

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF TWO READING  
SPECIALISTS CONNECTED TO THE CARIBBEAN CENTRE FOR  
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHER TRAINING (CETT) IN ENHANCING  
STUDENT READING ACHIEVEMENT IN UNDERPERFORMING  
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN TRINIDAD**

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## ABSTRACT

### AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF TWO READING SPECIALISTS CONNECTED TO THE CARIBBEAN CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHER TRAINING (CETT) IN ENHANCING STUDENT READING ACHIEVEMENT IN UNDERPERFORMING PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN TRINIDAD

Janice Catherine Charles

The study focused on the experiences of two reading specialists connected to CETT in enhancing student reading achievement in underperforming primary schools in Trinidad. Its purpose was to highlight strategies, challenges, and best practices employed by the reading specialists in order to assist the various stakeholders in education in raising the literacy level in Trinidad and Tobago. CETT, a programme under the Ministry of Education, focuses on teacher training in primary schools in order to develop students' literacy skills. This was a qualitative study and the data collected was mainly comprised of two in-depth interviews with two reading specialists connected to CETT. The findings of the research indicated that the participants had mostly favourable experiences. In addition, participants shared the view that teachers received insufficient training at the various institutions, with respect to teaching reading. Moreover, low literacy was also seen as linked to crime. Some teachers were also considered to

be unprofessional and lazy, while others were thought to lack self-efficacy. It was also recognized that teachers and administration misunderstood the role of the reading specialist, and more support from administration was necessary. Additionally, there was the need for parents to be educated about literacy. Furthermore, students needed motivation to increase their self-esteem which impacted on their progress in reading. Additionally, administration should be monitored to ensure that they fulfil their roles as managers of schools. There should also be professional development workshops to educate teachers about the importance of practice, describe how literacy is linked to crime, and to build self-efficacy.

Keywords: experiences of CETT reading specialists, suggestions for improving literacy, teacher efficacy, struggling readers

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“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” Leo Buscaglia.

It is with deep heartfelt gratitude that I acknowledge everyone who has assisted in the completion of this research project:

- ❖ God
- ❖ My Supervisor
- ❖ My friends (Lemoy, Clara, Colin)
- ❖ My family (parents and children)
- ❖ All who assisted in words, thoughts or deeds.

May God bless you richly! You will always have a place in my heart and

I thank God for you.



Thank You!

Janice Charles

## **DEDICATION**

I wish to dedicate this finished work to my parents, Dominic Charles (deceased) and Theresa Charles, without whom I would not have life. Thanks for always supporting me. Also to my two beautiful children, Ria and Ricardo, who endured periods of my time away, I wish to thank you for your understanding. I also wish to thank my friend Colin, who has been very helpful. Thanks to all of you for the tremendous support without which this work would not have been possible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Dedication</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Introduction .....	3
Overview of Project .....	3
Background to the Problem .....	3
Statement of the Problem .....	14
Purpose of the Study .....	14
Significance of the Study .....	15
Research Questions .....	15
Definition of Terms .....	15
Organization of Study .....	16
<b>Chapter 2</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Review of Literature .....	18
<b>Chapter 3</b> .....	<b>27</b>
Methodology .....	27
Overview .....	27
Research Design and Type of Study .....	27

Rationale for Phenomenological Case Study .....	31
Description of Participants .....	32
Data Analysis Procedures .....	33
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study .....	35
Rationale for Sampling .....	35
<b>Chapter 4 .....</b>	<b>37</b>
Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings .....	37
Overview .....	37
Data Collection Procedures .....	37
Ethical Considerations .....	38
Analysis of Data .....	39
Discussion of Findings .....	54
<b>Chapter 5 .....</b>	<b>65</b>
Conclusion .....	65
Recap of Study .....	65
Restatement of Findings .....	66
Recommendations .....	67
<b>References .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Appendix B .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Appendix C .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Appendix D .....</b>	<b>79</b>

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Overview of Project**

This research project gives an insight into the world of two reading specialists from the North Eastern district of Trinidad. One is a former reading specialist under CETT and the other is currently employed with CETT as a reading specialist. It is divided up into five (5) chapters. Chapter one deals with the background to the problem, the problem, the purpose of the study and its significance, research questions, expected outcomes and definition of terms. Chapter two focuses on the importance of experiences and reviews the literature about reading specialists. Chapter three discusses the methodology of a phenomenological case study, describes the participants and the data analysis procedures. Additionally, it states the limitations and delimitations of the study. A rationale for sampling is also provided. Chapter four highlights the data collection procedures, ethical issues that were taken into consideration, the analysis of the data and the findings and results. Chapter five summarizes the study, restates the results and offers recommendations.

#### **Background to the Problem**

According to Shaw (2009), the roles of the reading specialist and the literacy coach have been connected so that the reading specialist is no longer solely responsible for the teaching of students but must also be well-informed and capable of mentoring teachers. As professionals who are to be experts in the field interacting with teachers, principals and students, reading specialists must be

highly qualified individuals. Basically, they must have advanced graduate preparation and the necessary qualifications, certificates, or degrees. They must also meet the requirements in the “Standards for Reading Professionals” (International Reading Association [IRA], 2000, p.100). Furthermore, they must possess prior classroom experience. However, the ideal reading specialist or literacy coach has been described by Frost & Bean (2006) as an individual with a master’s degree in reading, additional qualifications in coaching, a history of successfully teaching students at the levels on which to be focused, experience working with teachers and modeling lessons, observation skills, and expertise with presentations.

The idea of the Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT) emerged from a Summit of the Americas Initiative declared by President George W. Bush in April, 2001 (Miller & Walters, 2005). It is one of three centres that have been established; the other two are in the Andean region of South America and Central America. The goal of CETT is to combat the problem of low literacy and underachievement in schools by enhancing teacher training (Miller & Walters, 2005). The levels that are targeted are Second Year, Standard One and Standard Two since CETT believes that by establishing strong foundations the problem with literacy can be prevented rather than being cured. The goal of the three centres is to provide training for 15,000 teachers during a period of four years. CETT believes that the key to delivering a high standard of education lies with teachers. Therefore, empowering teachers in the area of reading would inadvertently impact positively on the development of the learner.

The base for the Caribbean CETT (CCETT) is in Jamaica (Dye, Helwig, Lambert, & Marshall, 2008) and it is managed by the Joint Board of Teacher Education at the University of the West Indies (Closing Ceremony for the Caribbean Center of Excellence for Teacher Training, 2009). For the purpose of the CETT programme, the Caribbean is referred to as the 12 independent English-speaking Caribbean countries known as the Commonwealth Caribbean (Miller & Walters, 2005). CCETT is directed by the national policies of the various Ministries of Education and has partnered with both the private and public sector to improve literacy and reading. Some supporters of the CETT programme are the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank (WB) (Dye et al., 2008).

The partnership with different organizations is indispensable to enhance the quality of education in the region and improve children's reading skills (Closing Ceremony for the Caribbean Center of Excellence for Teacher Training, 2009). Under CCETT, reading specialists conduct workshops with principals and teachers to sensitize them about the reading programme. Reading diagnosis and assessments are also done to inform teachers' instructions. The teachers are then able to identify the areas of weaknesses and thus make preparations to enhance the learner. Additionally, the use of differentiated instructions is stressed to ensure that the individual needs of the students are met.

The history of literacy coaching can be traced to the 1920s in the United States (Hall, 2004 as cited in Bean, 2009). The concept of reading specialists in schools emerged in the 1930s. The profession was given many different titles such as reading specialist, reading resource teacher, reading consultant, reading supervisor or reading coordinator (Vogt & Shearer, 2003). In the 1960's and 1970's classroom teachers were trained to work with struggling readers (Vogt & Shearer, 2003). They supervised teachers to improve reading programs in the United States (Bean, 2009). According to Vogt and Shearer (2003), during the recession (1980-1990), the position of the reading specialist was reduced or removed. In 1995, two recommendations made by the International Reading Association (IRA) were: an evaluation by school boards to determine whether they have the best professionals for teaching reading and the placement of a reading specialist in every classroom that has struggling readers (Vogt & Shearer, 2003). There is also now a great need for reading specialists partly because of the "No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Legislation of 2002" (Vogt & Shearer, 2003, p.18). According to Ormrod (2011), the NCLB was passed in 2001 in the United States and insists on continuous assessments of basic skills to find out if there is enough progress being made each year by students in reference to standards determined by states with respect to Reading, Mathematics and Science.

The reading specialist has grown in importance in the Caribbean. The University of the West Indies' Open Campus has put much needed infrastructure in place to ensure the effective training of literacy coaches online since 2000 (Gumbs, 2011). Some Caribbean countries that have such access are Antigua and

Barbuda, Bermuda, St. Lucia, Barbados, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Jamaica (Gumbs, 2011). Furthermore, the CCETT, which employs reading specialists, has centres in St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Guyana, Belize, Barbados, the Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, and St. Kitts and Nevis. (Caribbean Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training [CCETT], 2005). Trinidad and Tobago has also recognized the need for and the importance of reading specialists. CETT exists in Trinidad and Tobago and since 2005 the Ministry of Education has employed reading specialists who provide training for teachers who work in underperforming primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2008). At present 93 reading specialists are being trained at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine (School of Education at the Faculty of Humanities and Education, 2004-2011). They are from both the primary and secondary schools and are pursuing a Masters in Education in Reading. There are 83 females and ten males.

The role of the reading specialist depends on the needs of the school. The function of the reading specialist as a reading coach has been recommended for schools with numerous struggling readers (Dole, 2004). A literacy coach works directly with the teachers to enhance literacy skills among the students. As Dole (2004, p. 464) put it "... the lowest performing students need the highest performing teachers." Thus a great emphasis is placed on professional development. Dole (2004) referred to Joyce and Showers (1995) that Professional development involves having theoretical evidence concerning the strategies to be taught, modeling of the strategies, opportunities for teachers to

practise the strategies, feedback after implementing the strategies and collaboration about them to gain more knowledge and understanding.

In addition, according to Walpole and Blamey (2008), the reading specialist or literacy coach is a curriculum manager who is responsible for purchasing new materials, organizing the materials, putting students in groups and arranging schedules for instruction. As a trainer, he or she encourages a faithful adherence to assessment and to the curriculum. As an assessor, the reading specialist or literacy coach makes a summary of data collected from the entire school. He or she will also be called upon to observe teachers in the classroom and provide the necessary feedback. As a Modeler, the reading specialist or literacy coach demonstrates instruction in and out of the classroom. Furthermore, as a teacher, he or she designs and provides formal presentation and develops teacher study groups. Moreover, as a Literacy Coach he or she will use assessment to inform teaching instructions, and encourage thinking via reflective inquiry. Additionally, the reading specialist or literacy coach will facilitate a collaborative professional ambience. He or she will also work with teachers in preparation for instruction, creating controllable classrooms and conducting successful lessons (Mraz, Algozzine, Algozzine, & Kissel, 2009).

The reading specialist's role is not to provide clinical supervision but to be a resource person for all stakeholders in education that includes teachers and administrators. In being a resource person, he or she needs to assist in the compilation of suitable reading materials that will meet the needs and interests of the students. The compilation of materials involves matching texts to students'

interests and abilities. Guth and Pettengill (2005) also suggested selecting resource books that contain graphic organizers and reproducible material since those are preferences for teachers. These reading materials are the tools that teachers and administrators will use to enhance literacy among the students. Guth and Petengill (2005) in referring to Kasten and Wilfon (2005) stated that one of the challenges of a reading specialist is to motivate the learner to prevent aliteracy. The onus is on the reading specialist to teach pupils to desire to read. Therefore the reading materials must consist of an abundance of different genres at the students' instructional level. Moreover, adequate time must be allotted for leisure reading.

Moreover, the reading specialist or literacy coach is to provide other resources apart from reading materials that the classroom teacher might need. These resources include diagnostic instruments and literacy supplies for parents to use at home. As regards the diagnostic instruments, a teacher or administrator may need advice about a pupil's reading ability so the reading specialist can decide on the suitable tool to use with the student. This tool will include instruments to assess fluency, word analysis, vocabulary and comprehension. Furthermore, parents may indicate to teachers of their desire to assist their children and the teachers can consult the reading specialist for materials that can be used.

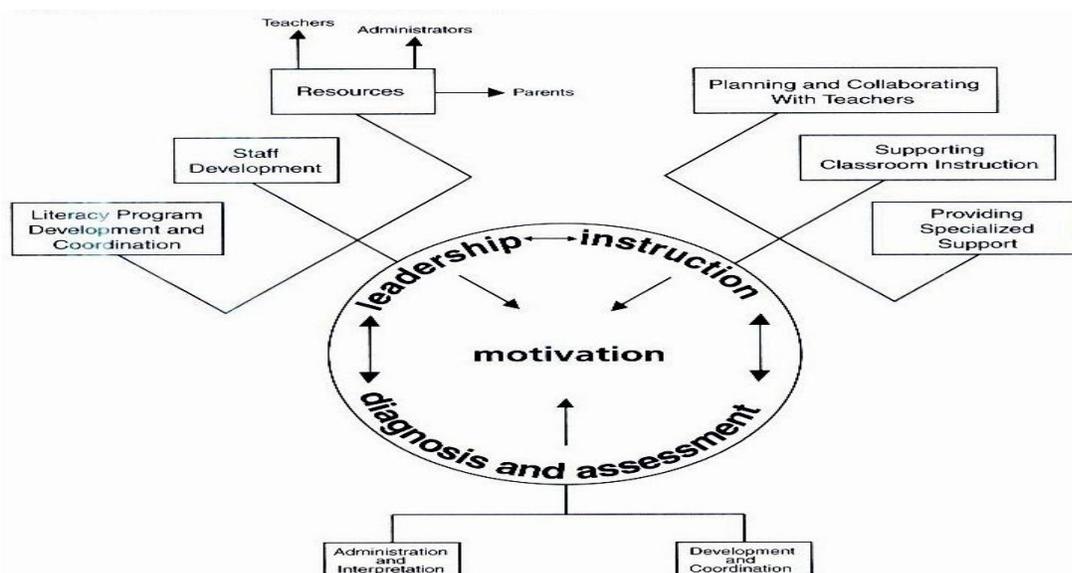
As an organizer of schoolwide reading programmers, the reading specialist or literacy coach needs to establish a literacy committee that will assist in the development, implementation and sustainability of the reading programme (Guth

& Pettengill, 2005). Then he or she needs to meet with the school's administrator in developing a literacy vision. In addition, to assist in the development of the reading programme, interviews can be conducted with reading specialists. He or she also meets with the literacy committee to get an idea of the philosophy of the school, and makes a list of the various aspects of the reading programme to be implemented.

Diagrams 1 and 2 illustrate the various roles and responsibilities of the reading specialist.

Diagram 1

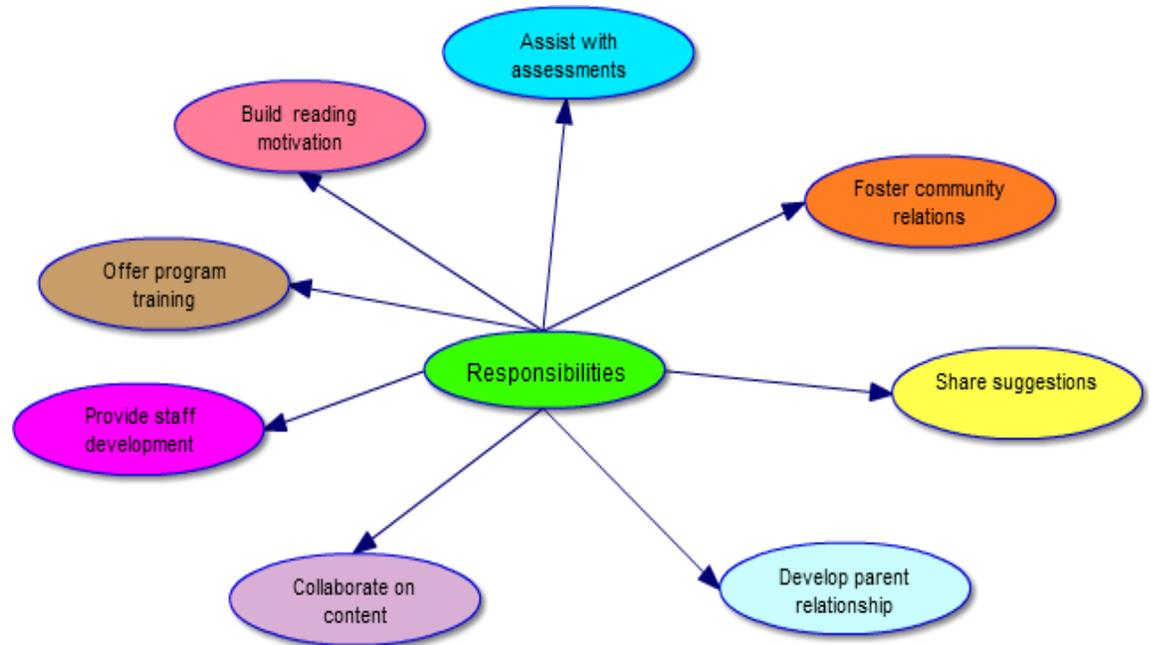
#### Roles of the Reading Specialist in the Literacy Program Model



Note: Adapted by Guth and Pettengill (2005, p 4) from the International Reading Association (2000).

Diagram 2

## Responsibilities of the Reading Specialist



Note: Taken from Guth and Pettengill (2005, p. 5)

Reading is a process that involves a combination of phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency. According to Vacca & Vacca (2007), Woody Allen explained that one must read to survive. Reading is not entertainment. It is vital. Furthermore, the Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association indicated that teenagers today must become highly literate in order to survive in an age inundated with an overwhelming amount of information (Vacca & Vacca, 2010). Therefore, it is indisputable that reading is an invaluable asset and a paucity of reading skills can rebound in undesirable consequences.

There has been an underperformance of students in schools of Trinidad and Tobago. As regards the primary schools with particular reference to the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) for the period 2005 to 2008, the Division of Educational Research and Evaluation [DERE] stated that "... the number of students performing in the 30% or less category increased with a minor improvement seen in 2008" (p. 32). Moreover, the percentage of students that scored between 31% and 59% increased continuously from 24.5 % to 29.3% between 2005 to 2008 (DERE, pp. 40, 41). Additionally, the students who scored between 0-59% in 2008 were 42.6%. Furthermore, an analysis of the Language Arts National Test in 2005 from the Ministry of Education, National Report on the Development of Education [NRDE] in Trinidad and Tobago indicates that 64% of the pupils scored at or below the Basic level (NRDE, 2008).

In addition, on analyzing the National Test results from 2005 to 2009, it was revealed that 125 schools have been labelled "Academic Watch", which

means that there is an insufficient number of students meeting the required standards (DERE, 2011). In addition, in 2006 the Progress in International Reading Literacy Survey (PIRLS), after an examination of the reading literacy skills of a group of ten year olds, indicated low levels of achievement (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). The average scores of Trinidad and Tobago fell below the international mean of 500 in each area that was examined. The overall average was 436 points (Mullis et al, 2007). Results for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) up to 2007 indicated that 40-50% of students are underachieving (NRDE, 2008).

The Minister of Education, Mr. Tim Gopeesingh recently announced on radio that there are thousands of our nation's children who have problems in reading and comprehension. Furthermore, weak readers usually cannot cope in the content areas because of their inability to make sense of the text (Montali and Lewandowski, 1996 as cited in Hall, Hughes, & Filbert, 2000). According to McCoss-Yergian and Krepps (2010), precise instruction in literacy strategies enhances comprehension skills in all the content areas. In addition, research supports the fact that struggling readers need high-quality literacy instruction by the most highly qualified teachers (Dole, 2004, p. 464).

The information considered thus far suggests that there is a literacy problem in Trinidad and Tobago. In light of this reality, I decided to be a part of the Master in Education, Reading programme with the intention of obtaining solutions. There are students who have reading difficulties and it is challenging for teachers to deal with such situations. Therefore, both the students and

teachers need assistance and that is where the reading specialist can be beneficial. A highly qualified reading specialist is in a position to help eradicate the problem of low literacy that plagues our nation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Underperformance in the schools is still a matter of grave concern and research has shown that improving classroom pedagogy treats with that matter (Dole, 2004). Reading specialists have had varied experiences regarding the development of student literacy in schools. Jones et al. (2010) focused on challenges, Dearman and Albert (2005) offered solutions to literacy challenges, and best practices were highlighted by (Bean & Swan, 2003). In view of the fact that there is great need for enhancing literacy instruction in schools in Trinidad and Tobago, understanding the experiences of reading specialists at CETT can benefit the development of student literacy since the reading specialists' experiences in teacher training will be relevant to our context. Since there is inadequate research on the experiences of reading specialists in Trinidad, there is a dire need to investigate this phenomenon.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to understand the experiences of two Reading Specialists connected to CETT which focuses on enhancing literacy in underperforming primary schools.

### **Significance of the Study**

A deeper understanding of the experiences that Reading Specialists have in enhancing student literacy will be gained. The findings of this study can help universities develop more appropriate programmes to better prepare reading specialists to improve student literacy. This research can help the 93 reading specialists (School of Education at the Faculty of Humanities and Education, 2004-2011) that are on the verge of being placed into schools to become more knowledgeable of best practices to improve their self efficacy.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the experiences of CETT Reading Specialists in providing literacy support in underperforming primary schools?
2. What are some suggestions that the Reading Specialists put forward to improve literacy based on their experiences?

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Reading Specialist**

A reading specialist is a professional with advanced preparation and experience in reading who has responsibility (i.e., providing instruction, serving as a resource to teachers) for the literacy performance of readers in general and of struggling readers in particular” (IRA, 2000, p. 100).

#### **Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to the degree to which one believes that he or she has the ability to affect student performance (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 1988).

**Struggling readers**

Struggling readers refer to students that read below their grade level.

**Underperforming**

Underperforming refers to schools or individuals whose assessment results have fallen below what is expected.

**Student literacy**

Student literacy "... should be conceived as encompassing several levels determined by the extent to which one can use printed and written material to function in society and to extend one's knowledge and abilities" (Miller & Walters, 2005).

**Reading or Literacy Coach**

Reading or Literacy Coach is defined by the IRA as a provider of professional development to teachers (Dole, 2004).

**Organization of Study**

The study is organized into five chapters. An overview of the research is presented in Chapter one providing a general idea of the content of the study. Next, a review of the literature is offered in Chapter two so that the study can be contextualized and an insight can be gained into how the topic being explored has

already been treated by other researchers. Chapter three focused on the qualitative method of phenomenological case study that is most apt to address the research questions posed by the researcher. Relevant issues like the procedure for data analysis, limitations, delimitations, rationales for the research design and type of sampling undertaken and a description of participants are also included in that chapter. In Chapter four there is a description of the procedure for data analysis, as well as the actual analysis that was done. Based on the analysis, the findings and results were discussed. Ethical issues worthy of being taken into consideration are also mentioned. Chapter five recapitulated the study, reiterated the results and offered recommendations. In Appendix A, there is a sample of the consent form that was signed by each participant. In Appendix B, there is a letter seeking permission to conduct the study. Appendices C and D contain samples of the interviews of the participants

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of two CETT Reading Specialists in enhancing literacy in underperforming primary schools in Trinidad. The review of the literature focused on the following areas:

- experience and learning
- the experiences of other reading specialists
- the need for reading specialists
- the importance of literacy

Experience has been defined as: “The totality of ways in which humans sense the world and make sense of what they perceive ...” (Miller & Boud, 1996 as cited by Jarvis, Holford & Griffin p.56). Jarvis et al. (2003) posited that experience is something that is trivialized, “There is a sense in which we take for granted the idea of experience” (p.53). However, this study has been undertaken to demonstrate that the experiences of reading specialists is not a trivial matter. Furthermore, knowledge of these experiences can provide secondary experience for all those involved with the improvement of students’ literacy, and ultimately fluent readers would be produced. Jarvis et al. (2003) highlighted that an individual’s knowledge of the world cannot be gained mostly through primary experiences since it is impossible for anyone to personally experience the many varied occurrences that happen worldwide. However, one can learn from secondary experiences and so be made aware of happenings in the global village,

planet earth. . Additionally, Jarvis et al. (2003) continued by stating that learning from the experiences of others is extremely indispensable and important:

*... there are many situations when we have to learn from secondary and mediated experience. In these cases, we have to recognize that we are learning from other people's experiences and interpretations. These must be assessed critically before we accept them. But without learning from secondary experiences, our knowledge of the world would be greatly impoverished (p. 67)*

A Chinese Proverb states that: "If you would know the road ahead, ask someone who has travelled it". The "road" of a reading specialist can best be described by reading specialists themselves. Learning from the experiences of reading specialists, which is an example of social learning, can be very enriching and beneficial to individuals who are interested in the enhancement of literacy. According to Tomasello, (2004), social learning is an important type of learning for human beings. He stated that "Observing the activities of others and learning from or through them enables individuals to acquire information with less effort and risk than if they were forced to learn on their own" (Tomasello, 2004 p.51). Therefore, learning through the experiences of the two reading specialists is important in the empowerment of future reading specialists or anyone who is interested in the development of literacy.

Furthermore, Moon et al. (2002) affirmed that interacting with individuals in one's environment is a main factor in determining what is learnt as well as how learning occurs. Hence, reading specialists belong to the "literacy environment"

and interactions with them, and reporting the findings will greatly assist in the learning of budding reading specialists or anyone who is interested in improving the level of literacy in Trinidad and Tobago. In reference to Soltis (1981), Moon et al. (2002) continued by indicating that an individual's concept of knowledge, way of thinking and expression of ideas are a direct result of his or her interactions with people during the course of time. Therefore, by interacting and gaining an insight into the world of the two reading specialists, it is hoped that meaningful learning will occur for all who are concerned about literacy.

Studies have been conducted on the experiences of reading specialists or literacy coaches. The studies described practices, challenges and offered suggestions for overcoming obstacles. As regards practices, McCombs and Marsh, (2009) pointed to the duties of a reading specialist or literacy coach. There were four categories: formal work with teachers, informal work, working with administration, and jobs that were not related to coaching in any way. Additionally, McCombs and Marsh, (2009) reported that the reading specialist or literacy coach did not spend enough time working with teachers in the classroom: "... only 15% of coaches reported spending 30% or more of their time working one-on-one with teachers. These figures fall short of the state's goal that coaches spend 50% of their time working with teachers in classrooms (p.503).

In addition, Walpole and Blamey, (2008) indicated that the reading specialist or literacy coach has multiple roles which they stated as being an assessment leader, a curriculum manager, a classroom observer, a modeler of lessons, a teacher and an organizer of professional development workshops.

Furthermore, most reading specialists or literacy coaches disclosed that they were supported by administration in dispensing their duties. However, a small number revealed that administration prevented them from functioning effectively as a support for teachers. Moreover, the majority of reading specialists or literacy coaches stressed that their work would have been unsuccessful without the assistance of administration (McCombs and Marsh, 2009).

Based on her numerous years of experience Toll, (2005) asserted that from the onset reading specialists or literacy coaches should create an encouraging first impression, and work assiduously to build trust and amicable relationships. She stressed the importance of meeting with key stakeholders like administration, staff, students and parents. Additionally, Toll, (2005) suggested that reading specialists or literacy coaches should possess three vital attributes: a consideration of feelings, thoughts and principles; valuing the knowledge and opinions of people, and respect by others. Furthermore, Toll, (2005) offered some suggestions for communicating effectively with teachers. She stated the importance of listening, remaining silent, the use of phrases to indicate that one is paying attention, encouraging people to talk, and obtaining opinions from individuals. Moreover, she highlighted that the reading specialists or literacy coaches should try to understand the perspectives of teachers who are uncooperative and are opposed to the support being offered to them.

Toll, (2005) also put forward the idea of having a “support system” (p. 133), which would include other reading specialists or literacy coaches and other educational professionals. She dissuaded the reading specialists or literacy

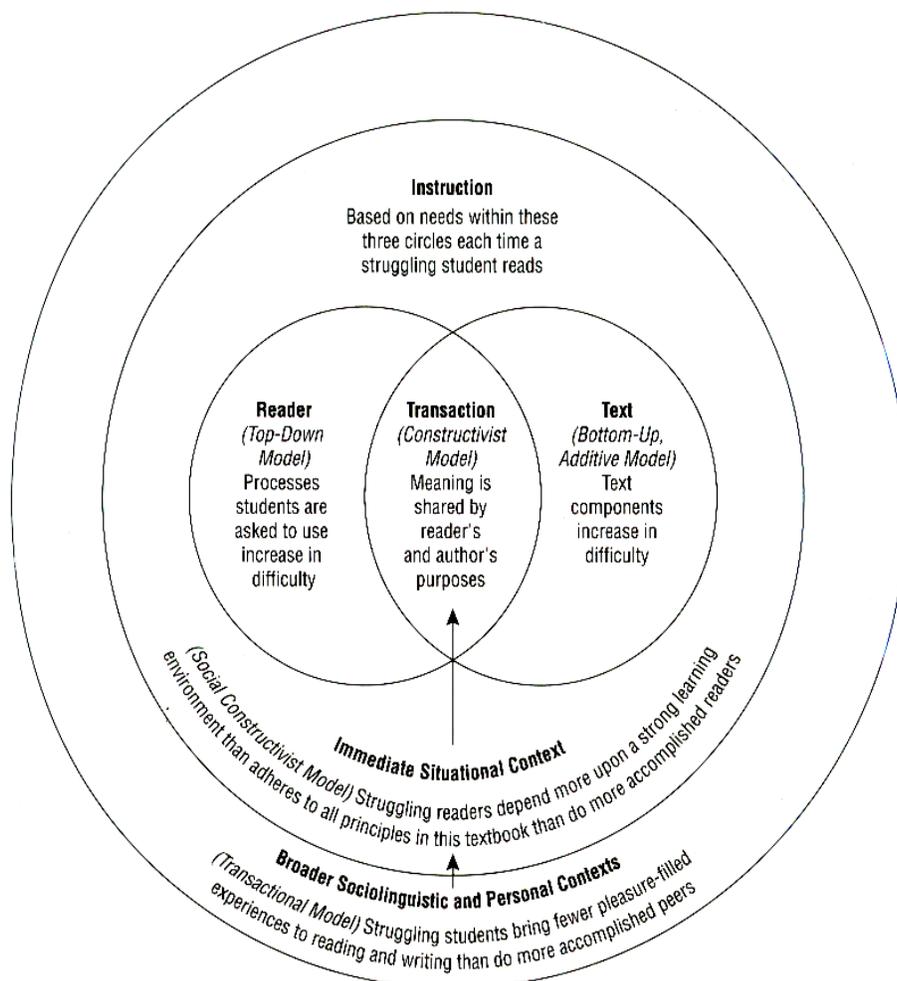
coaches from choosing people within the work environment to avoid bias, favouritism and lack of confidentiality. Block, (2003) purported that most reading specialists or literacy coaches focus on changing reading programmes to meet the students' needs instead of attempting to change the learner. She also stated that successful reading specialists or literacy coaches listen to their pupils, and together with the teachers have planned interventions to improve students' literacy. Furthermore, Block, (2003) continued by stating that most successful reading specialists or literacy coaches utilize the Interactive-Compensatory Model (See Diagram 3). That model is a combination of the following models: Bottom-Up, Top-Down, Interactive, Constructivist, Social Constructivist and Transactional (Block, 2003 p.49).

With respect to challenges, reading specialists or literacy coaches mentioned the multiplicity of roles as posing some difficulties. Bean et al. (2000) put it this way:

*... in a study conducted by Bean, Trovato, & Hamilton (1995), reading specialists, although expressing positive views about their roles, also indicated a great deal of frustration and confusion about the many different tasks that they assumed. They indicated that they had more and more responsibility for a resource or leadership role, in addition to their instructional role. (p.4)*

Diagram 3

## Interactive Compensatory Model



Weaver's 1988 Model adapted and expanded by Block, 2003

In addition, Jones et al. (2010) pointed to challenges of indiscipline among students stemming from disorders as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). There were also difficult situations with teachers who misunderstood the role of the reading specialist or literacy coach, maintained unreasonable expectations, displayed negative behavior, and utilized encounters with the

reading specialist or literacy coach as “time off” for themselves. Furthermore, administration lacked clarity about the role of the reading specialist or literacy coach, so that too was problematic. As regards parents, the reading specialists or literacy coaches reported that there existed a lack of communication because teachers seldom invited the literacy specialists to meetings for parents. Moreover, Otaiba et al. (2008) contended that the reading coach had inadequate resources to fulfill her role.

Reading specialists or literacy coaches also suggested ways to cope with obstacles that arose as they faced their daily duties. Murray et al. (2008) proposed obtaining support from social services to resolve issues that are unrelated to literacy but which plague the learner. Additionally, Toll, (2005) suggested the following: to combat feelings of frustration and futility – focus on the successes as a reading specialist or literacy coach. She also stated being in touch with one’s spiritual side, discovering avenues to relieve stress, and always being optimistic. Jones et al. (2010) further highlighted other ways of coping:

*The reading specialists also spoke about skills needed for reading specialists to successfully work with teachers including: (a) collaborative planning, (b) accepting the rule that the classroom teacher is always right, (c) expecting that it will take time to form good working relationships with teachers, (d) planning to spend time organizing spaced, (e) having resources and ideas for teachers, (f) understanding that diplomacy goes both ways, and (g) accepting baby steps. (p. 11)*

As stated previously in the background of the study, reading specialists have been around for some decades now although they are relatively new to Trinidad and Tobago. However, the literature has highlighted the importance of the reading specialist or literacy coach in transforming the face of literacy. Toll, (2005) espoused that the presence of the reading specialist or literacy coach affects the culture of the school and fosters collaboration and trust among the staff. In addition, she asserted that the reading specialist or literacy coach encourages teachers to engage in reflective teaching which is a tool to ensure that learning occurs. Therefore, the ability for students to learn is greatly increased and she put it this way: “An increasing number of studies are demonstrating that coaching leads to increased student achievement ...” (p. 7).

Additionally, Swartz, Shook, & Klein, (2001) as cited by Toll, (2005) stated that: “In the specific area of literacy, a study by the Foundation for California Early Literacy Learning demonstrated that coaching had a positive effect on students’ literacy achievement” (p. 8). Furthermore, Lapp, Fisher, Flood, and Frey (2003) as cited by Toll, (2005) indicated the following: “... a program in three high-poverty San Diego schools that included literacy coaching as 50% of reading specialists’ duties ...led to a marked increase in student achievement” (p. 8). Moreover, Bean et al., (2000) pointed to the following: “... according to a Market Data Retrieval Report (1997), states that have above average proficiency scores on the 1994 NAEP Test are also states with the highest percentage of reading specialists” (p. 6). Therefore, there is a domino effect: the reading specialist or literacy coach empowers the staff, especially the teachers,

and ultimately the students benefit. They, the learners, are then in a position to obtain a high level of achievement, not only in literacy but also in all academic areas.

The issue of the experiences of the reading specialists is related to a much larger issue, which is that of students' literacy. This study was undertaken with the hope of assisting in improving literacy in Trinidad and Tobago since undoubtedly reading failure is problematic in this twin-island state. As stated previously the presence of reading specialists or literacy coaches can make a difference. Such a difference is needed in Trinidad and Tobago because students who are not literate would encounter more difficulties and impart an unfavourable legacy to future generations. Olivier and Bowler, (1996) expressed it this way by making a comparison of two students:

*The student who has learned how to read, spell and write, who has developed a solid foundation of vocabulary, who knows how to understand and construct sentences to express thoughts precisely, who can recognize and use various forms of expression is well prepared for continuing education and success in the workforce. But the student who has difficulty learning language and the skills that depend on it will have fewer tools for building a solid education and constructing a meaningful life if he is not taught these skills in a way that enables him to learn them (p. 66).*

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Overview**

This chapter deals with the research design used and the type of study that was conducted. It gives an understanding of the phenomenological case study with reference to the strategies of inquiry: phenomenology and case study. The use of a qualitative approach as opposed to a quantitative approach is also discussed. In addition, a description of each participant is provided and the data analysis procedures are highlighted. Limitations and delimitations of the study are also mentioned. Furthermore, a rationale is put forward for using a phenomenological case study, as well as the type of sampling undertaken.

#### **Research Design and Type of Study**

The study design is a phenomenological case study, which involves aspects of phenomenology and case study. Creswell (2003) cited Moustakas (1994) concerning this study design that the phenomenological strategy is employed when the researcher desires to understand a phenomenon from the participants' descriptions of their experiences with respect to that phenomenon (p. 15). "In these studies, the inquirer constructs a rich, detailed description of a central phenomenon." (Creswell, p. 133) Moreover, Creswell (2003) refers to Riemann (1986) that phenomenology subscribes to no explicit theoretical position. Rossman and Rallis (2003) refer to phenomenology as "questioning the structure and essence of lived experiences" (p.7) and states that qualitative research is rooted in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology.

Furthermore, the practice in German philosophy called phenomenology is mainly concerned with lived experiences, and it is a genre of qualitative research. that phenomenology emphasizes the world as lived by an individual, not the world or reality as something that is separate from the individual. This tradition inquires about experience and tries to deduce meanings as they are lived on a daily basis. Phenomenological research produces an in-depth analysis of the meaning of a certain area of the experience. It is assumed that the ideal understanding of the experience would be obtained via dialogue and reflection. (Valle et al.,1989 as cited in Laverly, 2003). Additionally, language is the vehicle through which meaning is created and expressed (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The study of a phenomenon lies in revisiting experiences that are taken for granted and maybe revealing new and/or forgotten understandings (Laverly 2003).

In a case study, a phenomenon is explored through one or more cases within a bounded setting or context (Koltz & Champe, 2010). Therefore, this study utilized a phenomenological case study to explore the following phenomenon: the experiences of reading specialists attached to CETT, which focuses on the professional development of teachers in the primary school. Rossman and Rallis (2003), referred to Stake (2000) that a case study is regarded as an overall strategy rather than a genre of qualitative research. It provides an in-depth, detailed investigation of individuals, in this case, reading specialists. In addition, its purpose is to comprehend the bigger phenomenon, namely, experiences of reading specialists through close examination of a certain case and thus focus on the particular.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated that case studies are “descriptive, holistic, heuristic and inductive” (p.104). In referring to Miles and Huberman (1994), they also indicated that with the use of more than one case, cross-case analyses can be conducted in order to make comparisons. The integrity of each case is respected and similarities and differences are considered. Case studies can employ various means of gathering data but as highlighted by Rossman and Rallis (2003): “Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. By whatever methods, we choose to study the case” (p.105).

Furthermore, since case studies concentrate on the individuality of specific cases they are “context-dependent” (p.105), which signifies that whatever information is obtained from one case cannot be generalized. Therefore, conclusions from one case cannot be held true for another case since no two cases are the same.

However, “logic-reasoning by analogy allows for the application of lessons learnt in one case to another population or set of circumstances” (p.105).

Qualitative research has been defined by Rossman and Rallis (2003) as an investigation that starts with questions and its eventual objective is learning. Furthermore, its aim is to improve social conditions. Qualitative research has been compared to learning a foreign language. (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997 as cited in Travers, 2001). He continued by stating that just as learning languages, the researcher must be curious about social life, and have an interest in writing about human experiences. The curiosity about the experiences of reading specialists and the desire to write about it in the research project are factors that indicate the reason for this study using the qualitative method. Ormrod (2011)

states that qualitative research investigates phenomena that cannot be interpreted in numerical terms, and undoubtedly the lived experiences of the reading specialists cannot be represented in a quantitative form.

Detailed qualitative research have provided valuable information about the characteristics of schools that influence the students' educational and social achievement (Hemmings, 2004; Ledson-Bilking, 1956; Ogbu, 2003 as cited in Ormrod, 2011). Therefore, the knowledge of the experiences of reading specialists can assist those involved in the education of students to help in the fight against low literacy. Additionally, since the study seeks to explore a phenomenon that is not well understood (the experiences of reading specialists in enhancing literacy instruction), a qualitative approach, which is exploratory, is the best design (Creswell, 2003, pp. 22, 30). Thus, the researcher seeks to develop an understanding of the phenomenon by listening to the participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2003, p. 30).

According to Creswell (2003), the qualitative study has been undertaken by following the approach of the researcher: putting herself in place to collate meaningful data, concentrating on a single phenomenon, introducing personal opinions into the research, checking the correctness of the findings, interpreting the data, offering suggestions and working together with the participants. All this has been done while investigating the topic of the experiences of reading specialists. Additionally, Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated that qualitative research works mainly in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretive research attempts to comprehend the social world as it is from the perception of individual

experience. The aim is not to predict but to produce a detailed description of the individual's point of view. Furthermore, the methods of research for interpretivism are usually humanistic in nature taking the form of face-to-face interactions like interviews (pp. 45-46).

In a qualitative study, the research takes place in the natural setting, not in Science laboratories. This form of research involves interviews for data collection, evolving research, interpretation of data which consists of text, holistic analysis of a social phenomenon, reflective thinking on the part of the researcher regarding biases, values and interests, intricate reasoning and the use of one or more strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 2003, pp. 181-182). Furthermore, the topic of this research is more aptly explored using the qualitative method rather than the quantitative method since a representation of numerical values would have been an inappropriate means in which to address the research question. Undoubtedly, the quantitative approach could not sufficiently provide a rich description of the insights of the participants.

### **Rationale for Phenomenological Case Study**

The design of the study is in keeping with the major assumptions of qualitative design: that people endeavour to comprehend the world in which they live and work. They create subjective meanings through their experiences usually by interacting with others (social constructivism) in a historical and cultural context. People create varied and multiple meanings so the researcher seeks to obtain the complexity of perspectives. The researcher's own previous experiences

influence the interpretation of other people's views of the world (Schwandt, 2000; Neuman, 2000; Crotty, 1998 as cited in Creswell, 2003, pp. 8-9).

### **Description of Participants**

Participant X is a female with 13 years experience as a classroom teacher. She has worked for 18 years as a Reading Facilitator and four years as a Reading Specialist. She possesses a Certificate in Reading and a Bachelor of Education in Administration. She has undergone training by the Ministry of Education and CETT personnel in numerous courses, some of which are in Diagnostic, Assessment, the Literacy Block, Lesson Planning, Partnering with Sponsors like BGTT and Maintaining Relationships with Stakeholders. She has also received training in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as, places like Belize, Jamaica and Grenada. She is in the North Eastern district of Trinidad and is responsible for eight schools in that district for two years now. Her responsibilities lie with developing literacy in the Performance Enhancement Programme (PEP) schools. The PEP schools are schools that have a large number of students who have scored under 30% in the Secondary Entrance Examination (SEA). Her job as a reading specialist entails visiting teachers and principals, setting up reading programmes, planning workshops, diagnosing, prescribing, and evaluating to enhance students' performance as well as teachers' performance. Her work days are either spent visiting schools or at the office writing up data to be sent to the Minister of Education.

Participant Y is female and a former employee of CETT. She worked under CETT for one year and was attached to the North Eastern district. She

decided to leave CETT because she did not feel she was making the impact on literacy that was needed. Her job entailed going to schools to which she had been assigned to sensitize teachers about the reading programme and materials provided, observe teachers using the material, and monitor the delivery of the CETT tests. She was also responsible for planning workshops and writing up reports at the Port of Spain office. She left the CETT programme in 2009 and at the time she was the youngest member of the team. She turns 50 years this year. Participant Y has been an educator for 30 years. She worked as a reading facilitator for about five years attached to the North Eastern district. She also worked at the secondary school level as a Social Studies teacher for three years, and at the primary school level for 19 years. She possesses a first degree in Language Literature with Education, a Certificate in Education specializing in Language Arts, a teacher's diploma, a Master's of Education in Curriculum and is on the verge of completing a Master's of Education in Reading. She has visited several Caribbean countries like Belize, where CETT exists, for training. She also works with UWI Open Campus, tutoring early childhood educators and visiting them in their schools. Furthermore, she has done work in the prisons in the area of literacy.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), the analysis of data is the process of structuring, organizing and making meaning from all the information collected. They also indicated seven stages that are involved in the data analysis procedure: sorting out the data, becoming familiar with the information,

producing categories and themes, developing codes for the data, interpreting, exploring other understandings, and writing the report. A digital recorder was used to obtain the interviews. The audio files were then downloaded into the computer and stored. Next, the researcher repeatedly listened to the audio files via the computer to transcribe the data. The transcriptions were typed and saved and the researcher verified the date of the interview and who were interviewed. By transcribing the interviews, the researcher was able to become familiar with the data, obtain hints to collect more data, rouse insights and inspire analytical thinking. Additionally, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading it several times.

Furthermore, Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated that it is required that the researcher approach the text in an unbiased manner while engaging in phenomenological analysis. The researcher's preoccupation would be with the "meaning" and "structures" (p.296) that appear. The phenomenologic interview data was analyzed using the strategy of "meaning categorization" (p.296) whereby the researcher coded lengthy interview material into categories. Coding was done to obtain evidence or support for the categories and themes. Four categories were identified based on the interview questions. Then themes emerged from the researcher's familiarity with the information derived from the categories.

The data was coded by hand with highlighters and the researcher used different colours to represent the various categories. The categories: Challenges, Strategies, Support, and Solutions were represented by purple, pink, green and

blue respectively. The transcripts were typed with a wide margin on the right hand side, which allowed the researcher to summarize what was said, as well as to indicate categories and themes. Next, the researcher interpreted the data in order to present the meaning of the experiences conveyed by the participants. Finally, the researcher produced a report as the ultimate stage of the procedure for data analysis.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

The short time to conduct the research was a limitation to the study. In addition, generalizations cannot be made since purposive sampling was done to obtain two reading specialists attached to CETT. They are also both from the North Eastern district. Additionally, the two participants are female so that there is no male perspective. Furthermore, the data collected is dependent on the honesty of the participants. The delimitations are that the study utilized semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews. Additionally, the study design focused on a phenomenological case study.

### **Rationale for Sampling**

Berg (2009) stated that Purposive Sampling is a type of sampling in which "... researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent the population" (p. 50). According to Creswell (2003), the researcher should select the best individuals that can assist him or her in understanding the problem and the research questions (p. 185). Reading specialists from the CETT programme have been purposefully selected because their work involves enhancing literacy in schools and their experiences with

respect to this phenomenon is what the researcher seeks to study, and as such, they are the best persons to help the researcher understand the phenomenon.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

#### Overview

This chapter deals with the procedures that were adopted to collect data and the method of analysis that was utilized. Additionally, mention is made of the ethical issues that were taken into consideration in order to conduct the study. Furthermore, the findings of the research project were highlighted and discussed.

#### Data Collection Procedures

The main instrument utilized for collecting data was interviews. Those interviews were done one and one and face-to-face. They were also digitally recorded. According to Berg (2009), an interview is quite effective in obtaining information to address certain research questions. Interviews are very instrumental, for instance, "...when investigators are interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events, interviewing provides a useful means of access." (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998 as cited in Berg, 2009, p.110) Handwritten notes were also produced.

In this qualitative study, various strategies were employed to augment the credibility of the work. Berg (2009) defined triangulation as using "multiple lines of sight" (p.5). In addition, he indicated that: "by combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbol sand theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements" (p.5). Triangulation took the form of

participation validation or member checking, and making use of the community of practice (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Participation validation or member checking was done to confirm the data collected. Additionally, ideas were shared with a few colleagues from the Master of Education programme who provided constructive criticism.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Both Participant X and Participant Y signed an “informed consent form” agreeing to all that was stated in it. The form stated the programme of study being undertaken at the University of the West Indies, and offered an invitation to the participants to be part of the research study. The purpose of the research was clearly stated so that the participants could fully understand what the study entailed. Additionally, the participants were informed that the interviews were face to face and they were being conducted to gain an insight into their experiences. Next, they were told about the benefits of the findings from the research, namely that it would be used to help universities develop more appropriate programmes to better prepare reading specialists to improve student literacy.

The participants were also informed that the study posed no known risks. In addition, the researcher stressed the anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected. The participants were also informed that no name or identifying information about them would be associated with the recording or transcript. Additionally, the participants were told that only the researcher or someone to whom the participant’s identity is unknown will listen to the recordings.

Furthermore, they were informed that as soon as the transcripts were checked for accuracy, the audio files would be destroyed. They were also told that portions of the transcripts might be reproduced in the research project but no name or identifying information about them would be used. In addition, the participants were informed of the right to withdraw at any time from the study, and of their right to decline to respond to any question during the interview.

Furthermore, the Head of Department at the University of the West Indies granted the researcher permission to conduct the study. The researcher delivered a letter to the Ministry of Education, stating her intention to conduct the study with reading specialists from CETT and seeking permission to do so. The Ministry of Education gave the researcher permission to conduct the study and the researcher signed a confidentiality letter at the office on Frederick Street, Port of Spain. Finally, in the actual writing up of the research project the researcher has faithfully expressed what she believes has been conveyed by the participants without using discriminatory language (Creswell, 2003).

### **Analysis of Data**

In this study, the following research question was operationalised: “What are the experiences of CETT Reading Specialists in providing support for literacy in underperforming primary schools?” Consequently, the subsequent themes were generated:

- Experiences with Teachers
- Experiences with School Administration
- Experiences with the Ministry of Education

- Experiences with Parents
- Experiences with Students

### **Experiences with Teachers**

With regards to the theme: “Experiences with teachers”, both participants had pleasant and unfavourable encounters with teachers. Participant X stated: “I think that is why I remain in it because most of my experiences have been very, very good, and Participant Y’s similar response was: “I had some really good interactions with teachers who really understood the role of the reading specialist and the need for a reading specialist”. An example of Participant X’s memorable occasion is depicted in the following excerpt:

*...one school had a competition at one time with CETT with the classroom environment and the lessons. They did the thematic approach, each class; they did “Under the Sea”. It was really ... really nice. They set up their little listening centres. They had the coconut trees, boat, river, all the fish and creatures that you will find under the sea.*

Participant Y said:

*I found most of them [the teachers] very, very willing. I would go to them. I would let them know before that I was coming to do a lesson or I would say, ‘Do a lesson for me, let me see how I could help you’. ...*

With respect to the unfavourable experiences, Participant X was adamant that teachers possess the knowledge but do not implement what they know. She stated: “The sad part about it, the people who we have trained over the years have not implemented what we have taught them”. She added: “I wish there were

more people being receptive. More teachers be receptive for them to understand the importance of reading and implementation”. She indicated that teachers use their knowledge for professional advancement instead of development of the students: “They use the knowledge when they are doing courses. You see when they are doing their degree and all that, they will find all the notes ...”

She believes that teachers are indolent and therefore planning and preparing their work is problematic because they prefer to receive things “on a platter”. She remarked: “But for me, teachers are lazy people. They do not like to prepare their work. They want everything readily available for them”.

Participant X also highlighted the issue of teachers being unable to make an impact on the academic situation of the students because of the quality of instructions. She expressed that:

*... let me take the time to plan for them, grouping for instructions. No, one size fits all. That's how they are teaching. So you'll have those children who will be coming up all the time from Infants right up to Standard Five and being labeled that they can't read while no help. No help was readily available from teachers to help them...*

Furthermore, she stated that teachers are not disseminating information with the students in mind, for example, for the visual learner there are no teaching aids or irrelevant ones: “Because in the classes the teachers are not putting up any visuals. If they putting up a visual, it's not pertaining to the subject they have just taught”. Additionally, she indicated that the teachers do not engage in reflective

teaching: “What is your evaluation of yourself? Are you a reflective practitioner? Did I sit down and reflect how I did with my children today?”

Additionally, she pointed out that teachers need to be more creative: “[Teachers] just feel to put up a ready-made thing that they would buy in some store. We have all kinds of talents. Trinidadians are creative people”. In addition, she mentioned that the teachers are not encouraging the students to think since the questions being posed for Comprehension are mainly of one type: “... not looking at the questions to see what kind of Comprehension questions we have. If it’s only the literal level ... how many higher order questions you have? Do you have any creative questions there? “

Participant X articulated that teachers are not planning instructions based on the students’ interests:

*Is technology children, is click and go. You cannot expect that you are going to write a whole set of notes for children ... So you have to know how to plan your work now that you’ll grab their attention and have the activities that they would want to do.*

She also expressed that teachers are not grouping students for instruction in order for literacy to improve:

*“How do you group the different groups for instruction? You group all the strong ones together? You group all the weak ones together? How do you group? You put a strong one to a weak so that the strong one would be able to pull the weaker one? How do you plan for your children at that level too. Do they do that? No, one size fits all”.*

She also highlighted that Teachers' Training Colleges are not providing adequate preparation in Reading to teachers. Therefore teachers enter the schools with a limited knowledge of issues pertaining to reading: "You talk to them when they now come from training college or UTT [The University of Trinidad and Tobago] and you ask them certain questions ... The teacher doesn't have that background knowledge...". Participant Y also thinks that teachers are not being adequately prepared for teaching Reading in the Training Colleges. However, unlike Participant X, she also believes that some teachers do not possess the knowledge, and those who do have some knowledge lack self efficacy. She pointed out that: "Teachers in spite of the fact that they would have gone to [Training] College, they would have done Reading and based on my experience in College, we weren't taught how to diagnose children with reading difficulty".

Regarding self efficacy she adds:

*... but teachers haven't received sufficient training as to how to exactly use these books and match leveled material to the concerns and needs of the students. So what we have again is lovely libraries that the Ministry put a lot of money into furnishing. But teachers are not using them. Because a lot of them feel that they don't know what to do with them.*

Additionally, she points to unprofessionalism among teachers. The unprofessionalism takes the form of not writing lesson plans, purposeful absenteeism, deceitfulness, and creating confusion. She states, concerning the writing of lesson plans: "They [teachers] want to know if they are still on teaching

practice and strange enough, Trinidad and Tobago is the only island that teachers don't write notes of lessons.

As regards the purposeful absenteeism, she indicated: "Sometimes you go to listen to them and they don't come to school that day, you know". Furthermore, Participant X mentioned that teachers display deceitfulness by claiming ignorance: "We like to bad talk each other too much. It's always [Participant X] did not tell me that ... and I didn't hear that". To overcome that hurdle, Participant X speaks to the teachers and principal simultaneously. She asserted: "... I'm including the Principal in everything.... So when all of us meet, the same message is being said. So I speak to everybody together". In addition, she described how teachers attend workshops to create mischief: "...people would come to hear you doing a presentation and they would come to attack you or they would make snide remarks about that. Unprofessional!"

Finally, related to the theme of "Experiences with Teachers" is the issue of teachers not considering and empathizing with the needs of the learner.

Participant X remarked:

*... as difficult as it may be with all the socioeconomic problems that we are having and experiencing and all that, teachers have to look at their role as a vocation in helping because that is what God put us here for ... Helping the less privilege, the unfortunate.*

Participant Y agreed with Participant X on this issue and referred to it as "making a connection" with the students: "... if teachers are able to connect with children then half the work is done".

Participant Y's experience with teachers indicated that teachers did not understand the role of the reading specialist, and thought it was an extension of the Ministry of Education. She explained:

*Some teachers saw the reading specialist's role as an extended arm of the Ministry of Education so that they saw the reading specialist as somebody who was literally coming to spy on them and give feedback to the Ministry in terms of their performance.*

Additionally, Participant Y indicated that teachers felt that the Reading Specialists under CETT were incompetent:

*Although we were called Reading Specialists, we received no additional training apart from people who would have a first degree. . So many of the teachers felt as though Reading Specialists weren't competent enough to deal with their issues. Because it was they had a first degree and there were teachers that you were trying to work with who also had first degrees.*

Furthermore, Participant Y highlighted the issue of resistant teachers and how she treated with the situation:

*In some of the urban areas we have teachers who have been there for years and very set in their ways and are not always willing to embrace new things and they would tell you that they are going home just now and that they have been teaching since before you were born. And my response has always been well then I can learn a lot from you then ...*

Additionally, she wanted teachers to be “proactive” and use their own initiative concerning the resources with which they have been provided: “I remember going to a particular school and I said to them, ‘If I were to dust for prints, I won’t wouldn’t see any finger prints on this’. They are in plastic bags. Teachers need to get more proactive”.

### **Experiences with School Administration**

Generally, Participant X had favourable encounters with the administration of the schools. She stated that the relationship has been a very “supportive” and “understanding” one. She believes that the instructional leadership of a school is a key element in the reading programme. It is important for the leadership to be able to articulate the programme and ensure that it is run successfully. However, she noticed that Principals view the Reading programme as mainly the responsibility of the Reading Specialist and not really having a part to play in it. In other words, they do not understand the role of the Reading Specialist. She indicated:

*... Principals must come on board ... They should be able to articulate the programme to their people when they come ... Even though the Reading Specialist will go in and help but it’s not that you leave it solely up to the Reading Specialist to do your job.*

She further articulated that it is difficult for the Reading Specialist to be in a school every week when he or she is responsible for other schools. Therefore, it is imperative for the Principals to cooperate with the Reading Specialist and take charge of the school: “Every Monday morning, you want the reading specialist to

come into your school... You have to take charge of that because you were trained to do so.” Participant Y and Participant X shared the same perspective regarding the necessity for Principals to understand the role of the Reading Specialist for literacy development to be successful in the schools. She put it this way: “Once administration could understand what is my role and my purpose ... and function, then we can work together in the interest and benefit of the students”. Participant Y indicated that she had no problems working with school administration.

Participant X also lamented the fact that there are Principals who do not seem to understand how critical Reading is to learning: “...they [the Principals] are not seeing that reading is the main purpose of all schools, because if children can’t read they definitely can’t perform well in the other subject areas”. She also indicated that after the teachers have been trained, they are not monitored by Principals, who do not either ‘possess the skills’ or are preoccupied with other duties. She stated: “*Hence we still have a problem with reading at primary level. Because the lack of monitoring and Principals not possessing the skills or if they possess the skills they are bogged down by other things ...*” In addition, Participant X highlighted the issue of Principals behaving in an unprofessional manner. She stressed that: “... we need more Principals who could separate the professional self from the personal and let teachers respect you for what you are, or you know where to draw the line”. Finally, there are Principals who hide the resources that have been sent to the schools by CETT and teachers are unaware of what is available to improve literacy. She explained that: “... most of the teachers

are willing to know when you tell them about it but sometimes the Principals have them under lock and key. So you have to go find the resources...”

### **Experiences with the Ministry of Education**

Participant X revealed that there is a lack of continuity in the Ministry of Education due to change in personnel and those in authority there cannot empathize with struggling learners because of their upbringing, and therefore are clueless as to the reasons for students not being able to read. She emphasized:

*The thing about the Ministry is that people in the Ministry are always changing, and nobody seems to understand why children can't read.*

*Because most of the people in the Ministry, in my view, are people who were fortunate enough to be born into homes where they could read*

Furthermore, she contended that it is a question of politics and the “powers that be” are not genuinely concerned with remediating the reading situation in Trinidad and Tobago. She described the situation as “incompetence”:

*There is no competent person at that level ... If this dispensation changes in the morning, a new group of people would come with a new set of ideas.*

*Nobody knows what was left previously to see if you could look at it. Take out what you want and move forward. They're doing all kinds of consultations; you think they're asking anybody on the ground ... Watch who are the people they have in the consultations: people who know absolutely nothing about Reading.*

Participant X claimed that the Ministry of Education had made a terrible decision by getting rid of Post Primary. She asserted that students with reading problems were put in Form One and promised Reading Specialists, but that

promised has not been fulfilled. The problem of low literacy in the secondary schools has given rise to school violence. She explained:

*You do your programme and their children used to go to secondary schools and go in Form Two and perform well. You take them and put them in schools saying you are going to have Reading Specialists for them. There are no Reading Specialists now in those schools. What will happen to the children now? Nobody is taking them on. They are running, hiding, all kinds of things, putting knives in their bags and that kind of thing. That is what we are experiencing now.*

Under this theme, Participant Y highlighted her experiences under CETT, which is managed by the Ministry of Education. Firstly, she indicated that during her period of working for CETT, there was an insufficient number of Reading Specialists. She described the situation as: “... a challenge because there were insufficient people in the unit to carry out the unit’s programme”. She also mentioned: “In Trinidad at the time, we had about 10 Reading Specialists, and there were some districts that had no Reading Specialists”. She also declared the need for a District Network of Reading Specialists. It was very difficult for her to travel far distances to support fellow Reading Specialists. However, she did that to support her colleagues. She remarked: “I remember going down to a school in south to support another Reading Specialist doing a workshop. I had to travel from Sangre Grande all the way to south to give the kind of support”.

In addition, she stated that the schools assigned were too far apart for the Reading Specialist to make an impact on Reading:

*We had about sixteen (16) schools that were under the CETT programme that we were supposed to visit, and they were spread as far as Matelot, Toco, Johnny Press,. So it was difficult to really service these schools in the way that they needed to be serviced.*

Furthermore, Participant Y referred to the multiple role of the Reading Specialist, which was very challenging and proved problematic with regards to improving literacy in the schools. Besides visiting the assigned schools, her role included:

*“... being in Port of Spain office, planning workshops, living in workshops. So our real role and the crocks of the jaw of Reading Specialists in terms of going out to schools and doing interventions, we were unable to do that in the way that it should have been done ... Days and days of planning, putting together folders if you had a workshop. Photocopying the material for the folders ... You may be asked to bring greetings at a graduation function, represent the district in all kinds of things”.*

Participant Y indicated that unlike places like Belize, the role of the Reading Specialist is not outlined in Trinidad and Tobago, and appears not to be of any great significance to the Ministry of Education: “... Belize had a more positive attitude towards the Reading Specialist. They were valued there. I remember going to a session where the Minister of Education was interfacing with the Reading Specialist. She wants the Ministry of Education to be supportive of the Reading Specialist: “Once the Ministry gives the kind of support, I feel this is the programme, M. Ed, [Master of Education in Reading]

that can really make a difference because CETT did not have the manpower to do it”.

Additionally, Participant Y believes that the focus of CETT is misplaced and that the emphasis should be on empowering Reading Specialists to assist teachers in improving the literacy level among students. She argued that: “... the focus was too much on monitoring the use of resources in school rather than on training specialists so that they could deliver. So in the long run the students’ reading scores would improve”..

Furthermore, Participant Y highlighted that many contract workers had been hired as Reading Specialists, all retirees, utilizing “archaic strategies”, and not fully qualified to be reading specialists. She remarked:

*... CETT has employed a lot of contract workers, people who have retired. Experienced people, yes, but old people. Nobody with a Master’s in Reading, and all of the Reading Specialists are not people with first degrees ... people who still apply archaic strategies. People who are not willing to do the Action Research...*

### **Experiences with Parents**

Participant X had used Parents Teachers Association meetings to meet with parents to assist them in improving their child’s literacy. She also meets with new parents of First Year students who are on the verge of starting school when the academic year begins. That meeting is to educate the parents in ways that can be utilized to better prepare their children to start Primary school: “P.T.A meetings give them [parents] ideas to help with their children”. Participant Y

believes that parents do not understand what is happening in Reading and need to be educated by the Reading Specialists and teachers: “I have always been very, very involved with parents but I am of the view that parents do not understand what is happening in Reading. So we really need to educate the parents”.

### **Experiences with Students**

Participant X insisted that students are not to be blamed for being unable to read since they cannot give an explanation for their predicament: “... What is the matter with the literacy?... having gone into teaching now and meeting children so they realize that they just don’t know and you can’t blame the children.” Additionally, she had observed that struggling learners have problems with their self-esteem and need to be encouraged or motivated in tangible and intangible ways:

*“... the weaker students or students who they say are at risk. They need a lot of encouragement because they feel that they can’t do anything. So if they read a line or read a word, I would say ‘Great!’ Motivate them and they will always want to read”*

Participant X had also noticed some common areas of weakness in Reading among students. Those areas are Grammar, Structural Analysis and Comprehension. She stated that those problematic aspects of Language Arts are also common to the Caribbean. It is a regional problem. She believes that that situation exists because Standard English is our second language: “But throughout the Caribbean we have found that. Well you have dialectical interference and all

the different versions of it that would impede children learning the home language”. She suggested the strategy of modeling: “You should be doing this morning and evening. You could start the day with a Read –Aloud. You could do a Read-Aloud in the evening”. Participant Y agreed with the use of Read-Alouds to develop literacy and refers to them in this way:

*Well, I love to use Read-Alouds with struggling readers because I feel that not because a child cannot read the print, he mustn't be exposed to the print. A child can be taken into the wonderful world of a story through the lips of a teacher and he should not be denied the pleasure of reading because they cannot decode words.*

Participant Y also lamented the lack of support services that are essential in promoting literacy:

*You may visit a school and a teacher explains to you a situation with a particular child and you realize that this is not a reading problem. This is a problem for Special Ed.[Education] And you want to make that referral but not always are the support services there*

Finally, Participant Y had also tutored inmates from the prison. She posited that there is a link between crime and a lack of literacy:

*... we met some people there who were really struggling with reading. And I was wondering, remembering asking one gentleman, if he was given the opportunity to learn to read or if he was a better reader if he thought his situation would be different and he said, 'Yes'. Because he said,*

*'When I don't know how to read, I can't get no work. Nobody is going to hire me. What option do I have left? ...*

Participant X also indicated that there exists a connection between crime and literacy: "Look at our crime rate. Half these crimes when you check them the children can't read".

### **Discussion of Findings**

The reading specialist cannot do it alone. Highly literate schools greatly depend upon collaboration among the administration, reading specialist and the staff (Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Lipson et al., 2004 as cited in Guth and Pettengill, 2005). If the literacy level is to rise in Trinidad and Tobago, there must be a concerted effort by all the stakeholders to do their part. According to Toll (2005), "resistance" can be considered as negative behavior (p. 119). Therefore, any form of non-conformity by teachers to training or support by the reading specialist is termed "resistance". The participants mentioned the issue of resistant teachers and that matter also appeared in the research literature. "The number one concern of literacy coaches is the resistant teacher." (Toll, 2005, p.100). In addition, very experienced teachers were quite resistant: "Some of these veteran teachers were resistant to the notion of changing from whole group to small group differentiated instruction." (Otaiba et al., 2008, p.145). Moreover, Jones et al. (2010) mentioned that: "many participants indicated that they worked with resistant teachers" (p.11).

Participant X had indicated that teachers were not practising what they had been taught. However, teachers need to utilize a strategy often for it to become a part of his or her practice: "... many teachers need to use a strategy as many as 20

times before it is fully integrated into practice.” (Otaiba et al., 2008 as cited in Joyce and Showers, 1994, p. 148). Therefore, if the teachers do not move from the theory into the practice and put their knowledge to use, their professional growth would be stunted. Even worse, the students would not benefit as they should and the situation with literacy would not improve in Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, the job of the reading specialist would become a difficult one.

Participant X was resolute in her stance of teachers not doing what they were supposed to do to improve literacy among the students. She mentioned the lack of planning that was done and Vacca and Vacca (2007) indicated that lesson planning is sensible and a tool in promoting learning among the pupils: “Having a blueprint or a plan in advance of actual practice is simply good common sense. A plan is essential because students respond well to structure” (p. 341). When the teacher plans and prepares for the learner, many indispensable aspects will be taken into consideration, aspects that impact on the students’ learning. Participant X referred to some of these aspects like teachers’ instructions, reflective teaching, multiple intelligences, learning styles, differentiated instructions, interest-based learning, grouping, and the use of technology.

As regards teachers’ instructions, teachers need to be competent and experts in the area of reading for it to be done effectively (Pressley, 1998; Snow et al., 1998 as cited in the International Reading Association, 2000, p. 100). Moreover, “In successful schools, quality teaching is the trademark difference” (Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Lipson et al., 2004 as cited in Guth and Pettengill, 2005, p. 13). In addition, Johannesen (2004) highlighted the

importance of teachers' instructions in the following way: "... instead of focusing on the mechanics of language and accumulating facts and information, teachers need to provide instructions that will enable nonacademic, at-risk students to learn how to learn" (p. 646).

Furthermore, "... High quality teaching – knowing the material and how to convey it – makes the difference in student achievement. Research supports this view" (Kaplan & Owings, 2003 as cited in Vacca and Vacca, 2007, p. 3). The research indicated that the instructions of teachers affect learning therefore attention must be paid to the quality of instruction that students receive. However, the issue of quality instructions would be addressed when the teachers plans for the students. After being trained by the reading specialist, the teacher defeats the entire purpose of the professional development by not planning work for the learner. As the research showed, a lack of planning would result in underachievement and the needs of the learner would not be addressed.

Participant X made the statement that "one size cannot fit all" to express the need for reflective teaching, differentiated learning, grouping and higher order questions. Research exists to support her view. Firstly, with respect to reflective teaching, Merry (1998) stressed "... a successful teacher must be a 'reflective practitioner' rather than a mere delivery service ..." (p. 22). Next, concerning differentiated learning, Fleming and Mills (1992) dealt with the four types of learners: visual, aural, read/write and kinesthetic. Since each type of learner acquires knowledge differently, instruction must be varied especially for struggling learners. Furthermore, as regards grouping, "a substantial literature

now indicated the tendency for instruction in lower ability groups to be of different quality to that provided for high-ability groups.” (Evertson, 1982; Oakes, 1985; Gamoran, 1986 as cited in Collins & Cook, 2001, p. 128).

Moreover, Gardner’s Multiple intelligences (Collins & Cook, 2001) facilitate differentiated instructions. Additionally, Barr (1995) mentioned that grouping is a strategy that is used to enhance learning: “More recently, teachers have developed repertoires of flexible grouping strategies to meet students’ individual needs in reading” (p.338). In addition, Bloom’s Taxonomy deals with higher order forms of questioning to stimulate thinking and increase learning. .

Furthermore, Participant X articulated the importance of the use of computer technology to maintain student interest in the classroom. Vacca and Vacca (2007) highlighted the vital role that technology plays in promoting learning among students:

*The speed at which the world of the classroom is mutating requires teachers to rethink business as usual. Students are changing. Texts are changing. The very face of literacy is changing. Technological advances, brought on by the digital forces of the computer, are transforming the way we communicate and construct knowledge. (p. 416)*

After being trained by the reading specialist, the teacher is expected to consider the student as an individual learner who is to be taught based on needs and interests. The teacher must fulfil his or her role for literacy to be enhanced in the nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

However, as Participant Y mentioned the issues of adequate training of staff and teacher efficacy would affect how the teacher delivers the curriculum. According to Ignat and Clipa (2010), self-efficacy is crucial to the development of the teacher since it is indispensable in making decisions, delivering the curriculum, teaching effectively, and a form of motivating students (p 180). If teachers are not sufficiently trained and do not feel empowered to deliver the curriculum, then literacy and the learner would suffer the consequences. The reading specialist must ensure that teachers receive enough information and practice to be properly poised to raise the level of literacy in Trinidad and Tobago.

Participant Y also mentioned a shortage of reading specialists at CETT, which would account in part for teachers not being adequately trained. The training colleges under The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), and other institutions like The University of Southern Caribbean (CUC) also need to do their part in training teachers because teachers seemed to be ignorant of key aspects of reading like diagnosis and assessment which are critical in formulating effective instructions for the learner. Therefore, after the reading specialist trains the teacher, the teacher now needs to be monitored to ensure that he or she is practising enough strategies, and that all aspects are being considered in teaching the student as an individual learner.

Administration is partly responsible for the monitoring of teachers because it is the principal's duty to supervise what the staff is doing and offer any assistance necessary. Such principals would not seek to keep away resources

from the staff. Walpole and Blamey (2008) highlighted the “active support” (p. 227) of the principal concerning even the literacy vision of the school. In addition, a study done by Bean et al., (2000) showed the value principals in successful schools placed upon the role of the reading specialist:

*Principals of exemplary schools, who have reading specialists on staff, valued their presence and believe that these reading specialists contributed much to the success of their reading program. At the same time principals saw specialists as fulfilling a multitude of tasks, ranging from instruction to leadership tasks, with instruction being seen as the predominant role of reading specialists. ( p. 21)*

It must be noted that the reading specialists were not mainly preoccupied doing the principal’s job of managing the school. Furthermore, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2005) stressed the key role of the principal:

*As the school leader, the principal is the key to bringing staff on board to increase the literacy levels of all students. This role as an instructional leader is critical to assuring that students have access to highly effective teachers. (p.47)*

Guth and Pettengill (2005) further emphasized the principals’ role in monitoring teachers: “As instructional leaders, principals are often responsible for evaluating teachers in many disciplines ...” (p. 77). Therefore, if the principal is not supportive of the reading specialist, one cannot expect an increase in the literacy level of students.

Furthermore, the Participants noted a misunderstanding of the role of the reading specialist. Studies done by researchers have all highlighted the occurrence of such a situation. Jones et al. (2010) indicated that: "... the predominant dilemma encountered by the reading specialists with administrators was a lack of understanding of their work and their role in the school ... Classroom teachers equally misunderstood reading specialists' roles" (p. 16).

Otaiba et al. (2008) stated that : "... teachers at various grade levels have differing views of the role of the reading coach, with many not understanding what the role is and who it is for" (p.147). However, Jones et al. (2010) aptly put it this way: "Reading specialists can be a wasted resource if classroom teachers and administrators fail to utilize all of the knowledge and skills brought to schools by these educators" (p.16). Consequently, if the reading specialist is unable to fulfil his or her role, then the literacy level of students would be negatively affected.

Additionally, just as Participant Y could not comprehend the need for her spending time photocopying a lot of documents, and having to represent the Ministry of Education at functions, so too research has shown that other reading specialists have also been confused about their multiple roles as reading specialists. "Some reading specialists report frustration and confusion associated with new responsibilities, and while they feel prepared to meet these leadership role requirements, they do not feel prepared or comfortable in these roles" (Bean, Trovato, & Hamilton, 1995 as cited in Jones et al., 2010, p.5)

Participant Y also highlighted the training and qualification of the reading specialist. She noted that teachers were not comfortable with the reading specialists' credentials. The IRA insists on the reading specialist being a highly qualified individual to void any feeling of inadequacy by staff members, which ultimately redounds in the perpetuation of a low literacy level among students. Therefore, "... to protect the integrity of the reading specialist position, all individuals in such a position should have advanced graduate preparation and appropriate educational credentials" (IRA, 2000, p. 100).

Jones et al. (2010) has commented that reading specialists encounter challenging situations as they attempt to fulfil their roles: "It is reasonable to assume that reading specialists experience challenges as they take on new roles and responsibilities in complex school and district-wide settings" (p.3).

Participant Y disclosed her challenges by indicating the insufficient number of reading specialists, the great distances between assigned schools, long distances to travel to support colleagues and the absence of a district network of reading specialists. However, 93 reading specialists are on the verge of graduating from the University of the West Indies with a Master's in Reading, and it is believed that the challenges described by Participant Y would be greatly reduced. If they are utilized, the budding reading specialists will be in a position to help rectify the situations that were highlighted by Participant Y.

Merry (1998) defined self-esteem as the way in which one values oneself. He continues by stating that: "A high level of self-esteem gives children the confidence to explore new environments and take on challenges, and it does seem

obvious that a child with high self-esteem will be a more successful learner than one with low self-esteem” (p. 79).

Undoubtedly, self-esteem is very important in learning and contributes to intrinsic motivation in the student. However, as stated by Participant X, the learner sometimes feels helpless as regards reading and possesses a low self-esteem. In such cases, the issue of extrinsic motivation is paramount. The reading specialist would encounter those cases because most struggling readers, if not all, have a low self-esteem because of repeated failure in reading, and the reading specialist is faced with the task of elevating that self-esteem. In this study, the reading specialist is reminded of the importance of devising ways to motivate the learner. “Research supports the power of interest, motivation, and engagement on children’s ability to ‘transcend the frustration level’” (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Hunt, 1970, 1996 as cited in Donovan et al., 2000 p. 311).

The Ministry’s policy of Universal Secondary Education (USE) started in the year 2000 (National Report on the Development of Education in Trinidad and Tobago, 2004). Money is spent on obtaining places for students at the secondary school level. According to the aforementioned report: “... to sustain its commitment to USE, the Ministry of Education also purchase places for 7,766 secondary students at private institutions since there are insufficient places at the public secondary schools ( (National Report on the Development of Education in Trinidad and Tobago, 2004). However, enough has not been put in place to treat with the struggling learners. Participant X inferred that the Post Primary class was a better

idea than USE. The students have been placed in schools but are not benefitting sufficiently from what is being offered.

The statements made by the minister indicate too that the USE cannot be considered a success. The Minister of Education, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, inferred that many students have a literacy problem:

*Out of the 17, 000 children who now go to the secondary schools, only 13,500 of these enter for five subjects or more including Mathematics and English, so 3,500 of these enter for less. And out of these 13,500 who write five subjects or more, only 6,500 of them, approximately just one in two, of these pass the five subjects, including Mathematics and English (Allaham, 2011).*

The mention of strategies like Read-Alouds and Modeling (Tompkins, 2010) can assist other reading specialists as they prepare to enhance literacy among the students. According to Tompkins (2010) Read-Alouds cause incidental learning of words and are important for all students, especially those with reading difficulties. Since struggling learners are only capable of reading a small number of books, reading aloud to them is a vehicle to ensure that in spite of their challenges, they are still exposed to new vocabulary. Stahl, Richek, & Vandevier, 1991 as cited by Tompkins, 2010 stated that: "... researchers report that students learn as many words incidentally while listening to teachers read aloud as they do by reading themselves" (p.227). Tompkins, 2010 continued by stating that teachers greatly scaffold students' learning by modeling how fluent readers read. Additionally, modeling can be used for various reasons including a

demonstration of reading and writing conventions, and an indication of the use of reading and writing strategies.

The reading specialist cannot do it alone and is supposed to be part of a team that would address the various individual needs of the learner. Participant Y mentioned the hearing impaired students who were hindered from reading because their special needs were not being met. Learning to read cannot be done in isolation from the holistic development of the learner. In addition, Taylor et al. (1999) as cited by Bean et al. 2000 indicated stressed that: "... the most effective schools were those which incorporated a collaborative model of reading instruction using a team of professionals including the Title I, reading resource, special education and classroom teacher" (p. 6)

The two participants have indicated that there is a link between literacy and crime, and research supports what they have espoused. Drakeford, 2002; Pell, 1994 as cited in Rogers-Adkinson, Melloy, Stuart, Fletcher, & Rinaldi, 2008 stated that not increasing basic literacy skills may be an early indication of future imprisonment. In addition, Rogers-Adkinson et al. 2008 suggested that crime can be reduced by making effective education available with the main focus being on literacy. Furthermore, according to Newman, Lewis, & Beverstock, 1993; Tewksbury & Vito, 1994 as cited by Rogers-Adkinson et al. 2008: "Evidence suggests a correlation between low education attainment, low literacy levels, and high levels of crime ... (p. 199)

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Recap of Study**

The research design was a phenomenological case study which utilized aspects of both the traditions of case study and phenomenology. It followed the qualitative paradigm, and such a design was employed to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of two reading specialists connected to CETT. Interviews were the main instrument used to collate data which was recorded, transcribed and triangulated to verify its accuracy. The data was colour coded manually to highlight four categories: Challenges, Strategies, Support and Solutions, and eventually themes emerged from the various categories. The themes were experiences with teachers, experiences with school administration, experiences with the Ministry of Education, experiences with parents, and experiences with students. The study showed the need for teachers, school administration and the Ministry of Education to support reading specialists in order to improve student literacy, and ultimately raise their standard of living. It was also revealed that parents are ignorant of issues related to literacy and there exists a need for them to be enlightened. Furthermore, the study pointed to the issue of students' underperformance being linked

to lack of planning, the quality of instructions, and strategies employed by the teacher.

### **Restatement of Results**

The data revealed that teachers needed to focus on students as individual learners, as well as to collaborate with the reading specialist in order to achieve improved students' literacy. In addition, there was a call for school administration to be more supportive of reading specialists, and function effectively as managers of their schools to ensure that levels of literacy rise. Both teachers and principals misunderstood the role of the reading specialist. There was also the need for a greater level of professionalism from teachers and the school administration. Moreover, the Ministry of Education must put certain measures in place to effectively treat with the problem of student literacy. Those measures include the provision of support services in schools, adequate training of teachers particularly in the area of Reading, employing more reading specialists, and allowing for reading specialists to network and support each other. There was also the requirement for parents to be educated regarding issues in reading to be better able to partner with the reading specialists and teachers in the education of their children. Furthermore, students need to be motivated to raise their self esteem which is a major determinant of progress in literacy.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that teachers be regularly monitored by the school administration to ensure that there is cooperation with reading specialists. Additionally, the administrative leadership of schools should be closely supervised to ascertain that their managerial duties are being fulfilled. Moreover, universities need to collaborate with reading specialists to plan programmes that would equip teachers to teach reading effectively. In addition, the Ministry of Education and reading specialists need to clearly define the role of a reading specialist. The Ministry should also ensure that reading specialists work with a team of professionals that provide support for the learner in whatever area that is necessary to ensure a high level of literacy is achieved. In addition, more reading specialists need to be employed under CETT, and they should work close to their homes. Furthermore, workshops should be developed to assist parents in understanding issues in literacy, and teachers, in building self efficacy.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent Form to Participate in the Study

**From:** Master's Programme in Education at the University of the West Indies

**Invitation:** You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted for a thesis at the University of the West Indies.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of reading specialists in enhancing literacy instruction.

**Participation Requirements:** You will be required to participate in face-to-face interviews with the researcher about your experiences in enhancing student reading achievement in schools in Trinidad. The interviews will be digitally recorded. In addition, handwritten notes will be taken.

**Potential Benefits/ Risks:** A deeper understanding of the experiences of Reading Specialists in enhancing student literacy will be gained. The findings of this study can help universities develop more appropriate programmes to better prepare reading specialist to improve student literacy. There are no known risks.

**Anonymity/ Confidentiality:** The data collected in this study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. No names are required in this research. No name or identifying information about you will be associated with the tape or transcript. Only the researcher or someone to whom the speaker's identity is unknown will listen to the tape. The tape will be transcribed by the researcher or someone to whom the speaker's identity is unknown. As soon as the transcripts are checked for accuracy, the audio file will be deleted. Portions of the transcripts may be reproduced in the thesis but no name or identifying information about you will be used.

**Right to Withdraw:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. You may decline to answer any question during the personal interview if you wish to do so.

Agreement: I have read and understood the above description for participation in this study. My signature indicates that I agree to participate in the study.

Respondent's name in block letters:

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Respondent's signature:

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Researcher's name in block letters

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Researcher's signature:

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Date:

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## Appendix B

### Letter Seeking Permission to Conduct the Study

Lp# 53/1,  
Union Road,  
Four Roads,  
Diego Martin.

3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2011.

The Chief Education Officer,  
The Ministry of Education,  
Alexandra Street,  
St. Clair.

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I received a scholarship from the Ministry of Education to pursue a master's degree in the field of reading at the University of the West Indies. As part fulfillment of this degree, I am to conduct research. Thus, I am kindly requesting your permission to conduct interviews with Reading Specialists that are attached to the Caribbean Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT). The study is an investigation into the experiences of Reading Specialists attached to CETT in enhancing student reading achievement. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of Reading Specialists at CETT so that a greater insight can be gained with regards to strategies employed, challenges faced and advice for budding reading specialists.

The deadline for final submission of my research project is the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, 2011 and I would be most grateful for your support in enabling me to meet that deadline.

Thanking you in advance for your kind assistance as always.

Yours faithfully,

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Janice Charles

## Appendix C

### Sample of Interview of Participant X

Participant X: What value are we getting from what we are really teaching the children? Those are questions we have to ask ourselves if we are reflective practitioners. As teachers, what are the purposes of this lesson?

Researcher: Just as what you said, as part of the training whereas we train teachers so that they would be able to help the students. These are the things that you would tell them. But really. Would you say that most of them or some of them do not implement it?

Participant X: Most of them.

Researcher: Most of them do not implement it. So do they have the knowledge?

Participant X: They have the knowledge.

Researcher: They have the knowledge.

Participant X: Yes. They use the knowledge when they are doing courses. You see when they are doing their degrees and all that, they will find all the notes and that kind of thing but you see to implement it in school where it matters most, no. It's too much of work. Because they do not like to plan and prepare the work. That is the problem.

Researcher: All right. So you did all this training with the planning and provision showing them what to do. So do they know what to do?

Participant X: Yes. But they are not doing it. And then they complain about the children. They do not know what to do again. And we stuck in that old mode. We are dealing with a different type of children now. These children are quick children. Is technology children. Is click and go. You cannot expect that you are going to sit down and write a whole set of notes for children. Together with all the chocolate and other things that they are eating. They are hyper. So you have to know how to plan your work now that you'll grab their attention and have the activities that they would want to do. How do you group the different groups for instruction? You group all the strong ones together. You group all the weak ones together. How you group? You put a strong one to a weak so that the strong one would be able to pull the weaker one. How do you plan for your children at that level too. Do they do that? No. One size fits all.

## Appendix D

### Sample of Interview of Participant Y

Researcher: At the time, or all now, well in general, do you believe that the role of a reading specialist is important and why?

Participant Y: Critical. The role of the reading specialist is critical. Because first of all, the research is there. The data is there. Our students are not performing. They're not performing in Language Arts. They cannot perform in Language Arts because they cannot read. There are some serious reading issues. Teachers, in spite of the fact that they would have gone to college, they would have done reading and based on my experience in colleague, we won't taught how to diagnose children with reading difficulty. The average teacher could teach the average child. The average teacher cannot diagnose a child with reading difficulty. So this is where the reading specialist could come in. Help teachers. Train them how to diagnose children's reading issues. Whether it is fluency, whether it is phonemic awareness, diagnose their issues and assist them in planning interventions. I feel if we can do that, then teachers are going to feel a greater sense of efficacy and then they would figure yes I can handle this child and I can plan a programme and I can execute a programme to help them with reading. And this is where our role becomes critical. Teachers have already given up and are throwing up their hands in the air. When you visit them they tell you, "Miss, the child can't read." What exactly he cannot read? Is it that he cannot sound the words? Is it that the reading is not fluent? Is it that? They can't say because they haven't yet diagnose. They don't know and many of them have difficulty saying I don't know how to diagnose a child. Reading specialists' role become critical in that sense because we become the ones to go into the schools, train the teachers, do the demonstration lessons. Model the proper strategies so that teachers are going to feel a lot more empowered. At the end of the day, our students are going to benefit tremendously.

Researcher: Okay. I would like you to describe for me a typical day of the reading specialist from what you have experienced.

Participant Y: All right. A typical day in the life of a reading specialist. If you are a reading specialist based in the North Eastern District, you would first report

to the district office. Let the supervisor know that okay this is my programme because the supervisors suppose to be working closely with the CETT coordinator.

Word Count: 15, 330