" "¿que piensan de la historia?. Some students offered answers such as "nosotros debemos compartir lo que tenemos", "que no debemos ser egoistas", "no debemos ser engreidos". In retrospect, we realize that our instruction could have included more pre- and during-reading questions from the teacher to guide the students´ comprehension of the story. Instead, we chose to ask the students questions at the end. By leaving our questions for the end, we may have missed some opportunities to teach the children how readers can use reading strategies to build meaning as they read.

In terms of the seating arrangement, Jorge decided to arrange the students´ seats in a horseshoe shape instead of in rows. Jorge decided to change the seating arrangement to make more eye contact with all the students, who now were sitting one next to the other. This arrangement allowed Jorge to be more connected to the class and to avoid having students chat in the back of the classroom. Through changing the

arrangement of the classroom, Jorge was able to have more control of the students´ discipline and the students had more opportunities to be engaged in the instruction.

As the lessons progressed through the data collection period, Jorge not only improved his way of teaching the strategies but also he started to look for topics to make his teaching more coherent and relevant to the 6th grade syllabus. For instance, for the topic "What´s your favorite sport?, What´s your favorite sports/person?", the reading material for our lessons needed to be related to sports. Jorge looked for reading material that could be related to this topic (e.g., newspaper articles on famous sportspeople).

However, Jorge noticed that reading from newspapers had a high reading difficulty level for the students. For example, the vocabulary in those texts was too advanced for the students´ knowledge. As a result, Jorge decided to look elsewhere for text that was somehow related to sports but that had a genre more familiar than the newspaper article to the students. He found a story called "A fight between two brothers", that involves two brothers that liked playing basketball. In the middle of a game, they had a fight because one wanted to have the ball and the other one did not let him. So, they started an argument that became a physical fight. Finally, they were grabbed and separated until the brothers calmed down. Later on, the brothers went to get something to eat and away from the basketball court, they forgave each other. The unexpected contribution of bringing this reading to class was that the text was related to the value of forgiveness and respect, which was a topic that the students discussed as a result of the reading activity. The following students´ comments in class (taken from the observation report) suggest that the students reacted positively to this text and that they figure out the message from the story:

> Jefferson: el perdón es algo muy importante
>
> Tatiana: no debemos de pelear
>
> Camilo: toda la lectura esta relacionada con el respeto

Another aspect included in the improvement of Jorge´s lessons was his decision to have the students work in pairs or in groups. In earlier lessons, the students were working by themselves, and Jorge and Mauricio noticed that since they did not have a peer to share information or to check answers with, the students tended to fail more often in developing the activities proposed. That is why Jorge changed the organization

of the students (from working individually to working in pairs or groups) to complete activities. As the students worked in groups, Jorge walked around and gave them individual feedback. His feedback seemed to help the students raise their confidence to ask more questions to Jorge, and to discuss the reading with their partners. When the students were working in pairs Mauricio observed that they shared their ideas orally with more confidence in comparison to when the students worked alone. For instance, when reading together, a student who was stronger than his peer asked "in which part of the text are you?" with the intention of helping his peer with comprehension. In the following notes from the observations, Mauricio noticed that Camilo initiated a discussion about the story "a fight between two brothers" with a classmate (dialogue between the peers is unavailable):

> (Observation lesson 6) Camilo wrote the known and unknown words on his notebook and on the board. Then Camilo talked to his partner about the meaning of specific words.

In another part of the same reading, the whole class discussed the message of the story after Jorge asked them: "What did you learn about the story?". During that disscussion students answered to the teacher orally: "profe, es que uno debe ser respetuoso", "que con los hermanos uno no se debe pelear", "debemos tratar bien a las personas". By inviting the students to express their thoughts on the story, students were focused and consequently more connected to the reading activities. Overall, at the end of the lessons, we realized that the organization of activities in groups or in pairs had a positive impact among the students.

Participants' Perceptions about Reading and Their Reading Habits

To gauge the participants' perceptions about reading and their reading habits, we asked our five participants if they liked to read in Spanish in one of our interviews. Data from the interview revealed that most of the students reported liking to read in their native language, except for one (Diana), who reported not reading too often. In contradiction to their liking to read was their answer about the frequency in which they read. All of the participants reported that they only read very little or only once a month (i.e., Jefferson: eehh! mmm… cada mes!; Diana: muy poco!). We see a contradiction in most of the participants` answers about liking to read and the low frequency in which they reported reading because we assume that if one likes to read, one would read more

often than what these students reported. This contradiction makes us wonder if the participants deeply understand the purpose and the act of reading, or if they may not have understood the question in the first place. We speculate that if we have asked them if they liked to play "dofus" (an online game where the player gets resources to go up the levels) they would have said yes right away, and they would have reported playing the game everyday. However, this was not the case with reading. To become a good reader, the children would have to read often. We also speculate that they have not been exposed to reading for fun and for meaning. We also wonder if the children responded that they liked to read just because that was the right thing to say to a teacher.

Only one participant (Laura) reported to read a diversity of text such as stories, jokes, and adventures. This participant`s answer made us speculate that she may read more often than other participants. Unfortunately, we did not include the question about reading frequency in her interview.

In their interviews, our participants widely reported that they read "para aprender". Except for one participant (Camilo), who reported liking to read "con el propósito de aprender a leer bien y la escritura" (not only for his own learning but also for his writing improvement), all the other participants focused on the "learning" purpose of reading. We were surprised at the uniformity of their answer, which we interpreted as a lack of understanding that people read for purposes other than informational or academic. We were left to wonder if these children have ever been exposed to reading text for sheer pleasure at home or at school. Their answers seem to suggest that their understood purpose of reading has to do exclusively with acquiring information or practicing decoding skills. They may not see reading as a possible hobby or as a leisure activity.

We also gathered some of the participants' perspectives on reading from the questionnaire that we gave them after some of our class activities, where the students read two short stories (The Hare and the Tortoise, and The Little Read Hen). Data from the questionnaire reveals that 3 of the 5 participants answered candidly that they read exclusively because they "have to" read to fulfill an academic task. Tatiana, Diana, and Camilo reported that they read in the English class "porque el profesor nos dio [la lectura]" and "para un trabajo de Ingles". Jefferson and Katherine reported that they read in the English class "para aprender mas Ingles". The participants' answers to the questionnaire are somewhat related to their answers in the interview. Instead of seeing

reading a story as a pleasurable activity, our participants (Tatiana, Camilo, Diana) seem to view reading text exclusively as an obligation or a school duty.

Students´ Preferred Strategies at the Moment of Reading English Texts in Class.

By the time that our students started to get used to the reading strategy lessons, they felt comfortable with some of the strategies more than they did with others. They particularly liked to underline known & unknown words and to make relationships between known words and images (when available) because they thought these strategies were easy.

> **Observer:** The students applied a strategy called "underlining known words and important info" which they acquired very easily. In that way, they see that those strategies were very easy to get the principal idea of the reading. The children seemed to feel more comfortable using the underlining words strategy to approach the English text than using other strategies such as silent reading, or reading the title for predictions.

We are aware of the fact that we did not take further the strategy of underlining known and unknown words to involve students into thinking about the text and thus facilitate their comprehension of the text. Nevertheless, the students were attracted by the idea of telling familiar from unfamiliar words by marking them with different colors. To help the students make relationships between the text and the images, Jorge pointed out the images printed on the text such as animals, people, objects and places, and the words on the text that were related to the images. This activity also helped Jorge catch the students` attention and interest in the short stories. We noticed that the students engaged on their own in underlining and image-word relationships around text in most of the readings they did in class.

Most of our students showed lack of eagerness at the moment of reading the short stories in English. When we presented the short stories in English they said: "profe, ¿otra vez una lectura en Ingles?", "profe, es que no entendemos nada". Sometimes our students even suggested that we provided the readings in Spanish so that they can understand them. For instance, they said: "profe, podrias hacerla en Español". Their reactions before reading the stories and when we asked them to read on their own suggested to us that they liked the stories, but they were not appealed to reading them in

English. Reflecting back on our instruction, we could say that even after our lessons, the students had not acquired enough tools to engage in comprehending English text.

In other classes, we asked our students two questions about their strategies preferences. In their responses, the students reported using underlining words more than other strategies because they thought that underlining words was the easiest strategy. When asked about the most difficult strategy for them, they answered that note taking was the most demanding.

> Teacher: ¿Cual es la estrategia mas facil? "which was the easiest of all reading strategies?"
>
> Students: subrayar palabras conocidas y desconocidas "underline known & unknown words was the easiest one".
>
> Teacher: ¿ah y cual es la más dificil? what is the most difficult?
>
> Students: la más difícil es la toma de tomas. "The most difficult one is note taking"

We confirmed with the observers' notes that the students preferred to underline words from the text.

> Instruction checking?
>
> The teacher asked about taking notes.
>
> Students say that:"anotar cosas importantes del texto".
> teacher asked about which one of these strategies do you think is easiest? and students said "underlying is the easiest one "

We interpreted that our students found note taking as a difficult strategy maybe because it requires higher and more creative thinking than simply underlining known words or sentences from the text. We realize that we could have taken further advantage of the underlining words strategy by expanding the instruction of the strategy to teach the students to use the context given by the known words to make sense of the unknown neighboring words. Another possible way to take advantage of the underlining strategy could have included teaching the students to recognize English and Spanish cognates.

Through a questionnaire to our participants, we found that most considered the reading strategies taught to them as an important aspect to learn in their English classes. Notice the students` responses to the following questions after the instruction:

Question: ¿Qué son estrategias de lectura para ti?

Jefferson: Es una forma de comprender la lectura

Diana: son las que nos describen que hacer y que enumerar

Katherine: subrayar las palabras de la lectura

Camilo: Son ayudas que uno puede aplicar cuando uno lee una lectura

Tatiana: Son las que nos describen que hacer y comprender

In the previous examples we noticed that Jefferson, Diana, Camilo, and Tatiana were able to answer what reading strategies meant for them. These answers are starkly different from their answers to the same question at the beginning of the study. While at first the students answered that they did not know any reading strategy or how to use strategies when reading, now they seemed to know the purpose of a strategy when reading. Jefferson, Diana, Camilo, and Tatiana also could recognize that reading strategies are essential tools for reading comprehension. Although Katherine did not explain the meaning of reading strategies, she reported "subrayar las palabras de la lectura", implying that underlining words was the reading strategy she used the most.

In another section of the post-questionnaire, we noticed that students Jefferson, Diana, Katherine and Tatiana not only learned what reading strategies are, but also, they reported that their reading comprehension improved after the application of the instruction of reading strategies in short stories. For example:

Línea 38 & 39 PREGUNTA 5: ¿Crees que las estrategia/s de lectura (skiming, scanning, underlining known and unknown words, image description, note taking, reading title for prediction) anteriores te ayuda/n a mejorar tu comprensión de lectura en Ingles? Explicar porque

Jefferson: si porque entiendo más el ingles y también todas las áreas.

Diana: Si, por que así sabré algunas palabras, puedo describir imágenes en cualquier lectura, puedo tomar notas de lo que entiendo ya se de las desconocidas y las desconocidas.

Katherine: si porque yo aprendo más Ingles.

Camilo: Por que cuando subrayas sabes la conocida y las desconocidas.

Tatiana: Si, porque uno aprende más mejor la lectura y mi comprensión.

In the previous examples, Katherine said that by knowing and applying reading strategies she seems to learn more English. From his answer, Jefferson seems to have expanded his recently acquired knowledge of the strategies to other subjects such as content areas. The case of Diana seems to have a relation with Jefferson because she also expanded her ideas and boundaries about what reading strategies meant for her. For instance, Diana reported that she would know more words and she seems able to describe images on any reading material. She also reported that with the help of reading strategies she can take notes not only about what she understands during reading but also about the known and the unknown words in further readings. Finally, Tatiana´s case, she reported that with the knowledge of reading strategies she might able to improve in reading comprehension. Camilo seems to have interpreted the question as a request to report on a specific strategy. He answered clearly about his use of the strategy we taught to identify known and unknown English vocabulary. However, his answer was not as thorough as the answers from the other students, in the sense that he did not mention the advantages of knowing reading strategies in order to improve his English.

At the end of the whole process, we compared the answers of the questionnaires given to the participants before and after the instruction and we were positively surprised at the students´ replies. After the whole instruction process, they all reported some progress on their definition and application of reading strategies.

Students´ Performance When Reading English Short Stories.

Given the problems in the instruction that we exposed earlier and the sparse data that we collected through the questionnaires, we cannot affirm that all students benefited from our instruction. We did not include a method in our study that allowed us the certainty of saying that the students in our classes learned to use reading strategies as a product of our instruction. Nevertheless, despite the fact that we did not teach the students reading strategies thoroughly and that we did not document the students' progress, we wanted to report on the students´ responses to questionnaires that we gave them after teaching some strategies and having them practice with reading short texts.

We wanted to explore how the instruction that we gave them could have possibly impacted their English reading comprehension.

One of the items of the questionnaire asked the students for their global understanding of the story. The participants expressed in their own words what the short story was about. The following examples were taken from the after-reading questionnaire about two short stories called "The Little Red Hen" and "The Hare and Tortoise":

> Line 14 PREGUNTA 2: ¿De qué trata la historia?
>
> Linea 17, 18 & 19. Jefferson: De un conejo engreído y de una Tortuga que hicieron una carrera y perdió la tortuga. La otra lectura era acerca the Little Red Hen. De una gallina trabajadora y de unas gallinas que no ayudaban a nada.
>
> Diana: la Tortuga y la libre, la gallinita roja.
>
> Katherine: Big race, max hare vs. tobi torto ise
>
> Camilo: De una liebre y una Tortuga haciendo una carrera
>
> Tatiana: De la tortuga y la liebre

We noticed that in the previous example Jefferson was more analytical than his classmates because he wrote a paragraph briefly summarizing the stories (i.e., "de un conejo engreido", "de una gallina trabajadora"). The other students (Diana, Katherine, Camilo, Tatiana) reported the main characters from the stories under the question about the main idea of the story. Thus, only one student (Jefferson) answered the question appropriately although at the end, he mixed the roles of the characters of the second story. Jefferson named all the characters with the same word "hen", when the characters were all different because the story was about one hen, chickens, a duck and a goose.

In the following example from the questionnaire, we asked the students to identify the main and secondary characters of the story. Although we did not teach them how to recognize characters in English stories, we assumed that they knew how to do this from their knowledge of Spanish stories. Below are the answers from each student about the characters:

> Línea 30 Pregunta 4 ¿Quién es o son los personajes principales y secundarios de la historia?

Katherine: la gallina, el pato, la tortuga, la liebre, etc.

Tatiana: la tortuga y la liebre

Jefferson: Principales: conejo, tortuga y gallina

Diana: Tortuga y liebre, gallina, el pato y el ganso

Camilo: la liebre y la tortuga

The students´ answers show that even without instruction or a review about what characters are, they can recognize at least the main characters of an English story. Only Jefferson attempted a classification of the story characters (i.e., "principales"). Jefferson´s classification suggests that he followed the instructions from the question and that he provided a more precise answer than the rest of the participants, who reported main and secondary characters altogether.

In another part of the same short story the participants were asked if they could recognize time and space of the story. We did not teach the students how to distinguish those characteristics (space & time) of the story; actually the students applied their resources of their prior knowledge to answer the question. The following sample is taken from the after-reading questionnaire:

PREGUNTA 5: ¿En qué tiempo y espacio se encuentra la historia?

Katherine: En la granja y el bosque. Y el tiempo en el día

Tatiana: en el día

Jefferson: en el día, en la granja y en el bosque

Diana: en un día

Camilo: en el bosque, y el tiempo es en el día

By answering question 5 the participants were able to expand their knowledge in relation with time and space of the story. At any moment we suggested the students that the animals in their story were located in a farm or in the woods as Katherine´s and Jefferson replied in their answers. The purpose of this question (5) for the students was to figure out what the students were able to imagine and to predict in the two short stories that they were reading.

In question 6, the participants were asked if they were able to figure out with the knowledge of their L1 what the main idea of the short story was. The excerpt is taken from the questionnaire:

> PREGUNTA 6: ¿Cuál es la idea principal de la historia?
>
> Katherine: De que la tortuga y la liebre hacían un reto y gano la tortuga
>
> Tatiana: Que la tortuga gana la carrera
>
> Jefferson: enseñanzas
>
> Diana: Que hacer la carrera y haber quien gana
>
> Camilo: de una carrera

In questions 6, most of the students could identify what the main story was. We can notice that Katherine´s answer was accurate and a very complete answer in comparison to their classmates. In Jefferson´s case, he replays that the main story was related to moral values. In Tatiana, Camilo and Diana´s case, they went straight to the point with their answers. In question 7, we wanted if the participants could relate things from the story to their reality. The excerpt:

> PREGUNTA 7: ¿Qué cosas buenas o malas pudiste identificar en el texto?
>
> Katherine: Ninguna
>
> Tatiana: la mala fue que la liebre se creía mucho y la tortuga gano
>
> Jefferson: buenas: conseguir metas y malas: ser engreído
>
> Diana: Que el ganso y la pata no querían ayudar
>
> Camilo: ninguna

In question 7, the participants had the opportunity to reflect on the reading. They answered it by saying what the negative and positive things could they catch from both readings (The Little Red Hen & The Tortoise and the Hare). In Katherine and Camilo´s case, the texts did not project any positive or bad reaction to them (i.e. ninguna). On the other hand, Jefferson was able to classify his answers by saying (i.e. buenas: conseguir metas y malas: ser engreido). And finally, Diana just was able to give one negative aspect about one story as it is shown in the data. Overall, we can say from the students'

written reports that most students understood the generalities of the stories, but they did not report enough details. We realize that we could have modeled to the students how to answer the questions properly. Because we did not model to them how to answer the questions, we could not assume they would answer the questions thoroughly.

To highlight unexpected performances of students during the reading activities, we found interesting information about Diana who went beyond her peers to rewrite in Spanish the English stories provided by Jorge, the teacher. Diana rewrote two different short stories in the back of her English worksheets without the teacher prompting her to do so. She wrote the commentaries all on her own initiative.

Diana´s writing shows her interpretation in Spanish of the English story. Noticeable in her writing is the use of characters, the main idea of the story, and an imitation of the way the original text was displayed on the page. The way Diana wrote the story suggests that she did not translate the story word by word. Notice that the original story starts with "the little red hen was in the farmyard with her chickens, when she found a grain of wheat", and Diana´s Spanish version starts with "la gallina roja incontro un grano por aquel granero". Diana seems to have recognized the story as a familiar story for her and rewritten it in her own version, with her own words. We noticed that Diana even emulated the lay out of the original text in her Spanish version.

In her case, she demonstrated comprehension of the English text by retelling the story in Spanish the way she knew it. In other words, she used her previous knowledge about children's stories in her L1 to demonstrate her comprehension of the English text in writing.

Diana showed a similar performance in the story "The Hare and the Tortoise". After analyzing Diana´s written product we found out that she used her written language in a very original way in order to retell the story. She rewrote her own version of the story as if she would be telling the story to somebody else. She used phrases such as "la liebre se creia las más veloz y era presumiendo y retando a los demás y la Tortuga aceptó y la liebre con mucho gusto dijo que si que bueno […]". Notice that in the previous phrase, Diana uses run-on sentences, which we consider typical of the way that children retell stories (e.g., "y era presumiendo y retando a los demás y la Tortuga aceptó y la liebre…"). She also uses reported speech that is inappropriate for writing stories (e.g., "dijo que si que bueno"). This written piece reveals that Diana may not yet have an understanding of the differences between oral and written discourse in Spanish. We know that written language tends to be more dense and less redundant in comparison to oral discourse. When we speak, we chain ideas across sentences, and the listener is more tolerant to redundancy and repetition. However, when we write, we should avoid repetition and should strive for coherence. Although Diana wrote the story as if she were telling it orally, she demonstrated her comprehension of the story by

rewriting it with the previous knowledge she had in Spanish. We also highlight that she was the only student who responded to the reading by rewriting it, in contrast to her peers who did not do it.

Another students´ performance we must highlight was a response from Tatiana to a class activity. One day, Jorge was guiding the students through practicing the strategy of underlining words, which he had just taught to the class. In previous classes, Jorge often used a comparative table on the board to organize the known & unknown words identified on a text. But, that day Jorge did not do that. Tatiana asked him: "Profe, ¿por qué no podemos hacer el cuadro comparativo de palabras conocidas y desconocidas de los que hemos hecho antes?" Jorge responded: "ahh, que buena idea". That was a suggestion that Jorge did not expect. At that moment, Jorge realized that this student was an attentive and reflective learner. Actually, activities such as developing a comparative table, modeling, using cognates, guessing exercises, and practicing the vocabulary in different context were always related to reading strategy instruction. We may assume that Tatiana´s response was empowered by the reading activities developed in class. She may have felt the necessity to process new information and to reinforce the known words by developing an advance organizer (such as category charts). We also may speculate that Tatiana really liked to get involved with the strategies and practice activities provided by the teacher.

The Importance of L1 in the Process of Learning a Foreign Language

Throughout the process of data collection in the instructional sessions, we gained awareness about the importance of L1 to support understanding in L2. In the first lesson, the instruction was entirely in English. The use of English only in the first lesson seems to have not contributed significantly to the students´ understanding of different activities which were intended to enhance language development and reading strategies. Thus, some students manifested their concern because they had problems to comprehend the messages given by the teacher. For instance, during a reading activity, a student made the following statement: "profe, ¿otra vez una lectura en Ingles?", "profe, es que no entendemos nada" *"profe, ¿por qué no nos hablas en Español?" "nosotros no entendemos en Ingles…..o puedes volver a repetir las instrucciones pero en Español, por favor…."*. These students´ concerns evidenced the need to use the L1 to support students' comprehension and language development in L2, and also to strengthen the

instruction and students´ learning of reading strategies in L2. Below, there is a sample of the first video recording which helped us to raise our awareness about the importance of using Spanish (L1) strategically so that students had a better comprehension of the different activities in the class:

> Teacher's notes: "I asked the students 'What is our nationality'. Curiosamente, ninguno de los estudiantes responde a la pregunta del profesor. Quizás eso podría ser porque ellos no están acostumbrados o no han expuesto su oído al idioma Ingles. Inmediatamente traduje la pregunta: '¿Cuál es nuestra nacionalidad?' Ahí si cuando el profesor les dice en Español los estudiantes entienden y dicen la mayoría de ellos ¡¡Colombia!!! Entonces se forma un alboroto entre los estudiante y no dejan escuchar nada.

Notice that first, the teacher asked a question in English related to the students´ nationality "*What is our nationality?*". However, it could be evidenced that most of the students did not comprehend the question. The students´ lack of understanding led Jorge to translate the question, so that they could come across with comprehension "*¿Cuál es nuestra nacionalidad?*". The students´ lack of comprehension when using L2 led us to establish some assumptions: Probably, students were not familiarized enough with oral English. Also, students might have not had previous exposure to the English language. Their past instruction in English might have been of a low quality regarding the teaching methodology. Based on this experience, we arrived to the conclusion that it was necessary to use Spanish strategically in the following sessions. Thus, after the first session, explanations were given first in English and then in Spanish so that students could become aware of the different activities and topics. It seems that at very basic levels of instruction of English as a foreign language (L2), the native language (L1) (in our context Spanish) may constitute a primary resource to scaffold students´ understanding of L2.

We found it was important to include the Spanish teacher as a secondary participant and we decided to give her a questionnaire. We wanted to see if the problem with children not using reading strategies was more a question of them not having been exposed to this kind of instruction, even in Spanish. So, we thought we could find important information about the reading instruction given to students in their Spanish classes. From the questionnaire given to the Spanish teacher, we found out that the she did not know explicitly about the use of reading strategies, let alone about teaching

reading strategies. She was surprised when we told her that taking notes, underlining words, reading the title for predictions, were reading strategies. She even asked us to teach her the strategies so that she could use them in her own reading comprehension. Below are some of her answers to the questionnaire:

Question: ¿Qué son para ti estrategias de lectura?

Actividades que se pueden aplicar para mejorar la lectura

Question:¿Sabes o conoces alguna estrategia de lectura? ¿Cuál?

No

Notice that in the first question "¿Sabes o conoces alguna estrategia de lectura?" the teacher frankly manifested that she did not know any explicit reading strategy. In the second question we noticed that the Spanish teacher was capable to answer what reading strategies meant for her, but she was not able to identify even one reading strategy explicitly. This teacher's responses made us think that native language teachers should possess knowledge about reading strategies to teach reading in the L1. With this knowledge, native language teachers could teach their students how to accomplish comprehension in Spanish, so that the students have cognitive resources to apply when they read text in English.

What We Learned From Reflecting on our Instruction

While writing our findings, we had the opportunity to reflect on our lesson design and instruction. In every section of our findings, we noticed that we could have offered better instruction to the children if we had had more knowledge and experience with the use of reading strategies ourselves. In retrospect, we realized that we moved fast in the instruction of each strategy and that we did not fully explore the potential of the strategies we taught. In the following section, we reflect and propose some ways in which we could have taken more advantage of the reading strategy instruction we designed. We hope to use this acquired knowledge in our teaching careers in the future.

In the process of lesson planning we chose appropriate material for the students. The short stories we selected were relevant to the topics of the sixth grade English curriculum and to the reading skills that we planned to teach every class. Nevertheless, in planning our instruction for reading strategies, we did not keep in mind important steps that now, in retrospect, we realize were needed to guide the students towards reading comprehension. In this section, we will point out a number of components of reading strategy instruction that we could have taken into account in our lessons. The ideas we reflect on in this section were motivated from our reading of teaching literature (Herrell & Jordan, 2008).

Visual Aids and Realia

First, during the teaching of the reading strategies we did not take into account the use of additional visual aids related to the reading material we gave to our students. The visual material would have helped Jorge to turn basic information whether written or spoken into more memorable knowledge for the students. With the use of visual aids and realia, Jorge could have had the possibility to provide meaningful content so that the students could remember the contexts of the stories they read. The use of visual aids would also have helped Jorge to engage the students in conversations about the story to reach deep comprehension of the text. This, in turn, could have given the students opportunities for oral practice and its used could have helped the students to retain the English vocabulary learned in the class.

During the instruction of the strategies in reading class, we could have used real objects to get the students familiarized with the written text that we presented to them.

The use of realia could have promoted students´ conversations about the reading, and thus increased the potential for comprehension and word learning.

Read and Clarify

Language teachers must consider that in order to teach reading, teachers model how readers read and how they coordinate reading strategies to approach comprehension. In our case, when Jorge taught the students how to read in English, he let them read the short story first silently. Jorge allowed the students to read silently as a first attempt to get the students familiarized with aspects of the story (e.g., characters, environment, and vocabulary). Unfortunately, Jorge did not model the strategy that he wanted the students to use by reading aloud to the students. Instead, Jorge gave the students general guidelines on what to do when reading by themselves. If Jorge had modeled the reading English short stories, the students would have known what to do when, for example, encountering an unknown word, reading a segment and not understanding it, or figuring out a text reference that is not clear. When a teacher models reading by thinking aloud as he reads, the students may become more prepared to face further and challenging texts with new vocabulary. According to Herrell & Jordan (2008), it is important to first model to the students the reading because it allows the students to interact whether with their classmates or their teacher. Modeling how to identify a key concept from a specific reading to our students also helps them to construct meaning from the text. It is helpful for a teacher to implement modeling with the help of visual material in order to support what he/she is teaching. Thus, students can understand and make connections between new vocabulary and their L1 background knowledge to build L2 skills (English).

Another factor that Jorge did not take into account when teaching reading was to stop in appropriate places for clarifications as he read the stories aloud to the students. By often stopping at key parts of the story and by asking questions to the students, students can have the opportunity to make inferences, connections and visualize events portrayed in the reading. If Jorge had stopped while he was reading short stories in places such as paragraphs or unknown phrases, the students would have built meaning out of text when they read.

Engage the Students Actively

In preparing the readings for the class, Jorge always searched images related to the short stories and added them to the text. The implicit purpose of adding images to the text was to engage the students´ attention to the reading and keep them focused on the lesson. At the very beginning of the lessons, Jorge did not take full advantage of the images provided to help the students make explicit connections between the images, their L1, and the new concepts/vocabulary taught in the class. The expectation was that the students were able to make these connections by themselves. Now, we know that if the teacher does not teach students to make connections explicitly, the students may not make them by themselves.

In later lessons, after discussion with his research partner, Jorge changed his teaching methodology and started modeling while reading aloud to the students. We noticed that the students started making connections between the text and their prior knowledge in L1 immediately.

Other possible instructional strategies to engage the students actively in the reading activities could have been the use of puppets and role plays to represent the short stories, in addition to reading aloud the stories to the students. The use of puppets could have helped students remember vocabulary, events, and characters more than the simple images initially provided. The use of "role plays" could have helped the students to recreate the short stories and that activity would have created a major impact for the students throughout the reading instruction.

Review Key Concepts

In the first two classes Jorge did not review key concepts about the previous class. The two researchers discussed the issue of not providing the students with a review of the strategies taught in previous lessons. Reviewing previous strategies could have been important to help the students make connections so that they could expand their opportunities for learning new information. We realize now that Jorge could have also the texts read with the students to reinforce new vocabulary learning and to further explore details from the story that the students may not have encountered in their first and only reading.

Although we had the students respond to a comprehension questionnaire, we did not plan ensuing instruction based on the students´ feedback on that questionnaire. Instead, we continued the planned lessons without giving much thought to what the students expressed in terms of comprehension in the questionnaire. In terms of assessing and monitoring growth, we could have taken advantage of the students´ knowledge of the story characters in Spanish (demonstrated in the questionnaire) to introduce story character identification in English.

When the students did not understand a word or an idea from a short story, we made a table to compare words they did not know with words they knew. We could have taken more advantage of that strategy, if we would have reread aloud the story making pauses on the lines containing the unknown words and making clarifications by using the word in real contexts. Another possible activity to promote the understanding of unknown vocabulary includes suggesting to the students to write sentences by including the unknown word on the board. In that way, sentences would have provided students with more context to learn the new word. Another activity that Jorge could have applied with the students is the use of morphological analysis of words to uncover the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. Jorge could have taught the students to recognize prefixes, suffixes, and roots of words. In that way, students would have learned easily to find close relations between English and Spanish words, as well as among the English words they knew and the unknown vocabulary in further readings.

One teaching practice that we always implemented was monitoring and assessing the students when they worked in groups. When students were organized in groups to develop a reading activity Jorge always walked around each one of the groups answering students´ doubts, and asking them questions. By often assessing and monitoring students during group work, the teacher can expand the opportunities to provide appropriate and immediate corrective feedback. This instructional practice was one that we will continue using in our teaching.

Discussion of the Findings

The study that we have conducted provides important information about the instruction of reading strategies to Spanish-speaking middle-school English language learners. In this section, we will look at our findings under the light of the research on strategic reading known to us.

The Exposure of Young Readers to Formal Instruction of Reading Strategies

We taught our students to use a set of reading strategies so that they used them as tools to comprehend English text. Initially, our students seemed to perceive reading as an activity exclusively academic, and did not conceive reading as an activity for pleasure. From the very beginning we observed that our students neither knew what a strategy was, let alone could they explicitly use strategies as tools to comprehend reading. From the Spanish teacher, we found that the students were not taught reading strategies in Spanish. One important contribution of our study is that through our instruction, we introduced the children to some reading metalanguage (e.g., strategy, skimming and scanning, prior knowledge, taking notes, underlining unknown words, reading title for prediction, connections between pictures and text), and to the fact that a reader can manipulate the information from text in order to comprehend it. At the end of the instructional period, students were able to recognize that reading strategies are tools for approaching reading comprehension. Authors like MacNamara (2009) acknowledge the importance of knowing reading strategies to comprehend reading and to overcome reading problems. By introducing the jargon of reading to the students we may have given them some initial conceptual tools to further understand the concept of reading.

Students` Spontaneous/Natural Tendency to Recognize Spanish-English Cognates

The students in our study searched for Spanish cognates in the English text and used translation in order to comprehend short stories in English. Interestingly, we did not teach the strategies of searching for cognates and translation to our students. Unlike us, the researchers in Jimenez, Garcìa & Pearson (1995, 1996) modeled the students how to use these strategies when reading. However, Jimenez et al. (1995, 1996) realized that, for the most part, the readers who tended to use cognates as tools for comprehension were the more proficient readers. In our case, by and large, the students searched for Spanish cognates in the English reading without us teaching them how to

do it. A relevant difference between our participants and those in Jimenez et al. (1995, 1996) is that our students have a strongly developed L1 for living and being schooled in a prevalent monolingual Spanish context. This context may provide them with a "word bank" to draw from to identify the meaning of English words that look similar to the corresponding Spanish word. Conversely, the students in Jimenez et al. (1995, 1996) did not have a strong Spanish language. Therefore, the weaker readers with weak Spanish linguistic background tended to not recognize cognates in the text.

At the beginning of the instructional reading, we did not realize that reading strategies such as cognate recognition and translation were important and efficient methods for approaching reading in English texts. Indeed, searching for cognates is a reading strategy that supports the comprehension of vocabulary in a second language, which is a major concern for bilingual reading (Jimenez et al. 1995, 1996). When students learn how to create connections between Spanish cognates and English, they expand their vocabulary in the English language with the help of their L1. In our classes, we targeted the instruction of vocabulary through teaching the students to identify and underline known and unknown words. As we posited it earlier, our instructional weakness was that we did not teach those strategies thoroughly so that students could have had the possibility to expand their language boundaries to comprehend English texts. Nevertheless, at the end of the whole reading instruction we were able to raise interest in English words among the students. The students´ natural tendency to use cognates, accompanied by well planned vocabulary strategies, could contribute to the students´ progress in acquiring new vocabulary in English.

Misleading Assumptions of Students´ Reading Performance

We learned from our study that the assumptions that we held as teachers about the students´ reading abilities were, for the most part, unfounded. In the interviews with our participants, we found that most of them reported liking to read in their native language. This response led us to assume that the students read often in Spanish, since this was an activity they said they enjoyed. Contradictorily, most students pointed out not reading frequently, or reading only very little or just once in a month. Their report on their reading frequency contradicted our assumption that if a person likes to read, he/she would read more often in comparison to what the students reported. This insight agrees with those of other undergraduate researchers, who, like us, had to revise their

assumptions on the students' reading performance based on the reading data they collected (Raba, López, & Echeverry, 2010, in development).

One particular participants´ answer (Camilo) led us to believe that he could be a strong reader. Camilo reported in his interview that he liked to read stories and Condorito magazines. From Camilo´s response we assumed that he was a strong reader. However, Camilo´s poor reading performance in the classroom surprised us and made us challenge our initial assumption. His performance showed that he was not the good reader that we imagined in the first place. In contrast to Camilo, Diana reported in her interview that she did not read much and that she only seldom read. Diana´s reading performance in the classroom demonstrated that she was a more reflective and attentive reader in comparison to her peers.

As teacher-researchers, we learned from the students that we can not take the students` reports as proof of their performance. We always have to look at how they read, otherwise, we will not know what they can actually do with text. An alternative interpretation of the data from these two students (Camilo and Diana) made us wonder if their reading performance was due to their response to the instruction. For instance, Camilo may in fact read at home, but his lack of response to the instruction may have been due to a lack of interest towards the reading activities or the stories. Consequently, he may like to read, but he may not have liked the structured reading instruction given by his teacher. Diana, on the other hand, may not have had much contact with text as she reported in her interview, but she could have found the stories and instruction structured enough for her needs as a reader. The instruction in her case may have sparked her interest in reading.

Tapping Into the Students' Previous Knowledge to Approach English Short Stories

We took advantage of our students´ prior knowledge by giving them short expository text about their own country and hometown, as well as fables known to them in Spanish (i.e., the turtle and the hare, the little red hen) in order to tap into their previous knowledge and thus help them with their reading comprehension of the English text. We saw the relevance of using the students` prior knowledge with the performance by Diana. She rewrote in her own Spanish version the two fables. She was able to produce this writing because she knew the English stories in Spanish. In this

way, Diana was able to use her prior knowledge of the stories and her L1 to demonstrate her comprehension of the stories in English. Both stories were not just a translation from English to Spanish. Her writing sounded as if she would be telling the story orally to somebody else, which reflects her prior knowledge on how to tell stories. Although the language she used in her written retelling was very oral in its construction (i.e., use of redundancy, presence of run-on sentences), she still achieved telling the story effectively.

We noticed that using their previous knowledge helped them make meaning of the texts. This finding coincides with Jiménez and Gámez's (1996) research who took advantage of their students´ prior knowledge in relation to their Latino culture (e.g., their knowledge about typical Mexican food) in order to help them with their understanding of culturally-relevant stories written in English. Our findings coincide with those by Jiménez & Gámez (1996) in that using text that somehow is related to what the students already know is important to activate their prior knowledge when they are learning a second or a foreign language. When the L2 text is relevant to what they know, students are more able to make connections between what they know and the new information presented by the text. Thus, their comprehension of L2 text could be enhanced.

Our findings also revealed that at the beginning of our instruction we were not aware of the importance of using our students' Spanish. Through a retrospective analysis of our instruction, we realized that the use of L1 helped our participants to convey meaning from the text; but, we did not see the value of the L1 in our research project until after finishing collecting our data. Jiménez and Gámez (1996) helped us acknowledge the importance of the role of the L1 in reading comprehension through one of their findings that pointed out that the use of both English and Spanish around text was very helpful for their Latino/a students. We may venture to speculate that when the L1 is appropriately used, that instructional choice can be very beneficial in order to approach and comprehend L2 text, although most English as a foreign language teachers may not consider the first language as a resource to comprehend L2 text, but rather as a hindrance. As Nasary (2008) claims, *the first language can be a facilitating factor and not just an interfering factor for acquiring L2 language" (p.68).*

Previous studies agree with Nasary`s (2008) claim about the importance of the L1 when learning a second language. For instance, Clarke (1979) studied "good" and "poor" Spanish readers in reading English and found that "good" Spanish readers performed better on English reading tasks than the "poor" ones. Also, Jimenez, Garcia, and Pearson (1995) found the same with their study of the strategic reading processes of eight bilingual Latino children. They found that for the proficient bilingual reader the relationship between Spanish and English was helpful for understanding text written in either one of the languages. The less proficient bilingual reader, on the other hand, did not know how to take advantage of the relationship between the languages. A reader like this one could benefit from instruction that taps into the advantages of using the first language to comprehend text in the second.

Instructional and Research Implications

Instructional Implications

In order to teach reading strategies EFL teachers need to know how they use strategies themselves to get meaning out of the text they read. In addition, teachers also need to be aware of the fact that reading strategies are efficient cognitive tools that readers have at hand to comprehend texts. So, to transfer knowledge of reading strategies onto the students, teachers have to know how to use reading strategies and be able to apply the strategies effectively while reading. Once teachers are able to comprehend and handle the metalanguage of reading, they may be ready to teach the strategies to the students. Otherwise, if a teacher does not know the metalanguage to approach reading, he/she would no be able to share that knowledge with the students efficiently.

From this study we learned that to impart instruction on reading strategies, EFL teachers have to pay attention to several factors. First, they should know what strategies to emphasize in one lesson so that they do not fall into the trap of teaching too many strategies at the same time and thus, not allowing the students enough time to thoroughly understand the use of each strategy. Second, teachers should pay attention to the pacing of their reading strategy instruction to ensure that students see how to connect the information they have in their heads to the information they take from the text. Third, teachers should know well how to model the use of strategies for the students and how to coordinate the use of strategies to enable the students to apply the strategy appropriately when they read independently.

Teachers may use thinking aloud to model the strategies to the students. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the acquisition of thinking aloud skills is not easy. Teachers have to train themselves on how to think aloud while reading so that they can be later capable of modeling the strategy to the students. However, language teachers also need to pay attention to how they make sense out of what they read by seeing how the new information fits with what they already know. This is how teachers can make the strategies they use much more conscious. When language teachers help their students make conscious connections with previous knowledge or experiences

before or during reading, students will learn how to make those connections automatically.

Another factor is that language teachers need to be explicit when they are teaching a reading strategy by providing the students with enough examples. Teachers should provide explicit strategy instruction so that their students are able to fully understand what their teachers want to explain them. So, if a teacher does not show and model to the students how to use a reading strategy, they may not learn it. That is why language teachers have to provide the students with explicit description of strategies by using modeling, guidance, and gradual release until the learners become independent, and thus the use of the reading strategy will be well established.

If we were to conduct this study again, we would pay more attention on how to give more explicit reading strategy instruction, since at the beginning of our study we did not teach the reading strategies in a very explicit way for the students to understand. We neither had enough knowledge on how to apply the 6 reading strategies that we taught for our students (i.e. skimming text, scanning text, reading titles for predictions, taking notes, underlining unknown words, underlining important information, and using images to comprehend text). Consequently, we did not thoroughly teach the strategies to the students, and not always gave them the most appropriate tools through modeling and teaching explicitly the strategies to approach English texts. That is why it is important to model and to provide the students with explicit instruction so that they are able to become independent learners.

Rich reading habits are necessary to build strong readers. This premise applies specifically for EFL instruction, and for teaching in general. If students are encouraged to incorporate reading routines at home or at school, they will build a reading discipline that may help them grow a desire for reading time. Reading for *pleasure* –and not only reading for academic purposes-- is a habit that teachers and parents need to foster among children. We believe that if students read frequently, they would enhance their knowledge and will become better readers and thus, their literacy would increase in comparison to a person who does not have readings habits. Parents can help their children at home by establishing a family reading routine, where parents can read to their children a children`s book, a magazine article, a cartoon, or any other text that is

interesting for both. A reading-for-pleasure routine will encourage and motivate both children and families to read for fun and not only for academic purposes. Parents and children can have discussions around the text, thus giving the children a chance to express ideas about a reading. At school, teachers not only should help children develop reading skills inside the classroom while they are studying but also outside of it. That means, teachers should recommend the students to read while they are on school vacation. For instance, by introducing children and their families to the resources of the public libraries can offer them.

Another relevant instructional implication from our study is that as novice English language teachers, we learned that young learners need high levels of motivating reading activities to avoid boredom and distraction. To promote motivation for reading, teachers need to learn how to encourage reading engagement among students, since engagement is essential in order to achieve reading comprehension The promotion of reading engagement in students in the classroom requires a coordination of how teachers plan their curriculum, select appropriate reading materials, diversify students´ reading experience, and provide explicit reading instruction with the help of reading cognitive skills. First of all, when planning and designing a reading curriculum, teachers need to include reading topics that are interesting for the students. Teachers should also keep a slow pace in the instruction when students are in a reading activity to give them the opportunity to internalize the information and to allow them to make connections from one activity to another. Another important fact for EFL teachers when they are teaching reading instruction they also need to keep a slow pace when they are explaining the strategies. That means, including one strategy per time and not giving extra unnecessary information. Second, teachers have to pay attention to the vocabulary, content, and reading tasks when selecting reading material. They always should select appropriate text for the target students. Third, teachers must select a diversity of reading genres for the students. When we taught the reading instruction we did not take into account to include different reading genres, and we now think it is important to incorporate several genres (i.e narrative, expository, poetry, historical fiction and fantasy) because the variety will expose students to different text structures and to different ways to express ideas in writing. In that way, students will also encounter different types of new vocabulary, characters, scenarios that will engage and promote their desire to read. Teachers should also make use of different places in which

the students have the chance to carry out their reading activities. For example, the teacher can take the students to read to the library or to other places in school that may be stimulating for reading. An appropriate change of environment may help create positive experiences among students associated with reading. And finally, teachers should provide explicit instruction combined with cognitive reading strategies so that the students will grow as independent readers.

EFL teachers need to realize that a teacher has the responsibility to empower and scaffold students´ learning by giving them reading strategies to be independent through explicit reading strategy instruction. As Taylor, Harris, Pearson & García (1995) state, explicit instruction of a specific strategy and its use provides opportunities for students to improve their reading skills. In other words, teachers should promote the use of reading strategies in students such as questioning, prior knowledge, making connections, and making inferences (Jiménez, Garcia, & Pearson 1995, 1996) to ensure reading comprehension.

Research Implications

If we had the opportunity to conduct this study again, we would choose to test the students with a reading English language assessment before giving the students the reading instruction. An initial test would provide us information about our students´ reading proficiency. The implications of doing an English reading test for the students is that it will evaluate how well they understand what they read in English. This information will support the planning of strategy instruction.

The reading test would also help us select the students for our project. If we wanted to observe the impact of our instruction, an initial reading test could give us information to select participants who are successful readers and participants who are not successful readers. After we impart the instruction, we could consider if there each group of students made progress, and we could determine the aspects of the instruction that may have helped them.

Another reason to have an initial test is that the results will give us the possibility to organize groups heterogeneously. Provided that the students know how to work cooperatively, we could put together strong readers with poor readers in groups.

The idea of organizing groups this way is that the students will help each other through cooperative work to understand the English readings.

Further research also could inquire about when and how English can be introduced to 6th grade students. Because the use of oral English by the teacher and reading text by the students were problematic issues in the classroom at the beginning of our study, we think that it is essential that EFL teachers need to take into account to start slowly and to steadily introduce English to children that do not know this language. We wrongly assumed that our students could easily understand the oral English instructions by the teacher. Soon we realized that our students did not understand what we wanted to explain to them during the reading strategy instruction. So, when tasks are beyond students´ understanding and they are not capable of achieving the goal of the task independently, the teachers should scaffold the task to help the students get to the goal. In addition, the English language learning process not only has to be scaffolded for the students but also sheltered. That means that the instruction should include special techniques to make the input more comprehensible (e.g., strategic use of visual aids, gestures, body language, realia, advance organizers, questions). So, through scaffolding the tasks and sheltering the instruction, teachers can use English as the language of instruction and still assure that the students will be able to achieve the goals of the instruction.

Conclusion

The instruction of reading strategies can be very beneficial and useful for students in order to approach any text. Reading in English for EFL learners can be a frustrating experience, especially when they do not have the cognitive tools to understand what is written. When students acquire reading strategies, they are empowered with cognitive tools to make meaning out of text.

Since teachers are the ones who provide guidance for the students to develop reading strategies, they have to be well informed and trained to deliver reading strategy instruction. Strategy instruction requires teachers to be aware of their own reading strategies, so that they can deliver their teaching explicitly. It also requires teachers to possess a repertoire of knowledge about how to teach strategies to students. In sum, teachers need to know how to model their thought processes to the students while the teacher reads, and to scaffold the use of reading strategies so that students can see how by using the text and the cognitive tools provided by the strategies, text comprehension can be achieved.

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Appendix 1

Reading Strategies Questionnaire Applied to the Short Story in Class Activities

Querido(a) estudiante,

Por favor responder las preguntas del siguiente cuestionario como se indica:
1. ¿Por qué estás leyendo este texto? explicar él porque

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. ¿de qué se trata la historia?

_____

_____

_____

3. ¿Qué estrategias de lectura aplicaste al texto? tomaste notas al lado del texto, hiciste lectura silenciosa, subrayaste el texto (palabras conocidas & desconocidas), o escaneaste el texto.

_____

_____

_____

_____

¿Quién es o son los personajes principales y secundarios?

_____

_____

4. ¿En qué tiempo y espacio se encuentra la historia?

_____

_____

_____

5. ¿Cuál es la idea principal de la historia?

_____

_____

_____

6. ¿Qué cosas buenas o malas pudiste identificar en la historia?

_____

_____

_____

7. ¿Qué clase de sentimiento o emoción te produjo después de leer la historia?

_____
_____
_____

Appendix 2

Interview

Reading strategies interview

1. ¿Te gusta leer?

2. ¿Te gusta leer en algún lugar especial?

3. ¿Con que frecuencia te gusta leer textos en Ingles?

4. ¿Comprendes o entiendes textos, cuentos y libros cuando los lees?

5. ¿Qué tipos de textos te gusta leer? ¿cuentos, libros, revistas, periódicos o libros?

6. ¿En que forma lees?

7. ¿Tienes alguna estrategia de lectura?

8. ¿Subrayas las cosas que consideras importantes?

9. ¿Con que proposito lees?

10. ¿Tiendes a analizar el texto que lees?

11. ¿Reflexionas acerca del texto que lees?

Appendix 3

Final Questionnaire:

Nombre: *Curso:*

Reading Strategies Interview

1. ¿Que son estrategias de lectura para ti?

2. ¿Aprendiste a utilizar una estrategia de lectura durante el curso de Ingles?

3. Que fue fácil o difícil de aprender a usar estas estrategias?

4. ¿Cuál/cuales de las siguientes estrategias de lecturas aplicas actualmente?
a. Skimming
b. Scanning
c. Subrayar palabras conocidas & desconocidas
d. Descripción de imágenes
e. Toma de notas
f. Leer titulo para predicción

5. ¿Crees que la/s estrategia/s de lectura anterior te ayuda/n a mejorar tu comprensión de lectura en Ingles? Explicar porque

6. ¿Ya que has aprendido sobre estrategias de lectura, cómo ves ahora la lectura en inglés?¿Te animas más ahora a leer que antes?

7. ¿Que aspectos de la instrucción crees que te ayudaron más?

8. ¿Hubieras podido entender el texto sin darte esa instrucción?