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Literacy in elementary school in Jamaica: the case of the grade four literacy test

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LITERACY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN JAMAICA: THE CASE OF THE GRADE FOUR LITERACY TEST

by

Yewande Eleene Lewis

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in Teaching and Learning
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

July 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Carolyn Colvin

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe changes that led to the revision of the Grade Four Literacy Test in Jamaica from a classroom-based assessment to a national high-stakes examination in 2009. Educators and researchers in Jamaica have observed and examined the less-than-desired student performance in English literacy exams over several decades. My research continues the tradition and adds to the investigation of literacy challenges in Jamaica. The overarching research question for this study was to understand how the Grade Four Literacy Test, originally a classroom-based assessment for a decade, became a national high-stakes exam in 2009? I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main theoretical and methodological framework while analyzing key education government documents and newspaper articles related to the Grade Four Literacy Test. Using qualitative case study methods, I conducted classroom observations and interviews at two public elementary schools located in inner-city settings. Using CDA, I traced the changing discourse within four education policy documents and newspaper articles that promoted a test-taking accountability agenda during the revision of the literacy test. School observations and interviews enabled me to observe how faculty and administrators responded to the amended literacy test. Through interviews with key research participants I examined stakeholders' assumptions regarding literacy identity. One of the implications of this study is the importance of enhanced teacher training in comprehension and bilingual strategies, and effective use of classroom-based literacy assessments within the Jamaican language context. Future research might focus on efforts to ensure that students who eventually pass supplementary literacy tests are

assisted in moving beyond learning to read to a position where they are reading to learn key content needed to succeed within the academic setting of school.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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To my parents, Rupert and Maureen Lewis, who lead by example.

And to my dearest Aunt Luna.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1: 1

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe changes that led to the revision of the Grade Four Literacy Test in Jamaica from a classroom-based assessment to a national high-stakes examination in 2009. Educators and researchers in Jamaica have observed and examined the less-than-desired student performance in English literacy exams over several decades. My research continues the tradition and adds to the investigation of literacy challenges in Jamaica. The overarching research question for this study was to understand how the Grade Four Literacy Test, originally a classroom-based assessment for a decade, became a national high-stakes exam in 2009? I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main theoretical and methodological framework while analyzing key education government documents and newspaper articles related to the Grade Four Literacy Test. Using qualitative case study methods, I conducted classroom observations and interviews at two public elementary schools located in inner-city settings. Using CDA, I traced the changing discourse within four education policy documents and newspaper articles that promoted a test-taking accountability agenda during the revision of the literacy test. School observations and interviews enabled me to observe how faculty and administrators responded to the amended literacy test. Through interviews with key research participants I examined stakeholders' assumptions regarding literacy identity. One of the implications of this study is the importance of enhanced teacher training in comprehension and bilingual strategies, and effective use of classroom-based literacy assessments within the Jamaican language context. Future research might focus on efforts to ensure that students who eventually pass supplementary literacy tests are

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research problem

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine how the Grade Four Literacy Test (G4LT) has come to embody the goal of improving education at the elementary school level in Jamaica. By exploring the ways in which the discourse/Discourse (Gee, 2005) about the G4LT changed between 1999 and 2009, and how schools and participants responded to these changes, I am able to provide a snapshot of a key moment in Jamaica's contemporary educational history. Indeed, throughout this study I argue that an accountability ideology of high-stakes testing in Jamaica has come to dominate reforms to improve literacy which in turn has trumped other literacy intervention measures such as classroom-based assessment and bilingual instruction. High-stakes tests refer to examinations that are usually summative (given at the end of a unit, term or school level) and carry with them stringent consequences, for example, retention in or promotion to a particular grade (Afflerbach, 2004; Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Cimbricz, 2002). Now that the Grade Four Literacy Test has been nationalized (since 2009) with significant consequences for students transitioning to secondary school, it qualifies as a high-stakes test. Previously, between 1999 and 2008, the Grade Four Literacy Test was a low-stakes classroom-based assessment. Although the G4LT was administered by teachers at the end of the term in May, there were no explicit consequences for students, teachers and schools. Rather, the results of the G4LT were to be used to provide feedback to students and parents about their literacy performance, as well as offer instructional information for teachers.

While literacy has long been associated with national development (Brandt, 2001; Gee, 2008; UNESCO, 2009b), there has been a growing global trend to view accountability measures as the more efficient and effective means of improving

education, in particularly literacy (Bush, 2001; Popham, 1987). In this study I focus on the relationship between literacy and accountability, in the form of high-stakes testing, and use Jamaica's experience to illustrate this growing trend. Indeed, while this study focuses on recent events in Jamaica, it speaks on a broader level to other contexts and other countries where literacy has become the freight by which national development is envisioned. And in these same contexts, discussions of accountability emerge to dictate how progress may be viewed and understood. High levels of literacy have been associated with human rights, poverty reduction, sustainable development, socio-political inclusion, empowerment, health and gender equality among other human indices (UNESCO, 2009a). Attaining literacy levels on par with the developed world has been on the radar of the Ministry of Education in Jamaica from the time it became a member of UNESCO in 1962, the same year of its independence from Britain (Miller, 1994).

Likewise, accountability measures in the form of testing have been associated with educational reforms. In summarizing the wave of education reforms and the role of testing in the United States from the 1950s to the 1990s, Linn (2000) makes the point that " the most recent wave of reform continues to emphasize accountability, but adds some significant new features…[such as] the attachment of high-stakes accountability mechanisms for schools, teachers, and, sometimes, students" (p. 8). In Jamaica the recent change of the Grade Four Literacy Test from a classroom-based assessment to a national test with serious and life altering ramifications for students' transition to secondary school is an example of the wider test-taking accountability measures implemented in other countries such as the United States.

A brief review of Jamaica's history with regard to literacy within the last thirty years reveals a discourse trajectory when one analyzes text production, distribution and consumption (Woodside-Jiron, 2004). In Jamaica, as elsewhere, the focus in the 1970s was on achieving acceptable adult literacy rates (Friere, 2000; UNESCO, 2003). JAMAL, the Jamaica Movement for the Advancement of Literacy now renamed the

Jamaica Foundation for Lifelong Learning, was birthed in 1973 and concentrated its efforts on improving adult literacy with some amount of success (Sterling, Morris, & Bernard, 2001). By the 1980s, attention was focused on the literacy attainment within the school population. In the United States in 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education wrote *A nation at risk: The imperative for education reform* which addressed the issues "afflicting American education" and provided solutions (NCEE, 1983, p. 3). In that same year UNESCO published a report (UNESCO, 1983) on the state of secondary education in Jamaica which also highlighted some of the challenges at the elementary school level. While the authors of the 1983 UNESCO Report commended Jamaica for its high elementary school enrollment rate, they highlighted the poor quality of education in public schools, particularly those serving children in rural and inner-city communities. Very early in the report the authors noted "the fact that about one of every two primary school leavers is considered illiterate is alarming. It suggests massive inefficiencies in the delivery of primary education that have serious ramifications in secondary education, vocational training and in the labor market itself" (p.1). At the primary level, the report recommended the gradual elimination of automatic promotion and a certificate which ensured that primary school leavers had acquired basic literacy and numeracy skills. Another recommendation was the "introduction of continuous assessment and record keeping and of a national achievement test at grades 3 and 6" (pp.21-22).

In response to the education challenges outlined in the 1983 UNESCO Report and the recommendations listed, the Jamaican Education ministry embarked on a series of reforms at both the elementary and secondary school level. As part of this wave of

education reforms the National Assessment Programme[1] (NAP) was developed in 1999 by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica as part of a continuous assessment of student performance for all elementary aged students in grades one to six (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999). The NAP consisted of four assessment tests - the Grade One Reading Inventory, the Grade Three Diagnostic Test, the Grade Four Literacy Test, and the Grade Six Achievement Test. The NAP tests, which were classroom assessments with the exception of the Grade Six Achievement Test, replaced the Common Entrance Exam (CEE) in 1999[2]. The purpose of the NAP tests was to provide formative assessment of student progress throughout elementary school which then culminated in students sitting for the summative Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT). Depending on their GSAT results students would transition to different types of secondary schools.

By the millennium, however, there was another wave of education reforms both locally and internationally in response to real and perceived educational challenges that persisted. In December 2001 the United Nations General Assembly declared the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) which was officially launched in February 2003 (UNESCO, 2009b) . The UN reaffirmed the "central role of literacy in development" with the following objectives: "progress towards the 2015 Education for All goals; attainment of useable literacy, numeracy and other basic competencies; dynamic literate environments, and improved quality of life as an impact of using literacy" (UNESCO, 2009b, p. 3). Closer to Jamaican borders, President George W. Bush approved the ratification of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 in the United States (Bush,

[1] Jamaica adopts the British system of spelling for Standard Jamaican English (SJE) words. Therefore, for proper nouns in SJE I use the British spelling as well as when quoting participants; otherwise I use American spelling.

[2] From 1958 to 1998 all Jamaican elementary school children sat the Common Entrance Examination at grade six. Depending on the students' result they would be placed in different types of secondary schools (Henry, 2006).

2001). NCLB was a response to concerns over the obstinate achievement gap between predominantly white middle class students, on the one hand, and ethnic minority and working class students, on the other (Bush, 2001). Special attention was focused on reading since "nearly 70 percent of inner city fourth graders [were] unable to read at a basic level on national reading tests" (Bush, 2001, p. 1).

As if in keeping with local concerns and global trends, then Prime Minister P.J Patterson of Jamaica in 2004 commissioned a task force on Education which published the report, *Task force on educational reform: Jamaica a transformed education system* (2004)[3]. The task force report quoted the 1983 UNESCO document and highlighted challenges that persisted two decades after the initial report: "Despite high enrollment rates, significant curriculum reform and other efforts, performance at all levels of the system has been well below target as measured by student scores on national and regional assessments…." (Davis, 2004, p. 10). Given the poor quality of student performance, one of the recommendations was to nationalize the G4LT, that is, to change it from a classroom based assessment to a high-stakes national test as a means of making schools more accountable for student performance, which in turn, would raise the quality of education. It was not until 2009 with a change of government from the People's National Party (PNP) to the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) that the Grade Four Literacy Test was finally changed to become a national test.

In this current thrust of education reform the Grade Four Literacy Test has come to symbolize for the Education ministry in Jamaica the key mechanism by which to improve the overall quality of education at all levels (R. Morris, Allen, & Evering, 2008). While school enrollment rate at the primary school level is high, low student performance

[3] While I do not have evidence to say that there is a direct link between NCLB (2001) and Jamaica's Education task force report (2004), there has been a considerable historical influence between education reforms and ideas in America and Jamaica (King, 1998).

on the G4LT and other examinations raises questions related to the quality of education provided in government sponsored public elementary or primary schools. On the one hand, Jamaica's primary school enrollment rate of 94.5% (PIOJ, 2009, p. 228) compares favorably with most Latin American and Caribbean countries as well as with UNESCO's developed nation bloc[4] (UNESCO, 2009a). The Ministry of Education in Jamaica has apparently been successful in impressing upon parents and guardians the importance of registering their children, both boys and girls, for school by ensuring adequate school spaces for elementary aged students.

On the other hand, results from both regional[5] and local examinations in Jamaica indicate that students from K-12 are not performing well in various subject areas. Of particular interest are the results for students in the area of English literacy which continue to fall below expected standards (Bryan, 2001; Bryan & Mitchell, 1999; Craig, 2001; Davis, 2004). The Ministry had set a target of 85%[6] success rate in literacy for primary school students by the year 2010 as assessed by the Grade Four Literacy Test, but this has not been achieved (Davis, 2004, p.9). Indeed, attention has always focused on the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) as it is the high-stakes entry exam into secondary school, but with the Ministry's renewed emphasis on improving literacy at the primary school level the focus has shifted to the Grade Four Literacy Test. The logic of

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[4] Jamaica's primary enrollment rate for the 2007/8 academic year was 94.5% (ESSJ, 2008) compared with 95% for the entire region of Latin America and the Caribbean, and 96% for developed nations as a bloc in 2007 (MDG 2009, p.14).

[5] I am referring to the English-speaking Caribbean unless otherwise specified. The English speaking Caribbean includes: Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Dominica, Antigua, St. Kitts & Nevis, Anguilla, and Montserrat (Roberts, 1988, p.3).

[6] In 2004 the Ministry of Education had set a target of 85% of students receiving mastery on the G4LT by 2010. When the new Minister of Education, Andrew Holness, came into power in 2007, the new target was set at 95% of students gaining mastery on the G4LT by 2015 ("95% mastery by 2015," 2009).

the Education ministry, I would argue, is that by focusing on improving literacy via the G4LT it can improve the test scores at GSAT by ensuring that "all new entrants to the secondary level are certified as literate" (R. Morris, et al., 2008).

The Education ministry's focus on improving English literacy and the public's outcry at the low performance of students in this subject area highlight the value attached to literacy in English in Jamaica. Indeed, a student's proficiency in English literacy, both reading and writing, is an important discourse at school. English is the official language of Jamaica (Bryan, 2001) and all school examinations are written in English. Literacy is therefore a gateway subject which if not acquired at a proficient level can undermine a child's successful experience of school which in turn has implications for his/her future employment. Stanovich (2000) coined the term 'Matthew effect' to describe a phenomenon where students who did well in reading continued to perform well in school in general, but students who performed poorly in reading continued to underachieve throughout their schooling. Other research supported this premise. For example, Allington (2006) reports that those students who fall behind because of their reading skills tend to stay behind, thereby widening the gap between those who fall behind and those students who are assessed as reading on grade level. Allington (2006), researching in a predominantly white society, further points out that those students who are "struggling readers" are usually students who are poor, black[7] and boys. In Jamaica most of the students who are assessed as struggling readers tend to be boys from poor neighborhoods who attend primary schools in either inner-city or rural communities, and have failed the Grade Four Literacy Test (Bagley, 1979; Davis, 2004; Evans, 1999, 2001; Miller, 1994). In light of this, I selected two primary schools located in inner-city

[7] Race is not necessarily as relevant in Jamaica (as opposed to America) where the majority of Jamaicans are black (91.2%) followed by mixed (6.2%) and other (2.6%). This was taken from the 2001 Census and was available on the CIA's World Factbook website: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jm.html

communities since I wanted to understand the social and economic dynamics that work for and against such schools in their efforts to provide quality education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine how the Grade Four Literacy Test has come to embody the goal of improving education at the elementary school level by exploring the ways in which the discourse/Discourse about this literacy test has changed over time, and how schools and participants responded to some of the changes that ensued when the literacy test was nationalized. I examined government documents and newspaper articles from 1997 to 2009 in order to analyze the ways in which different stakeholders discussed ideas about literacy and the Grade Four Literacy Test specifically. I also investigated how two schools supported those students who failed the literacy test. Documenting how schools, successfully and unsuccessfully, supported the students who failed the literacy test is a critical part of the puzzle of how best to go about improving literacy. Finally, I interviewed research participants to better understand their perspectives with regard to the Education ministry's new spotlight on the Grade Four Literacy Test.

Background

In order to provide context for my study, I describe the various assessments that have shaped and continue to shape the lives of Jamaican students. Local and regional assessments of various English literacy tests provide a useful picture of the performance of Jamaican students in this subject area. The major regional exam in the English-speaking Caribbean is the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) which assesses students at $11^{th}/12^{th}$ grade in various subjects including English language. After taking the CSEC exam students either apply for jobs in the labor market or pursue further studies. In 2007 only 45.1 % of Jamaican students received a passing grade in the required English language subject test of the CSEC exam (PIOJ, 2008, p. 4). Students

from other Caribbean islands performed better. Students from Barbados and Trinidad & Tobago passed at higher rates, 68.1% and 52.9% passes respectively. The exception was Guyana, whose students performed slightly worse than Jamaica. Guyanese students scored 40.1% passes in the CSEC English language subtest in 2007 below Jamaica's 45.1% pass rate (PIOJ, 2008, p. 4).

In terms of local examinations, Jamaican students in elementary schools also performed at a mediocre level according to media reports ("Education deficiencies,"2009). In 2009 when the Grade Four Literacy Test became a nationally administered exam the average pass rate for public elementary schools was 67% ("G4LT results,"2009a). This means that 33% of grade four students in public elementary schools in Jamaica were reading below their grade level as assessed by this test. Based on only these two measures of assessment, the regional CSEC exam in English Language and the local G4LT, it may be clear why the Education Ministry has focused on English literacy, and why literacy is a topical issue in the print media in Jamaica. Similarly, student performance in English literacy has been an important issue for investigation within academia in the West Indies (Bagley, 1979; Bryan, 2004a; Craig, 2006a; Drayton, 1990; Pollard, 1998; Simmons-McDonald, 2004). Caribbean researchers have postulated different explanations for Jamaica's persistent low literacy performance in schools. I have grouped these explanations into three broad categories which I will discuss below: socio-historical and economic, bilingual education and language ideologies, literacy teaching and learning.

Socio-historical and economic explanations

Because of the "inequities in educational opportunities that have existed historically in the Jamaican society" it is important that I start with the socio-historical and economic explanations (Miller, 1994, p. 27). Indeed, Jamaica's school system has been described as an unequal education system that has one set of schools for students

from poor families on the one hand, and another set for those from economically prosperous families on the other (Evans, 2001). Less financially prosperous families send their children to public elementary schools which are theoretically non-fee paying, although there is a cost-sharing scheme in which the government pays salaries and helps with infrastructure and meals, while parents contribute to covering the costs of books for example (Evans, 2001, p. 152). Many of these students are predominantly Creole speakers and can largely be identified as black (Bryan, 2004c; Roberts, 1988). Better off families, whether black, multiracial or from other ethnic groups, are more likely to be enrolled in private (fee paying) elementary schools called preparatory schools. For the 2007-2008 academic year approximately 278,138 students were enrolled in public elementary schools, while 36,992 students were enrolled in private elementary schools across Jamaica (PIOJ, 2009, p. 229).

Historically, Jamaica has been described as a "plantation economy" with a highly stratified pyramid social structure (Figueroa, 1971). Jamaica was a British colony from 1655 until 1962 when it received its independence. During the colonial period Jamaica produced sugarcane for export from its sugar plantations using enslaved labor from West Africa up until 1838, and later indentured laborers from Africa and Asia. The highly stratified social structure was borne out of Jamaica's plantation economy where the enslaved blacks were at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the planter class, of European ancestry, at the top. A few freed blacks and mulattoes were straddled somewhere in between these two groups (Roberts, 1988). Some scholars argue that the two-tiered education system that Jamaica inherited stemmed from the two types of schools that were established after the abolition of slavery in 1834 – private schools that offered both elementary and secondary curricula for whites which trained them to be professionals, and government common schools for the freed blacks who were trained for agricultural labor and other skilled jobs (I. Ferguson, 1947). The school system therefore

reified the social structure which was forged during slavery and perpetuated during the colonial and to some extent postcolonial period (Bagley, 1979).

The attempts of successive Jamaican governments to reform the school system in the late1980s and 1990s, however, have not been so successful in making the school system more equitable. (For a more detailed discussion of Jamaica's education system and school reform efforts see Chapter III). Perhaps more time and resources are needed before these measures can truly effect change. Students who attend private elementary schools and traditional high schools have better chances of achieving success as measured by national test scores than those who attend primary and non-traditional high schools (Evans, 2001). In the June 2009 sitting of the Grade Four Literacy Test 67% of primary school students attained mastery, that is, passing all three components of the literacy test. But of those students who attended preparatory schools, 93 % attained master (CaPRI, 2009; Luton, 2010). In other words, education in Jamaica reflected the inequities within society as opposed to being a lever for social mobility (King, 1989; Knight, 2008).

Part of the problem, I argue, lies in the lack of finances to fund public education due to the large portion of Jamaica's budget that must go towards debt financing. Approximately fifty-four percent of Jamaica's 2008/9 budget was allocated towards debt financing which left forty-six percent to pay for other expenditures (PIOJ, 2009, p. 84). Jamaica does allocate a commendable portion of its remaining budget towards education. For the 2008/9 financial year 12% of the national budget was earmarked for education of which 94% went to salaries and other emoluments (PIOJ, 2009, p. 221). Hence, there is little left over in the budget to invest in other areas of education such as instructional resources. Additionally, for the financial year ending 2007, the Jamaican government spent roughly USD $ 1,329 per student at the primary level, which although it compares favorably with other Caribbean and Latin American countries falls way below the USD $9,280 which is spent on each elementary aged student in the United States (CaPRI,

2009; UNESCO, 2009a). In the Millennium Development Report for 2009, the authors summarize the situation for developing countries well when they say, "In many developing countries, school systems are chronically under-financed and under-resourced and often fail to deliver a high quality education. As a result, too many children leave school without having acquired the most basic literacy and numeracy skills" (UN, 2009, p. 16).

Language and language ideology explanations

While not disputing Jamaica's socio-historical legacy in education and current economic problems, Caribbean linguists emphasize that the problem of low student performance on literacy tests has to do with language (Craig, 1976, 2006a; Devonish, 1986; Pollard, 1998). This is because in most of the Caribbean islands various forms of Creole languages are spoken alongside an official language (Craig, 1980b; Roberts, 1988). Essentially, Caribbean linguists contend that if children are taught English within some form of a bilingual framework, then English literacy scores would improve (Craig, 2001; Devonish & Carpenter, 2007). Similarly, American linguists like Labov (1982) have made recommendations for the teaching of English to speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) using some form of bilingual education. Within the Caribbean, educators/linguists such as Bryan (2001), Craig (2006a), and Pollard (1993) have suggested transitional forms of bilingual education, while others like Devonish (1986; 2007) have proposed full bilingualism and changing the status quo to make both Standard Jamaican English (SJE) and Jamaican Creole (JC) the official languages of Jamaica. Instruction would therefore be in both Standard Jamaican English and Jamaican Creole.

Historically there has been opposition to using Creole as a language for classroom instruction within the Caribbean (Craig, 1980a; Drayton, 1990). Currently, Jamaica's Ministry of Education recognizes Standard Jamaican English as the official language and

"Jamaican Creole as the language most widely used in the population" (Bryan, 2001, p. 23). Jamaican Creole, is therefore, not accorded the same official status as English. In terms of classroom instruction, the Ministry of Education has adopted a more politically expedient approach in which teachers "promote basic communication through the oral use of the home language in the early years (e.g. K-3) while facilitating the development of literacy in English" (Bryan, 2001, p. 23). This is in contrast to Devonish's (2007) advocacy of full bilingualism in classroom teaching and learning. The reason for the government's more conservative approach towards language instruction relates to the negative language attitudes that persons in the English-speaking Caribbean have inherited and continue to perpetuate in favor of English as opposed to their own vernaculars (Bryan, 2004c; Evans, 2001). However, these negative attitudes appear to be changing and there is currently greater acceptance of Creoles in public spheres in the Caribbean at large (Carrington, 2001; Mair, 2002; Shields-Brodber, 1989).

Literacy studies explanations

With the growth of literacy as its own field of study within education there are Jamaican scholars who are addressing low student performance from the perspective of literacy teaching and learning. Bryan and Mitchell (1999), both from the School of Education at the University of the West Indies, were consultants to the Ministry of Education and submitted the *Literacy Improvement Initiative* (1999) as part of the ministry's plan of action to address low literacy levels in schools across the island. The *Literacy Improvement Initiative* focused on seven areas: student achievement, bilingual policy, teacher preparation, and literacy support in schools, equal opportunities for boys and girls and children with special needs, stakeholder involvement, and adult education. These seven focus areas within the Literacy Improvement Initiative reflect a more comprehensive approach for addressing literacy challenges as the document highlights socio-historical factors and issues related to language and ideology as well.

Under the umbrella of literacy studies, multiple factors influencing student performance in English literacy within Jamaica's public education system are addressed. For instance, researchers in literacy studies have also taken into account the gender issues within literacy learning in Jamaica in which boys consistently underperform (Evans, 1999; Miller, 1986). Although teacher training is explored by several Caribbean linguists (Craig, 2006a), the link between teacher training and assessment is given more emphasis within literacy studies (Bryan, 2004a, 2004b; Bryan & Mitchell, 1999; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993). Within literacy studies in the Jamaican context, the importance of language has not been neglected either. Bryan (2001), for instance, authored the Language Education Policy which described the complexities of the bilingual situation in Jamaica and outlined the Ministry's current position on the place of Jamaican Creole in schools as mentioned above– a progressive step but a somewhat conservative move as well.

Research focus

In this study I focus on the changes made to the Grade Four Literacy Test in 2009. To a large extent this study is about teasing out the ideological assumptions that are embedded within the discourse of government documents and newspaper reports regarding the Grade Four Literacy Test. The different ways that the G4LT is written about in policy drafts, government reports and the print media provide insight into assumptions that different stakeholders make with regard to how they define literacy, how they perceive struggling readers, and how solutions to improving literacy are discussed. Reviewing and analyzing the newspapers is akin to listening to a series of conversations between the Education ministry, on the one hand, as it tries to promote its efforts to improve literacy through the media, and the various public groups, on the other hand, who either critique or endorse these efforts (Woodside-Jiron, 2004). Gee (2005) in fact describes this kind of societal level discussion as conversation with a capital "C" or

Conversation and defines it as the "talk and writing that has gone on…in society at large around a major theme, debate, or motif" (p. 22).

But I did not want to leave the analysis there, at the textual level; I wanted to include the activities of schools and the perspectives of various stakeholders as well. Having been a grade three teacher in Jamaica, I wanted to investigate how the activities of teachers were influenced as a result of changes in the discourse of government mandates in relation to the Grade Four Literacy Test. This study, therefore, explores how schools, in particular teachers, responded to the demands of preparing students who had to repeat the literacy test in December 2009 after having failed the first sitting in June 2009. One of the changes in the new Grade Four Literacy Test is that students have to pass the literacy test before they take the Grade Six Achievement Test, the sole secondary school placement exam. Students, however, have multiple opportunities to sit the literacy test. During the course of this research study I observed how two public elementary schools implemented their own strategies for teaching struggling readers to retake the test. I also interviewed different stakeholders – school personnel, administrators from the Ministry of Education, and academics – to better understand their perspectives about the new high-stakes national Grade Four Literacy Test.

Although there have been a few studies which explore different interventions to improve literacy, such as the Literature-based language project proposed by Wilson, Smikle, & Grant (2001), there are few qualitative studies (Bryan, 2004b; Evans, 2001, 2006) that document what is actually happening in the schools and how the public perceives the literacy strategies implemented by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica. And while there are a number of quantitative studies that document school processes, these are more survey type studies which focus on other areas outside of literacy such as aggression in Jamaican children (Meeks-Gardener, Powell, & Grantham-McGregor, 2000), gender and achievement (Evans, 1999), or psychosocial development of students (Samms-Vaughan, 2005), for example. My research begins to address the gaps by

providing a rich qualitative study documenting the discourse about the Grade Four Literacy Test, and how two case study public elementary schools are supporting their readers who were unsuccessful in the first sitting of the nationalized Grade Four Literacy Test. As a qualitative study, my research about the G4LT will also complement subsequent larger quantitative studies which may address the relationship among literacy test scores, school type, social class and gender among other variables.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the main theoretical framework which undergirds this study. It is usually described as both a theory and a method (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005; Rogers, 2004). As a theory, Critical Discourse Analysis draws on multiple disciplines including critical linguistics (for example, Kress (2001) and poststructuralist theories (for example, Hall (2001). Hence, within CDA analysts focus on both the form and function of language, as well as how power constrains and empowers the ways in which different individuals and institutions use language (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005; Kress, 2001; Wetherell, 2001). Language is therefore constitutive in that it has the "magical" power to get things done, but the power to get things done depends on the given authority of the speaker or institution (Gee, 2005, p. 10). As a method CDA provides the analyst with a systematic set of questions and linguistic constructs to examine both textual data and social phenomenon. As Rogers (2004) explains, the "recursive movement between linguistic and social analysis is what makes CDA a systematic method, rather than a haphazard analysis of discourse and power" (p.7). The most common CDA methodologies used in education research are those of Normal Fairclough and James Paul Gee (Rogers, 2004).

Gee's (2005) concept of *"big" Discourse* and Fairlcough's (2001) three-tiered framework helped to structure the way in which I analyzed the data and shaped the way in which I constructed the narrative of the Grade Four Literacy Test. Blending these two versions of CDA was useful. Gee's concept of "big" Discourse, which he distinguishes from "small" discourse, provided the theoretical lens for the study. From Gee's (2005)

perspective "small" discourse relates to "language-in-use" (spoken or written text) while "big" Discourse includes language-in-use and other "non-language stuff" such as ways of behaving, thinking, dressing etc (p.7). In other words, "all life for all of us is just a patchwork of thoughts, words, objects, events, actions and interactions in Discourses" (Gee. 2005, p. 7). In order to apply the concept of Discourse in a meaningful way to my study, I used a narrower definition, that is, Discourse as "ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbols, systems, places and times" and "ways of performing and recognizing characteristic identities and activities" (p.33). With the changes in the Grade Four Literacy Test, how were the activities of schools coordinated differently? What attributes should students possess and what activities must they perform in order to be recognized as having a literate identity based on the G4LT? Fairclough's three-tiered framework captured how Discourses about the G4LT permeated the institution of the Ministry of Education, the situational activities within the case study schools, and the societal discussions about literacy as represented in the print media. I also used Fairclough's concept of ideologies, which he defines as "common-sense assumptions," to tease out the major assumptions that dominated discussions about the Grade Four Literacy Test.

Research questions

Given the research problem of improving literacy in primary schools in Jamaica and the purpose of this research to illuminate how the Grade Four Literacy Test is poised to achieve this end, the research questions are as follows:

How did the Grade Four Literacy Test, which was once a classroom-based assessment for a decade, become a national high-stakes exam in 2009?

a. How did the discourse about the Grade Four Literacy Test change between 1999 and 2009 in specific government documents and in the print media?

b. What did schools, and particularly teachers, do to prepare the students who failed the nationalized Grade Four Literacy Test in June 2009 and had to retake the test in December 2009?

c. What were the perspectives of participants with regard to the following questions:

   i. How would you define literacy?

   ii. What role does literacy play in Jamaica's national development?

   iii. What are some of the major factors that the Ministry of Education should take into account when thinking about improving literacy in Jamaica?

   iv. What do you think about the Grade Four Literacy Test?

The research questions correspond to the chapters that follow. The first question is the overarching research problem which is broken down into sub-questions. Sub-question (a) is discussed in Chapter IV. Here I describe the day of June 18, 2009 – the first day the Grade Four Literacy Test was administered as a national exam. I also trace the changing discourse about challenges of improving literacy in Jamaica in several Ministry of Education documents and newspaper articles. In Chapter V, which relates to sub-question (b), I examine how schools responded to the changes that followed the revised G4LT, and what teachers actually did to prepare students to retake the test. Sub-question (c) is discussed in Chapter VI. In this Chapter, I examine the perspectives of participants in relation to ideas about what it means to be literate, their views about the Grade Four Literacy Test, and what they think the Ministry of Education should do to

improve literacy. Chapter II is the Literature Review section and Chapter III is the Methodology section where I provide more context about Jamaica's education system, Critical Discourse Analysis and how I collected and analyzed the data.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literacy

Defining literacy is not as simple as it appears to be. At a quick glance, literacy can be defined simply as the ability to read and write. This perspective is held by cognitive psychologists who have contributed helpful information in terms of our understanding of how reading works (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1999; Perfetti, 1999; Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, & Pesetsky, 2001). From this tradition, literacy is a matter of decoding the alphabetic system in the target language, in this case English. Literacy is about moving from the spoken word to print, and the ability of the individual to decipher and interpret what is written with sufficient speed and accuracy. Within this tradition, the mental processes of writing is emphasized (McCutchen, 1995). From the perspective of cognitive psychology then, literacy is a skill that can be taught in schools with the appropriate instructional methods to the average student who has not been diagnosed with any learning/reading disabilities (Colheart, 1998; W Labov, 2003; Stanovich, 1998). This skills-based approach to literacy has been a dominant perspective/ideology within literacy studies and has informed much research and policies about school-based reading and writing (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 1999; Rayner, et al., 2001).

However, by the 1970s new ideas began to emerge about literacy that problematized the skills-based definition of reading and writing. The works of Kenneth and Yetta Goodman in the mid-1960s onwards illustrated that readers often used context clues within the text to decipher words through a process of sampling, inferring and predicting (Y. M. Goodman, Watston, & Burke, 1996). Teachers could also assist students with reading difficulties if teachers understood their reading errors or miscues (Kenneth S. Goodman, 1965). Such “whole language” proponents argued that reading was not simply about decoding isolated words, but about making meaning from texts.

The work of Freire (2000) was also pivotal in the 1970s in advancing the idea that literacy could be both a source of oppression and liberation. Using a banking metaphor, Freire (2000) showed how students were mere receptors for the knowledge transmitted by teachers, the gatekeepers of the status quo. Through dialogue, the "problem-posing teacher student" could support students in learning what they, the students, wanted to know more about (p. 93). Within this latter framework, students could become agents of their own destinies through literacy. The notion that the practice of literacy occurred outside of schools was also popularized in the work by Barton and Hamilton (1998) who demonstrated how individuals used literacy skills in their everyday lives, and coined the term "vernacular literacy" to talk about reading and writing outside of school contexts. As Vygotsky (1978) became popular in the US, his notions about learning as a social activity and the zone of proximal development also influenced how persons thought about literacy. Within this paradigm, literacy was no longer a context-less neurological skill, but now was context-bound with political and social overtones. Added to this was the idea that there was a relationship between literacy and identity (Gee, 2000; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Gee (2005) argues that literacy forms part of a discourse which essentially is an identity-kit, or a way of thinking, speaking, behaving and writing.

Brandt (2001) suggests that these two competing traditions of skills-based and context-based literacy under-value the economic importance of reading and writing. While placing her research within the tradition of the context-based paradigm of literacy, Brandt expands her understanding of literacy to include its economic worth, and defines literacy as a resource which has both private and public value and which is taught and supported by sponsors and learned and traded on by those they sponsor. She explains:

> To treat literacy as a resource is to emphasize that it takes its shape from what can be traded on it. This perspective attends to the competitions that surround literacy, the struggles to harness it for profit or ideological advantage, the struggles for the prerogative to manage or measure it, and the ways that these incessant struggles set the terms for individual encounters with literacy. Above all, this perspective emphasizes the instability of literacy, its link to

> political and economic changes and to the shifting standards of value and conditions of access that accompany those changes (p. 7).

To a large extent, I adopt Brandt's notion of literacy as a resource that confers on both the sponsor and the sponsored some form of value, such as employability, humanitarian prestige, social status, or mastery of literacy assessments. While some forms of literacy are acquired in a person's daily routine, the focus of this study is the teaching and learning of literacy in the formal settings of schools. This distinction between literacy that is acquired in everyday contexts and literacy that is learned in institutions is in keeping with Gee's (1992) own distinctions between "acquired primary discourses," such as our mother tongue, and "learned secondary discourses," in which we are instructed in formal contexts such as schools.

In the context of this study, then, literacy is defined as a resource that is taught and learned within formal school settings in the form of reading and writing skills. This does not negate, however, that literacy occurs outside of school contexts. Here, literacy as embodied in reading and writing skills is not simply a cognitive process, but is also a meaning-making activity with socio-political consequences depending on both the quality of the literacy resource and the demands of the education system and local/global marketplace.

Literacy: A global commodity and human right

Literacy has for a long time been an exclusive activity meaning that is has historically been reserved for select groups (Heath, 1996; Resnick & Resnick, 1977). However, after World War II (1939-1945) leaders within Europe and North America in particular saw the need to create a universally literate society. Heath (1996) comments that "within those Western democracies that came early to industrial and urban life, ideals about the relationship of literacy to economic progress for the nation and social advancement for the individual became tightly intertwined with industrial growth and political stability" (p. 6). In other words, literacy began to be regarded as a public rather

than an exclusive good - a right, so to speak, for everyone as a result of the ways in which literacy shaped economic progress, social advancement, and political stability. Heath (1991) explains that throughout the Middle Ages (5th to 15th centuries) reading and writing were seen as activities reserved for priests who were responsible for reading, interpreting and preserving the Holy Scriptures. By the 14th century reading and writing continued to be reserved for men, this time wealthy men. It was not until the 18th century in New England that women were freely allowed to participate in literacy activities (Perlmann & Shirley, 1991). Slaves in the New World, of course, were not permitted to read and write. Literacy was therefore the exclusive right of persons of European ancestry within the plantation economies of the New World - America, the West Indies and some nations in Latin America. It was feared that if slaves read, they would become insubordinate and rebellious, desiring their freedom. However, this did not prevent some slaves from learning to read and write in clandestine (Cornelius, 1983).

By the late twentieth century, literacy was beginning to be redefined as a global good, and even more specifically a human right. In 1945, after the tragedy of World War II, the United Nations formed a body that was focused largely on education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) main aim was not merely to rebuild schools in the devastated nations, but to build democratic societies. UNESCO sought to accomplish this task by focusing on human development, and in particular literacy development. By educating the masses, the ideals of democracy could be preserved by facilitating, through literacy, a public that was well informed. Below is such a quote from a UNESCO document:

> Literacy lies at the heart of UNESCO's concerns and makes up an essential part of its mandate, being entwined with the right to education set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. These concerns have to do with promoting the meaningful acquisition and application of literacy in laying the basis for positive social transformation, justice, and personal and collective freedom (UNESCO, 2004, p. 5).

On its webpage, UNESCO provides yet another statement about the significance of literacy:

> Literacy is a human right, a tool of personal empowerment and a means for social and human development. Educational opportunities depend on literacy. Literacy is at the heart of basic education for all, and essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy (http://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/literacy-important/)

In both quotations, but particularly in the latter, literacy is equated with a human right, and is described as a tool that can help to create a social environment where human beings of all walks of life can flourish. Literacy, within this discursive model, has multiple roles as listed above – eradicating poverty, achieving gender equality, and ensuring sustainable development for example. This statement is significant because it illustrates what UNESCO emphasizes in literacy development. In turn, because UNESCO is a multinational organization with 193 member states and six associate states, these statements are likely to inform the literacy planning and policy of nations worldwide. It is noteworthy to mention here that both the United States and Jamaica are member states of UNESCO. The United States[8] became a member state in 2003 and Jamaica in 1962, the same year it gained independence from Britain. It can be argued, then, that through membership in UNESCO both nations endorsed the literacy agenda promoted by this global organization.

Intersection of literacy, language and policy

Especially by the mid-1960s when numerous African and Caribbean nations became independent of colonial powers, issues regarding the relationship between literacy and language surfaced. Questions related to which language should be taught in

[8] The United States was previously a member state from 1946 to 1984. See http://erc.unesco.org/portal/UNESCOMemberStates.asp?language=en

schools or through a particular literacy program, and whether or not a policy document should be created became prominent (Coulmas, 2005). The question of which language should be taught in schools is a highly political issue. Such literacy issues are political because it is the language of school rather than the vernacular language which usually becomes the official lingua franca of government, business and hence the dominant language. In such a case, a "diglossic" language situation could ensue in which the "vernacular" language is spoken in informal settings, while the "school" language is used in formal contexts (C. A. Ferguson, 1959). The question of whether or not a policy about language should be created is also challenging, precisely because it raises similar questions such as, which language should be identified as the official language, and whether a distinction should be made between the official and national language. Take, for example, the African nation of Kenya which has multiple languages and dialects. In 1974 the government of Kenya decided to have an official language policy in which Swahili was ascribed the status of the national language with English as the preferred official language (Myers-Scotton, 1993). English was selected as the official language in Kenya for a number of reasons which included the perception of English as an "ethnically neutral language," and the international status of English (Crystal, 1995; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

In the hypothetical case of a nation where only one language is spoken, then the first question about which language should be taught in schools seems deceptively obvious. Take for instance the United States which has no official national language policy, and considers itself a monolingual English speaking nation (Coulmas, 2005). Yet, even within the United States the issue of what language should be taught in schools continues to resurface. In the Lau v. Nichols case of 1974 (California) students of Chinese ancestry made a claim against the school for not providing adequate instruction for the students to learn English (Fillmore, 2000). In the more popularly known bilingual education lawsuit – the Ann Arbor case of 1979 - the courts recommended that African

American Vernacular English (AAVE) be taught to African American students in a transitional manner to facilitate their learning of English (Labov, 1982). This approach was not carried through, however, for several reasons including public opposition. Similarly, in the Oakland case of 1996 (California), the courts, with the advice of sociolinguists, resolved to "recognize Ebonics as the primary language of African American children" particularly during the students' Language Arts lessons (Rickford, 1999, p. 267). Different interest groups opposed the court's ruling to adopt transitional bilingualism in schools because some parents feared that their children would receive mediocre English instruction. With the rise of the Latino population in the United States more attention has focused on bilingual Spanish/English education programs in schools with ongoing debates about their effectiveness (Alonso-Zaldivar, 2003) Moreover, in response to the growing Spanish-speaking population, the English Language Amendment was proposed in 1981 but failed. In response to this English-only movement, another group was formed in 1987 as the English Plus movement (Crystal, 1995).

Similar to the United States, many Anglophone Caribbean islands defined themselves as English monolingual speaking countries partly owing to their British colonial heritage. Many governments in English-speaking Caribbean islands ignored the Creole vernacular spoken by its inhabitants (Craig, 1976; Simmons-McDonald, 2004). With time the Jamaican government eventually recognized the importance of acknowledging the reality that more than one language was spoken on the island. In 2001 the Ministry of Education of Jamaica chose to retain English as the official language, while recognizing Jamaican Creole as the "language most widely used in the population" in a draft language education policy (Bryan, 2001, p. 23). The Ministry of Education's recognition in 2001 that Jamaica is a bilingual nation is significant because it reflects a major shift in Jamaica's attitude towards language. Hitherto, the official position was either to stamp out Jamaican Creole, or to ignore it, pretending that English was the mother tongue of most Jamaicans. These historical attitudes (and there are

remnants still today) are similar to those which governed the treatment of Navajo, and other Native languages in the United States (Spolsky, 2002). May (2005) quotes the commissioner of Indian affairs, J.D.C. Atkins, in his 1887 report in which he writes that "schools should be established, which [Native American] children should be required to attend [and where] their barbarous dialects should be blotted out and the English language substituted" (p. 324). This was the exact sentiment in British colonial Jamaica in which British and American School Inspectors deplored the use of Creole in the schools describing Jamaican Creole as a "degenerate form of English" (Bryan, 2004c, p. 171). Nevertheless, the tide has shifted in Jamaica since the 1960s and there is greater public acceptance and use of Jamaican Creole in various public spheres (Carrington, 2001; Christie, 2003). Other Caribbean islands, specifically Haiti and Curacao, have made significant strides in not only recognizing the mother tongues spoken in these islands but also making the Creoles official languages which are used for instruction in schools (Christie, 2003; Schieffelin & Doucet, 1998).

Whatever the language status of a nation—be it monolingual, bilingual or multilingual—at the intersection of language, literacy and policy lies a host of challenges and compromises as different interest groups voice their opinions; multiple ideologies are at play. Bryan (2004c) lists different groups that continue to have an influential role in the language and literacy policy perspectives in Jamaica: foreign and local examination boards, international funding bodies, program initiatives/interventions, public opinion, and academic research. With particular reference to Jamaica's Language Education Policy of 2001, Bryan (2004c) explains that any policy is marked by compromise:

> The views whether of academic research, cultural pluralists, teachers or parents have to be reconciled. Now that we have a basis for a language education policy, we can see that it bears the mark of many painful compromises and reviews of long-held positions by stakeholders, thus making it an evolutionary rather than revolutionary document, attempting to acknowledge or even placate disparate forces (p. 184).

Bilingual education[9]

Like many disadvantaged and marginalized groups in the US, many poor Creole speakers in Jamaica have been alienated from the social, economic and political life of the country because they do not possess a strong command of the Standard Jamaican English language, whether in speech, reading, or writing (Devonish, 1986). In other words, they have not mastered the language of social access, that is, English (McCourtie, 1998). In light of this, Pollard (1998) comments that the "ideal product of the Jamaican classroom is the bilingual student" (p. 11), that is, a student who has both the competence and awareness to switch between Jamaican Creole and Standard Jamaican English. Put another way, such a student is able to use language both accurately and appropriately depending on the context. Indeed, Coulmas (2005) asserts that the "bilingual speaker has at any point in a conversation the capacity by means of code choice to activate social meanings, display preferences and attitudes, as well as his or her compliance with, or unwillingness to conform to, community norms" (p. 124). There is a great challenge, therefore, for educators to know how to teach English to Creole speakers while being aware of and sensitive to issues of cultural identity as indexed by language.

Indeed, research interest in bilingual education and the teaching of English to vernacular speakers began to emerge in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Craig, 1999). This was during the time of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in which there was increased awareness of the plight of American Blacks. Craig (1999, 2001) who often draws parallels between the Caribbean and the United States, summarized two perspectives regarding the dialects of African Americans and Caribbean Creole speakers, as well as the working class. One view held that African American Vernacular English, other vernaculars, and the dialects spoken by working class individuals were forms of

[9] Especially within this section on Bilingual Education I draw on research from the United States since the US plays a major role in influencing education perspectives in Jamaica.

broken English and indicated lower cognitive ability. Bernstein's (1972) 'restricted' and 'elaborated' code supported this kind of scholarship. The 'elaborated' code was spoken by those who were educated and had higher cognitive ability, while the 'restricted code was spoken by the uneducated or dialect speakers. The other view, however, contested this deficit perspective. Labov (1969) among others such as Craig (1976) in the Caribbean, held the view that African American Vernacular English was rule-governed, did not indicate lower cognitive ability, and that the teaching of the standard language to vernacular speakers needed to be redesigned. While some in the Caribbean opted for transitional forms of bilingual instruction (Bryan, 2001), others argues for full immersion bilingual instruction (Devonish & Carpenter, 2007). Indeed, research has shown that "high-level bilinguals have been shown to do better as a group than corresponding monolinguals on several types of tests, including some aspects of intelligence…cognitive flexibility…creativity… metalinguistic and metacultural awareness and efficiency in learning further languages" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 251).

Language/literacy ideologies

Decisions about what language should be used as part of literacy instruction in schools is not simply a matter of policy making, but is also rooted within ideological positions (Errington, 1998). Kroskrity (2000) suggests that it is profitable to think about language ideologies as a cluster concept consisting of a number of converging dimensions including gender, race, class and identity. Woolard (1998) traces the different ways in which language ideology has been framed, defined, and the ways it continues to be re-examined. She points out that language ideology is a "mediating link between social forms and forms of talk" (p. 3). She points out the basic division between neutral and critical views of ideology. On the one hand, ideology is seen as an objective mental phenomenon void of social and subjective dimensions. On the other hand,

ideology is perceived as rationalizations rooted in social experiences. It is this latter strand of ideology, situated in social experiences, that informs the work of this study.

In their examination of language ideologies Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) describe the ways in which language ideology is linked to politics, economics, national identity, language policy, and literacy. I highlight three themes. First, Woolard and Schieffelin note that the model of development is pervasive in postcolonial language planning. This is evident in Jamaica's Language Education Policy (2001) document in which the author addresses concerns about the effects of low literacy levels on human development. The LEP (2001) stated that the "unsatisfactory performance of students in language and literacy at all levels of the Jamaican educational system, and its accompanying effects on language competence and on the potential for human development in the wider society, have perpetually been matters of concern" (p. 4). Such a statement echoes UNESCO's promotion of literacy as a valuable asset which is described as a human right, a tool to be used for individual and community development.

Second, Woolard and Schieffelin pinpoint how multilingual societies complicate the Western paradigm of one language-one people. Many postcolonial nations in Africa and the Caribbean, for example, were and are multilingual, which tends to frustrate the purist notion of one national language. Irvine and Gal (2000) make a parallel argument and show how through the process they call "iconization," European colonial cartographers divided the African continent and ethnic groups to match language groups. In other words, through iconization linguistic features of a language were made to index the perceived essence of a social group in keeping with the Western idea of one language/one people. Even in the United States one can argue that the underlying assumption of the English-only movement (Crystal, 1995; Rickford, 1999) is based on this ideal, that is, the perspective that one language should represent the American people. This one-language-one-nation ideology is ill-suited, however, to describing many nations worldwide in which more than one language is spoken. Take for example

Jamaica in which a diglossic relationship exists between Jamaican Creole, which many Jamaicans embrace as part of their identity, and Standard Jamaican English, which is ascribed as the official language (Devonish, 1986; C. A. Ferguson, 1959) .

Third, Woolard and Schieffelin make the point that ideology provides the link between language, cognition and social life, or put slightly differently, ideology provides the rationalization for the ways persons think about, feel about and use language. This third understanding of ideology is reminiscent of the notions of ideology expounded by two Critical Discourse Analysts (CDA) – Gee (2005) and Fairclough (2001). These two CDA theorists and practitioners espouse the view that what we believe and how we behave are encoded in Discourse. Gee (2005) makes the helpful distinction between small "discourse" and big "Discourse" with the former relating to our oral and written text, while the latter encompassing text and all other behaviors that form part of our ideology. Discourse models, then, are ideologies that inform our thinking, behaving and speaking according to Gee. Fairclough (2001) adds another dimension to the description of ideology by arguing, like (Bourdieu, 1977), that it is used by the powerful to retain their position of power/authority amidst ongoing class struggles.

Jamaica's 2001 Language Education Policy, I would argue, is heavily influenced by the ideologies or Discourse models of development and language identity. The Ministry of Education in Jamaica opted to retain Standard Jamaican English (SJE) as the official language while promoting the oral use of the child's home language in the early grades. As a Third World nation and an ex-colony, Jamaica is striving to hold its place in the global economic market. Currently, English is the dominant language of the world and is in itself a valuable asset (Coulmas, 2005). In this regard, English is seen as a commodity, a resource to be harnessed and used for economic advantage and social mobility. Brandt (2001) puts it well when she says "literacy is a valued commodity" (p. 21). Within this ideological perspective of development, there is little room to view

language solely as a badge of identity; language is also a tool to be used, a resource to be harnessed for economic and human development.

On the other hand, the promotion of the oral use of the home language by allowing students to answer questions in Jamaican Creole, I would argue, is rooted within another ideological position – a counter position to the idea of a homogeneous language ideal – a sort of ideology or Discourse model of heterogeneity. The Ministry of Education has finally accepted that Jamaica is a bilingual nation. Simmons-McDonald (2004) mentions that prior to the 1960s "in schools in the Caribbean, the common practice was to prohibit and suppress the use of Creole on the school premises" (p. 187). But in 1953 UNESCO published a report in which they listed recommendations for the use of vernacular in education, noting that no language is insufficient to meet the needs of the child's first months in school (2006b; Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert, & Leap, 2000). Despite such pronouncements, however, it is challenging to convince parents and the public that using the home language to teach a standard is not detrimental to their child's learning (Craig, 2006b; Simmons-McDonald, 2004). In the 1979 Ann Arbor case, parents were not pleased that their children were going to be taught AAVE, at least that is what they understood (Labov, 1982). This misconception perhaps stemmed from a lack of clear communication on the part of researchers, educators, and policy makers, and the resulting lack of understanding on the part of the parents. The misperception is that students are not taught English; and this is not so. Rather the home language is used as a medium of instruction to facilitate the development of literacy in English. Craig (2006b), one of the leading Caribbean linguists, captures this tension regarding the teaching of the home language and the Standard when he says: "The lesson to be learned from West Indian and North American cases is that countries have to decide how to accommodate, on the one hand, the rights of parents to chose an education for their children and, on the other hand, the rationalist ideal of children's rights to their first language" (p. 103).

Literacy instruction – reading and writing

So far I have explored multiple definitions of literacy and discussed the relationship between literacy, language education policy and ideology. This was done in order to provide a broad understanding of the socio-political importance of literacy and language in education. I now turn my attention briefly to what researchers have written about the reading and writing processes, the difficulties that some students may experience while learning to read and write, literacy assessment and the interventions set up to assist such students. While the previous section was a general overview, this section provides a narrow perspective in keeping with the immediate focus of this study which in part examines middle grade students in Jamaican elementary schools who have failed a literacy exam.

In order to appreciate some of the difficulties that students may encounter while learning to read or write, it is important to understand the process of learning to read and write and some of the problems that middle grade students may experience. Before heading to school, children develop their oral language abilities in their home and communities. For example, children begin to understand that objects can be identified by certain words (Rayner, et al., 2001; Wells, 1986). As children arrive at school, they begin to learn how to read and write words in a formal setting and through structured routines. Whether in a whole language (K. S. Goodman, 1989), phonics driven (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001), or balanced instruction classroom (Pressley, 2002) students begin to learn explicitly or implicitly the letter-sound combinations or grapho-phonemic correspondences that make up the English alphabetic system. While several stage and phase theories exist to describe this process of reading development (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1999), Roller's (1998) explanation is useful because she specifically examines readers who experience difficulties and she focuses on both reading and writing.

Roller (1998) describes three categories of early readers (which are not necessarily correlated to age but reading ability): emergent readers, beginning readers and transition readers. Emergent readers are "prereaders" who are just grasping basic print concepts, for instance, they are just beginning to learn that words consist of letters which represent sounds, and that print conveys a message (p. 5). In terms of writing, emergent readers may be able to spell some common words. Beginning readers, however, know much more about print and can recognize about 100 to 300 words automatically. They use multiple strategies to recognize words, such as re-reading for context clues and meaning. Beginning readers can spell more words, and write about familiar topics. Transition readers have "mastered basic word-identification skills" and are focused much more on comprehending rather than decoding text. Such readers are "ready to use reading for enjoyment and learning" (p. 5). Transition readers can spell complex words, recognize different genres of writing, and are able to "combine information from multiple sources" (p. 48).

Along the path to becoming literate within the institution of school, students may experience difficulties either in decoding, comprehending or writing as implied by Roller's (1998) descriptors of readers who struggle. In terms of decoding words students may lack knowledge of the alphabet or the letter-sound correspondence (Ehri, 1999). Students who struggle with decoding may also have less working memory to focus on comprehension, lack sufficient vocabulary, and possess partial background knowledge to fully comprehend the text, or lack effective meta-cognitive strategies to monitor their comprehension (Perfetti, Marron, & Foltz, 1996). In relation to writing, students may experience difficulties in the planning, transcription, text generation, and revising stages (McCutchen, 1995). Less skilled writers may not have a well developed knowledge of genres, or may write less structured expository texts (planning phase). Or, such writers may have greater difficulty with spelling, and mechanics and tend to generate shorter texts. These students also tend to correct fewer errors as they are less aware of them.

Research has also shown that when the home language parallels the discourse used at school, then the transition from home to school is relatively unproblematic for the student; otherwise if there is a disjuncture between the language at home and the language and (Discourse or way of life) taught at school, then challenges may arise for the student (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983). This difference between the home language and that of the school, and the difficulties that children in the Caribbean face in bilingual situations as in Jamaica has been a long articulated argument voiced by many West Indian linguists (Christie, 2003; Craig, 1976, 2006b).

Middle grade

Although there are remedial reading programs for all age groups, the focus in this study is on support for struggling readers in upper elementary grades. I focus on grade four because of the notion of the 'grade four slump', which Chall (1983) described as the point at which previously successful children begin to experience reading difficulties. In the NCLB document it is noteworthy that grade four is highlighted as the grade in which 70 percent of poor inner city youth were unable to read on grade level. As mentioned earlier, the intervention chosen by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica has targeted grade four students as evidenced by the recent focus on the Grade Four Literacy Test.

The fourth grade can be described as a transition grade in terms of reading materials (Johnston & Allington, 1991). Prior to this time students read mainly trade books with a dominant story-type format, and some amount of expository text but perhaps in a narrative form. However, in grade four the expectation shifts and children are expected to read expository and content area material. Allington and Johnston (2002) note that it is during fourth grade that the "linguistic, cognitive, and conceptual demands of reading increase somewhat dramatically; there is a heavier use of textbooks and an expectation of greater independence in using reading and writing as tools for learning" (p.

15). Students entering grade four will now encounter an increased volume of academic type language in their text, and are expected to retrieve information from their textbooks. While some students transition smoothly into these new expectations, others find it difficult to cope as effectively with these new demands. In Jamaica, the preparation for the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) – a competitive elementary school leaving exam – begins at grade five. In this two year preparation for GSAT there is an increase in the volume of reading and difficulty of the texts as students transition from grade four to five.

Remedial education

Therefore, in addition to the difficulties that some students may experience while learning to read and write, the literacy demands of the upper elementary grades compound the challenge that some students encounter in schools. Added to this, as in the case of Jamaica as described earlier, is the bilingual language situation in which literacy must be taught and learned. While some students progress smoothly through the different grade levels, others need literacy support or remedial assistance at some point in time while at school as described below.

In their overview of remedial reading programs, Johnston and Allington (1991) argue that terms associated with supporting struggling readers – remedial, diagnosis and clinic – carry with them negative connotations. Generally speaking, prior to the 1900s these terms were associated with modifying instructional practices, but thereafter, and with the concomitant development of reading assessment, there was a growing tendency to locate the problem within the child. A deficit hypothesis of reading became a prevalent notion. Allington (1994) comments that "the educational profession has used a variety of labels in referring to these children, but the labels have typically changed in response to legislative enactments and court rulings concerning the responsibility of the schools to educate marginalized students" (p. 98). He lists several labels that have been

used over the years: 'defectives', 'immigrants', 'low-grade children', 'high-grade morons', 'reluctant learner', 'slow learner', 'dyslexic', 'attention deficit disordered' 'remedial readers' and 'differently abled' students. The programs, too, are branded with such names as 'vocational schools/classes', 'child guidance clinics', ungraded schools/classes', 'Negro schools', 'social promotion', and 'special education schools'.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Allington's critique of these student and program labels, this type of remedial language does portray how the discourse about struggling readers is problematic. Mehan (2001) provides a telling case study of the experience of one student, Shane, who is diagnosed as learning disabled (LD). Through discourse analysis of the transcripts of school conferences to discuss Shane's progress, Mehan shows how the labels used to define the student by the psychologist trump the ways in which both mother and teacher know their son and pupil. Mehan (2001) argues that this is the beginning of the formation of Shane's institutional identity as an LD student, as he becomes "objectified as the case moves from the classroom to testing to committee meeting" (p. 359).

Given the negative connotations of remedial reading programs and the knowledge that a disproportionate amount of the students who attend them are poor minority boys (Allington, 2006) why have remedial programs persisted? I will suggest two reasons why remedial programs are still around. First, because each child is different, there is no guarantee that all children will read on grade level as scheduled by the school (Johnston & Allington, 1991). This provides a basic rationale for remedial programs. Second, in recent years there have been concerted efforts to narrow the achievement gap between white students and minority students. This has recently come to the fore with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The report also hints at the issue of a social class divide in relation to reading: "As America enters the 21st Century full of hope and promise, too many of our neediest students are being left behind. Today, nearly 70 percent of inner city fourth graders are unable to read at a basic level on national reading

tests" (Bush, 2001, p. 1). And finally, the NCLB report proposes that in order to "close the achievement for disadvantaged students" the federal government is willing to provide assistance to states in return for student performance results and higher school accountability. Likewise in Jamaica, the Grade 4 literacy summer camps have changed since 2008 and the Ministry of Education is implementing for the first time in 2009 a nationally based Grade 4 literacy examination to ensure greater accountability.

Organization of remedial reading programs

One of the main characteristics of remediation programs in the United States is that they are partially or wholly funded by the federal government (Allington, 1994; P. Johnston & Allington, 1991; Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Bolt, 2007). In terms of the structure, most remedial programs are usually in small groups of no more than eight students in a group, but rarely one-to-one. Typically they are pull-out programs held outside of the regular classroom but in the same building. The teacher usually has specialized training in either special education or remedial reading. In recent years the trend has been to provide special services to younger and younger children. Usually remedial and special programs are offered separately. In terms of instructional emphasis, seat work and completion of worksheet drills seem to be the predominant feature with little time for children to actually read books (Allington, 2006).

In my experience, however, with the Summer Reading Clinic (SRC) program at Iowa, children do have a chance to read books. This program is based on modified principles of Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993, 2000). Originally, it was a residential program, and later on it became a 6 week long non-residential summer program in collaboration with the Iowa City school district (Roller, 1996, 1998). It is held annually between June and July. The basic format of SRC one-on-one tutoring is as follows: 5 minutes of (re)reading an easy book, 10 minutes of writing, 5 minutes of a mini-lesson, 10 minutes of reading a new book, and 5 minutes of the teacher reading aloud to the

student a book that is challenging and enjoyable. Thus, more time is spent reading books than completing worksheets. The students also have the opportunity to choose the books they want to read. Although this is typically the format for the elementary aged student, for the older pupils they might actually read more content area books, and magazines more suitable for that age group, or engage in more writing activities.

Quality middle grade intervention programs

In light of the specific needs of upper elementary grade readers, what sort of programs would be best suited to support those who struggle? In answering this question, I draw on the recommendations of Santa (2006) and Allington (2006). Santa (2006) provides four overlapping ideas: building classroom communities and relationships; direct strategy instruction; internalizing philosophy of learning; and professional expertise. A classroom that is both structured but has a sense of community has a greater sense of 'honoring' the voices of the students. Struggling readers especially need to be reminded that their voices are honored. Santa puts it this way, "honoring voices involves sharing power, providing choice, and maintaining a sense of freedom, As human beings, we have a basic need to control the direction of our lives, but within structure" (p. 468). Santa recommends the direct teaching of strategies for comprehension which includes metacognitive strategies. In relation to this she adds that struggling readers need to be gently reminded that learning takes work; glossing over a text does not automatically result in comprehension. She also recommends providing many opportunities for writing and talking as writing allows students to rehearse what they know, and discussions allow students to consider multiple perspectives.

In general, Allington (2006) would rather do away with remedial reading programs. He criticizes most remedial programs for interrupting regular instruction time suggesting that struggling readers miss out on important classroom learning. He also criticizes remedial programs for the poor quality of reading instruction that occurs as

more time is allotted to worksheet activities than actual reading. Nevertheless, in order to best support struggling readers, Allington advocates the following four research based principles: improving classroom instruction; enhancing access to intensive, expert instruction; expanding available instructional time; providing available support for older struggling readers. This last point is noteworthy because Allington and others (Moore & Cunningham, 2006) have remarked that programs have focused on the early grades with little attention to older readers who also need support.

Assessment and accountability

Remedial reading pull-out programs and literacy summer camps are not the only types of interventions used to support struggling readers. Classroom-based assessment and external tests that measure student progress are also used in supporting students with reading and writing difficulties (Peter Johnston & Costello, 2005; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993). The two kinds of assessments are summative and formative. While classroom-based assessments such as portfolios are examples of formative assessments, end-of-year school exams and achievement tests are examples of summative tests. Johnston & Costello explain the difference between summative and formative assessments in this way:

> Summative assessments are the backward-looking assessments of learning, the tests we most commonly think of that summarize or judge performance as in educational monitoring, teacher and student accountability test, and certification….Formative assessment, or assessment for learning, is the forward-looking assessment that occurs in the process of learning, the feedback the teacher provides to the student, and the nature of the feedback matters (p. 259).

Both forms of assessment are useful. However, in recent decades in the United States summative assessments in the form of accountability testing has become a dominant feature of education (Peter Johnston & Costello, 2005; Sadovnik, O'Day, Bohrnstedt, & Borman, 2008). This is despite a resolution made by the International Reading Association (IRA) in 1991 in which they resolved that:

> …literacy assessments must be based in current research and theory, not limited to traditional psychometric concepts, and must reflect the complex and dynamic interrelationship of reading, writing, and language abilities critical to human communications; and therefore, to better inform teaching and learning, be it further resolved that literacy assessments must incorporate a variety of observations, taking into account the complex nature of reading, writing, and language, and must also include high quality text, a variety of genres, and a range of authentic literacy tasks…(as cited in Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993, p. 47).

In other words, assessments should evaluate tasks and learning that depict what children actually do, rather than test concepts that merely represent what students are learning. Instead of relying on one test score, literacy assessments should include multiple forms of evaluation that best capture the abilities and potential of the student over time. That is to say, formative assessments should be an important element of literacy assessment. Nevertheless, despite this proclamation there exists a tension between formative and summative assessment with the latter becoming increasingly prominent.

In their analysis of testing in eighteen states in the United States, Amrein & Berliner (2002) provide a brief history of test-taking. Politicians in the 1970s spearheaded minimum competency testing as a means of school reform in reaction to the perception that U.S. schools were not performing as well as other developed nations. As such, "states began to rely on tests of basic skills to ensure, in theory, that all students would learn at least the minimum needed to be a productive citizen" (p. 3). By the 1980s minimum competency test was discredited as lowering the content of the curriculum. Then in 1983 the US National Education Commission published *A Nation at Risk* which "called for an end to the minimum competency testing movement and the beginning of a high-stakes testing movement that would raise the nation's standards of achievement drastically" (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, p. 4). One of the features of high-stakes testing was the "highly consequential outcomes for students, teachers and schools" in the form of student promotion or retention, or the labeling of schools as successful or failing, for

example (Afflerbach, 2004, p. 2). Policymakers felt that these consequences would lead to greater accountability which would then translate into improved student performance.

Almost two decades after a *Nation at Risk* was published, the No Child Left Behind Act was drafted in 2001. It echoed similar sentiments written in the *Nation at Risk*. Foremost, was the perception that the United States was trailing behind other nations in terms of academic achievement, and therefore needed to adopt accountability measures, such as achievement testing. In addition to raising the overall standards of school performance, the main focus of NCLB was to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers. Policy-makers hoped to narrow the gap by implementing the following: establishing annual assessments for every child in grades 3-8; publishing progress reports on all student groups; requiring adequate yearly progress for disadvantaged students; releasing state funds and technical assistance to schools in need of improvement; providing federal funds to more schools by decreasing the poverty threshold from 50 percent to 40 percent; applying sanctions on schools that fail to improve (Bush, 2001, pp. 7-9). All these measures were aimed at increasing the level of accountability in the schools and the act was touted as having bipartisan support. Needless to say there has been much criticism of No Child Left Behind (Sadovnik, et al., 2008; Yatvin, Weaver, & Garan, 2003).

Anagnostopoulos (2005), in her study of how the Chicago Academic Standards Examinations (CASE) influenced teachers' and students' interaction with texts, points out the connection between testing and accountability and the trend in the United States to rely on "testing to leverage accountability and instructional change" (p. 35). To a large extent, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 embodies this trend of increased accountability through testing especially in the realm of reading. Anagnostopoulos makes it clear that different studies show variation in the effects of testing on classroom instruction, student and teacher behavior. She points out that critical studies highlight the

negative aspects of testing, while implementation studies draw a mixed interpretation of the effects of testing on students and teaching.

Critical studies provide evidence to suggest that state-mandated tests have deleterious effects on teaching and learning. Cimbricz (2002) lists a number of the negative effects of testing as reported in various critical studies cited in her meta-analysis on state-mandated tests; among them are: narrowing the curriculum as teachers teach to the test; limited student learning; pressure on teachers to perform to produce results; student anxiety especially when the tests are high as opposed to low stakes. Using interviews, document analysis and observations Wright (2002) investigated how the high-stakes Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9) undermined the teaching and learning in one inner-city elementary school with a large English Language Learner student population in southern California. He concluded that the high-stakes SAT-9 created both teacher and student anxiety, with teachers feeling pressured to raise test scores and students becoming emotionally upset or apathetic with test-taking.

Implementation studies focus on how teachers modify their behavior in response to testing given the policy mandates, teaching circumstances and professional outlook. Using a case study approach, Firestone, Fitz & Broadfoot (1999) examined the implementation of mathematics assessments in the United States (Maine and Maryland) and in the United Kingdom (England and Wales). Based on their study these authors suggest that while assessment policy "can influence more codifiable practices," it is less able "to influence teachers' instructional approaches (p.760). In other words, while assessment is useful in narrowing down a particular teaching activity or learning outcome into measurable tasks, it does not radically change teachers' instructional practices. Through a meta-analysis of literature on state-mandated tests, Cimbricz (2002) examined the relationship between state-mandated testing and teachers' beliefs and practices, and concluded that the relationship between the two is not always straightforward but is mediated by both by teachers' interpretation of mandates and the educational context

Concluding remarks

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter literacy is a complex concept to define and indeed defies easy explanation. Nevertheless, I have examined the ways in which literacy has been defined and discussed the close relationship between literacy and language. Thereafter, I described the reading and writing challenges that some students experience while learning school-based school based literacy especially at the upper elementary level. This led to a brief discussion about literacy interventions, classroom-based assessment and finally accountability via high-stakes testing. In the following chapters I describe my methodology by starting with a brief history of education and literacy in Jamaica at the elementary level, followed by a discussion of Critical Discourse Analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I begin with a brief description of Jamaica. This is followed by my own account of attending public elementary school in Jamaica as a lens through which to understand some of the cultural aspects of schooling in the country and my particular dispositions as a researcher. I then provide an overview of the Grade Four Literacy Test from 1999 to 2009, followed by a brief historical account of education in the country, in addition to the current state of literacy at the grade four level. After this I introduce Critical Discourse Analysis as my theoretical framework and explain how I use it in this study. A short description of the case study approach is provided. I explain how I collected data via document retrieval, classroom observations and interviews. Thereafter I explain how I analyzed the data, and then end with an outline of the chapters to follow.

Jamaica is located within the Caribbean Sea and is approximately ninety miles south of Cuba. It is about 4,243 square miles which is a little smaller than the US state of Connecticut. Jamaica has a population of approximately 2.7 million persons with Kingston as its capital city. Main exports include bauxite, garments, sugar, rum, and bananas. Tourism and remittances from migrant workers overseas are also major income generators for the island. The gross national income (GNI) per capita in Jamaica is US $4,870 compared with US $47, 580 GNI for the United States[10]. Jamaica became a member of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization) in 1962, the year of its independence.

[10] Information retrieved on June 7, 2010 on the BBC's country profile reports. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1190968.stm#facts for Jamaica and http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1217752.stm#facts for the United Sates.

Figure 1. Map of Jamaica within the Caribbean.

Source: This map is taken from the web at http://www.ncdiver.com/NCD2/faq/caribbean-map.jpg.

The island was a British colony from 1655 until 1962 when it won independence. As a result of this colonial history, Jamaica is an English-speaking island with Standard Jamaican English (SJE) as the official language, and Jamaican Creole (JC) as a recognized language spoken by the majority. Jamaican Creole was birthed out of the brutal contact situation between Europe and Africa within the context of the plantation economies of the West Indies. On the one hand, there were the languages of the different West African groups brought over to Jamaica via the slave trade. The most prominent language group that survived the sea passage was Twi (Alleyne, 1988). On the other hand, the white fortune seekers who came across from Britain spoke different dialects of

British English, such as dialects of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Indeed, Bryan (2004) describes Jamaican Creole as evolving out of a "contact situation, where English was the dominant language of conquest and the West African languages were the codes of the subjugated during the period of European capitalist expansion that was maintained by slave labor"(p.167). Jamaican Creole can structurally be described therefore, as a language with African syntax but with English vocabulary, yet possessing its own idiomatic expressions made from the fusion of both. Not surprisingly, the slaves spoke Creole while the whites and educated coloreds spoke forms of British English. Hence, the language structure clearly paralleled the social structure of the plantation economy.

School culture in Jamaica

Conducting observations at the two case study schools brought back memories of my own childhood experiences of elementary school in Jamaica[11]. Although I attended elementary school some twenty-five years ago, the rhythms and rituals of the two case study public elementary schools were quite similar to my own experiences. Looking back at my elementary school days in Jamaica, I remember wearing a uniform like many of the children today. All students, whether they attended private or public schools, wear uniforms. I wore a green tunic and black shoes with white socks. Boys wore khaki colored pants and shirts. My school, Hope Valley Experimental (Hope Valley for short) was a public school which was unique in two ways. Physically disabled students formed part of the student population of my school, which was an uncommon feature of school in

[11] See Evans (2001, 2006) for a description of education in Jamaica. Although Evans focuses on secondary schools, she does provide useful information regarding schooling at the elementary level.

the 1980s; it was also located between a working class community, August Town, and the University of the West Indies, Mona campus. Children of professors and children of domestic helpers, therefore, mingled at this school. Again, having students from differing economic and social classes was not very common at that time. Most families who could afford it paid for their children to attend private elementary schools, while parents of less financial means sent their children to public elementary schools. My parents, who taught at one of the universities, sent my brother and me to Hope Valley because it had a good reputation according to reports from my parents' friends who also sent their children to the school. The school of education on the Mona campus also influenced policies and programs at the school in part because of its close proximity. And finally, as my father said, he wanted us to "mix with the masses" in keeping with the broader democratic agenda of the People's National Party- led government of the 1970s (R. Lewis, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

As I visited the schools in this study, there were sights, sounds and practices that were all familiar and similar to other public elementary schools. Like the case study schools, my school was enclosed by a fence and had a gatekeeper who would close and open the gate while school was in session. Although some classrooms were fully enclosed, some of the classrooms at Hope Valley were partitioned by blackboards. Therefore, the classroom noise would travel easily from one class to the next. Like Hope Valley, the two case schools were rather noisy with children running up and down during lunch time, and at times being quite restless even during class time. Children in my school, as in the two case study schools, spoke either *basilectal* Jamaican Creole or a *mesolectal* form (with fewer Creole features but still not Standard Jamaican English (Craig, 1980b, p. 1)[12]. As in my school, playground areas were either asphalted with

[12] For example, the English clause *I don't have any* could be in Creole *mi na gat none*, or in mesolect *I never gat none* (Craig, 1980, p.1).

very little grassy areas around the school compound. Morning assemblies and prayers at lunchtime and at the end of the school day were all part of the ritual. Whether a public or private school, a religious affiliated or secular school, students all had to say some form of prayers. I recall reciting Psalm 100 and Psalm 23 at school, and during my study was surprised to hear the same close- of- day school prayer in the two schools: "School is over for today/ We have done our work and done our play/ Before we go we'd like to say thank you Lord for everything, Amen." In terms of extra-curricular activities for students, I remember there were track and field, netball and Brownies. Both of the schools had co-curricular activities including Brownies, and a quiz team. These were all typical public school experiences when I went to school, and from my observations, little had changed when I visited the two case study schools.

I took the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) in 1986 when I was about eleven years old and in grade six. I passed for a traditional high school, St. Andrew High School for Girls, which was considered one of the better schools like all the other traditional secondary schools. Some of my other friends did not score high enough to enter a traditional high school, and were sent to other secondary schools – an All-Age school, Junior High, Primary and Junior High, Secondary High, Technical High or Agricultural High. Most of these schools, particularly the All-Age schools which were historically the common schools built to educate the children of former ex-slaves, were not perceived of as "good" schools (Evans, 2001, 2006).

Eventually in 1999 the CEE was replaced by the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) as a more equitable system of placing elementary school children in secondary schools. GSAT was part of a new battery of tests within the National Assessment Programme (NAP) which was adopted to provide students, teachers and parents with feedback on student performance throughout their elementary education. NAP consisted of four exams, which were largely classroom-based assessments. Both public and private schools had to administer these classroom-based assessments with the exception of

GSAT which was administered and scored by Education ministry personnel and then published. Each year when GSAT approached during the month of May, it became the main focus of students, parents, schools and the Ministry of Education. The other NAP tests took a back seat. But in 2009 the Grade Four Literacy Test was pole vaulted into the limelight when it became a nationalized high-stakes test in a similar vein to GSAT.

Background to the Grade Four Literacy Test

In 1999 the G4LT test was developed by the Student Assessment Unit within the Ministry of Education as a part of the National Assessment Programme (NAP) "to determine the literacy levels of students completing Grade 4 [and] the information gathered was intended to be used to inform student promotion to Grade 5 and for applying remediation measures" (MOE, 2007, p. 1). In 2008 under the Competence-based transition policy (Morris, Allen & Evering, 2008) the G4LT was modified from a classroom-based evaluation to a nationally assessed test. Indeed, one of the objectives of the Competence-based transition policy was to "position the Grade Four Literacy Test as a critical focal point of the primary level" as one way of securing "national commitment to literacy, as the foundation for education, training and national development" (p.7). Before June 2009, the G4LT was administered in mid-May and graded by the teachers, and the results given to students and parents as part of their end of year school report. In fact, the literacy test was given as part of end of year internal school examinations.

Over the last decade (1999-2009) the administration of the Grade Four Literacy Test has changed; however, its content has remained largely the same. The literacy test has three sections: word recognition, reading comprehension and communication task. Students have six minutes to complete the word recognition task which includes 40 items in total. Then pupils have another thirty-five minutes to complete the reading comprehension section, and forty minutes to complete two writing tasks in the communication segment. Students who fail all three sections are identified as being in a

Non-Mastery category, while those students who pass all three sections are identified as achieving mastery. Students who fail either one or two sections of the literacy test are identified as having achieved only Near Mastery.

For those students who did not pass, particularly in schools which had a high failure rate, summer classes in literacy instruction were provided during July. From 1999/2000 there were day summer camps and in 2004 residential summer camps were introduced for schools with fewer than 15 students at the near and Non-Mastery levels. However, in 2007 members within the Ministry of Education recommended that the literacy summer camps be shifted from the summer holiday month of July to June during the school term (MOE, 2007). The primary rationale behind this proposed change was to increase the attendance of struggling readers who were not attending the literacy camps during July; and since students would be at school during June there would be a captive audience.

Further changes were made to the G4LT in 2008. Political power had shifted from the People's National Party to the Jamaica Labour Party in 2007 and a new Education minister, Andrew Holness, was appointed. The amendments to the G4LT were described in the Competence-based transition policy (2008) as mentioned above. The literacy test was now to become the focal point of primary education in regulating the flow of primary school students to secondary school through assessment of students' literacy competence as assessed by the G4LT. The test was to be nationalized, meaning that it would be administered by Education ministry personnel, and results were to be published in the local newspapers. Students who failed the G4LT had three to four other opportunities to retake the test. The summer school option was replaced by having the schools create programs to assist their struggling readers. Schools that performed poorly (below the national literacy average) would have the additional support of literacy specialists sent out by the Education ministry (Mrs. Carr, personal communication, November 3, 2009). All students would still be promoted to grades five and six

regardless of whether they passed the literacy test or not since at each level there would be supplemental sittings of the literacy test. However, only those students who were "certified as literate" would be allowed the sit the Grade Six Achievement Test in March. That is to say, struggling readers who failed to pass any of the three or four sittings of the G4LT would not be allowed to sit GSAT, the major secondary school placement exam. Instead students who failed to pass the literacy test by grade six would be placed in the Alternate Secondary Education Programme (ASEP) which is now being implemented.

Having described the changes to the G4LT several questions emerge, two of which I highlight. One question focused on how the schools are going to provide the extra literacy instruction needed to prepare those students who have to retake the G4LT. The second question addresses whether these changes to the G4LT – the multiple resittings and the establishment of these ASEP - further perpetuate the two-tiered system of education in Jamaica. While I explore the first question in Chapter V using two case study schools, the second question is best examined within the historical context of Jamaica's education system which I now discuss.

Education in Jamaica: Historical and current perspectives

Within twenty years of the Negro Education Act[13] of 1835, two types of school systems emerged in Jamaica: elite schools which prepared the children of the white ruling class for professional careers, and publicly financed schools for the children of the masses which prepared them for artisan and semi-skilled jobs (Davis, 2004; Ferguson, 1947). "The dualised system became entrenched into the social fabric and for more than

[13] In 1835 the British colonial government established the Negro Education Grant which provided financial assistance to educate the former slaves[13] recently freed in 1834. Religious bodies were charged with administering the grant while colonial legislature gave the educational directives from Britain (Davis, 2004). Prior to the Negro Education Grant there was no formal education for slaves. However, a few missionaries set up schools on some plantations (Wilkins & Gamble, 2000).

a century education functioned as the most powerful gatekeeper of the status quo" (Davis, 2004, p.41). Social mobility was at best elusive for the majority working poor, although a few exceptionally bright students could climb the social ladder through limited scholarships available to elite secondary schools. Another option for social mobility was also available through the teaching profession. Promising students from common schools would sit annual Teachers Examinations which allowed them to enter teachers' colleges which were all staffed by British trained personnel (Ferguson, 1947). However, tuition was not free and only those who passed with honors were granted scholarships. More opportunities for social mobility opened up in the 1950s, a period marked by political transition within the British Empire as colonies intensified their demands for independence. During the 1950s when the British population in Jamaica was declining, the door opened for well-educated persons from the working class to take up to positions within government ministries (Bagley, 1979). By 1958 a Minister of Education was appointed by the British government with full responsibilities for education. And by 1962 with Independence from Britain, there was an even greater push to reform the education system. In 1965 an Education Act was drafted by the newly independent postcolonial Jamaican government.

Jamaica made rapid progress in terms of achieving universal access to primary education after Independence, and this achievement has remained consistent (UNESCO, 1983; Davis, 2004). In order to improve access at the secondary school level, the government absorbed the cost of almost all high schools owned by churches and trusts in a grant-in-aid arrangement which facilitated "an increase in the flow of children of working class parents into traditionally elite schools" (Davis, 2004, p.42). The Common Entrance Examination (CEE) which was introduced in 1958 also created more spaces for children of the working poor to gain access to high schools. For forty years between 1958 and 1998 the Common Entrance Exam was the required test that all primary school students took in either fifth or sixth grade in order to ascertain which high schools they

would attend (Henry, 2006; Whyte, 1983). Nevertheless, spaces were still limited in the better (traditional) high schools. Only those students who passed the Common Entrance Examination transitioned to the traditional high schools, while those who failed went to non-traditional secondary schools, for example All-Age Schools which were the common schools for children of the working poor. Barnes (2000) put it this way, "those who did well were guaranteed a place in one of the select high schools, and those who did not were relegated to schools deemed inferior or denied the opportunity of a high school education." That is, students who did not do well on their CEE would be placed in under-resourced secondary schools, or All-Age Schools which ended at grade nine. Hence, the two-tiered education system from the colonial era continued well into the 1990s and beyond.

Although a revised Education Act was drafted in 1980, UNESCO published a report in 1983 with scathing descriptions of the state of education in Jamaica. The report commended Jamaica for achieving almost universal primary school enrollment, but highlighted serious challenges in terms of the quality of education provided at the primary school level which undermined access to secondary education for the working poor. With regard to primary school education the report stated:

> Primary education is where basic aptitudes and knowledge are supposed to be acquired laying the basis for all that follows. The fact that about one in every two primary school leavers is considered illiterate is alarming. It suggests massive inefficiencies in the delivery of primary education that have serious ramifications in secondary education, vocational training and in the labour market itself. It also means that a good deal of effort as well as public funds invested in primary education have gone for naught" (UNESCO, 1983, p.10).

Local research also reflected this theme, that is, the inadequate preparation that primary education offered to the children of low income families. Bagley (1979), in his comparative study of black students in rural Jamaica and black students of Jamaican heritage in Britain, shared similar findings. He noted that children of peasant farmers and unskilled workers did poorly on the Common Entrance Exam -the sole entry exam to

secondary school- when compared with children of elite, managerial and professional workers. Bagley (1979) suggested a number of reasons for the mediocre performance of working class students including a "Europeanised curriculum [that] ignored the linguistic culture of the masses" (p.71). In referring to the linguistic culture of the masses, Bagley was making reference to the Creole spoken by the majority of Jamaicans which has historically been described as "bad English" (Bryan, 2004c). Indeed, Jamaican Creole was birthed out of the brutal contact situation between Europe and Africa within the context of the plantation economies of the West Indies (Bryan, 2004c). And while the negative perception of Jamaican Creole has diminished in recent years (Bryan, 2004a, 2004b; Craig, 1980, 1979), the use of bilingual strategies in teaching English has lagged behind despite efforts by Caribbean linguists (Craig, 1980; Devonish & Carpenter, 2007; Drayton, 1990; Simmons-McDonald, 2004).

Another contributing factor to the poor performance of rural and working class students wrote Bagley (1979) was their "naïve faith in the education system, and subordination to its inequitable ends" (p.71). Perhaps, as in Heath's (1983) classic study of American working class parents in the white community of Roadville and black community of Trackton, parents had high expectations for their children and confidence in the school's abilities to prepare their children for the workforce. In a later study, Lareau (2003) had similar findings, that regardless of race, American parents from working class background expected teachers to "lead the way" in educating their children (p.198). Likewise in the Caribbean, both middle class and working class parents hold education as the key ingredient to social mobility. As Evans (2001) points out, Jamaicans' criticism of schools is greater because of the exalted goals parents have regarding education. She notes that while it is historically true that "education has provided some degree of upward social mobility for many Jamaicans…it has done so to a lesser extent for some groups than for others" (p.3).

Other factors that Bagley (1979) pointed out included the preferential treatment demonstrated by teachers to students based on social class, color and gender; lack of trained teachers, large class sizes and authoritarian teaching style (pp. 71-2). Miller (1994) in his overview of literacy in Jamaica pointed out the "strong relationship between literacy levels attained and social factors such as race/class, gender, residential location and age [and that] the advantages are in favour of lighter skinned persons of the higher socioeconomic strata, younger people, girls and urban residents" (p. 26). Indeed, other research conducted in Jamaica tends to suggest that girls outperform boys throughout the education system (Evans, 1999; Miller, 1986), although this has been recently critiqued (Bailey, 2004). Lack of teacher training in teaching English was also a major problem in two ways. First, many Caribbean teachers adhered to the assumption that English, not Creole, was the mother tongue of the students and so more often than not ignored the mother tongue of the children in the classrooms, thereby sending the message that the students' language was not valued (Drayton, 1990; Simmons-McDonald, 2004). Second, many teachers lacked appropriate training. Problems faced by the teachers included a "lack of content knowledge, lack of pedagogical skills and lack of understanding the curriculum guides….. poor teaching methods such as lengthy teaching periods, chorus reading, rote learning and excessive teacher-dominated talk" (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999, p. 30). To compound issues, class sizes at the primary level have been large. Glewwe, Grosh, Jacoby and Lockheed (1995) in their study of factors determining primary school achievement in Jamaican schools, estimated the teacher pupil ratio at 1:43. Current estimates suggest that 67.4% of primary schools have a ratio of one teacher to 21-34 students with only 0.9% of schools having one teacher to 51 or more students (MOE, 2009c, p. 34).

Recommendations from the UNESCO 1983 report helped to initiate a slate of reforms both at the elementary and secondary levels. Among the many locally sponsored and overseas funded literacy initiatives between the 1980s and 1990s, the Primary

Education Improvement Projects (PEIP) I & II have had a major impact on literacy at the elementary level in Jamaica[14]. Unable to foot the bill on its own, the Jamaican government secured bilateral loan agreements with the Inter-American Development Bank to fund the PEIP I and II projects at a cost of several million US dollars. Both projects lasted from 1983 to 1999 (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999).

The National Assessment Program (NAP) emerged out of PEIP I and was strengthened in PEIP II. NAP was to be the "central testing and evaluation unit for primary education in the MOE&C" (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999, p.28). Under PEIP I more schools and libraries were built, as well as the primary school curriculum revised. Under PEIP II even more focus was paid to the language arts component of the revised primary curriculum. One of the major outputs of the language arts was to be a "review [of] the experiences of other countries in the region, which have a strong tradition of creoles and also review educational programs, which have taken second language teaching into account" (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999, p.83). Many years earlier, in the seventies the same bilingual principles, enunciated clearly and promoted by Craig had been tried in the schools where a series of books called the Language Materials Workshop Series introduced them (Craig, 2001).

More recently the New Horizon (NHP, 1998-2005) and the Expanding Education Horizon (EEH, 2005-2009) projects have also played an important role in literacy improvement. Both the NHP and the EEH projects were funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in association with the government of Jamaica at a cost of several million US dollars. The aims of the EEH project included the following: training teachers with appropriate literacy and numeracy

[14] For purposes of this study I will only focus on those reforms specific to public elementary schools and English literacy.

strategies and resources; providing training in technology integration strategies to enhance literacy and numeracy activities; and supporting the literacy and numeracy initiatives of the Education ministry through the Primary Education Support Project (PESP) and the Caribbean Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training (CCETT)[15]. The two case study schools were participants in both the New Horizon and Expanding Education Horizon projects which sought to improve the literacy and numeracy scores of the seventy-two worst performing schools in Jamaica (Armstrong & Campos, 2002).

As these projects were underway the Ministry of Education endorsed several pivotal policies between 1999 and 2009. I will mention four that focus on literacy and elementary education. In 1999 the chief education officer at the Ministry of Education, Wesley Barrett, commissioned researchers at the School of Education at the University of the West Indies to draft a document pertaining to literacy in Jamaica. The Literacy Improvement Initiative (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999) provided a comprehensive overview of the various literacy projects at the elementary level right up to projects targeting adults. The Literacy Improvement Initiative (LII) also provided for the crafting of a literacy action plan to improve reading and writing skills at the elementary level. The action plan had seven strategic objectives which included: student achievement, a bilingual policy, teacher preparation, literacy support, equal opportunity in education, stakeholder involvement and adult education. Some of the outcomes of the LII recommendations included the establishment of literacy coordinators who were assigned to a cluster of public elementary schools doing poorly in the Grade Four Literacy Test; the expansion of

[15] PESP was another Government of Jamaica and Inter-American Development Bank funded project that lasted from 2000-2005. Through PESP the Language Experience Awareness literacy strategy was develop to support the revised primary curriculum (PIOJ, 2006, p. 227). CCETT was a USAID sponsored initiative under the Presidency of George W. Bush and was established in 2001 to improve literacy throughout the Caribbean (Armstrong & Campos, 2002).

teacher training by awarding scholarships to do Masters in Literacy studies; and the drafting of a bilingual education policy.

Although the Language Education Policy (Bryan, 2001), an outcome of the LII, did not focus on the Grade Four Literacy Test per se, it was the sole government document that addressed the teaching of English within Jamaica's bilingual context. For the first time Jamaican Creole (JC) was officially recognized, although it was not accorded official status alongside Standard Jamaican English (SJE): "The Ministry of Education, Youth & Culture recognizes the Jamaican language situation as bilingual; English as the official language; Jamaican Creole as the language most widely used in the population; Spanish as the official foreign language, owing to the geographic location of the country" (Bryan, 2001, pp.23-24). Of significance, however, was the exploration of different forms of transitional bilingual approaches to the teaching of English to the Jamaican Creole speaker. On the one hand, the Education ministry could adopt full bilingualism and provide instruction in both languages in schools though this was not considered to be politically expedient because of perceived resistance from parents and the public, and the potential cost of translating materials (Bryan, 2004c; Christie, 2003). On the other hand, the ministry could retain Standard Jamaican English as the official language, and explore forms of transitional bilingualism. The Education ministry decided to pursue a moderate option in which teachers would "promote basic communication through the oral use of the home language in the early years (e.g. K-3) while facilitating the development in English literacy" (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999, p.23).

Despite modest improvements in the literacy levels as evaluated by the Grade Four Literacy Test there was still dissatisfaction with the quality of elementary education in Jamaica as the millennium progressed (Bryan, 2004a). In 2004 and 2008, under different governments and different Ministers of Education, policy documents were drafted. In 2004 under the People's National Party government, then Prime Minister P.J.

Patterson commissioned a report on the status of the entire education system in Jamaica. Due to time constraints, the committee zeroed in on primary and secondary education (Davis, 2004, pp.2-3). One of the recommendations of this Education task force report was to nationalize the Grade Four Literacy Test as a means of promoting greater accountability in primary schools, and as a way to regulate the flow of 'illiterate' students transitioning to secondary schools (Davis, 2004, p.159). However, this was not done. It was not until 2008 with a new government administration run by the Jamaica Labour Party and under the new leadership of Andrew Holness in the Ministry of Education that changes were made to nationalize the Grade Four Literacy Test. And while there is no Grade four literacy policy document, the Competence-based transition policy (Morris, Allen & Evering, 2008) was the key document which ushered in a new era for the literacy test, transforming it from a classroom-based assessment to a high-stakes literacy evaluation.

Having described the Grade Four Literacy Test, and provided a brief outline of Jamaica's education system, I now turn my attention to describing the theoretical framework and data collection methods of the study. First, I describe Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and then the case study approach, followed by a description of the two schools with which this study is concerned and their place within the current education system of Jamaica. I also outline how I collected and analyzed the data gathered for this study.

Theoretical framework and methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

Because of my interest in the Discourse surrounding the Grade Four Literacy Test and in examining how schools responded to the policy changes regarding the test, I chose to use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the theoretical lens through which to analyze

the data. Critical Discourse Analysis is a "contemporary approach to the study of language and discourses in social institutions" (Luke, 1997, p. 1). Examination of the relationship of language and society is not new and has been investigated by other methods in the fields of anthropology, linguistics and social science among others. However, Critical Discourse Analysis attempts to examine discourse /language use and social behavior/ societal changes not as separate effects, but as processes that are intricately related and cannot necessarily be studied as distinct processes for investigation (Fairclough, 2001; Foucault, 1999; Gee, 2005; Hall, 2001). In other words, "a central point discourse researchers make is that language is constructive. It is constitutive of social life. Discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations. It doesn't just reflect them" (Wetherell, 2001, p. 16). Language is not a transparent medium that simply reflects behavior, but is itself constructing action in every utterance. This view is in fact similar to those held by linguistic anthropologists in the tradition of Gumperz (2001) , Hymes (2001), and Bauman (2004).

Background to Critical Discourse Analysis

It was not until the 1980s/1990s that Critical Discourse Analysis emerged as a full-fledged theory and method with a multidisciplinary genealogy. CDA borrowed heavily from linguistics and poststructuralist theories (Luke, 1997; Rogers, 2004). The linguistic work of Gumperz, Labov, Halliday and Kress in the 1970s and 1980s challenged the ideas of Saussure. Saussure (1985) espoused the view that language form was distinct from language function, and emphasized the structure/system of language (langue) above language-in-use (parole). Wetherell (2001) terms these challenges as the "social turn in linguistics." In a similar vein, there was a concomitant linguistic turn in the social sciences in the 1950s (Luke, 1997). Alongside this was the changing paradigm from structuralism (for example Durkheim) to post-structuralism (for example Foucault) in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period the works of Bakhtin (1981), with his

emphasis on speech genres, and Foucault's (1999) work on power, for example, became more influential within academia in the United States.

With the social turn in linguistics in the 1980s, the relationship between language form and language use was no longer perceived as arbitrary (Saussure, 1985); neither was language merely viewed as a transparent medium. Rather, as demonstrated in the works of Gumperz (2001), for instance, the speaker's form correlated with the social context, hence the decision to code switch between contexts. Halliday's (1978) work demonstrated how speakers made utterances with different purposes in mind – ideational, interpersonal or textual. Within the field of critical linguistics, Kress (2001) among others, went on to suggest that variations in power also determined language use. Here the work of Foucault was also influential as he brought to the fore the idea that institutional discourse carried with it the power to effect change, mainly by constricting behavior (Hall, 2001; Foucault, 1999). From a methodological perspective, this social turn in linguistics in the late 1970s/80s propelled new forms of investigating language such as conversation analysis and later CDA. No longer was the unit of analysis only language bits (whether the phoneme, syllable, or clause) but included utterances above that, the discourse.

As early as the 1960s there was what Luke (1997) describes as the "linguistic turn in the social sciences." The continued educational underachievement of ethnic minorities and lower socioeconomic groups in the United States had stirred research interest in the educational opportunities of different groups within the population (McDermott, 1976). Debates within sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication over the educational inequalities of minorities and lower socioeconomic groups had emerged in part as a result of these troubling issues. Moreover, developments in the Civil Rights Movement in the US in the 1950s/60s created a "heightened awareness of the critical role of education, and very importantly, language and literacy education, for improving the quality of life of the vernacular-speaking masses" both in

the United States and overseas (Craig, 1999, p. 12). Strong interest in dialects grew in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, the Caribbean, as well as in other postcolonial nations (Craig, 1976, 2001; W. Labov, 1969; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Many of the educational studies during the time of the 1970s and 1980s used discourse analysis of face-to-face conversations within the microcosm of the classroom to address the questions of underachievement (Courtney B. Cazden, 2001; Philips, 1972). While such studies provided detailed descriptions of language-in-use in the classrooms and supplanted cognitive psychologists' 'deficit' model hypothesis (Bernstein, 1972; McDermott, 1976) for explaining student performance, they failed to take into account the larger social variables that contributed to such low academic performance (Foley, 1991; Ogbu, 1981). Large-scale migration from developing countries to the United States in the 1960s meant an influx of heterogeneous students from different countries, speaking different languages within the educational institutions of the United States (Luke, 1997). Bilingual education soon became a prominent field of study. By the time the millennium rolled around, educators were also faced with media texts (Fairclough, 1995), hybrid cultural identities (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), changing structures of work and economy based on demands of the Information Age (C. B. Cazden, et al., 1996) and higher expectations for literacy (Brandt, 2001; Crystal, 1995).

By the time the 1980s approached the context was, therefore, ripe for the development of Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA assumed that the challenges in education could be examined through careful examination of language, discourse and texts: "Educational institutions could be seen as complex sites constructed by and through discourses expressed in various texts – from policy statements and textbooks to face-to-face talk in classrooms" (Luke, 1997, p.4). CDA also insisted on the connection between the microcosm of the classroom/local contexts and the larger macro-social structures: "The outstanding task for Critical Discourse Analysis, then, is to provide detailed analysis of cultural voices and texts in local educational sites, while attempting

to theoretically and empirically connect these with an understanding of power and ideology in broader social formations and configurations" (Luke, 1997, p.5). In keeping with this perspective, I use CDA to provide analyses of the changing Discourse related the Grade Four Literacy Test and the responses of the schools to these policy changes, while attempting to connect this with an understanding of the institutional power and ideologies that lie behind these policy reforms.

Gee and Fairclough

The two most popular 'versions' of CDA used by education researchers are those developed by James Paul Gee and Norman Fairclough. I use a blend of both Gee's (2005) and Fairclough's (2001) approaches in this study. While Fairclough, a British linguist, is explicit in his focus on class based struggles, Gee, an American linguist, is much more focused on how language gets used to perform certain activities and identities. Both focus on issues of power.

Fairclough (2001) uses a three-tiered approach involving description, interpretation and explanation. At the description level Fairclough focuses on language form – analyzing how vocabulary, grammar and textual structures are used to cement a particular idea. When ideas become naturalized, through discourse at the situational, institutional and societal levels, orders of discourse become common sense assumptions or ideologies which either sustain existing social orders or create new orders of discourse. Hence, Fairclough suggests there is always a struggle between the elite and their desire to hold onto the prevailing orders of discourse and the masses that at times concede or resist those discourses. An analyst using Fairclough's CDA will then interpret these textual cues and explain the effects, social determinants and ideologies of the particular orders of discourse under investigation.

Gee's (2005) primary focus is on big 'Discourse' which includes situated identities; ways of performing a particular identity or activity, ways of coordinating or

getting things done, and characteristic ways of gesturing, thinking, speaking etc (p.33). In a nutshell, Discourse is about pattern recognition, recognizing certain ways of being as indexed by a particular activity or identity. For example, reading in a clear, audible voice, without any errors and with the appropriate phrasing and intonation will be recognized as "good reading," whereas reading in a halting manner with numerous errors will be recognized as characteristic of a "struggling reader." Gee uses seven building tasks with related questions that can be applied when analyzing discourse data. The seven building tasks are significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics (distribution of social goods), connections and sign systems & knowledge. Additionally, Gee includes a section on validity – the trustworthiness of one's data in measuring what you set out to measure. Validity within discourse analysis, for Gee, includes four elements: convergence, agreement, coverage and linguistic details (Gee, 2005, pp.113-117). These I will discuss in the data analysis section.

Criticisms of Critical Discourse Analysis

Yet like any other area of study, Critical Discourse Analysis has both its share of supporters and critics (Toolan, 1997). Some of the criticisms of CDA include its lack of objectivity, inadequate rigor, imbalance between social theory and linguistic method, as well as the extraction of discourse from its social context (Rogers, 2004, p.14). Rather than allowing the evidence to be revealed from the data analysis, critics claim that critical discourse analysts project their biases onto the data: "For some writers, the temptation to work backwards from their conclusion, seeking the evidence that makes it inevitable, rather than forward to it, from objectively examined data, is one they find themselves unable to resist" (Tyrwhitt-Drake, 1999, p. 1083). This is because, as Tyrwhitt-Drake argues, critical discourse analysts are more committed to their "dogma" regarding political and societal change. Toolan (1997) suggests that there is also a lack of standardization in its methods, and that the more robust descriptions stem from linguistic

and discourse analysis within CDA rather than its more impressionistic elements like hybridity. Toolan (1997) adds, "too often, an elaborate theoretical and interpretive superstructure is built upon the frailest of text-linguistic foundations" (p.93). To a large extent, the complaint that CDA extracts discourse from its context is similar to that which was lodged against discourse analysis as mentioned earlier (Rogers, 2004). Perhaps the most damning critique of CDA, however, is what some authors suggest is its arrogance in claiming to change society by uncovering social injustices (Fairclough, 2001; Richardson, 2007; Widdowson, 1998). Tyrwhitt-Drake (1999) puts it this way:

> The aspect of critical discourse approach which gives me greatest concern is not its apparent ambivalence towards accuracy and detail, the foundation of all scholarly work; nor its penchant for guessing at people's attitudes and motivations; nor its tendency to adopt some practices (such as presupposition and naturalization) which it identifies as manipulative in the usage of others; nor its apparent blindness to the danger that it is establishing its own hegemony, resisted in turn by papers such as this. The real worrying thing about this movement is its assumption of the high ground on moral issues (p.1087).

Any analyst using CDA has to be careful not to fall into the trap that Tyrwhitt-Drake mentions, that is, assuming the moral high ground on societal issues. Knowledge of CDA's multidisciplinary genealogy, as outlined earlier, should help analysts realize that no one discipline, even CDA, can provide the solution to the many research challenges of society. Solutions to real world problems are seldom understood or alleviated by one method. Indeed, one of the legacies of post-structuralism is the idea that multiple interpretations exist (Glesne, 2006; Honan, Knobel, Baker, & Davies, 2000). Nonetheless, Fairclough (2001) contends that there is a "positivist tendency to regard language texts as 'objects' whose formal properties can be mechanically described without interpretation. But try as they may, analysts cannot prevent themselves engaging with human products in a human, and therefore interpretive, way" (p. 22). In other words, analysts must recognize that subjectivities in their own interpretations. As such, "the evidence is never so complete or so unambiguous as to rule out alternative

interpretations. The important criteria in judging the worth of a story are: does it fit the facts as I have observed them and does it provide a helpful basis for future action?" (Wells, 1986, p. xiii). From this perspective then, my study provides one interpretation, amidst others, of the changes that occurred as a result of the amended Grade Four Literacy Test in 2009.

Rogers (2004) also describes CDA as rigorous, but mentions that each analyst adopts his/her own approach to the study at hand. While this flexibility is one of the strengths of CDA, some critics as mentioned earlier see this as problematic. To some extent this lack of standardization can make CDA appear less rigorous. Being aware of this, I have tried to be consistent in my data collection methods and in the textual analysis of discourse materials. I have also applied Gee's (2005) measures of validity as well as other measures, such as triangulation and member checking to enhance the trustworthiness of my data (see Data analysis section for more details).

Finally, to summarize, Critical Discourse Analysis is a contemporary, multidisciplinary approach to analyzing discourse within institutions of society. And like many other disciplines, it has its share of criticisms. Yet one of the major benefits of CDA is that it provides a metalanguage for discussing the relationship between discourse and behavior, as well as issues of power and inequity/access within today's global world (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005; Luke, 1997). Rogers (2004) provides a helpful overview of Critical Discourse Analysis describing essential elements that comprise this field of study. First, CDA is both a theory and a method because of its particular perspectives about language and society described above, as well as the procedures for data collection and analysis that it offers, for example, Gee's building tasks. Second, CDA is critical because it addresses social problems, examines issues of power, or seeks to "study the relationships between language and form and function and explain why and how certain patterns are privileged over others" (Rogers, 2004, p.4). Third, the object of study in CDA is discourse which can be defined as "language above the sentence or above the

clause" (as cited in Rogers, p. 4). Fourth, CDA is systematic in its approach although each analyst employs different procedures with some leaning more towards a linguistic approach and others adopting more of a social approach in their analysis.

How Critical Discourse Analysis is used in this study

Very few studies have in fact employed the use of CDA in their examination of Caribbean social issues. Waller (2006), in his study of the discourse surrounding small businesses in the tourism industry in Jamaica, has encouraged more Caribbean social scientists to use CDA as a tool in investigating social problems. While Waller (2006) leans heavily on Fairclough's approach to CDA, I have chosen to use a blended approach combining elements from both Fairclough and Gee.

One of the important theoretical concepts used in this study is Gee's "big" Discourse. There are multiple layers that Gee (2005) uses to describe Discourse but the definition most useful for this study is Discourse as "ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places and times" and "ways of performing and recognizing characteristic identities and activities" (p.33). Based on this definition, therefore, all government documents, policies, and school activities, as well as discussions in the media that referred to the Grade Four Literacy Test are part of the Grade Four Literacy Test Discourse since these helped to dictate the ways in which people and objects were coordinated and the ways in which activities and identities were constructed due to the decision to nationalize the literacy test.

Using Fairclough's (2001) three-tiered diagram (see Figure 2) enabled me to conceptualize how the Discourse about the Grade Four Literacy Test influenced the discussions and activities at the institutional, situational and societal levels. Hence, at the institutional level, the Discourse about the G4LT is constructed in part by the institution of the Ministry of Education in response to the challenge of low literacy performance of

primary school students. The Discourse about the literacy test is written about in government documents such as the Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999), the Education task force report (2004) and codified in policies such as the Language Education Policy (2001) and the Competence-based transition policy (2008). Academic institutions, such as universities, also play a significant role as researchers sometimes write or advise Ministry of Education administrators in the creation of these documents and polices. At the situational level, the G4LT Discourse influences the activities of the schools as they respond to the policy directives. And finally, the Discourse about the literacy test permeates society through the discussions about literacy captured in media reports.

Figure 2 is, then, a re-interpretation of Fairclough's (2001) framework suited to my research agenda in which I argue that the policy discourse about literacy at the institutional level of the Ministry of Education was in part a response to student performance at the situational level of the schools, as well as the discussions about literacy within society. These three discourse types which focus on literacy at the situational, institutional and societal levels helped to construct a Discourse model which focused on the nationalized G4LT of 2009. It is this G4LT Discourse which in turn helped to shape new discourses about literacy in the media, and influenced literacy activities and identities within schools.

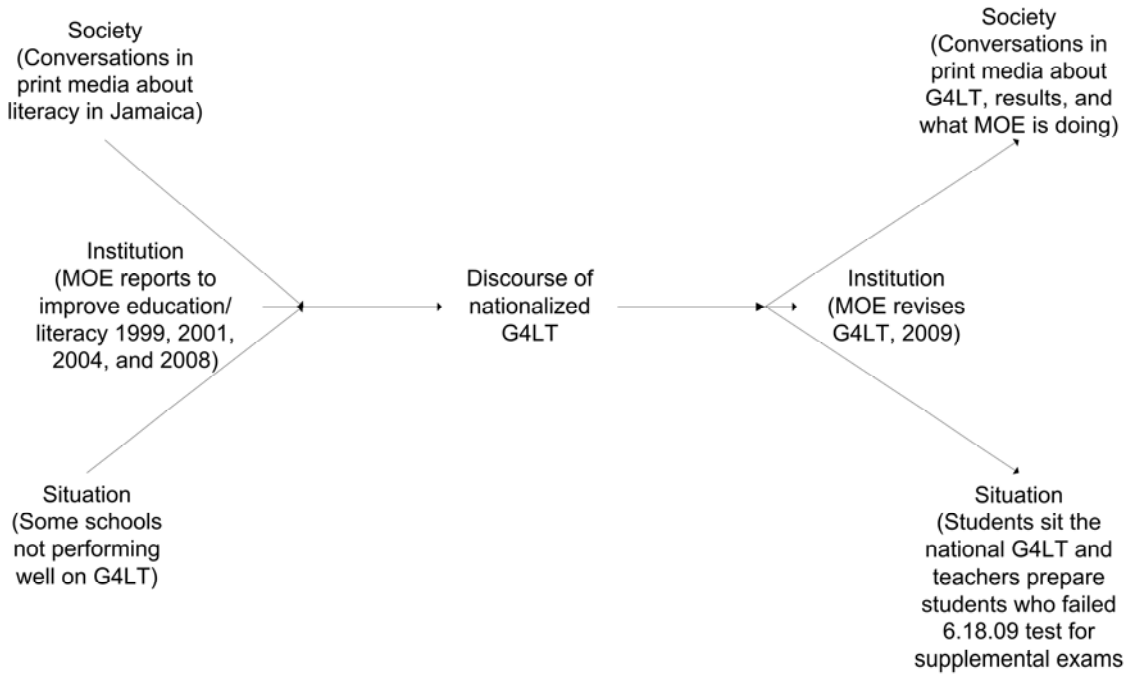

Figure 2. Explanation of Grade Four Literacy Test Discourse Model using Fairclough's Paradigm.

Having outlined the theoretical framework, I now describe three key assumptions that undergird this study. Firstly, in this study I seek to understand the Discourse surrounding the nationalized Grade Four Literacy Test within the current education status quo. To this extent, then, I depart from Fairclough whose approach to Critical Discourse Analysis is more prescriptive or emancipatory rather than descriptive. Waller (2006) describes this distinction as the difference between a normative and a critical approach: "The former is an attempt to understand the configurations of a discourse operating within standard status-quo space. The latter is specific to deconstructing hegemonic relations of power in and over discourse and how this undermines social justice and may be considered anti-status quo, challenging the status-quo so to speak" (p.8). The design and scope of this study does not lend itself to the 'emancipation' of those (students, teachers) managed by the current education system; first there is need to understand how

persons operate within the system. If the study were designed with a literacy intervention over an extended period of time, then perhaps it could be prescriptive. As it is, the study was primarily exploratory and descriptive, using a case study approach to capture data within a short time span. My intent in this research was to lay the groundwork for future studies using varying methodologies to investigate literacy in the Jamaican and other developing nation contexts.

Yet secondly, this study is critical as it does examine issues of power as they relate to the administration of the Grade Four Literacy Test. Within the scope of this study I describe power as having the authority to get things done, or as Fairclough (2001) puts it, "power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants" (pp.38-39). On the one hand, I find Fairclough's definition useful especially in his three-tiered elaboration of how the powerful constrain the non-powerful in terms of contents (what is said or done), relations (the social relations people enter into in discourse) and subjects (the subject positions people can occupy) (p.39). Extending this three-tiered approach to the study one can ask the following questions: How does the discourse of the Education ministry regarding the G4LT constrain the activities of schools preparing students to take the literacy test? How does the new G4LT control what is done in the classrooms? How does the new G4LT influence the relationship between teachers and struggling readers? What subject positions are constructed for students as a result of the discourse about the new G4LT?

On the other hand, I find Fairclough's (2001) perspectives on power somewhat deterministic. Fairclough does mention that "power is won, held and lost in social struggles" (p.61). However, this perspective is usually overshadowed by his greater emphasis on the powerful capitalist classes overpowering those on the margins (p.26-30). Within this study, therefore, I explore not only how bureaucratic power can constrain others, but how power as evidenced by discourse circulates and permeates all levels of

society and how power can be productive as well in terms of creativity and individual response (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; Foucault, 1999). Hence, the focus of the study is more about the ways in which individuals and institutions exist within powerful Discourse models, and less about how one group oppresses another. This is not to diminish, however, the significant ways in which powerful bureaucracies constrain the behaviors of those with less power.

Nevertheless, I am interested in the ways in which power manifests itself and is reinforced through ideology, or the prevailing Discourse models of the time which in turn dictate to society what to think, believe, say or do (Gee, 2005). Gee (2008) asserts that "nobody looks at the world other than through lenses supplied by language or some other symbol system" and that "we are all both 'beneficiaries' and 'victims' of ideology" (p. 29). In other words, ideology sums up the ideas we use to make sense of the world; and these assumptions can both constrain and liberate us. Power also takes the form of sponsorship, that is, agents who "enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way" (Brandt, 2001, p.19). For instance, the Ministry of Education has the authority to change the Grade Four Literacy Test. Academics have the authority to make contributions to the construction of literacy policies. Funding agencies, especially international donors with valuable US currency, have the authority to shape literacy projects. One such example is USAID's Expanding Education Horizon Project (2005-2009). Other literacy sponsors, such as UNESCO, have the global power to set the agenda for literacy worldwide. And finally, at least within the scope of this study, power manifests itself through linguistic/cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), or what Gee (2005) has identified as one aspect of the work of Discourse, that is, pattern recognition. In other words, "people engage in such work [pattern recognition] when they try to make visible to others (and to themselves, as well) who they are and what they are doing" (p.29). The students, whom I observed, are therefore trying with the support of their teachers to be recognized as

literate based on their retaking and passing of the G4LT. Yet, Gee warns us that who we are and what we are "are creations in history and change in history" meaning that we are, at least, partially products of our social and historical circumstances as well (p.41).

Third, I focus on literacy and identity. A number of articles/books have been written about the relationship between literacy and identity (Gee, 2000; Lam, 2004; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Lin, 2008; McCarthey & Moje, 2002; Moje & Luke, 2009). Although (Gee, 2000, 2005) focuses on the ways in which language is used to enact certain social activities and social identities (being recognized for instance as a "good" or "struggling reader"), Fairclough's (2001) subject position is a more robust construct to discuss the issue of literacy and identity within this study. Subject positions are the social roles that individuals occupy in relation to different discoursal types (Fairclough, 2001, p. 31). As such, what are the subject positions constructed for students and teachers within the discourse of government documents, the media, and general *Conversations* about the G4LT? Another dimension of 'subject position' is the way in which 'subject' can be defined: either as "someone who is under the jurisdiction of a political authority, and hence passive and shaped" or as the "subject of a sentence" in which case the individual displays agency and action (Fairclough, 2001, p. 32). From this perspective then, readers who have failed the G4LT can, with appropriate literacy support, redefine their literate identity from one of Non/Near Mastery reader to Mastery reader.

Data collection

One of the strengths of using Critical Discourse Analysis is that it can be applied with other methods/methodologies such as ethnography, case study, or other approaches (Anagnostopoulos, 2005; LG Waller, 2006; L Waller, 2006; Woodside-Jiron, 2004). In his examination of discourses surrounding information technology within small businesses in the tourism industry in Jamaica, Waller (2006) used a bricolage of methods

including Fairlcough's CDA and case study. He described case study in the following way:

> In a sense then, the case study approach is like an examination of halted reality in putting together events and activities. It allows snapshots of moments in an ongoing process, which thereafter, the researcher interprets with the aim of explaining the phenomenon after investigation. In less abstract terms, with the case study approach, once the facts of an event or an activity are collected, they are then explored examined and compared with other similar situational occurrences to draw out specific issues related to one's research agenda (p.15).

In this study I combined Critical Discourse Analysis with a case study approach. While CDA provided the theoretical lens and the analytical tools, I used the case study method to capture snapshots of key moments within the schools such as the day students sat the first nationalized G4LT on June 18, 2009. Yin (2009), a major proponent of the case study method, defines it as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Certainly, the Grade Four Literacy Test, first piloted in 1998 and continued yearly as an internal school exam until 2009 when it was administered centrally by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica, can be defined as a contemporary phenomenon. In terms of design this research employs an embedded case study design which has an overall case study with multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2009, p.50). The Grade Four Literacy Test can be seen as the overall case study, while the two schools can be viewed as the subunits of analysis embedded within the larger case. However, throughout the paper I refer to the two schools as cases (as opposed to subunits) while referring to the test as simply the Grade Four Literacy Test. Multiple data sources were collected in order to depict an in-depth view of G4LT within the actual setting of two schools. As such, I have gathered data from government documents, newspaper articles (both online and hard copy), classroom observations of literacy teaching, and interviews from school staff, students, Education ministry personnel, and academic researchers.

All of the data were gathered in Jamaica – the classroom observations and interviews were conducted in Jamaica, but some of the documents were retrieved online while in the US. I made two trips to Jamaica – three weeks in June 2009 and six weeks in October/ November 2009. While in Jamaica I observed the administration of the Grade Four Literacy Test on June 18, 2009 in one school and interviewed teachers, academics and the senior literacy supervisor. For the second trip I conducted more interviews but my primary focus was on observing how the schools supported those students who had to retake the Grade Four Literacy Test in December 2009. From September 2009 to February 2010 I collected numerous newspaper clippings both online and hardcopy.

First research trip (Jamaica)	**Second research trip (Jamaica)**
Selected schools	Observed literacy support for students who failed the test & had to retake it, 2 schools
Observed Grade Four Literacy Test, 6.18.09	Retrieved documents
Interviewed academics	Interviewed school personnel, Education ministry personnel, academics
Interviewed senior literacy supervisor	

Table 1. Research trips to Jamaica.

Documents

I collected government documents, newspaper articles and student materials (samples of writing, audio clips of readings, literacy certificate). The Language Education Policy (2001) and the Education task force report (2004) are both available online. However, the Literacy Improvement Initiative and Competence-based transition policy were not online, but I was able to get copies from different academics that I interviewed. I retrieved online and hard copy newspaper articles from the *Gleaner*

Company, the *Jamaica Observer* and the *Jamaica Information Service* (*JIS*)[16]. The *Gleaner* has had a long history of news reporting in Jamaica since its establishment in 1834, the year that the system of slavery was abolished on the island. The *Gleaner* Company therefore has been a recorder of the nation's history since Emancipation in 1834, through to Independence in 1962 and continues to the present. This news house also has a large research library where I was able to get photocopies of articles related to the Grade Four Literacy Test. The *Jamaica Observer*, in contrast, is a much younger news company and was established by one of the leading hoteliers in Jamaica, Gordon 'Butch' Stewart, in 1994. It is the only other newspaper to effectively compete with the *Gleaner*.[17] The *Jamaica Information Service* (*JIS*), which was established in 1956, is a media house supported by the government. It does not print news articles for sale to the public as the other news houses, but provides news reports online, through radio and television.

Media organizations	**Online**	**Hard copy**	**Total**
Gleaner	48	104	152
Observer	57	0	57
JIS	53	0	53
Subtotal	**158**	**104**	**262**

Table 2. Number of newspaper articles reviewed.

[16] Throughout the text I use the abbreviated forms of the *Gleaner*, *Observer* and *JIS*.

[17] There have been other newspaper companies in Jamaica, such as the *Sunday Herald*, but these have not been as successful in competing with the *Gleaner* as the *Jamaica Observer*.

The two schools

With a set of criteria I selected two schools for the study with the assistance of an education administrator at the Ministry of Education and the project manager for a prominent school-based program. My criteria included a public elementary school that had seen improvements in their literacy rates over the last five years as a way of writing a counter-narrative (hooks, 1994) about public school accomplishments in Jamaica. Too much of the discourse about education in the developing world tends to be deficit-orientated (Miller, 1994). Moreover, with such a dual system of education in Jamaica it is easy to compare a public and private elementary school and perpetuate the deficit narrative. Therefore, I decided to examine two primary schools in detail. Perhaps, one of the limitations of this study is that both schools were part of the seventy-two schools enlisted in the USAID New Horizon and Expanding Education Horizon projects. As such, these schools benefited from interventions that other Jamaican public schools have not received as yet. St. Alphonso is also a part of the Change from Within (CFW) program, a local organization focused on building self-esteem in students in a number of schools (Jackson, 2008). Another limitation could be the small sample size – only two schools were selected. However, the purpose of qualitative research is not necessarily to generalize from the sample to the larger population, but rather to provide rich descriptions of a particular social phenomenon to gain better understanding (Erickson, 1986; Glesne, 2006; Heath & Street, 2008; Merriam, 1998).

The two schools selected, St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary, are two public elementary schools both located in inner-city communities within the capital city of Kingston. As of the 2007/2008 academic year, Jamaica had 793 public elementary schools with an estimated 278,138 students enrolled and 204 private schools with approximately 36,992 students enrolled (PIOJ, 2009, p. 228). St. Alphonso and Bedford

Primary schools are public elementary schools located in region one[18] within the capital city of Kingston. Most of the students who attend these schools are from working class communities, of African ancestry and are predominantly Creole speakers (Craig, 1978; Evans, 2001). Indeed, during my observations most of what I heard on the playgrounds and in the classroom from students was Creole or *mesolect* speech forms (Craig, 1980). Most of the students could also be described as different shades of "dark brown." Jamaica currently has 91.2% of the population that identify as black. As reported by both principals, many of the parents of children who attend the schools are employed in low paying jobs such as office attendants, house maids, carpenters, receptionists or are unemployed. About 10-20% of the students at either school are enrolled in the PATH[19] program (Programme of Advancement through Health & Education) and these students receive stipends for school lunch. The majority of the teachers at both schools were trained. For the year 2008 approximately 91% of primary school teachers across Jamaica were trained (MOE, 2009c).

As of June 2009 St. Alphonso had a student population of 911 and Bedford Primary had a smaller population of 487. St. Alphonso is also a Roman Catholic school but receives public funding like most schools in Jamaica. It was founded in 1967. As far as the principal could confirm, Bedford Primary was not affiliated to any religious body and was established in 1921. In relation to the Grade Four Literacy Test, St. Alphonso had 151 students and Bedford Primary had 71 students who sat the literacy test on June

[18] For administrative purposes the Ministry of Education has subdivided the island into six administrative regions. These do not correspond with the fourteen parishes that make up the island.

[19] See the following website for information on the PATH program http://www.mlss.gov.jm/pub/index.php?artid=23. Students on the PATH program receive free or meals at a reduced cost.

18th, 2009. On that day approximately 46, 663 grade four students sat the Grade Four Literacy Test across Jamaica (MOE, 2009a). In September 2009, regardless of their pass marks, all those students who sat the test were promoted to grade five. St. Alphonso had a pass rate of 78 % which was above the national literacy average for public elementary school (67%), while Bedford had 69% which was also above the national average. When I went on my second trip to Jamaica to continue the research, St. Alphonso had 155 students in grade five of which 33 were receiving support to retake the December 2009 supplemental exam. Bedford Primary had 81 students in grade five of which 26 were receiving extra help. In both schools the majority of those students receiving intervention with their reading were boys. For the two schools forty-four boys compared with fifteen girls retook the G4LT in December 2009[20].

St. Alphonso primary	**Bedford Primary**
Roman Catholic (yet public)	Government run
911 students	487 students
32 teachers	19 teachers
151 students sat G4LT on 6.18.09	71 students sat G4LT on 6.18.09
78% students mastered G4LT on 6.18.09	69 % mastered G4LT on 6.18.09
22% failed G4LT on 6.18.09	31% failed G4LT on 6.18.09

Table 3. Brief overview of two case study schools.

[20] Note that the numbers and percentages for this paragraph and for Table 3 are taken from both the *Gleaner's* G4LT results (MOE, 2009a) and from reports from the principals, so there might be slight differences in numbers and percentages. Also school population figures differ slightly for each term due to movement of students transferring from and to different schools.

Classroom observations

While I observed the grade four block in June 2009 to witness the administration of the Grade Four Literacy Test, I conducted observations on the grade five block in October/November 2009 to collect data on how teachers were supporting students who had to retake the literacy test in December 2009. The total observations of literacy activities I conducted at the schools were 23 sessions with one session ranging from 30 to 45 minutes. These literacy activities focused on reading comprehension and writing tasks. I used a Pilot 0.7 fine gel pen and a notebook to write up my observation notes. I folded each page to allow for a 2 inch column so that I could write reflective notes and questions at the margins. While I did not use pre-set categories as a checklist to my observations, I did find Merriam's (1998) observation checklist helpful (see Appendix C). They guided my observations to the extent that although I looked for ways in which the teacher explained literacy activities to the struggling readers, I also took note of the physical setting of the classroom, as well as the different types of interruptions among other observations.

St. Alphonso Primary School

At St. Alphonso I had the opportunity to observe both the administration of the Grade Four Literacy Test in June and how the school was supporting those students who failed the test in June and had to retake it in December 2009. In other words, I observed the students when they were in grade four and then again when they transitioned to grade five. I documented what programs the school had in place to help those students who were now identified as struggling readers based on the Grade Four Literacy Test, and how the teachers interacted with these students during literacy teaching in the class. This meant that at St. Alphonso I observed the reading sessions that occurred at 9 a.m. on Mondays to Fridays for the Non-Mastery reading group, and Mondays to Thursdays for the Near Mastery and Mastery reading groups.

Bedford Primary School

I observed only the grade five block at Bedford Primary and completed a total of fifteen research days at the location with a total of 8 literacy activity observations. All of this was conducted in October/November 2009. These literacy activities focused on what Ms. Thwaites called her Literacy development sessions which were usually in the mornings from 8:15 to 9:45, but which often ended just before lunch time which was at 11 a.m. During these early morning Literacy development sessions the class focused on communicative tasks such as writing a letter, filling out a form, or answering questions on a comprehension passage. I observed all three types of literacy activities in her class.

School	**No. of days at school**	**No. of literacy observations (1 session – 30-45 minutes.)**
St. Alphonso Primary	23	21
Bedford Primary	15	8
Total	**38 days**	**29 sessions**

Table 4. Number of observations conducted at the schools.

Interviews

Briggs (1986) raises important issues about the interview as a means of data collection. Oftentimes we neglect to ask how the interview itself changes the dynamics of the dialogue between researcher and participant. In my own research I observed this change of dynamic to some extent with teachers, for instance, who were less comfortable with interviewing than with the scholars whom I also interviewed. All three academic participants were willing to participate in the interview and had no problems being tape-recorded. In fact one of the academics told me he would have been surprised if I did not tape record the interview. One teacher and two of the three main Education ministry

personnel did not want to be tape recorded, and so I had to take notes very quickly which meant that I hardly got the opportunity to make face-to-face contact with the interviewee. Persons who did not want to be recorded either held public office and had to be careful not to have their speech floating in the 'air', or were simply uncomfortable.

All of the formal interviews were conducted using an interview guide in order to compare data among multiple participants. Using an interview guide was strongly recommended by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Iowa. I had separate interview guides for students, school personnel, and non-school participants (see Appendix A). For informal talks with participants I simply jotted down relevant phrases in my field notebook. Although I interviewed students and collected samples of their work, because of IRB limitations I focused primarily on the adults, namely teachers and principals. Below are two tables showing the persons I interviewed for the study. Over the nine-week period I interviewed a total of 30 persons.

St. Alphonso Primary	**Bedford Primary**
8 adults	***4 adults***
Principal	Principal
Grade 4 supervisor	-
Grade 4 teacher	-
Grade 5 supervisor	Grade 5 supervisor
Grade 5 focus teacher	Grade 5 focus teacher
Grade 2 teacher	Grade 5 focus teacher
Remedial reading teacher	-
Chief external proctor	
4 students	***4 students***
3 students retaking G4LT in Dec 2009	3 students retaking G4LT in Dec 2009
1 student who passed G4LT in June 2009	1 student who passed G4LT in June 2009

Table 5. Number of adults and students interviewed at the schools.

5 from Education ministry	**4 Academic researchers**	**1 Project manager**
Senior literacy supervisor	Literacy professor	Project supervisor (EEH)
Former education officer	Literacy professor	
Education special advisor	Linguistics professor	
Literacy specialist	Education professor	

Table 6. Number of administrators, academics and project coordinators interviewed.

Data analysis

Keeping organized was the first step in ensuring that the transition to data analysis was smooth. I did not have the luxury of easily returning to the research sites since these were miles away in a different country. I kept a Microsoft excel spreadsheet with a list of the research tasks I accomplished on a particular date while in Jamaica (in June and October 2009). This was to come in handy when at times I forgot to write down the date of an interview in my notebook. Each observation was typed up on a page of my OneNote notebook. I distinguished between the date of my observations and the date of my write-up, and headed each observation with a title and summary for easy retrieval. Heath and Street (2008) provided an example of an observation which was typed up in a table format which I found useful for later analysis (p. 78). Basically each cell represented a different stage within the larger observation which made it easier for me to differentiate general observations from literacy teaching observations. I transcribed all the interviews conducted in June, but because of time pressures, I listened to all interviews but transcribed only specific responses from the October interviews. For easy retrieval I also kept all the documents in separate files. Government documents were kept separately from the newspaper articles. Each *Observer, Jamaica Information Service* (*JIS*), or *Gleaner* newspaper article was grouped and recorded in a separate Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Hard copies of most articles were kept in separate file jackets. Within the spreadsheet each article was listed as being of high, medium or low

relevance. Only those articles with high-medium relevance were considered for further analysis. Eventually, I organized the dissertation chapters alongside the different data sources. Hence Chapter IV was informed by the documents retrieved, chapter V focused on the classroom observations, and Chapter VI was a summary of the interviews conducted. It took me a month to read and re-read Gee and Fairclough to grasp the concepts and select ones which would be suitable for analyzing each data source. I also used this time to test a number of CDA constructs on random newspaper articles to increase my familiarity with applying the terms.

For the government policy drafts and newspaper articles that I used in Chapter IV, I employed Fairclough's construct of *frame* to identify portions of text focused on literacy and in particular the Grade Four Literacy Test. A frame is defined as a "representation of whatever can figure as a topic…within an activity" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 132). For any frame or text of relevance (whether a government report or newspaper article) I asked the following questions: *What's going on? Who's involved? In what relations? What's the role of language* (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 123-4)? For the government policy drafts and reports I then conducted a word search to investigate whether or not certain terms (*literacy*, *assessment*, *accountability*, and *bilingual*) were present or absent in the document. Rather than look at each executive summary, I searched for relevant/meaningful passages which used these terms. Thereafter I applied a few constructs from Fairclough to the relevant portion of text - *experiential values of words, collocation, intertextuality* and *presupposition*. These constructs were applied to both the government documents and the news articles. My interpretations were substantiated from evidence from the text or by the literature. Below is a table summarizing my analysis for Chapter IV.

Chapter IV: How did the discourse about the G4LT change between 1999 and 2009 in government documents and the print media?		
Data source	**Construct**	**Analytical tools**
Documents	Frames	Summary questions, experiential values of words, collocation, intertextuality, present/absent term

Table 7. Data source & constructs used in addressing research question in Chapter IV.

For chapter five I extracted literacy teaching and learning observations from the general observations I made by cutting and pasting relevant portions of the literacy observations into a separate Word document. I selected literacy observations that focused on one of the three components of the G4LT – a word recognition, comprehension, or writing lesson. Additionally, I selected literacy observations that corresponded to Smith's (1991) eight types of teacher orientations toward preparing students to take high-stakes tests: teaching the curriculum with no special preparation, teaching test-taking skills, exhortation, teaching content known to be covered in the test, teaching test format and content, stress inoculation, practicing test, or cheating (p. 521). After selecting the relevant literacy observation, I then treated each literacy lesson as a schema, or a "representation of a particular type of activity" (Fairclough, 2001, p.131). There was a total of six schema or literacy activities that I analyzed: Mrs. Tennant's[21] lesson on blends; Mrs. Payne's poetry and crossword puzzle classes; Mr. Scott's comprehension session; and Ms. Thwaites's comprehension and writing lessons. I applied Gee's building tasks of activity, sign and social goods to each schema by asking the following questions: *What are the activities? What actions comprise these activities? What types of knowledge is relevant here (sign)? Assuming that literacy a social good, how is it made relevant in this schema?* As I answered each question

[21] All names of participants in this study are pseudonyms.

particular observations became evident which I noted in a comment section under each literacy schema. Below is a diagram summarizing my analysis for chapter V.

Chapter V: What did schools do to prepare students who failed the nationalized G4LT?		
Data source	**Construct**	**Analytical tools**
Observations	Schema	Activity, sign, and social good building tasks

Table 8. Data source & constructs used in addressing research questions in Chapter V.

Rather than examine each of the thirty interview transcripts, I selected persons from each of the three key institutions (schools, Education ministry, and academia) to highlight their perspectives. I selected the two principals, three administrators from the Ministry of Education and two scholars as they represented key stakeholders within the education system of Jamaica. I then focused on each of the seven participant responses to four questions that were common to all interview schedules: *How would you define literacy? What role does literacy play in Jamaica's national development? What are some of the major factors that the Ministry of Education should take into account when thinking about improving literacy in Jamaica? What do you think about the Grade Four Literacy Test?* Each person's response to these four questions was cut and pasted into separate Word document files. I then created a table in which I summarized each interviewee's response. In order to analyze the concept of identity I employed Fairclough's (2001) construct of scripts to 'represent the subjects who are involved in these activities, and their relationships" (p. 132). Each participant's response to the questions of defining literacy and examining the relationship between literacy and development was viewed as a script. For each of the seven identity *scripts* I applied Gee's (2005) building tasks of activities and identities to get at the subject positions that each interviewee was constructing orally. I asked the following questions: *What*

activities are recognized as literate or non-literate? What identities are being constructed within this response? In terms of participants' perspectives about the G4LT and their recommendations to improve literacy I simply listed each opinion/suggestion and made note of points that were common to all seven participants and those that were specific to one person or a group of persons. Below is a table summarizing the analysis in Chapter VI.

Chapter VI: What were the perspectives with regard to – the definition of literacy, literacy and national development, challenges and recommendations to improve literacy?		
Data source	**Construct**	**Analytical tools**
Interview	Script	Activity and identity building tasks, summary of perspectives, list of recommendations

Table 9. Data source & constructs used in addressing research question in Chapter VI.

Validity

Although there has been debate about value of validity within qualitative research (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990), it is a concept that is useful in terms of verifying the quality of one's data (Yin, 2009). The focus of this research is less on external validity or generalizing to other situations, and more concerned with internal validity or the extent to which the "research findings match reality" (Merriam, 1998, p. 201). The description of internal validity that I ascribe to is explained by Gee (2005) in the following way:

> I take validity to be something that different analyses can have more or less of, i.e., some analyses are more or less valid than others. Furthermore, validity is never "once and for all." All analyses are open to further discussion and dispute, and their status can go up or down with time as work goes on in the field (p. 113).

In order to make my research "more" rather than "less" valid according to Gee's aforementioned description, I employed the following strategies. First, one of the inherent strengths of the case study approach is the use of multiple data sources which

constitutes one form of triangulation (Yin, 2009). Glesne (2006), however, warns that triangulation is more than simply collecting data from different sources but relating the data to each other in order to minimize or address inconsistencies. Within this study I collected data from documents, observations and interviews. In several instances I was able to confirm a participant's point of view because of my familiarity with a newspaper or journal article they had written. Or I was able to verify teacher or principal reports through my observations.

Second, of the four measures of validity for discourse analysis that Gee (2005) espouses I focused on two – coverage and linguistic details. When analyzing a particular portion of text I ensured that my analysis of a specific paragraph was consistent with the general trend of the rest of the document or news article, and that I had linguistic evidence to support my claims. Gee (2005) puts it this way:

> Part of what makes a discourse analysis valid, then is that the analyst is able to argue that the communicative functions being uncovered in the analysis are linked to grammatical devices that manifestly can and do serve these functions, according to the judgments of "native speakers" of the social languages involved and the analyses of linguists" (p.114).

In terms of linguistic devices I relied on Fairclough's (2001) description of vocabulary within selected texts by assessing the experiential values of words and collocation. *Experiential values of words* are phrases that refer to the ways in which we classify words, or the social connotations that words have been ascribed over time. *Collocation* simply refers to the ways in which words co-occur which can at times be a deliberate choice of the author.

Third, I made use of the technique of member checking, that is, "taking the data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible" (Merriam, 1998, p.204). All of the seven participants who were interviewed for Chapter VI had the opportunity to read over their interview transcripts (either verbatim or summarized) and email me their comments. Of the seven

participants only one had a comment which was more of a clarification. After most of the chapters were in draft form, I had two scholar/educators from Jamaica read selected chapters that pertained to education in Jamaica to verify the accuracy of the information.

Researcher

As a Jamaican who went to a primary school but who also taught at a preparatory school for two years, I had a general understanding of school culture in Jamaica. Conducting research at the two primary schools reminded me how much things had remained the same – the noise, the heat, the prayers, the uniforms etc. At times this familiarity was helpful, as I had a cultural lens of sort to read between the lines and make useful inferences. At other times, however, this familiarity clouded my ability to "make the familiar strange and interesting again" (Erickson, 1986, p. 121). Re-reading my observation notes when I returned to the US (away from the research sites), or addressing the questions that my advisor (not from Jamaica) posed, helped me to see my observations from a fresh perspective. As the daughter of two professors who worked at one of the universities for thirty-years each, I had the benefit of what Bourdieu (1977) would call 'cultural capital' as I interacted with the academics. All the scholars interviewed knew my parents and therefore I had a fairly strong chance of getting an interview with each of them - which I did. However, this cultural capital was limited to the confines of the university. It did not extend to the schools or when interacting with administrators from the Ministry of Education. Once outside the realm of the university I had to rely on the generosity and trust of participants who were willing to take time out to answer my questions.

When I reflect upon the different roles I embodied in this research study - avid news reader, researcher, curious onlooker with questions, friendly adult, guest observer, and teacher - two concepts come to mind. The first concept is gaining access which Evans (2006) describes so eloquently in her case study, *Inside Hillview High School: An*

ethnography of an urban Jamaican school. One of the central points that Evans raises is that gaining access is a continuous process throughout the research study; it does not end once you have received permission but is an ongoing challenge. Although I received approval to conduct the study from the Ministry of Education in Jamaica, the Institutional Review Board at the University of Iowa, and had the blessing of the principals, I still had to negotiate with the teachers for their participation. While the students were very willing to have a friendly adult give them attention, it was much harder to convince a few of the teachers that I would not intrude on their time or give them additional work. Walking into the schools each day meant facing the challenge of gaining access: Would the teachers welcome me into their classrooms today to observe literacy activities? Would the teachers be willing to be interviewed? Keeping in mind that gaining access was a continual process therefore helped me to become more realistic in my expectations and humbled whenever persons were welcoming, knowing institutional approval did not necessarily translate into cooperation.

The second concept is what I call researcher boundary. Yin (2009) warned of the challenges faced by a sole researcher conducting multiple case studies. Glesne (2006) also mentioned the possibility of researcher burnout, that is, "researchers face mental and physical fatigue from overdoing, especially 'overbeing', which is a sense of always being on stage and therefore on best behavior" (p.72). Adopting a two-case study design was physically draining. It meant that rather than having a day in the field and a day-off out of the field to compile one's notes as suggested by Lareau (2000), I was at the schools almost every day. My days were long, starting at 6 a.m., spending three to four hours at one school, coming home to eat, making phone calls to non-school participants, preparing for the next day and then writing up notes until about 11 p.m. or sometimes later. I tried to go to one school per day, but on odd occasions I ended up visiting St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary on the same day. Towards the end of my six week research trip in Jamaica, I was so exhausted I remember making the decision to forego collecting data in

order to stay home and rest. It proved a wise decision as I was able to catch up on some notes, enjoy a slower day, and face the final weeks with renewed energy.

The concept of researcher boundary did not only pertain to protecting my physical health, but also maintaining a sense of mental well-being. I found it quite challenging to work at St. Alphonso. Generally speaking, both schools were noisy and hot (there are no air conditioning units in the classrooms, only standing fans and the temperature was in the high 80s Fahrenheit), but with time I got used to that. However, working at St. Alphonso seemed more frustrating because the 9 a.m. reading sessions were often cancelled for various reasons, the teachers seemed busier, and Mrs. Payne, the focus teacher, was aloof at times. Working in such conditions within the time limit that I had became overwhelming towards the end of the six weeks. I recall deciding to take some time away from St. Alphonso (between October 19 – 23) to get some mental space so that I could refocus and maintain a sense of professionalism when interacting with the participants of that school. During that time, I focused on Bedford Primary School and caught up on my field notes. Having a sense of researcher boundary also meant that although I was a guest observer in the schools, I would not take on the role of a sycophant in order to gain information. When Mrs. Payne insisted that I conduct her interview on November 9, 2009, the day before I was leaving to return to the US, I insisted that I would come at 7 a.m. and no earlier[22]. She acquiesced to that. I had reached the stage where I was willing to lose this data in order to maintain my researcher boundary.

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[22] On a previous occasion Mrs. Payne had scheduled a 6 a.m. meeting for me. Unfortunately, there was some misunderstanding about exactly where we were to meet and so while I was waiting outside her classroom Mrs. Payne was at another section of the school compound. Although she eventually arrived at her classroom close to 7 a.m., she did not meet with me until 11 a.m. that day. I therefore waited for five hours before being able to speak with her.

Concluding remarks

I have briefly described the education system in Jamaica, and provided some background information to the Grade Four Literacy Test. In addition, I have also outlined the theoretical framework of this study – Critical Discourse Analysis using a blend of concepts/constructs from Gee and Fairclough. The case study procedures that I used to collect the data and my methods of data analysis have also been reported in this chapter. In the chapters that follow I provide evidence to answer the overarching research question: How did the Grade Four Literacy Test, which was once a classroom-based assessment for a decade, become a national high-stakes exam in 2009? Through the examination of four government documents, the case stud of two primary schools and interviews with several participants, I contend that accountability in the form of high-stakes testing has come to dominate literacy reform in the Jamaica education system.

In Chapter IV I examine how the discourse related to literacy assessment changes in four government documents, and in turn how this language becomes part of the wider *Conversations* about literacy in the media, and hence part of a wider Grade Four Literacy Test Discourse. Chapter V focuses on the two case study schools. In particular I describe how teachers supported and prepared the students who failed the June 2009 sitting of the literacy test to retake the December 2009 supplemental G4LT. In Chapter VI, I examine the views of principals, Education administrators and academics about the G4LT, efforts needed to improve literacy, how they define literacy and the role they believe literacy plays in Jamaica's national development.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIETAL LEVEL DISCOURSE SURROUNDING THE GRADE FOUR LITERACY TEST

On Thursday, June 18, 2009 approximately 47,000 Jamaican elementary[23] students aged 9–10 years sat for the Grade Four Literacy and Numeracy Tests[24]. Between 1998 and 2008 the literacy test was administered in the schools by the teachers at the end of the term sometime in May or June. But in 2009, for various reasons I will detail later in the chapter, the Ministry of Education decided to administer the Grade Four Literacy Test as a nationalized exam with official proctors from the Ministry of Education. In this section I describe the day of the actual Grade Four Literacy Test, and describe how the discourse at the institutional level changed between 1999 and 2008 which, I argue, was a precursor to revising the Grade Four Literacy Test to become a high-stakes national literacy test in 2009.

The day of the Grade Four Literacy Test

Throughout the island the Grade Four Literacy and Numeracy Tests began at 9 a.m. and ended at 2 p.m. I was able to observe the administration of the Grade Four Literacy Test at St. Alphonso primary school. When I arrived at the school in the morning at 8:45 a.m. the students were already in the grade five and six classrooms which were designated as test centers. The principal informed me that 76 students were in test center one while 75 students were in the second test center, making a total of 151 students who sat the literacy test at the school. By about 10 a.m. the students were out

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[23] I use elementary as a general category to refer to children aged 6-12 who attend either primary or preparatory/private school. When referring to public schools I use public elementary or primary schools.

[24] In this paper I focus only on the literacy test and not on the numeracy test in the Grade Four Literacy and Numeracy Tests. The numeracy test was first introduced in 2008 (*JIS*, 2008b).

for a short fifteen-.minute break. As the students filed out of the test centers and into the courtyard I overheard some of them saying that the test was "easy." They had just completed the word recognition and reading comprehension components of the literacy test. They had 20 words to match to corresponding pictures in three minutes, and another 20 pictures to match to corresponding words in three minutes, after which they had 35 minutes to answer 30 comprehension questions which included diagrams, passages, and sometimes tables. After the break the students returned to their test centers and completed the Writing task which lasted for about 40 minutes. They had to write a letter and fill out a form. During the ten o'clock break Mrs. Tennant, remedial reading teacher, informed me that the students were both "nervous and excited." As the students headed back to their respective test centers I heard Mrs. Ramsay, the grade four supervisor and teacher, prompting the students by reminding them to "*close the letter … [and] write yu address first* [complete the letter by writing the appropriate closing/salutation and remember to write your address first] [25]." The students were now to complete the writing section of the literacy test. When the literacy test was over, the students trickled into Mrs. Ramsay's classroom at around 11:08 a.m. for lunch. They appeared less excited than before although they mentioned that the Communicative task was "fine." Here is a record of what I observed when the students traipsed into the classroom at the end of the literacy test:

> Two girls and a boy, with a patty[26] in his hand, trickle into the classroom at 11:08 a.m. The children are not smiling as before when they had completed the word recognition and comprehension sections of the exam. They had 40 minutes to complete the communication task. When more students trickle in Mrs. Ramsay

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[25] When participants speak in Jamaican Creole I try to transcribe their speech in Creole using the Cassidy-Jamaican Language Unit orthography (JLU, 2009). I then provide an English translation in brackets. This quotation by Mrs. Ramsay is a good example of the overlap of/fluidity between the two languages because she only uses one JC word in this statement.

[26] A patty is a popular Jamaican savory pastry similar to a meat pie.

> asks “How was it?” In a chorus the children respond loudly, “Fine” and later some students said “It was easy”. (Field notes, 6.18.09)

Below are samples of the Grade Four Literacy Test taken from a grade four workbook (Isaacs, Sayers-Johnson, & Pinnock, 2002, pp. 147-160). This workbook is prepared by local authors for use in preparing students for the G4LT. See sample questions below:

Word recognition sample questions

Underline the word that matches the picture.

	stairs	stamp	star	storm

Underline the picture that matches the word.

square				

Reading comprehension sample questions

Typically there are 4-6 questions per passage, table or diagram:

> Have you ever considered the fact that many of the vegetables we eat were sprayed with pesticides? Yes; sometimes the very food we eat is affected by poisonous substances and our environment is often polluted. The food, water, air and sound around us can destroy us if they are not protected from pollutants. We can assist in preventing pollution by dumping garbage properly, boiling or filtering all drinking water, using less chemicals on foods, avoiding loud music and using waste products to make the soil rich instead of burning them.

Pesticides are used on

a) plants b) people c) clothes d) animals

While travelling on the road, you see this sign post. Read it then answer the questions which follow.

	Santoy	
Bolans		25 km
Red Banks		33 km
Rockwell		51 km
Dallas Bay		64 km
Cotterwood		92 km

Which place is nearest to the sign post?

a) Dallas Bay b) Bolans c) Cotterwood d) Red Banks

Writing task sample questions:

Question: Your community has been experiencing a severe drought. Write a letter to a relative abroad telling him/her about the water situation.

Question: You want to be able to go to the bank to withdraw or lodge money any time, day or night. To do this you need an ATM card. Fill out this application form.

Last name: _____ First name: _____

Sex: Male/Female

Mailing address: _____

_____

Date of birth: _____ Occupation: _____

Home telephone number: _____

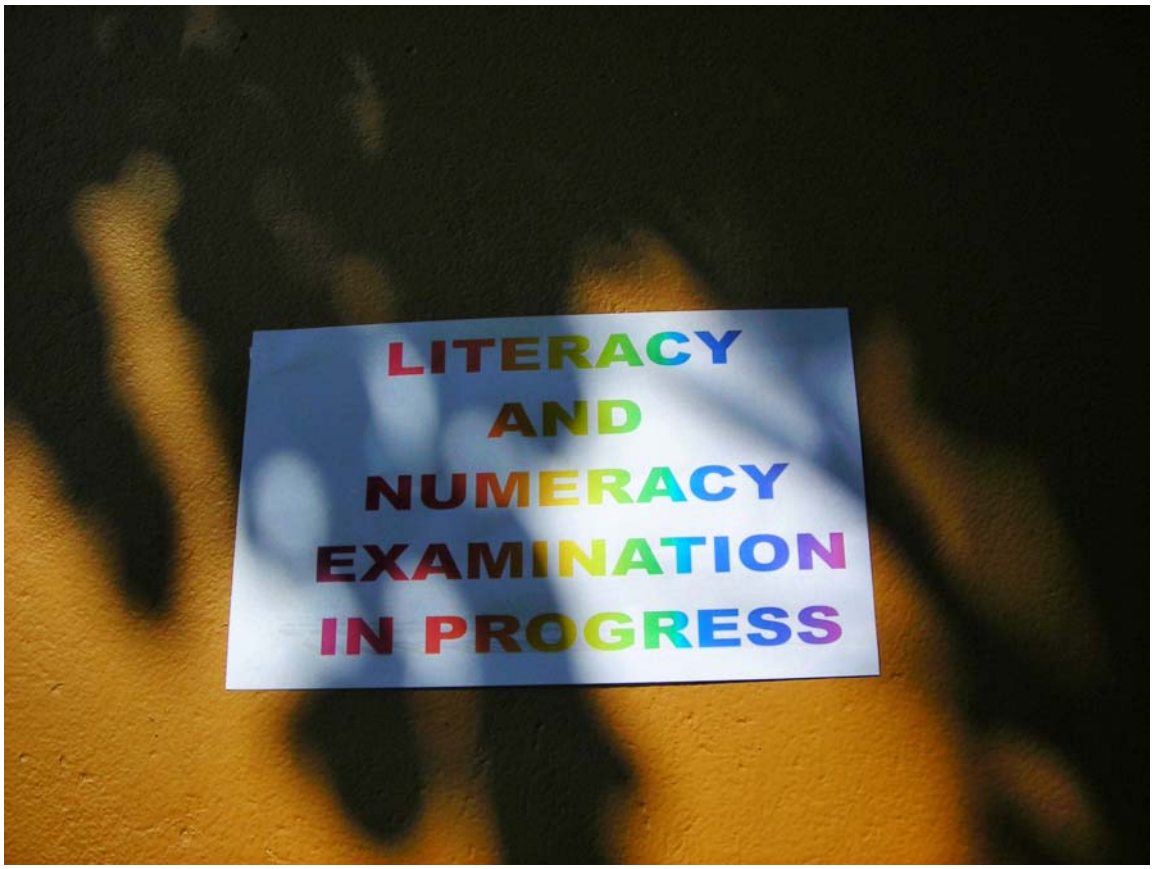

Figure 3. Grade Four Literacy Test at St. Alphonso.

The students had a 55 minute lunch break then returned to their respective test centers for the Numeracy Test. As no one was allowed in the test centers, aside from the test-taking students and the proctors, I took photographs (see Figure 1), interviewed the head proctor, the principal, and teachers while the students were busy with their tests. The rest of the school carried on as usual with the exception of the grade five and six students who were sent home on that day since their classrooms were used as test centers. The grade four teachers either left the school to return, or mark students' class work. Since I received consent forms from each teacher, I interviewed three fourth grade

teachers and took notes about what they did the day before the G4LT. Based on their responses, the teachers gave the students pep talks along with practice exams not only on Wednesday but throughout the year. Mrs. Ramsay, the grade four supervisor, mentioned that "she did nothing special [on Wednesday] for the Grade 4 exam as she has always been talking to them about it, telling them what to expect" (Field notes, 6.18.09). Mr. Damdar said he spent more time on arithmetic rather than on literacy since that was the subject area in which students were weak. He did, however, do some reading assessments using the Mico Diagnostic Reading Test[27]. Another grade four teacher, Mr. Parke, said his preparation for the G4LT was done by "talking to them, along with exams":

> In talking to the students he told them what they were going to face in the exam, that there was to be no communication, each person would sit in a bench by themselves, and generally what "to expect". He told them to treat it like a "practice test" and gave them "pep talks"…. Mr. Parke revised the following: language arts test from text book which is similar to the literacy test, and they did two math tests in the afternoon, again from the textbook. They practiced the test in a relaxed environment, and he marked the paper and went through the test with them (Field notes, 6.18.09).

At about 1 p.m. while I was waiting inside Mrs. Ramsay's classroom, I heard the voice of a female proctor tell the students, "Don't talk to your friends, don't whisper…you are still in an exam room" (Field notes, 6.18.09). Then at around 2:10 p.m. the students started to trickle into the classroom having completed the Grade Four Literacy and Numeracy Tests. Some students huddled around Mrs. Ramsay trying to recall the different math sums. After a brief discussion about the numeracy test, she then initiated the end of school routine by saying "hands up, hands clasped, eyes closed." The

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[27] The Mico Diagnostic Reading Test (Milner, 1995) is a reading assessment that was developed in Jamaica in 1983 by the Mico College Centre for Assessment and Research in Education. The test measures word recognition, oral reading, comprehension, listening comprehension and silent reading comprehension. It is designed for children at the grades 1-6 levels in primary schools.

students said the final prayer of the day. Mrs. Ramsay then reminded the students that they were expected at school tomorrow and that they would have religious education and structure tests as part of their end of year school assessment. Finally, she told the students to "play when you go home and do a little review [in preparation for the school tests the next day]" (Field notes, 6.18.09).

Reasons for making the Grade Four Literacy Test a national exam

Why did the Ministry of Education in Jamaica (MOE) decide to revise the Grade Four Literacy Test to become a centrally administered exam in which the results were published? In addition to the government's mandate to provide quality education for its citizens by various means, I suggest that the revised G4LT was influenced by an ideology of accountability at the expense of classroom-based assessment. As such, the form of accountability in the shape of high-stakes tests is gaining popularity as the main vehicle of educational reform in Jamaica. In this chapter I trace the changing discourse within four government documents in relation to the Grade Four Literacy Test to show how an accountability ideology has crept into the larger Discourse about improving literacy in Jamaican schools.

At the institutional level of the Education ministry, this shift from using local school-based assessments in the late 1990s to prioritizing high-stakes published standardized tests in the mid 2000s is evident in the increased emphasis on accountability evident in recent government documents. At the societal level, the MOE has successfully built support for its revised G4LT by increasing public awareness in the media about the importance of literacy, and promoting the efforts of the ministry to improve literacy. Publishing the G4LT results was also part of introducing greater accountability into primary schools. Changing the discourse at the government level, creating greater public

awareness about literacy, while gaining public support for the revised G4LT, and publishing the results are all part and parcel of an accountability ideology (Linn, 2000).

Changing discourse at the institutional level

Successive governments in Jamaica have implemented various measures to address literacy achievement in the nation's primary and secondary schools. In this section I discuss four government documents that have been central in addressing literacy, namely the:

- Literacy Improvement Initiative (LII, 1999),
- Language Education Policy (LEP, 2001),
- Education task force report (ETR, 2004),
- Competence-based transition policy (CBT, 2008).

I contend that the language in each document sheds light on the changing Discourse about literacy at the institutional level. Treating each government document as a *frame*, that is, a representation of a topic, I use Fairclough's constructs of collocation ("patterns of co-occurrence between words" (1995.p.102) and the experiential values of words to examine the vocabulary used in these texts to define literacy, and to discuss accountability and assessment. The experiential values of words refers to the "contents and knowledge and beliefs" that we possess about language (2001, p.93). I also use *intertextuality* to trace the possible influences that shape the language of a particular text. Gee (2005) provides a broad-based definition of intertextuality in which he states that "when we speak or write, our words often allude to or relate to…words that other people have said or written" (p.21), while Fairclough (2001) focuses more on the historical aspect of the term commenting that "discourses and the texts which occur within them have histories, they belong to historical series" (p.127). In this study I apply both definitions of intertextuality to my analysis. In addition I also use *Conversations* to describe the "themes, debates, or motifs that have been the focus of much talk and

writing" in Jamaica in the newspapers as it relates to literacy, and in particular the Grade Four Literacy Test (Gee, 2005, p.21).

Literacy Improvement Initiative, (LII, 1999)

The Literacy Improvement Initiative was drafted in 1999 during the People's National Party's (PNP) administration when Wesley Barrett was Chief Education Officer[28] in the Ministry of Education. It was written by Beverly Bryan and Ivy Mitchell, both of the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. This was a bold step as the ministry was using local research as opposed to overseas consultants to help resolve the persistent problem of literacy (personal communication, Evans, June 9, 2009). Perhaps by hiring the expertise of the local research community, the Ministry of Education hoped to gain greater credibility for its literacy initiatives. But as experienced in the Black English trial in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the United States, parents are not always convinced by the research findings of academics (Labov, 1982). In this particular case parents did not want their children to be taught using African-American Vernacular English. Nevertheless, the authority that comes with research conducted by universities or research organizations is often a powerful voice in policy decisions (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 1999).

The purpose of the Literacy Improvement Initiative document was to provide a "situation analysis of the background to literacy development in Jamaica" and then to devise a "five-year plan of action for literacy" (p.4). Before proposing a revised definition of literacy, the authors list three other definitions of literacy used in Jamaica in order to show how literacy had evolved over the years from simply being able to read, write and calculate to literacy as a complex set of abilities. For purposes of this study I

[28] The Chief Education Officer is in charge of all educational services and is third in command of the Ministry of Education after the Minister of Education and the Minister's permanent secretary.

will only mention two definitions. One definition highlighted was the one used by the Ministry of Education in their "review of primary education, Language Arts training and the Grade Four Literacy Test" (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999, p.14):

> A Jamaican child leaving primary school should:
>
> **At least** be able to read and understand simple **narrative** and **expository** texts and practical formatted information; and to write simple stories, reports and lists for a specific purpose which can be understood by others.
>
> **Normally be expected** to be able to read and understand **narrative** books, books of **expository** prose, simple newspaper articles suitable for their age-group and more complex formats; and to write stories which engage the readers, explanatory reports and **sets of instructions** which can be understood by others.

In exploring the experiential values of the words in bold (highlights by the authors) several points can be made but I will focus on one theme which relates to student expectations. It is interesting to note that there are two expectations set for students leaving elementary school as indicated by the modifiers "at least" and "normally be expected." Bryan and Mitchell (1999) comment on this and suggest that "in referring to basic and upper levels, it [the MOE's literacy definition] recognizes that competence in these domains of literacy can be expressed at different levels" (p. 14). To some extent this is true since any group of students will possess varying degrees of abilities (Roller, 1996). However, using a critical lens, this differentiated expectation becomes worrying when those who are expected to perform at the basic level are consistently those who belong to a certain socio-economic class and who are often Jamaican Creole speakers. In 2009 students who attended public elementary schools in Jamaica averaged 67% on the Grade Four Literacy Test compared with students who attended private elementary who averaged 93% (Luton, 2010).

Bryan and Mitchell (1999) however went on to formulate a definition of literacy that also included adults, as well as other forms of literacy outside of the alpha-numeric symbol system, and acknowledged Jamaica's bilingual heritage as well:

> Literacy refers to a complex set of abilities to understand and **use** the **dominant** symbol systems/language of a culture for individual and community development. In a technological society the concept of literacy is **expanding** to include the **media** and **electronic** text, in addition to **alphabet and number** systems. Literacy included critical understanding, problem-solving abilities, and oral/aural abilities. Literacy abilities are not static and will vary according to contexts and need. They begin with the child's acquisition of his/her first language and the intuitions developed about the way communication works in natural settings. To continue on-going growth in literate behaviour, individuals should be given **life-long learning** opportunities to develop all aspects of their literacy potential (p. 15).

Embedded in this definition was the idea that literacy is "complex" and therefore could not be solved overnight but would be addressed over time using a multi-pronged approach as discussed later in the action plan. In the text itself, the authors put in bold specific words which I have also highlighted in order to explore the experiential values of these words: use, dominant, expanding, media, electronic, alphabet & number. First, "use" implies that being literate is not simply a state but involves the active engagement of literacy skills for "individual and community development." Second, the term "dominant" can have two meanings – numerical superiority or prestige. In other words, the dominant symbol systems/language in the Jamaican context can refer to either Standard Jamaican English which is the official language and language of prestige or to Jamaican Creole which has numerical dominance since it is the "language most widely used in the population" (Bryan, 2001, p.23). In fact, two years after the LII (1999) was drafted, one of the authors, B. Bryan, was to develop a Language Education Policy (2001) which finally recognized Jamaica as bilingual. Third, I would suggest that "expanding" and "life-long" are used to refer to the idea that literacy is not a permanent state but is continually evolving over a person's lifetime and now includes "media and electronic text, in addition to alphabet and number systems." Fourth, "life-long" also implies that literacy is not simply school-based. It was this "dynamic definition" of literacy that was later to be used in subsequent government documents – the Language

Education Policy (2001), and the Competence-based transition policy (2008). Only the Education task force report (2004) excluded this "dynamic definition" of literacy.

The global strategies of the Literacy Improvement Initiative (LII) included: addressing student achievement, creating a bilingual policy, improving teacher preparation, creating better literacy support in schools, providing equal opportunities for both boys and girls and children with special needs, creating greater stakeholder involvement, and addressing adult education. The strategies outlined in the LII were based on different assumptions about literacy. As late as the 1960s and 1970s the concept of "functional literacy" was the predominant and global ideological assumption of what it meant to be literate (UNESCO, 2004). Therefore, it was sufficient that students attending the public elementary schools had only basic reading and writing skills (Bagley, 1979; Ferguson, 1947). Drayton (1990) argued that during the colonial period literacy in English was politically construed to act as a "civilizing agent" as opposed to a critical thinking skill. After British colonial rule in the 1960s, literacy in English still played a dominant ideological role in that it provided, through its mastery, an index to an individual's social status. In fact, many West Indians identified the Caribbean as monolingual in English and derided Creole speakers for speaking "bad English" (Bryan, 2004; Drayton, 1990; Simmons-McDonald, 2004). Hence to have a literacy document that acknowledged the bilingual status of Jamaica and to consider plans to adopt bilingual teaching strategy was a major shift from the past (Bryan, 1998, 2004c).

The importance of assessment and accountability was also addressed in the Literacy Improvement Initiative. The sub-section on assessment on pages five to six is instructive in locating the ideological position of the authors in which ongoing classroom-based assessment of literacy was valued:

> Much of the literature is showing a strong and necessary link between assessment of literacy and the curriculum through which it is delivered. An expanded definition of literacy and new methods of teaching require related authentic assessment. Some move towards a child-centred curriculum focused assessment is

> seen in the use of attainment targets in PEIP II. Additionally, the introduction of a range of assessments at Grades 1, 3, 4 & 6 by NAP, is marking the trend towards looking at children and individual differences. It follows, therefore, that we cannot make pathology out of illiteracy (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999, pp. 5-6)."

The phrases that are collocated with assessment include "authentic", "child centred", "curriculum focused", "range" "looking at children and individual differences". These are words/phrases that are not associated with an accountability agenda of high-stakes standardized achievement testing. Rather, the words are associated with classroom-based assessment. Hence, the authors discuss the importance of moving away from pathologizing "illiteracy" to training teachers to use classroom level reading assessment to support those students who experience reading difficulties: "…we cannot make pathology out of illiteracy….more teachers should be trained for literacy diagnosis at the classroom level" (p. 6). When the Literacy Improvement Initiative was completed in 1999 all the NAP assessments, with the exception of the Grade Six Achievement Test, were administered at the classroom level. It was not until June 2009 that the Grade Four Literacy Test was changed from a classroom-based assessment to a high-stakes standardized test.

In a similarly brief discussion of accountability in the Literacy Improvement Initiative, the authors emphasize the role of the teacher as opposed to the role a particular test:

> Accountability: This is a major and key aspect of the performance component. First and foremost, is the teacher as the central figure in the initiative and the main instrument in the Plan of Action. The focus on teacher training and resourcing is recognition that accountability presumes that personnel are adequately prepared to do the job (p. 55).

In this paragraph the "central figure" or the "main instrument" is collocated with the role of the teacher. The authors argue that teachers must be properly trained in order to be effectively accountable. In other words, accountability is linked to teacher preparation which in turn is rooted in teacher training involving child-centered and curriculum-focused literacy assessment as stated in the earlier section on assessment.

Nonetheless, the authors note at the end that "everybody is accountable" and that accountability must include not only the teachers but the wider school-system in addition to the different projects and programs of the Ministry of Education.

Five years after the Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999) was penned, the literacy rates had improved slightly. In 2004 approximately 57% of primary school students island-wide passed the G4LT compared with 52% passes in 1999 (see Table 10). Thus, there was improvement but not to the extent the MOE had projected. In the Literacy Improvement Initiative the ministry had projected that by 2005 approximately 70% of students would be reading at least at the grade six level while the remaining 30% would be reading at the grade four level; essentially meaning that by 2005 the Education ministry had estimated 100% literacy at the grade four level or above for all children leaving primary school. However, the literacy projections were still not met by 2004. Below is a table showing the slow but incremental improvements in literacy.

Year	**% Passing G4LT**
1999	52
2000	47
2001	43
2002	53
2003	58
2004	57
2005	64
2006	65
2007	64
2008	71
2009[29]	67

Table 10. Grade Four Literacy Test results from 1999-2009.

[29] The data for this table is taken from two sources: for 1999-2008 the data is taken from the Competence-based transition policy (R. Morris, et al., 2008) and data for 2009 is taken from the (MOE, 2009a).

Language Education Policy, (LEP, 2001)

Another outcome of the Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999) included the Language Education Policy (LEP) which was written in 2001 by Beverly Bryan, one of the authors of the LII and, as mentioned earlier, a professor at a prominent research university. The LEP focused on Jamaica's bilingualism and revealed the government's policy about language as it related to education. The LEP therefore "represented the clearest indication yet of an articulated national policy on language education by the government of Jamaica" (Brown-Blake, 2007, p. 383). Now through this language policy the government finally recognized Jamaican Creole as the "the language most widely used in the population" (Bryan, 2001, p.23). Standard Jamaican English remained the official language, with teachers using the home language to facilitate literacy in English in an age-appropriate manner (Bryan, 2001, pp. 23-24). The LEP reflected some of the same strategic policies as outlined in the Literacy Improvement Initiative, but with a specific focus on teaching English in a bilingual context. Emphasis was placed on teacher preparation, improving literacy support in the schools in terms of materials and human resource, closing the gap between boys and girls in terms of literacy, as well as stakeholder involvement.

As it relates to defining literacy, the Language Education Policy used the "dynamic" definition of literacy proposed by the authors in the LII (1999), as well as the literacy expectations for grade six students as set out by the Ministry of Education (see previous section on the Literacy Improvement Initiative to view the definition and expectations). These two inter-textual references to defining literacy are not surprising given that the language policy was an outcome of the literacy initiative and was written by one of the same authors, B. Bryan. I speculate that Bryan included the two literacy definitions to acknowledge the MOE's expectations of what a literate student should look like at the end of elementary school, while at the same time promoting an expanded definition of literacy to support the need for a language policy. Two clues in the text of

the revised definition of literacy provide evidence for including bilingual strategies within classroom instruction. First, the phrase "dominant symbol systems/language of a culture" within the Jamaican system, as I have argued earlier, can refer to both SJE and JC. Second, the sentence – *They begin with the child's acquisition of his/her first language and the intuitions developed about the way communication works in natural settings* – is an explicit reference acknowledging the mother tongue of most Jamaican children which is Jamaican Creole.

In terms of assessment and accountability, a word search showed that the word "accountability" was not mentioned in the LEP. Assessment, however, was mentioned in the document. If one discounts references to the word "assessment" in the name of one of the Ministry of Education departments, Student Assessment Unit, then the word "assessment" is mentioned five times. In the LEP document "assessment" referred to both formative and summative evaluation tests as outlined in the National Assessment Programme. Yet, in highlighting what *assessment* should do, Bryan outlines evaluation methods that are classroom-based and formative. Teachers were to "use targets and objectives outlined in national curricula as benchmarks to guide learners' progress" and "provide ongoing evaluation to determine learners' language competencies at various intervals in their schooling" and to use "alternative strategies for determining learners' achievement" (p. 27). Assessments should also serve multiple purposes including "inventory, diagnosis, intervention, placement, and to guide research" while also ensuring "feedback" (p. 28). As used in the language policy the term "assessment" is collocated with words and phrases (underlined) which index formative rather than summative forms of evaluating students' work (Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993).

Rather than focus attention on testing students only at the end of their schooling, Bryan foregrounds evaluation that is conducted by teachers within classrooms and which is used with multiple purposes in mind. Moreover, the relative exclusion of the term "accountability", which is usually associated with testing, and the inclusion of the term

"assessment" and how it is described serves as an index to the ideological position of the authors. I argue that the Ministry of Education at this time and members of the local research community were instrumental in shaping the Discourse about language and literacy in Jamaica during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This Discourse was shaped by the ideological positions of the authors (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999; Bryan, 2001) who proposed an expanded vision of literacy as complex and lifelong (as opposed to solely school-based) and which incorporated formative methods of assessment. Interestingly, this version of literacy is less likely to be assessed by standardized tests, so if adopted, this perspective might have diminished the power of standardized tests.

Education task force report (ETR, 2004)

By the mid-2000s, however, the shift from classroom assessments to high stakes accountability testing was occurring in Jamaica. I speculate that this shift in favor of accountability was not only local, but happening on a global level. In the United States the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was just being launched. Among its strategies NCLB focused on the use of high-stakes tests in reading and math; and schools that performed below a particular standard were put on probation (Sadovnik, et al., 2008). In 2004 during the PNP (People's National Party) administration, Prime Minister P. J. Patterson commissioned a task force to investigate education in Jamaica. The final report published as the *Task force on educational reform Jamaica: A transformed education system* (henceforth called the Education task force report or ETR) described not only literacy and language, but focused on the overall state of education at the primary and secondary levels. The report stated that "despite high enrollment rates, significant curriculum reform and other efforts, performance at all levels of the system has been well below target as measured by student scores on national and regional assessments…" (Davis, 2004, p. 10). It seemed as if the reform efforts of the 1990s had reached a plateau – enrollment rates were high, multiple projects to improve education were being

administered, yet performance rates were still low. Essentially, the committee opted for more stringent accountability measures with new performance targets.

The Education task force report focused on four areas: governance and management; curriculum, teaching and learning support; stakeholder participation; and finance. Similar to the Literacy Improvement Initiative, the Education task force report addressed student performance, teacher training, the learning environment, and public partnerships in education. Additionally, the Education task force report put finance on the agenda (a critical factor in education) and made recommendations to improve the procedures and functions within the education system; but it ignored Jamaica's bilingual language context. Indeed, the focus on finance was an important but missing factor in the LII (1999) which needed to be addressed considering the budgetary constraints of successive Jamaican governments given the country's debt. Yet, by ignoring the bilingual context of Jamaica (there was no result for a word search of "bilingual" in the document) the government and subsequently the Ministry of Education was falling into the trap which Craig (1980) had already mentioned two decades prior, that is, the tendency to adopt "educational models and procedures which take inadequate account of the unique aspects of West Indian language situations" (p.15).

Additionally, no definition for literacy was explicitly given in the Education task force report. The committee, however, developed a *National Shared Vision for Education* in Jamaica which provided some insight into the expectations that the committee had for the educated Jamaican, and the primacy of accountability. Part of that shared vision was that the education system would produce "full literacy and numeracy, a global competitive, quality workforce and a disciplined, culturally aware and ethical Jamaican citizenry" (Davis, 2004, p. 11). Thus, there was the expectation of full literacy; although the document did not fully explore what that meant. No reference to the Literacy Improvement Initiative or the Language Education Policy was mentioned in the report. And whenever literacy was otherwise mentioned it was usually in connection

with the goal of full literacy (pp. 32-33); the G4LT (p. 53); and remediation (pp. 97-98) thereby signaling a shift away from what Bryan (1999, 2001) had recommended in the Literacy Improvement Initiative.

In a critical change in which the LII (1999) and the LEP (2001) emphasized school-based assessment, the Education task force report highlighted accountability through national assessments as one of the vehicles through which the education system would be improved. For instance, the committee recommended that the Grade Four Literacy Test be changed to a national exam (p. 111) and the new target was set at an 85% pass rate to be achieved in 2010. (However, this rate was not achieved as in 2010 the national literacy average based on the G4LT was 67%, about 18 percentage points below the target). While no specific rationale was provided for this particular recommendation, I contend that changing the G4LT from a school-based assessment test to a national exam was partly informed by an ideology of accountability as evidenced in the following two quotes:

> We believe that accountability for performance is a fundamental issue at all levels of the system. We are therefore recommending a new model for governance where students are at the centre of the system and every institution is focused on, and held accountable for serving the students (p.12)

> The system of national and regional assessment has the potential to track and evaluate students' learning from Grade 1 through to Grade 13. However, results seem to be used mainly for placement. We are recommending a rationalization of the assessments for greater efficiency and effectiveness (p. 13).

Examining how the terms "accountability" and "assessment" are collocated with particular descriptors reveals the ideological viewpoint of the authors of the report. In the first quote the committee declared its position in terms of education reform – "accountability for performance" - as the pivotal or "fundamental" focus of the recommendations. Students would be central, but largely in terms of their ability to perform on assessment tests. Unnamed persons within the "system and every institution" would be held "accountable" or responsible for student performance. As the second

quote suggests, assessments under this "new model" would be used for tracking and evaluating student performance in comparison to the old system which used assessment mainly for "placement." Indeed, the implied criticism that the goals of the National Assessment Program were not being achieved is valid. The purpose of NAP was to provide information for the teachers and parents to help with student learning in primary school (MOEYC, 2004). As the following newspaper article suggests, the NAP tests were administered to students by their teachers as a classroom-based assessment but little feedback was given from the teachers to the students. In this particular excerpt the author of the article, Howard Campbell, is writing about his niece, Tiffany's, experience of taking the four NAP tests:

> If we were living in Utopia, the tests[30] given under the programme would tell students, teachers and parents how well a student is performing for their age and grade level....To the best of my knowledge, Tiffany has been through the other three tests, but this is Jamaica, she did the tests and that is where the story seems to have ended" (Campbell, 2005).

In other words, based the above article, teachers were not using the NAP tests to inform their instruction, or provide students with useful feedback. Yet, I would argue that the solution of adopting a model of reform, as suggested in the Education task force report, that stressed summative rather than formative assessment and a business-type approach to school governance is also problematic (Cuban, 2004). While greater "efficiency and effectiveness" within the education system is welcomed, it is naïve to assume that simply affixing business strategies to schools can improve education considering the fact that education serves individuals not products and the system has a plethora of competing demands to satisfy (Cuban, 2004).

[30] NAP includes four tests – Grade One Inventory, Grade Three Diagnostic, Grade Four Literacy & Numeracy Tests, and the Grade Six Achievement Test.

Further in the report, the committee recommended that teachers' salaries should be linked to student performance. Under the sub-section *Accountability for Results* the committee suggested that "teachers should be rewarded based on improved student achievement" (p. 88). In the conclusion the committee mentions a "framework of rewards and sanctions" and a "performance-based management system…ensuring "value for money" (p. 168). The following paragraph in the executive summary reiterates this accountability ideology:

> School leaders and managers will have the responsibility for how institutions are managed. They will also be held accountable for students' achievements through a performance-based management system. It is important that proper support and controls be provided to the institutions and we are recommending that this be done through the Regional Education Authorities and a National Education Quality Assurance Authority. As much as possible, these new institutions should build on existing institutions in the education system (p. 12)

Looking at the experiential values of the wording in this paragraph, it is evident that schools are akin to enterprises or "institutions" that should be managed using a "performance-based management system". Efficient management of schools by school boards and principals or "school leaders and managers" will lead to improved student achievement. Note that the word "manage' is repeated four times in this short paragraph. In brief, school leaders and managers "will manage" and be "held accountable" for student performance, students will "achieve", and authorities "will support" and "control" schools. It is interesting to note that there is no reference to teachers in this excerpt. In the subsequent paragraph, however, teachers are mentioned but only in relation to "the type of leadership teachers require… [and] changes to their terms and conditions of service" (p. 12). Teachers like students must be managed in order to produce better results. While teachers, therefore, played an essential role in the LII (1999) plan of action, they play a secondary or silenced role in the Education task force report.

Competence-based Transition Policy (CBT, 2008)

By September 2007 Jamaica was headed by a new government under the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), and a new Minister of Education took office, Andrew Holness. As part of his plan to improve education in Jamaica, Andrew Holness set out to improve literacy at the primary level by focusing on increasing the pass rate on the Grade Four Literacy Test ("Literacy our main focus - minister," 2008). The revisions to the Grade Four Literacy Test were drafted in the Competence-based Transition policy and authored by administrators in the Ministry of Education (Morris, Allen & Evering, 2008). In keeping with the analysis of the previous government documents, how did the CBT define literacy? What did the CBT have to say about terms like "accountability," "assessment" and "bilingual"?

The definition used in the CBT (2008) was the same one proposed by Bryan and Mitchell (1999) in the Literacy Improvement Initiative. Perhaps after nine years, the "dynamic" definition of literacy had become part of the status quo, albeit still relevant. Of significance, however, are the seven objectives of the policy. I mention three which specifically relate to literacy and the G4LT. Under the section for objectives it states that:

> The Policy is intended to:
>
> Ensure that all new entrants to the secondary level are certified as literate
>
> Re-brand literacy as a critical outcome of the Ministry's core services
>
> Position the Grade Four Literacy Test as a critical focal point of the primary level

Based on the online Merriam Webster dictionary (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/certify) the word "certify" is derived from the Latin word *certus* meaning 'certain'. To be "certified literate" then means to be certain that the student has met all the requirements needed to transition to secondary school, in this case, by being

literate as indicated by passing the Grade Four Literacy Test. But what of the experiential values of the word "certified"? The results from the query search "certified" on the British National Corpus (http://bnc.bl.uk/saraWeb.php?qy=certified) show that being "certified" carries with it the connotation of having official status. Within the context of the CBT a student who is "certified literate" then is officially recognized as being able to read and write which in turn is a form of bureaucratic control of the literate identities of students (Fairclough, 2001; Foucault, 1999).

The concept of rebranding literacy echoes Brandt's (2001) argument that literacy is like a resource. That is to say, literacy like a commodity can be re-packaged, promoted and sold to the public. Indeed, with its institutional power the Ministry of Education, as a sponsor of literacy, could "rebrand" literacy as a means of building consensus for the changes they made to the Grade Four Literacy Test. And as I will demonstrate in a later section, Education minister Andrew Holness put time into making media appearances in order to promote the revised Grade Four Literacy Test so that the ministry's efforts received valuable media attention.

The phrase 'focal point' was also repeated in the media (Henry, 2008; Literacy our main focus - minister," 2008; MOE, 2009b) and showed the extent to which the discourse/Discourse of the Education ministry was infiltrating the *Conversations* about education in the newsprint. Additionally, by making the Grade Four Literacy Test "a critical focal point" of primary education, the Ministry of Education was signaling its intention to shift focus away from the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) to the Grade Four Literacy Test in order to improve literacy. Up until 2008 only the GSAT exam was a national high-stakes exam. By 2009 the G4LT was to become the second nationalized exam at the primary level.

Neither the term "accountability" nor "bilingual" are mentioned in the CBT document, although "assessment" is used and the term "competence" dominates the text. The exclusion of the word "bilingual" is explainable when one considers that bilingual

instruction is a politically contentious issue in Jamaica (Christie, 2003; Minister urges care in use of Creole in schools," 2000). However, one must wonder why "accountability" is not mentioned? And how are "assessment" and "competence" written about in the document? One explanation for the exclusion of the term "accountability" in the CBT document is that this draft policy is a short and exclusive document focused on testing, in contrast to the Education task force report (2004) which explored broader issues of managing the school system and improving overall student performance via accountability.

Another explanation is that the authors *presupposed*, or took as common knowledge the link between the contents of the CBT document and issues related to accountability. Fairclough (2001) articulates the point that "discourses and texts which occur within them have histories…and the interpretation of intertextual context is a matter of deciding which series a text belongs to, and therefore what can be taken as common ground for participants, or presupposed" (p. 127). Further, Fairclough (2001) points out that sometimes presuppositions "make a general appeal to background knowledge" (p.128). In the case of the CBT document, I argue that the authors assume that their readers (those within the Ministry of Education) are cued into the accountability agenda that undergirds this policy draft regarding the nationalized G4LT such that accountability no longer needs to be mentioned.

Textual clues, particularly, how the words assessment and competence are described in this document is telling. For example, whenever the word "assessment" is used in a sentence, it often collocates or co-occurs with the words "diagnosis" or "special needs." In other words, in the CBT document "assessment" is associated with testing students with literacy difficulties and not necessarily related to ongoing classroom evaluation of students' work. The term "competence", too, is historically associated with Minimum Competence Testing that was popular in the United States in the 1970s (Jaeger, 1989; Linn, 2000) and which sought to ensure that secondary students had mastered the

basics. Within the CBT document, however, *competence* is collocated both with "minimum acceptable standards after 4 years of exposure to primary schooling" (Morris et al., 2008, p.8) and with "gifted" and "talented" students. Nevertheless, because the term *competence* is rooted in the historical paradigm of testing, and the general thrust of the CBT document promotes external examinations through a national G4LT, I argue that this document belongs within the test-taking accountability ideology.

I conclude this section by suggesting that between 1999 and 2008 the textual discourse at the institution level of the Ministry of Education had changed. Previously the discourse of classroom-based assessment alongside the importance of honoring the bilingual context of Jamaica was embraced by the Education ministry. This was evident in the Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999) and the Language Education Policy (2001). With time, however, this rhetoric shifted to reflect the growing global trend of an accountability ideology rooted in high-stakes testing as embraced in both the Education task force report (2004) and more recently the Competence-based transition policy draft (2008).

Discourse at the societal and situational levels

By the time the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) came into power in September 2007, the context was ripe for nationalizing the Grade Four Literacy Test. At the institutional level, as described above, the Discourse was infused with accountability rhetoric, while at the societal level the public was still dissatisfied with the level of student performance ("Hold the celebration," 2008; Pinnock, 2009; Ritch, 2004). Rather than re-invent the wheel, the Ministry of Education under the new leadership of Education minister Andrew Holness built on the work of the Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999) and the Education task force report (2004). The Competence-based transition policy (2008) finally cemented the recommendation (which was suggested in the Education task force report) that the G4LT be changed to a national exam. The public, at this time, continued

to complain about the education system. Below is a list of a few newspaper headlines between 2004 and 2009 which depict the sense of dissatisfaction at the state of education. These articles were selected from 209 *Gleaner* and *Observer* articles that I collected during the course of the study which focused on the negative perceptions of literacy performance in schools.

Media house (date)	**News article title**
Gleaner (October 12, 2004)	*"Disturbing trend": Henry-Wilson not happy with grade four reading results*
Gleaner (June 5, 2007)	*Still illiterate! Teachers claim grade four reading programme has failed*
Observer (July 1, 2007)	*Grade 4 kids at risk*
Observer (November 29, 2007)	*New Grade Four Literacy Test coming*
Observer (June 24, 2008)	*Education system inefficient, wasteful, says educator*
Gleaner (September 14, 2009)	*Education deficiencies laid bare*

Table 11. Titles of newspaper articles indicating poor literacy performance.

These titles promoted a doomsday message about literacy in the nation. Indeed, the word "disturbing", which was reported as a direct quote from Education Minister Senator Maxine Henry-Wilson[31], sent a powerful message about literacy at the primary level in 2004 (Mitchell & Francis, 2004). As such, a plan needed to be implemented as the public was becoming impatient with the continued state of affairs in education as indicated by the other headline "Still illiterate!" published in 2007 (Peterson & Rose, 2007). Therefore, I argue that when Andrew Holness was selected under the new JLP

[31] Burchell Whiteman was Minister of Education from 1993-2002 while Maxine Henry-Wilson was the Minister of Education from 2002-2007 – both during the People's National Party Government. Andrew Holness became the Minister of Education in 2007 under the Jamaica Labour Party government.

government in 2007 to head the Ministry of Education, there was little resistance to his recommendation to revise the G4LT to a national high-stakes exam. Given the power/authority of the MOE to effect changes within the education system there was a foregone conclusion that the GL4T would be changed regardless of dissenting voices.

This is not to say that there was unanimous consensus regarding the revised G4LT; quite to the contrary. Some members of the educational community resisted. There were principals, teachers and individuals who believed that a better approach to meeting the literacy needs at the primary level was to promote more effective literacy teaching at the basic school level (kindergarten). Excerpts from the following Letter of the Day published in the *Gleaner* newspaper in June 2009 by a teacher and literacy specialist is such an example. In the letter, *Arrest literacy problems early*, author T. Morris commends the Ministry of Education for focusing on literacy, but argues that intervention should start earlier at grade one rather than grade four. In order to bolster her argument the author asks four poignant questions addressed to the Education ministry:

> If these students can be identified from as early as age six – grade one – why should we wait until grade four to address the problem? Why wait until grade four when research has shown that students who leave grade one as poor readers are more likely to also leave grade four as poor readers?.... Again, this is commendable, but what is done to ensure that special programmes are actually put in place for these students? Why not have these students resit the grade one inventory until they are certified ready for grade one? (T. Morris, 2009).

Efforts to resist the transformation of the G4LT from a classroom-based test to a nationalized high stakes test were few. As in the case of the aforementioned article, the majority of complaints against the Education ministry's literacy strategy questioned its decision to focus on upper elementary rather than earlier grades (Douglas, 2007; Graham, 2008; Johnson, 2009). Perhaps too, consensus in support of the changes to the G4LT was already built from the institutional level of the Ministry of Education and had now filtered down to the societal level through the *Conversations* of the media houses. As I

will detail later, the new Education minister, Andrew Holness, pursued a very public persona in an effort to boost the idea of improving literacy especially by focusing on the G4LT. To a large extent, then, there was little resistance to the decision to make the G4LT a national exam.

Momentum was building for the revised G4LT. One year before the literacy test was nationalized, the *Jamaica Information Service* (*JIS*), the government media house, published an article on its website with the headline *Children must be certified as literate and numerate to sit GSAT* (*JIS*, 2008c). In this article the Education minister, Andrew Holness, outlined the Ministry's new focus on literacy and the consequences for those not achieving mastery on the G4LT. A year later on January 20, 2009 the *JIS* published another article from the Ministry of Education entitled *Education ministry holds consultations on implementing new literacy policy* (*JIS*, 2009) In the opening paragraph it stated that the MOE was drafting a new policy, the Competence-based transition policy, which "sought to regulate the movement of students from the primary level of the school system to the secondary level" by ensuring that students who enter secondary school are "certified literate". In the final paragraph it was noted that starting January 19th the Education ministry would be "discussing the details of the new policy with principals, school boards, teachers, parents and other stakeholders across the country."

One of the repeated phrases of this new Discourse about the revised G4LT was the notion that students were to be "certified literate". In the article *Education ministry holds consultations on implementing new literacy policy* the phrase "certified literate", is repeated three times. The three sentences from the article are as follows:

> The 'Competence-based Transition' Policy' will be implemented to ensure that all children progressing to the Secondary Level are certified literate.
>
> Students who achieve mastery on the literacy test will be certified literate and will qualify to sit the GSAT in 2011.

> In addition, the Alternate Secondary Education Programme (ASEP) will be introduced to cater to children who are not certified literate.

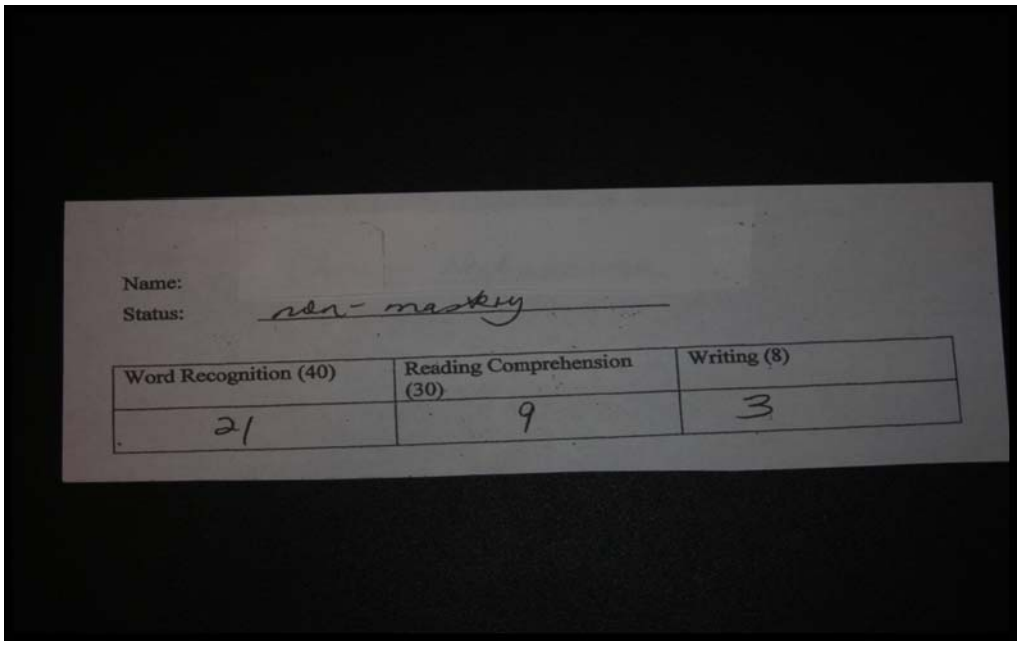
In the first sentence there is inter-textual reference to the government document, the CBT policy, which uses the language of certification as discussed earlier. The second and third sentences refer respectively to those students who master the G4LT and qualify to take the GSAT to enter secondary school, and those students who fail the literacy test. Literacy as measured by the Grade Four Literacy Test, then, is constructed as a critical asset in a student's school experience and as a significant regulator of children's educational progress. On the one hand, this appears to be a reasonable proposal given the significance of literacy (Brandt, 2001) and the problem of student promotion based solely on age regardless of how students were performing. On the other hand, this proposed system of tracking students can become problematic if those students who are "not certified literate" are consistently from the same social demographic - Creole-speaking boys from rural or inner-city schools. To this extent, the already two-tiered Jamaican education system will be perpetuated with one set of students sitting GSAT and another set attending the ASEP programs.

When I interviewed the senior literacy supervisor in November 2009 and enquired about the Education ministry's idea to have students certified as literate she said the following comments which appear in my field notes:

> Plans for literacy certificates [are] not in effect yet. Students will get something, a certificate or slip. What it will look like I cannot say. Something that they [the students] can refer to in later years (Field notes, 11.04.09)

Indeed, when I asked the principals at the two schools if the students received a literacy certificate, they informed me that the Ministry had not given the schools any certificates. At St. Alphonso the principal made a make-shift slip which she used as a sort of certificate to give to the students (see Figure 5). Whether or not literacy certificates will be printed in the future, the point has been made through the Education ministry's discourse of certification, that literacy will play a crucial part of a child's

education in terms of access to secondary education. One of the implications, therefore, of the new G4LT is that literacy may now be linked to an official document thereby increasing its value as a social good, that is, "anything that a group of people believes to be a source of power, status, value, or worth" (Gee, 2005, p.2). This is not to say that literacy in and of itself is not valued, as Brandt (2001) clearly states that literacy skill like wealth "is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially grants its seekers" (p.5). But I would argue that through certification, one's literacy status may now have the added value of official documentation.


Name:
Status: non-mastery

Word Recognition (40)	Reading Comprehension (30)	Writing (8)
21	9	3

Figure 4. A copy of Charlie's literacy certificate given to him by the principal of St. Alphonso.

Public awareness and public support

In all four government documents (the Literacy Improvement Initiative, the Language Education Policy, the Education task force report, and the Competence-based transition policy) stakeholder involvement was prioritized. In other words, governments know that for any policy to be effective there must be some degree of consensus. Fairclough (2001) argues that modern day governments rule by consent rather than coercion and that consent is manufactured via ideology which is reflected in discourse/Discourse. The senior literacy supervisor, Mrs. Hammond, mentioned that the ministry was working towards increasing public awareness about the importance of literacy: "from the farmer in the field to the man sitting in parliament" there needs to be an awareness of the importance of literacy (Field notes, 7.14.09). Another high level ministry official, Dr. Levy, whom I interviewed also mentioned that the Education ministry was spearheading a public literacy campaign in which minister Andrew Holness was dialoguing with private sector organizations 'to pitch support for the various literacy initiatives' which included financing literacy ads in the media or financing the building of literacy and numeracy enrichment centers at different schools (Field notes, 10.29.09). In fact several of the articles which featured Holness depict him at various opening ceremonies of literacy and numeracy enrichment centers. For example, in the picture below Holness is at the opening ceremony of the $5-million Rhodes Hall High School Literacy and Numeracy Resource Rooms funded by the MOE and Digicel Foundation, one of three cell phone companies in Jamaica (Cummings, 2008). Thus, through images the Ministry of Education sought to galvanize support for literacy and the revised G4LT.

Figure 5. Photograph of Education minister, Andrew Holness, at the opening ceremony of a literacy/numeracy enrichment center.

Another telling example in which the importance of public support for the revised G4LT is illustrated occurred in a *Gleaner* newspaper article, *Educating the uneducated* (Seaga, 2008). The author of the article, Edward Seaga, an icon in Jamaica's socio-political history and former Prime Minister of Jamaica under the Jamaican Labour Party, commended Holness for the work he was doing to improve literacy. In terms of structure the article is divided into three sections in which Seaga addresses primary, secondary and tertiary education. For purposes of analysis I focused on those paragraphs that related specifically to primary schooling and to Holness. While the experiential values of the wording in the first paragraph imply a critique of the former government's (PNP) approach to improving literacy, the wording of the second paragraph reflects Seaga's support of Holness's (from the JLP) literacy strategies:

> When the programme to transform the education system was published, I noted that it was so cluttered with problems to be dealt with that it would be very difficult to achieve or to show movement in finding solutions. Specific major problems should be the focus, one or two at a time, so that results could be assessed.
>
> Minister of Education Andrew Holness has made a good start with a bold plan to curb illiteracy, one of the principal problems – if not

> the principal one. Starting with illiteracy at the primary school level is convenient because Grade 4 testing is already available to show results.

In the first paragraph there is an intertextual reference to the Education task force report (2004) as indicated by the underlined phrase "the programme to transform the education system was published." Seaga collocates two negative phrases – "cluttered with problems" and "very difficult to achieve" - with the intertextual reference to the Education task force report which indicate his disapproval with the previous regime's strategy. The second paragraph is focused on the JLP's revamped G4LT, and the phrases "good start" and "bold plan" collocate with Holness's literacy strategy. Note also how the terms in the first and second paragraphs contrast. The first paragraph referring to the PNP includes the phrase "very difficult to achieve" which contrasts with "convenient" and "already available" in the second paragraph referring to the JLP's revised G4LT. By collocating certain words/phrases with the respective governments, I argue that Seaga is trying to build support for Holness and his literacy approach at the primary school level. And finally, through intertextual references to previous leaders of education reform in Jamaica, Seaga makes a final attempt to consolidate the current efforts of the JLP government as it relates to education by arguing that Holness could be "classified" as one of these great reformers:

> Minister Holness and his team have made a start and if he continues in that direction to overcome the fundamental problems, he could be classified with Ivan Lloyd, who introduced the Common Entrance Exam; Edwin Allen, who provided 70 per cent of secondary school places for primary school students and built 6 new secondary schools through World Bank financing….these have been the principal enduring landmark achievements of the reform of the education system.

Indeed, having such an iconic figure like Edward Seaga write about his expectations for Holness's education reform achievements, and comparing them to other historical education reformers is great publicity which adds even more authority to the G4LT reforms. Education minister, Andrew Holness, therefore, not only busied himself

with numerous photo opportunities at school functions to open different literacy and numeracy enrichment centers, but also had the support of a prominent political figure supporting his efforts.

As mentioned earlier Fairclough (2001) adopts a tripartite framework to discuss discourse at the level of the society, the institution and the situation. In the previous section I discussed the Discourse of the Grade Four Literacy Test at the institutional level of the Ministry of Education and at the societal level using news articles as an index of public opinion about the literacy test. My goal was to show how the textual discourse within the government documents eventually became part of the larger media Discourse about the G4LT thereby building consensus within the public's eye about the need to nationalize the literacy test. Next I briefly discuss how the discourse of the Grade Four Literacy Test influenced Discourse at the situational level in terms of how persons spoke about the test and how the test was administered.

The Grade Four Literacy Test Discourse on June 18, 2009

Between 1998 and 2008 the G4LT was administered as a local end of year school examination with summer reading camps for those students who failed the literacy test on their first attempt. In 2007 the Educational Services Division of the MOE wrote *Re-thinking the Grade four literacy summer programme* in which the authors suggested that the literacy camps be moved from the summer month of July to June during the school term in order to recruit and facilitate instruction for more students. By 2008 there were further changes in the coordination of G4LT. The G4LT was to be externally administered, externally marked and the results were to be published. Summer interventions were no longer a part of the plan. Instead, students had up to three other attempts to sit the Grade Four Literacy Test in supplemental sittings in grades five and six. Failure to pass the G4LT in grade six meant that a student would not be allowed to

sit the Grade Six Achievement Test, the exit exam for transitioning from primary to secondary school.

With all these changes, I contend that the Education ministry changed the Grade Four Literacy Test to look more like the Grade Six Achievement Exam. GSAT is externally administered and graded, the results are published, and up until 2009 was the only mechanism for assigning elementary school students to secondary school. I argue that the Education ministry has made the G4LT "significant" and "political", meaning that the revised G4LT has become valued as a new mechanism for the distribution of social goods, in this case the literacy certification needed to transition to secondary school (Gee, 2005, p. 112). In fact, the discourse of the principal and security guard at St. Alphonso, as recorded in my field notes, makes this similarity clear when they used the simile, "just like GSAT" to describe the G4LT on June 18, 2009:

> The guard man told me that no one aside from the students and the exam invigilators were to be in the test centers. No parents were allowed on the compound. In fact I witnessed the plain clothed 'guardsman' tell two parents at the gate that they could not come on the compound. No teachers and non-exam students are allowed in the test centers either. As both the guardsman and the principal said, this Grade 4 literacy test was "just like GSAT" with all these restrictions.

Changing the ways in which the G4LT is coordinated resonates with the teachers, students and the public as very similar to the GSAT exam, thereby signaling to the public the significance of literacy as an important tool in moving up the school ladder and eventually into the job market. Indeed, the sense of restriction – of who is permitted and not permitted into the test center– is all part of changing the Discourse of the once internally administered Grade Four Literacy exam to the Discourse of a nationalized G4LT. Mr. Damdar explained that before the exam was nationalized it was given as a regular end-of-year examination in which the test was administered by the students'

teachers, and marked by the teacher or a group of teachers.[32] Although students would have to be quiet and only those in the class took the test, one could argue that the internally given exam was administered in a more familiar setting with the teachers as proctors administering a test in the familiarity of the students' classrooms. This was not the case with the nationalized G4LT. Once more I was reminded of this changing Discourse as described by the head invigilator (proctor) whom I was able to interview briefly at the school during the fifty-five minute lunch break given to the test-taking students:

> He reiterated what I heard: No parents, no teachers and no non-test taking students are allowed on the block. If there is any breach he writes a comprehensive report. One student sits at a desk, and the names are in alphabetical order. The student booklets have both the student name and a number, but they have chosen to seat them in alphabetical order. (Field notes, 6.18.09)

The discourse of who is permitted and who is not is also reflected in the newspaper articles regarding the G4LT. Repeated in different news articles was the description of how students will not be permitted to sit the GSAT examination if they do not pass the G4LT by the time they reach grade six. On June 17, 2009, a day before the G4LT, the Education ministry contributed an article that was published in the *Gleaner*, *The G4 Literacy Test – focal point of primary education* (MOE, 2009b) In addition to providing the public with valuable information about the goals of the MOE for primary education, the format of the test, and provisions made for those students who fail, the wording of the article parallels the larger Discourse of restrictions that this national exam now embodies. The words of permission that are evident in this article include "accepted", "allowed", "certified", "classified" and "mastered." Of significance is that the word "mastered" is repeated eleven times in the article, and the word "certified"

[32] The Word recognition and Reading comprehension sections were previously marked by the class teacher, while the Writing task was marked by a group of teachers under the supervision of an MOE Education Officer.

collocates with literacy to indicate that literacy development now needs official/bureaucratic permission (Taylor, 1996). The following are two excerpts from the aforementioned article:

> Students who perform at an accepted level in all three sections of the test are classified as achieving mastery, while all other students fall in Non-Mastery category.
>
> The new policy direction of the Ministry of Education is that no child will be allowed to sit the GSAT until he or she is certified as literate.

The activities and discourse of the MOE, therefore, reinforce the ministry's attempt to raise public awareness about literacy. The ministry has achieved this by making the G4LT seem "just like GSAT" in the public's eyes, and by making the stakes pivotal in the transition from primary to secondary school by requiring literacy certification before a student can sit the GSAT exam.

Publishing results

Publishing the results of the Grade Four Literacy Test was also part of the strategy to build public consensus in support of the revised literacy test. In my second interview with the Senior literacy supervisor she echoed this sentiment: "The test has raised awareness of all - the private sector, public, parents - to the importance of achieving literacy especially now that the results are published in the newspaper" (Field notes, 11.4.09). On September 9, 2009 the Ministry of Education published the *Grade Four Literacy Test Results* in the *Gleaner* newspaper. The schools were listed and the percentages of those students who received mastery, or those who did not master the exam (either received 'almost mastery' or 'Non-Mastery') were listed. There were additional columns which showed the number of students sitting the exam in each school,

along with the grade four enrollment, total school enrollment, student/teacher ratio and the ranking of each school based on quintiles or tiers.[33]

Seventy percent of the grade four student population, in both public and private elementary schools, who sat the G4LT in 2009 were successful in the G4LT. Public school students attained 67% passes in the literacy test, while private school students attained 93 % passes (Luton, 2010). When I asked the senior literacy supervisor how the Education ministry felt about the results, she commented that:

> This was the first time it [the G4LT] was being externally invigilated. At first the MOE was concerned about whether there would be a drastic drop in the results. Last year (2008) it was 71% [this is when the G4LT was internally invigilated by the schools] and this year it was 67% which is a drop of only 4%. For the 'most part [MOE] encouraged, but not satisfied', there is still 33% that still need support (Field notes, 11.04.09).

Implicit in this statement is the Education ministry's concern about the trustworthiness of the literacy results when the G4LT was internally administered by the schools. Based on the narrow percentage point differences between 2008 and 2009, it appears that the marking and grading of the literacy test in the schools prior to the external administration of the exam was fair. The disparity in results between the public and private schools was large but sadly expected. This is not to say that all public schools performed poorly. Of the 792 public schools 142 schools (or 18%) performed in the fifth or highest quintile, meaning that these schools had 80% to 100% of their grade four students passing the G4LT. Neither St. Alphonso nor Bedford Primary schools were in the fifth quintile. However, both St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary schools were in the fourth percentile category, and had 78% and 69% of its grade four students passing the literacy test respectively.

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[33] Schools' performance on the G4LT was ranked according to quintiles or 20% tiers. The highest school performers were in the fifth tier having 80%-100% of their students master the G4LT, while the lowest performing students were in the first tier with only 0-20% of their students mastering the test.

Nine articles were written about the Grade Four Literacy Test results in both the *Gleaner* and *Observer* during September 2009. Mr. McDonald, a principal of a primary and junior high school and the author of the article, *Grade 4 literacy publication – the good and the bad,* pointed to the benefits of publishing the G4LT results as well as one potential danger (McDonald, 2009). He listed the benefits as follows: principals would be motivated to ensure that the literacy goals were met, the MOE would be held accountable for how the education funds were being spent, and parents would be motivated to help their children improve in their reading and writing. However, the principal went on to say that publishing the results "is bad because it will result in schools discriminating against students seeking registration in schools." Some schools, he argued, might begin to screen children and those with reading difficulties might not be accepted into a particular school, thereby enhancing the probability that the particular school will do better on subsequent literacy tests. Therefore, Mr. McDonald argued that the public cannot "judge" the performance of all schools using the same measure since some schools screen and others do not. In other words, certain schools only permit those students who are performing at a certain standard to enter their school, while other schools accept all students regardless of the student's learning profile.

In contrast to Mr. McDonald's letter to the editor, the writers at the *Gleaner* company wrote an editorial[34] which promoted a clear accountability agenda ("Bedford's case for accountability," 2009). One of the prominent discourse features of this editorial, *Bedford Primary's case for accountability*, was its intertextual link to a letter written by another principal, Mrs. Carr of Bedford Primary School (one of the case study schools). Similar to Mr. McDonald's letter, Mrs. Carr lauded her teachers for their hard work in supporting students to do well in the G4LT, and picked up on the issue of screening.

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[34] In order to preserve the anonymity of the case study school I have changed the titles of the articles involving Bedford Primary and changed other identifiable information in the citation.

However, the author of the editorial used Mrs. Carr's article, *Challenges and victory for Bedford Primary*, to build a case for the benefits of "performance-based rewards for teachers" (Carr, 2009). The editor accomplished this by directly quoting Mrs. Carr and re-interpreting it as evidence to support performance rewards for teachers: "…There is no excuse for schools not doing well," she wrote. Not even ours!" A closer comparison of the editorial and the letter, however, shows acute thematic differences between the two. Below is a table showing the distinction in discourse between the two newspaper articles as it relates to the representation of teachers and the definition of literacy success.

Word	**Editorial**	**Mrs. Carr's letter**
Teacher	"…the JTA's [Jamaica Teachers Association] cacophony against teacher accountability and performance-based remuneration and/or rewards"	"Kudos to the many teachers, like mine, who go beyond the call of duty to not only live up to the expectations of national assessment programmes, but to prepare our students to make sense of the very disorderly, disappointing world in which they live and are expected to learn"
Success	"It can't be all that difficult to establish reference points and to formulate appropriate measures, which Mrs. Carr suggests should be the case, to test outcomes. Indeed, such a system will be inevitable if Mr. Andrew Holness, the education minister, is to meet his target of full literacy at grade four by 2015."	"My personal victory is not exactly in the full mastery students, they were foreseen. I rejoice, however, for those who gained Near Mastery!" I encourage my staff to use data to instruct them, and to motivate themselves. If they are able to move a student from one grade level to another at the end of the year, they have achieved."

Table 12. Quotes from two newspaper articles related to Bedford Primary.

There are two important points when one compares these articles. First, the *Gleaner* editorial portrays teachers as resistant to performance pay which the author translates as defiant of accountability standards. Hence, the author argues that teachers in turn may undermine the goal of achieving100% literacy at the grade four level in 2015.

In contrast Mrs. Carr recognizes the hard work and professionalism of her teachers, and points to a broader role for teachers as not only preparing students to pass the national assessment tests but also preparing students for life. According to Mrs. Carr, education is more than passing a test, but also enabling students to live successfully in the world. As such, she encourages teachers to use necessary data to inform their decision. Therefore, while literacy is an important asset or tool, Mrs. Carr implies that educating children cannot necessarily be captured by a single test score as teachers "go beyond the call of duty" to prepare students to make sense of the world. Second, both articles differ in the definition of literacy success. Whereas achievement in reading and writing is linked specifically to the Grade Four Literacy Test in the editorial article, Mrs. Carr expands the notion of literacy success to include incremental improvement, that is, those students who may not have attained mastery in the G4LT but who "gained Near Mastery" or those students who moved "from one grade level to another at the end of the year."

Concluding remarks

The policy intentions regarding a nationalized Grade Four Literacy Test came to fruition on June 18, 2009 when thousands of Jamaican grade four students sat the first national Grade Four Literacy Test. From 1999 to 2008 the G4LT was administered as classroom-based assessment. However, that changed in 2009 shortly after a new party came to power in 2007 and a new Education Minister, Andrew Holness, sought to make his mark on Jamaica's education system. The media also played a pivotal role in distributing this new G4LT Discourse and a range of *Conversations* regarding literacy performance and accountability gathered momentum as the most effective means of ensuring improved literacy performance. In the next chapter, Chapter V, I describe how two schools responded to the changes that came along with this new nationalized G4LT.

CHAPTER V

SITUATIONAL LEVEL DISCOURSE SURROUNDING THE GRADE FOUR LITERACY TEST

Having discussed the Grade Four Literacy Test Discourse at the institutional and societal levels, I now turn attention to the situational context of two case study schools, St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary schools. As a reminder, Fairclough examines discourse using a three-tiered system of the situational, institutional and societal levels. He describes the situational level as the social spaces within which individuals interact with each other in relationships shaped by Discourse. Within this study, the schools are at the situational level. The pivotal question that I explore in this chapter is: What did schools do to prepare the students who failed the nationalized Grade Four Literacy Test in June 2009 and had to retake the test in December 2009? In response to this question, I first describe each school, and provide portraits of students who failed the Grade Four Literacy Test followed by a description of how teachers from St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary[35] schools supported students who had to retake the literacy test. I conclude with a summary of a few of the challenges faced by the schools in terms of literacy teaching and an example of one teacher who provided effective literacy lessons.

St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary Schools

Both St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary are public schools that are located near inner-city communities. St. Alphonso has a larger student population than Bedford Primary and therefore has a larger teaching staff. The majority of the teachers in both schools are trained, with either a diploma, degree in primary education or a Masters in Education. The parents of the students who attend the schools have low skilled or

[35] The names of all the schools, teachers, students and other participants are pseudonyms.

skilled jobs, and in some cases are unemployed[36]. Approximately 14-20 % of the students in both schools receive free and reduced cost lunch. On June 18, 2009 approximately 151 students from St. Alphonso and 71 pupils from Bedford Primary sat for the G4LT. At that time the students were in grade four but during the course of the research study those same students were all promoted, regardless of their results, to grade five as of September 2009. St. Alphonso had 78% of their students receive Mastery on the G4LT, while Bedford Primary had 69% of their students who passed. Both schools performed above the national literacy average of 67% for public elementary schools. Table 13 summarizes key attributes of the two case study schools.

Descriptor	**St. Alphonso Primary**	**Bedford Primary**
Population	871	506
Teachers	32	18
Teacher qualification	Diploma, Bachelors, Masters. 1 untrained teacher.	Diploma, Bachelor. 3 pursuing Bachelors.
Other staff	10	15
Free/reduced lunch (%)	14%	20%
Jobs of parents	Maids, vendors, teachers, unemployed	Maids, masons, office attendants, unemployed
Grade 5 population by gender	155 = 81 girls + 74 boys	81 = 37 girls + 44 boys
# who took G4LT	151	71
% Non-Mastery on G4LT	6%	7%
% Near Mastery on G4LT	16%	24%
% Mastery on G4LT	78%	69%

Table 13. Overview of St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary Schools.

[36] Most of the parents are employed as low-skilled workers who earn the minimum wage which is $4070 JMD per week or approximately $ 48 USD per week (with an exchange rate of $1 USD for $ 85 JMD). See http://www.mlss.gov.jm/pub/index.php?artid=48.

St. Alphonso Primary School

St. Alphonso Primary School is a Roman Catholic school which receives government support in the form of salaries, and money for the maintenance of school buildings. It was established in 1967, five years after Jamaica received independence from Great Britain. The school is located near a major main road which is strewn with potholes and many small shops selling basic dry goods (such as tin/canned foods, flour, and rice). This main street is also populated with bars, houses, and unused business buildings. One has to turn off from the main road onto a smaller road to get to St. Alphonso Primary School. Located on this narrow road are the school compound, and rows of homes in need of fresh paint and other repairs. Residents who live at the top of this small road often have feuds with persons who live at the bottom of the road because of disputes between young men over turf. Some of the vendors that sell food at the gate of the school reside in the homes along this lane.

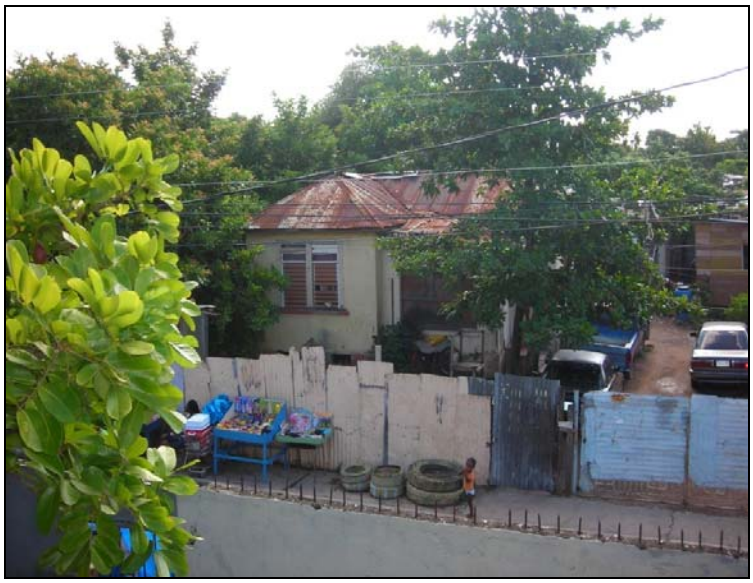

Figure 6. Community surrounding St. Alphonso Primary School.

As you enter St. Alphonso Primary School you come across the first quadrangle and see the Roman Catholic Church of the same name, and the kindergarten. After leaving this first quadrangle you then enter through a narrow gate and come to the second quadrangle. A set of two story blue buildings which house classrooms, the school's canteen, library, teachers' lounge, and a stage are all located in this area. Further down past a huge tree there is another set of two-story buildings, this time painted in brown. This building houses the office, the computer room, the reading resource room and a few other lower grade classes on the bottom floor. On the second floor are the grade four and five classrooms.

Figure 7. Grade 5 block (second floor) at St. Alphonso Primary School.

Focus teachers at St. Alphonso Primary School

I profile two teachers, Mrs. Payne and Mrs. Tennant. Mrs. Payne was in her fifties but looked much younger with not a strand of grey hair noticeable in her shoulder-length sister-locks. She had been a teacher for twenty-two years but was teaching grade 5 for the first time since September 2009, having taught other grades at the school. At the time of the study Mrs. Payne had a Masters in Literacy Studies from a local university which she obtained in 2006. In addition to being a grade five classroom teacher, Mrs. Payne was also responsible for coordinating the literacy lessons for the entire grade five block and preparing the Near Mastery students to retake the December supplementary literacy test. There were thirty-eight students in her classroom of which seven students were retaking the G4LT. Below is a photograph of Mrs. Payne's language arts corner which has a Question-Author-Reader chart, other language arts posters, and some books.

Figure 8. Language arts corner in Mrs. Payne's classroom, St. Alphonso Primary School.

Mrs. Tennant was the remedial reading teacher for the entire school. She was in her sixties and occupied her own small classroom near the principal's office. A petite lady, she wore glasses, and was quick to initiate a conversation with any adult. Mrs. Tennant taught for thirty-two years, having earned a First degree in Special Education from a local university. She taught at St. Alphonso for seventeen years, most of which was in the capacity of the remedial/resource room teacher. Mrs. Tennant prepared the Non-mastery students to retake the G4LT in December 2009. She had nine Non-mastery students – eight boys and one girl. Below is the picture of her classroom.

Figure 9. Mrs. Tennant's resource room, St. Alphonso Primary School.

The focus students at St. Alphonso Primary School

All students selected for the study had returned to me signed permission slips from their parents. The students willingly agreed to participate in the study after a brief discussion of the Assent form which I was obligated to read to them upon receiving the parent slip. Of the 155 grade five students at St. Alphonso I selected four focal students: two students (one boy and one girl) who were in the Non-Mastery reading category; one male student who was in the Near Mastery group; and a fourth female student who had received Mastery[37] on the literacy test. While the students who struggled with their reading were selected based on the teacher's recommendations (students had to be fairly talkative and also be retaking the literacy test), the choice of the Mastery student was based on student selection. During one of the student interviews, I asked each of the struggling readers to choose someone in their class whom they thought was a good reader. Based on their recommendations, I selected a student who achieved Mastery on the literacy test.

Below is a table of the four focus students followed by a portrait of Charlie and Yanike. Both started in the Non-Mastery reading group, but Yanike was able to improve her reading and in October started attending the Near Mastery reading group.

Student name	**Sex**	**Age**	**G4LT results**	**Reading teacher**
Charlie	Male	10	Non-mastery	Mrs. Tennant
Yanike	Female	10	Non-mastery	Tennant/Payne
Gary	Male	10	Near Mastery	Mrs. Payne
Sherene	Female	10	Mastery	Other teacher

Table 14. Four students from St. Alphonso selected to participate in study.

[37] I decided to select a student who was in the Mastery reading group in order to highlight students in the school who were also successful readers since I selected the school on the basis that it was an inner-city primary school that had improved in literacy over time.

Charlie is a talkative 10 year old boy who lived with his grandmother and other relatives. His father lived abroad and his mother resided in another community. He attended the **Non-Mastery** reading group at 9 a.m. from Monday to Friday with Mrs. Tennant. Charlie failed all three components of the G4LT: 53% for word recognition, 30% for comprehension and 38% for the writing task. His class teacher, Mrs. Payne, commented that his comprehension was better verbally than in writing. She also added that Charlie had improved a lot in writing and that previously he was known as a "non-reader" but has come [a long way]. She also stressed that nothing was wrong with him mentally but he needed constant intervention which he was not receiving in the earlier grades. So now he is in grade 5 and is way behind (Field notes, 11.4.09). When I interviewed Charlie about the literacy test he took on June 18, 2009 he mentioned that he felt both *"gud"* and *"norvos"* when taking the test. He said the hard part of the literacy test was the *"riiding paat"* [he felt "good" and "nervous" when taking the test. He said the hard part of the literacy test was the "reading part"] (Interview, 11.04.09).

Yanike was a shy ten year old girl who lived with her parents and older siblings. Initially she attended the **Non-Mastery** reading group with Mrs. Tennant, but by October she was promoted to the Near Mastery reading group with Mrs. Payne who was also her class teacher. Yanike failed all sections of the G4LT: 62.5% in word recognition, 37% in comprehension and 38% in writing. Mrs. Payne told me that Yanike had "come a far way" as in grade three she would have described Yanike as a "non-reader." Now with help Yanike is more interested in reading, and her writing is better than it used to be. Previously, Yanike needed constant reminders about spelling and letter sounds. Yanike thought the word recognition section of the G4LT was easy but found the rest of the exam difficult: *"It woz hard…I neva nuow houw to spel som af di wordz"* [It was hard…I did not know how to spell some of the words"] (Interview, 11.4.09).

Bedford Primary School

Bedford Primary School is a government school which was established in 1921,[38] forty-one years before Jamaica's Independence. The school is situated near two main roads where government buildings and one of the more prominent private (preparatory) schools are located. Yet, despite its close location to these government buildings, the immediate environment largely consists of residential houses in need of paint and repair with overgrown lawns. The streets that surround the school (see below) are as narrow as lanes and are actually one way streets; only one car can pass at a time. Right outside the school's gate are the vendors that sell bag juice[39], cheese snacks, other food items and toys to the school children during lunch time.

Figure 10. Community surrounding Bedford Primary School.

[38] The principal, Mrs. Carr, mentioned that there was uncertainty about the date the school was established.

[39] Bag juice is a drink, made of syrup and water that is sold in a small clear plastic bag.

As you enter Bedford Primary you come across a tall gate with high walls on which are painted the school crest and motto. If the gate is closed with a chained padlock, then an old gentleman will open it for you. From the gate you make a beeline straight to the office, past the very tall Shower of Gold tree. Similar to St. Alphonso the school yard is an asphalted quadrangle where the children play and have school devotions. There are three sets of buildings, all painted in yellow and blue forming a U-shape. Two buildings are three stories high and house the school's office and bathrooms on the first floor, and the classrooms on the second and third floors. The grade five classes like most of the upper elementary grades are located on the third floor. Opposite the grade five block is a set of one storey buildings which include the library, guidance counseling room, kitchen, drama room and canteen. Each morning, during data collection, I would enter the office and sign a visitor's log book and take a visitor number tag in keeping with what the principal of Bedford Primary had requested of me.

Figure 11. Inside Bedford Primary School. Grade 5 block on third floor (top left corner).

The focus teachers at Bedford Primary School

Ms. Thwaites was in her twenties and slender with short hair often pulled back into a ponytail. She was a novice teacher having taught for only one year at a private elementary school. Now she was teaching grade five for the first time at Bedford Primary. At the time of the study, Ms. Thwaites was also pursuing her First Degree in primary education, having recently completed a three year Diploma in the same field. Initially, when I went to Bedford Primary, the principal said I would work with Mr. Scott. However, one month into the school term the grade five supervisor reorganized the students so that Ms. Thwaites had all of the students who were retaking the Grade Four Literacy Test in December 2009. Of the 39 students in her class, 28 were repeating the literacy test. In the end I worked with Ms. Thwaites for the rest of the study. Figure 12 is a picture of her classroom showing the reading corner with charts and books.

Figure 12. Language arts corner in Ms. Thwaites's classroom, Bedford Primary School.

Mr. Scott was in his late twenties, about 5'5" tall and had a few gray hairs. He had taught at the school for seven-plus years. It was his second year teaching grade five. Previously, he was the grade six teacher preparing the students for the GSAT exam and wanted a break from the intensity involved in exam preparation, hence his decision to teach grade five. He had a certificate in physical education, a diploma in primary education and a first degree in the same area. He had forty-six students, of which four were temporarily transferred to Ms. Thwaites' class which was preparing to retake the literacy test in December 2009. Because I spent less time in Mr. Scott's class I did not take any pictures of his classroom.

The focus students at Bedford Primary School

As at St. Alphonso all students selected for the study from Bedford Primary had returned to me signed permission slips and willingly agreed to participate in the study after a brief discussion of the Assent form which I was obligated to read to them. Of the 81 students in grade five I selected three[40] students for the study based on teacher recommendations which were in keeping with my criteria that students had to be repeating the literacy test, and were somewhat talkative. All of these students selected for the study were boys. Two boys were in the Near Mastery group meaning that they had failed either one or two components of the literacy test and were retaking the G4LT in December 2009. The third male student had received Mastery in the literacy test having passed all three sections. This pupil was selected based on his peers' recommendations in response to naming good readers.

[40] Initially I selected four students but I received conflicting reports about the performance of one student on the G4LT and so I omitted this student from the study.

Below is a chart of all three focus students, followed by a brief portrait of Benjamin who was categorized as reading at the Near Mastery level on the G4LT.

Student name	**Sex**	**Age**	**G4LT results**	**Reading teacher**
Benjamin	Male	10	Near Mastery	Ms. Thwaites
Tarik	Male	10	Near Mastery	Ms. Thwaites
Anthony	Male	10	Mastery	No reading class

Table 15. Students from Bedford Primary School selected to participate in the study.

> **Benjamin** is a ten year old boy who lives with his mother and other siblings. He attained **Near Mastery** in the G4LT, meaning that he failed one or two sections of the test. Benjamin failed the comprehension and writing sections. He scored 88% in the word recognition section, 33% in comprehension and 38% in the writing task. Ms. Thwaites told me that Benjamin was poor in reading, comprehension and writing. She added that Benjamin was not able to write a story on his own and his sentence construction was weak. When I asked Benjamin about the G4LT he told me that he did not finish: *"I put a sentens bot I didn't finish it bot truu mai hand woz taird"* ["I wrote a sentence but I didn't finish it because my hand was tired"]. Perhaps, this excuse was a coping mechanism for Benjamin's difficulty in completing the test. In my observations I noticed that Benjamin memorized chunks of text in order to pass as being a good reader (Interview, 11.05.09).

Students who were unsuccessful in the June 18, 2009 Grade Four Literacy Test

Under the Ministry of Education's new plan for the Grade Four Literacy Test students would have up to four chances to sit the test – once in grade four, twice in grade five, and once in grade six before the Grade Six Achievement Test. Only those students who are "certified literate" on either the first, second, third or fourth attempts will be able to sit GSAT, "the much sought-after ticket to a higher education and a better life" ("It's not about GSAT," 2008). Those students who failed the literacy test on all four attempts would repeat grade six and then be transitioned to a high school's Alternate Secondary

Education Programme (ASEP). The ASEP would have a specialized curriculum which in some areas would be different from that of the mainstream high school. This reorganization raises a number of questions, but one that I explore is: How do schools assist their students who failed the Grade Four Literacy Test in June 2009 to retake the test in December 2009 given the significance of the literacy test as the basis upon which students' transition from primary to secondary school? At St. Alphonso[41] the grade five teachers implemented what I called a 9 a.m. reading session. Bedford Primary had a literacy development class most mornings for the students who had to repeat the literacy exam. Throughout this next section I will provide anecdotes from my field notes of classroom observations of the 9 a.m. reading session at St. Alphonso and the literacy development classes at Bedford Primary. I begin with a description of how St. Alphonso supported its struggling readers, and then how Bedford Primary devised its own strategy.

I examined these observations using constructs from Critical Discourse Analysis to illuminate several major themes which are discussed in a subsequent section. In analyzing data from my classroom observations of the Non-Mastery and near- mastery reading sessions I blended approaches by Fairclough (2001) and Gee (2005). At the situational level Fairclough uses schema to refer to "a representation of a particular type of activity in terms of predictable elements in a predictable sequence" (p. 131). In the literacy sessions at St. Alphonso there are predictable patterns: students from each grade five class go to specific teachers depending on their reading level, there is a lesson activity focused on reading and writing, and students return to their respective classrooms. Similarly, at Bedford there was a certain pattern to the literacy development

[41] Both schools implemented other literacy intervention strategies/programs. As mentioned both schools were part of the USAID's New Horizon and Expanding Education Horizon projects which in part focused on literacy. Mrs. Payne was also influential in establishing the Knowledge Center at St. Alphonso which focused on providing literacy enrichment classes for students experiencing difficulties in reading and writing. Mrs. Payne arranged for students to go on field trips and write journal entries about their experiences.

classes: Ms. Thwaites would begin the class by asking students to stretch their limbs, recite a poem, after which she would introduce the topic, ask the students questions, demonstrate the activity and have the students complete a literacy task on their own.

However, Fairclough's approach does not provide sufficient details about schemata, and so I pulled on three of Gee's building tasks – activity, sign systems and social goods – to help analyze each schema or lesson activity. Based on these three building tasks I modified four of Gee's questions to ask the following: *What actions comprise this schema or lesson activity? What sub-activities make up this schema? What types of knowledge are relevant here? Assuming that literacy is a social good, how is it made relevant in this particular schema?* Recall that according to Gee (2005) a social good is "anything that a group of people believes to be a source of power, status, value, or worth" (p. 2). Answering these questions for each literacy schema – Mrs. Tennant's lesson on blends; Mrs. Payne's poem and crossword puzzle activities; Mr. Scott's comprehension lesson; Ms. Thwaites comprehension and writing lessons - provided a useful way to organize the data and address one of my research questions: What did schools do to prepare the students who failed the nationalized Grade Four Literacy Test in June 2009 and had to retake the test in December 2009? More specifically, in what ways did the G4LT Discourse change the structure, content and speech of the teachers as they prepared students to retake the literacy test?

St. Alphonso's literacy support approach

On most mornings at 9 a.m. the grade five students at St. Alphonso were grouped according to their reading abilities for forty-five minutes of reading and writing instruction. All students went to these reading sessions from Mondays to Thursdays, with the exception of Fridays when only those students who were in the Non-Mastery reading group had to attend a fifth session on Fridays. All students were grouped according to different reading levels based on the results of the Grade Four Literacy Test

and the Mico Diagnostic Reading test which the teachers administered at each grade. Thus, there were five different reading groups: Non-Mastery for those students who failed all three components of the G4LT, and a near-mastery group for those who failed one or two components of the G4LT. The teachers at St. Alphonso then used the Mico Diagnostic Reading test to further organize those students who had mastered the G4LT into another set of reading levels. There were mastery students who were reading at grades 2, 3, or 4 levels according to the Mico Diagnostic Reading test who went to one teacher. A second set of mastery students who were reading at grades 5 and 6 levels went to the grade five supervisor, Mrs. White; and finally a third set of mastery students who were reading at grades 7 and 8 levels went to a third teacher. Table 16 on the following page shows the different 9 a.m. reading groups at St. Alphonso.

Mrs. White, the grade five supervisor, and Mrs. Radcliffe, the principal, reported that the 9 a.m. reading session was the brainchild of two teachers in grade one. I interviewed one of those teachers, Mrs. Black, now the grade two supervisor, who informed me that the idea of the 9 a.m. reading session began in 2004 when the grade one teachers noticed that the students were not reading well. The teachers then decided that each day in the morning for about an hour they would divide the entire group of students into different literacy groups according to their reading abilities. When they assessed the students after one year the students did "marvelously" (Interview, 11.03.09). This teacher-led intervention was eventually adopted by the grade five teachers who divided the grade five students according to the reading levels of the G4LT and Mico Diagnostic Reading Test.

Of all the reading groups Mrs. Tennant's was the most consistent in contrast to the Near Mastery and mastery reading group sessions which were sometimes cancelled. I experienced four cancellations of the Near Mastery reading sessions during the time of the study when I had hoped to observe these sessions - October 7th, October 8th, October 12th, and October 26th. On two occasions the Near Mastery and mastery reading sessions

were cancelled because teachers had personal matters to attend to during the morning. On another occasion, however, there was a cancellation because Mrs. Payne had to discipline a student who had stolen another student's cell phone. This involved driving to his home to retrieve the phone which took up all the lesson time. In the fourth incident the Near Mastery and mastery reading sessions were cancelled because of a flare up of community violence. On that morning I witnessed about six to ten young men walking up and down the quiet street on which the school is located. This was not a typical occurrence. I heard Mrs. Payne tell her students to sit quietly and put their heads on the desk. Earlier in the morning it appeared that someone was shot and killed in the vicinity. By contrast, Mrs. Tennant could almost always continue her Non-Mastery literacy sessions because she had no students of her own to supervise since she was the remedial reading teacher. The other teachers, unfortunately, did not have the benefit of a substitute teacher.

Reading level	**Level based on**	**Reading teacher**	**Reading sessions**
Non-mastery	G4LT	Mrs. Tennant	9 a.m. daily
Near-mastery	G4LT	Mrs. Payne	9 a.m. Mon-Thurs
Grades 2-4	Mico	Other grade 5 teacher	9 a.m. Mon-Thurs
Grades 5-6	Mico	Mrs. White	9 a.m. Mon-Thurs
Grades 7-8	Mico	Other grade 5 teacher	9 a.m. Mon-Thurs

Table 16. Literacy intervention groups at St. Alphonso Primary School.

Mrs. Tennant's Non-Mastery reading sessions

Charlie and Yanike were both in Mrs. Tennant's 9 a.m. reading session which occurred daily from Monday to Friday. At around 8:50 a.m. Charlie and Yanike and a few others from Mrs. Payne's class and other grade five classes would leave and walk along the grade five block downstairs, pass the principal's office and into Mrs. Tennant's

resource room. Mrs. Tennant's room was small with a few windows and a ceiling fan. There were many mobiles of word families hanging from the ceiling as well as charts everywhere. Once all nine children arrived she would begin the lesson. Children would sit at one of the two hexagon-shaped tables. Mrs. Tennant would have an example or instruction written on the blackboard, or she would sit with all the children at one of the hexagon-shaped desks and orally give them instructions for the reading or writing task. Students were either supplied a worksheet, or wrote in their exercise books. After finding their seats, Mrs. Tennant would introduce the lesson, provide a few examples or review the activity, then instruct the students to complete the activity. As the students worked, Mrs. Tennant would either walk around to observe what the students were doing, or have the students line up at her desk so that she could mark their work. At the end of the forty-five minute session the students would return to their respective classes.

On September 30, 2009 I observed Mrs. Tennant teaching her Non-Mastery group about blends. Word recognition forms the first part of the literacy test. Therefore Mrs. Tennant's activity on blends is an attempt to strengthen these students' phonetic skills as it is the students in the Non-Mastery category who have failed all three components of the test including the word recognition segment. Here is an excerpt from my field notes about this lesson on blends:

> Mrs. Tennant [asks the students], "If you put two letters together it will give you a…?' The students answer 'one word'. But that is not the answer that Mrs. Tennant is looking for and so she asks the question again. Eventually, one student says that two letters can give you one sound, and Mrs. Tennant tells them to clap themselves. However, she warns a student to stop clapping so loudly. Mrs. Tennant then shares a few examples for them from the worksheet of words with blends. The first example has to do with colors, such as the /gr/ in /green/ or the /br/ in /brown/. Mrs. Tennant actually has the coloured crayon in her hand as she shares this example with the students. Another example were words from musical instrument in which case Mrs. Tennant and the students all moved their hands up and down as if pretending to blow a trumpet. They all figured out the /tr/ in trumpet. After a few more examples Mrs. Tennant read the instructions aloud to the students and asked them to fill out the worksheet (Field notes, 9.30.09)

The worksheet that the students used to complete this activity was not from a copy of a Grade Four Literacy Test. However, I would argue that the activity paralleled a similar focus on word identification skills that the word recognition section of the G4LT assesses. In Mrs. Tennant's activity students had to write in or fill in the appropriate blends to form the correct word. In the word recognition section of the literacy test students have to either underline the word that matches the picture or underline the picture that matches the word. Mrs. Tennant's activity on blends is meant to strengthen the Non-Mastery students' ability to identify words using word identification skills. However, this methodology contrasts with that of the grade five curriculum which suggests "moving away from traditional exercises such as filling in the blanks, to placing greater emphasis on having pupils use language to express ideas in speech and writing" (p. 12). Moreover, the curriculum guide explains that when teaching phonics, for example, it should be practiced "each time opportunities to do so present themselves naturally in the material being used for listening, speaking, reading and writing" (p. 12). Text that occurs in fill-in-the-blank worksheets, like the one Mrs. Tennant used, are not "naturally" occurring in that they are not part of an extended text found in narrative stories or expository essays.

Mrs. Payne's Near Mastery reading sessions

By late October Yanike was promoted to Mrs. Payne's Near Mastery 9 a.m. literacy sessions. This meant that Yanike, based on Mrs. Tennant's and Mrs. Payne's professional judgment, had made sufficient improvement in her reading and writing. Since Mrs. Payne was Yanike's class teacher as well as the Near Mastery instructor, Yanike did not have to go to another classroom. Twenty-six students (twenty boys and six girls) were in the Near Mastery sessions. Based on the two sessions I was able to observe, the Near Mastery lesson would begin just before 9:10 a.m. after the grade five students from the other classes had finally settled down in Mrs. Payne's classroom. The

lessons focused on word recognition. In the first lesson Mrs. Payne used a poem and in the second one she used a crossword puzzle. She would introduce the lesson with an activity, have a discussion around the activity, interject mini-lessons where she thought appropriate, and then have the students complete the activity and later assign homework.

Mrs. Payne's literacy activities were more aligned with the grade five curriculum and less about test preparation. In one of her activities Mrs. Payne used a poem to teach word identification, pronunciation, parts of speech and fluency. In the excerpt below Mrs. Payne has just written seven words on the board from a poem that is in their textbook and with which the students are familiar. She then has students come up to the board and write a different word that they recall from the poem as a way of noticing how the word is spelled. After that activity is completed the students read the poem a few times in groups and as a whole class:

> As Mrs. Payne finished writing about 6 or 7 words on the board, she had a couple of students come to the board and write out a particular word. One male student spelled 'captain' as 'captin'. She then asked the students if that word was spelled correctly. Some said yes and others said no. Mrs. Payne didn't simply tell them the right answer then, she encouraged them to be sure of their answer. It was settled (can't recall how but probably by having the class vote) that it was spelled with an /a/ and she tried to reinforce this by having [them] explicitly state where the /a/ was placed in the word [i.e. after the /t/ but before the /i/]. She then also informed them that the English language could be such a tricky language because it made sense to spell 'captain' as 'captin' but that just because of the peculiarity of the English language you had to put an /a/ there (Field notes, 10.01.09)

Mrs. Payne was attempting to strengthen the students' word recognition abilities within the framework of the grade five curriculum. First, Mrs. Payne used a poem that the students were learning as part of the topic of that school term, Adventures with Books. Second, her questions and mini-lesson on the "peculiarity of the English language" helped students' meta-linguistic skills. Students were learning to notice the words they read - the ways in which words are spelled in the poem, and the peculiar rules

of the English language. Mrs. Payne, therefore, brought to the students' attention linguistic features which could improve their word recognition skills, yet without teaching to the test.

In the second literacy lesson I observed, Mrs. Payne had the students complete a crossword puzzle. In this activity or schema Mrs. Payne tapped into the students' personal experience by asking them to share what they had for breakfast that morning. This question directly related to the crossword puzzle worksheet which contained a list of breakfast food items. Below is a description of this activity from my field notebook:

> She begins to write on the whiteboard what the students have had for their breakfast that morning: turkey neck and pumpkin rice, egg, crackers and tea, cornflakes, curry chicken and dumplings, toast and bacon strips and bush tea, sausage and bread. Mrs. Payne even shares that she had crackers and tea that morning, and she insists that the students are to share what they actually had and not what they think they would like to have. Ms. Payne gives [a female student] a chance to answer a question but says to her, while pointing to the class next door 'there's competition over there' [the competition referred to the noise coming from the other classroom]. Mrs. Payne then goes into a discussion about the distinction between England and Jamaica and the term 'tea' (Field notes, 10.28.09, p. 6).

As Mrs. Payne wrote down what the students had for breakfast, she would interject with mini-lessons about pronouncing certain words (like *sausage*) or meta-linguistic information about the different meanings that Jamaicans and British have for the word *tea*. For example, Mrs. Payne informed the students that while the word *tea* was used in Jamaica to refer to any hot drink (tea, coffee, or sugar tea - hot water with sugar); in Britain it referred only to black tea. This was an important mini-lesson given Jamaica's bilingual language context (Pollard, 1998). Mrs. Payne, I argue, was also trying to make a home-school connection by using the students' personal experience to provide context to the class activity, thereby helping them to notice words in their environment (P. Johnston, 2004).

Bedford Primary School's literacy support approach

There were two literacy approaches that I observed at Bedford Primary. The first approach lasted only for one week and was used by Mr. Scott, one of the two grade five teachers. He selected three students from his class who were repeating the literacy test and reviewed a 2007 G4LT past test paper. However, Mr. Scott's literacy pull-out approach did not last very long. Based on what Mr. Scott and Ms. Thwaites (the second grade five teacher) said, the grade five supervisor decided to change the structure of the literacy support given to the students repeating the Grade Four Literacy Test in December 2009. As of Monday, October 5, 2009 the students who were repeating the Grade Four Literacy Test would be placed in Ms. Thwaites's class until the second term, while those students who were not retaking he test were placed in Mr. Scott's class. Thus, by early October the grade five students were shuffled between Mr. Scott's and Ms. Thwaites's classrooms, and would be reshuffled again in the second term in January after the students sat the December 2009 supplemental exam.

Ms. Thwaites called her literacy support approach "literacy development classes." There were thirty-nine students in her class of which twenty-six were retaking the literacy test in December 2009. I observed three of these sessions in October 2009. Based on Ms. Thwaites's timetable the literacy development classes were scheduled for Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays. From my observations the literacy development classes also tended to start sometime after 9 a.m. and ended just before lunch time at 11 a.m. Instead of focusing solely on content from the grade five curriculum, Ms. Thwaites focused on writing tasks, comprehension questions and other activities pertaining to reading or English language instruction during these literacy development sessions.

Mr. Scott's comprehension session

I observed Mr. Scott teach one comprehension lessons as part of the preparation for the supplementary literacy test in December 2009. Mr. Scott was explicit in his test-

preparation focus as he used a 2007 version of the G4LT to teach test-taking and comprehension skills to his three students. On Friday, October 2, 2009 Mr. Scott spent approximately an hour with the three students reviewing the comprehension questions from the past paper. Tarik was one of the three students. This lesson was held in the computer lab while the remainder of his class was upstairs in the classroom doing a math review test. Fridays, he said, were test practice days. Below is an example from my notes of Mr. Scott encouraging students to carefully select the multiple choice answers and to look for textual clues within the passage to support their answers:

> Again and again Mr. Scott encouraged the three students to provide a rationale for their answers. Although they suggested the right answers, he insisted that they provide a reason for their choice from either the text and through the process of careful elimination of the multiple choice answers. Here are two examples. For instance, he went through at length about the basis on which a suitable title for the two stanza passage should be selected [The question asked students to select an appropriate title for the passage.] The female student and one of the boys got the answer right away; the title for the passage was 'Shopping with Daddy'. However, he went through each [multiple choice] option with them suggesting reasons why those choices were suitable or not (Field notes, 10.02.09, p. 2).

In addition to telling the students to read for "meaning," Mr. Scott had the students re-read the passage as he realized they had difficulty decoding the text. He insisted that the students not simply rattle off the correct answer, but provide evidence from the test to support their choice. On the one hand, Mr. Scott's instructions at times mirrored useful comprehension strategies such as providing a rationale for one's answer (Duke & Pearson, 2002). On the other hand, Mr. Scott's overall lesson was an example of teaching to the test as he focused primarily on teaching testing-taking strategies (Smith, 1991).

Ms. Thwaites's comprehension lesson

During the period of my observations Ms. Thwaites did not use any G4LT review exam papers to prepare her students for the upcoming December literacy test. Rather, Ms. Thwaites developed her comprehension lessons based on her knowledge of how the G4LT was structured. In one of the comprehension lessons I observed that Ms. Thwaites's main strategy was to tell the students to read the text carefully. In my observation on October 27, 2009 Ms. Thwaites wrote on the board a five-sentence passage about a birthday party and then asked the students some basic questions about the passage:[42]

> Today is Kim's birthday. She is five years old. Mummy gives Kim a toy. The toy is a doll. Kim will have a birthday party.
>
> T: Who are the persons in the story?
>
> Ss: Mommy, Kim
>
> T: Another name for the persons in story
>
> Ss: Character
>
> T: What's happening in the story?
>
> Ss: A birthday party

The purpose of this first activity was to demonstrate to the students how to answer comprehension questions. As if to summarize her teaching on comprehension Ms. Thwaites then asks the students:

> T: What's the first thing you do [when answering comprehension questions]?
>
> Ss: "Read it [the passage]"

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[42] The story is taken from a grade one textbook, *Right Start: Language Arts Integrated Workbook* by V. Brown.

(Field notes, 10.27.09, pp. 30-31).

Later in the lesson the students read a second, more difficult and longer passage, *Brer rabbit's riding horse*[43]. Ms. Thwaites then tells the students to answer the comprehension questions which she has written on the blackboard with the four multiple choice options under each question. Soon after, Ms. Thwaites informs me that "she is writing it this way because that is how it will be in the exam," (Field notes, 10.27.09, p. 31).

Ms. Thwaites's writing lesson

During observations in Ms. Thwaites's literacy development sessions I was able to observe the two forms of writing tasks[44] required of the Grade Four Literacy Test – completing forms and letter or story writing. In this section I focus on the letter writing lesson as it best illustrates how Ms. Thwaites tried to integrate test preparation with covering the grade five curriculum. In an interview on October 29, 2009 Ms. Thwaites mentioned that the G4LT "makes it very hectic for the teacher who has to prepare both for the literacy test and then prepare the students for the regular curriculum." In this lesson Ms. Thwaites integrates the curriculum objectives with the mandate of preparing the students for the upcoming December literacy supplemental test.

In the literacy development lesson on October 23, 2009 Ms. Thwaites combined reading and writing instruction in her teaching methodology. During the lesson (which lasted the entire two hours) there was evidence of reading comprehension questions, reading fluency, mini-lessons on pronunciation and adjectives, on the one hand, and the task of writing a letter to a friend about a favorite character in a story, on the other. Ms.

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[43] Both *Brer rabbit's riding horse* and *The heights by great men* are stories within reading textbooks provided free of cost to primary school students by the Ministry of Education.

[44] In the G4LT the first writing task usually involves filling out a form, while the second writing task entails some form of extended writing – either writing a letter or completing a story based on a written prompt.

Thwaites began the lesson by handing out *The heights by great men* and requested the students to do the usual "hands up and stretch" routine and recite a poem. She informed the class that they would be doing paired reading, and then introduced the story by asking the students a few questions: "What is the title of the story?", "What [do] you think is going to happen?", and "What word describes Danny's feeling at the time?" Although these were pre-reading comprehension questions, the children were familiar with the story and so rattled off the appropriate answers. In fact, the poem the class recited at the beginning of the class was taken from the story they read. After about five questions, the reading began:

> Ms. Thwaites asks two girls to read, and then all of the students read all of page 5. She then asks three boys to read. The two girls read softly and I couldn't hear much. The boys read haltingly. I noted that with pair reading there is no cover up for those who have difficulty reading unlike with group/whole class choral reading. Walking around, Ms. Thwaites then reads pages 6-7, 'All the people of Fish Town love Mr. Tacky'. She reads fluently and with expression for the students (Field notes, 10.21.09).

At different points during the reading, Ms. Thwaites provided the students with appropriate feedback about pronunciation, asked the students questions from the text or signaled to the class to begin the "hands up and stretch" routine because they were becoming noisy. When the class had finished reading the story, Ms. Thwaites asked for the names of the main characters which she wrote on the board. She then proceeded to ask the students for words used to describe a particular character and an explanation as to why they chose that adjective. It is only after this mapping activity that Ms. Thwaites instructs the class that they will be writing a letter to a friend telling them about a favorite character from the story. In this excerpt, Benjamin tells Ms. Thwaites that Danny is his favorite character:

> Benjamin: Danny
>
> T: Why?
>
> Benjamin: *Bikaaz hii neva giv op huop Mis* [because he never gave up hope Ms.]

> T: I like that word [she writes hope on the board]
>
> Ms. T is now pointing on a green handmade chart which has a sample letter written on it in block letters. She points out all the parts of the letter with the students calling out the answers. At 10:17 two boys hit each other with their notebooks. Ms. T is busy writing on the board and doesn't seem to notice. At 10:19 Ms. T does the 'hands up and stretch' routine. (Field notes, 10.21.09, pp. 23-25).

In this literacy development lesson Ms. Thwaites was able to integrate literacy test preparation for the G4LT and cover content from the grade five curriculum. As mentioned previously, the Grade Four Literacy Test has a writing component that often includes writing a letter. One of the attainment targets for term one in the grade five curriculum states that students should be able to write in order "to narrate, persuade and for a range of transactional purposes" (MOE, 1999, p. 16). In the above lesson Ms. Thwaites combined a reading and comprehension activity with a writing task which closely parallels two activities suggested in the curriculum: students will "select a character from a story/book and build a satellite system of words around him/her or brainstorm for words to describe mood, feelings… (MOE, 1999, p. 18)" and "write a pen pal telling about their favorite character…." By following the curriculum and offering support to her class of struggling readers, such as pair reading, reviewing parts of a letter, showing students a sample of a letter, Ms. Thwaites is able to strengthen the literacy needs of her students without teaching to the test. As one of the Education administrators, Dr. Levy, said in an interview, "You cannot really study for the test, either you can read the questions or not, it's a basic reading and reading comprehension general test" (Interview, 10.29.09).

Summary of literacy lessons in both schools

All the focus teachers faced the challenge of teaching the grade five curriculum content and simultaneously preparing the students for the supplementary G4LT in December. In this section I illustrate how the Discourse of the G4LT as drafted in the Competence-based transition policy (2008) and circulated within the media helped to

influence and shape the behaviors and activities of both schools. Recall that each literacy lesson was conceptualized as a schema and analyzed using the building tasks of activity, sign systems and social goods with the following questions: What actions and sub-activities comprise the literacy lesson? What types of knowledge are relevant here? Assuming that literacy is a social good, how is it made relevant in the lesson schema? In this present section I will, therefore, discuss the themes that arose from the CDA analysis.

In summary, the Discourse of the G4LT shaped the organizational structure of the 9 a.m. reading sessions at St. Alphonso and the literacy development classes at Bedford Primary. To some extent what the teachers taught, and even how they taught the students was also influenced by this literacy Discourse. In both schools the literacy support for those students who failed the G4LT was based on students' reading labels - Non-Mastery, Near Mastery or Mastery in the case of St. Alphonso, or those who passed versus those who failed the G4LT in the case of Bedford Primary. Generally speaking, teachers taught content that was related to the literacy test and focused on test preparation. Mr. Scott was the most explicit of all the teachers as he taught his comprehension lesson using a G4LT past paper. Mrs. Tennant and Ms. Thwaites were not as explicit as Mr. Scott. However, Mrs. Tennant focused on word recognition skills – a component of the literacy test that her students had failed since they were in the Non-Mastery reading group. Ms. Thwaites taught her comprehension lesson based on the format of the test by giving her students a story with a multiple choice format. Mrs. Payne was the only teacher who did not "teach to the test" so to speak, as she worked with her students to develop their word recognition skills using materials based on the grade five curriculum. Nevertheless, all teachers in some way, whether explicitly or implicitly, mentioned the literacy test. In other words, the G4LT Discourse also influenced the teachers' own day-to-day discourse.

Teachers' references to the Grade Four Literacy Test

Some teachers made explicit references to the Grade Four Literacy Test, while others alluded to the test. Mrs. Tennant of St. Alphonso and Mr. Scott of Bedford Primary both made explicit references to the upcoming supplementary literacy test. Moreover, they both directed these comments to the students. More than once Mrs. Tennant referred to her Non-Mastery session as a "crash program." When I asked Mrs. Tennant about her lesson plans she told me that it was a 'crash program' and even later on mentioned that phrase to the students. Because it was a 'crash program' she had to 'incorporate all the skills, *evri likle ting* [every little thing]" (Field notes, 9.30.10, p. 2). On Monday, October 5, 2009 Mrs. Tennant had the students write a letter to their mother thanking her for providing lunch money - an appropriate and context based task given that each morning most children are given money to buy lunch and snacks. While the students were writing their letters Mrs. Tennant warned the class 'when you go in the exam children…write simple…nothing you *kyaahn spell…so yu duohn get rangbang*" [when you go into the exam children, write simply, don't write anything you cannot spell so you don't risk the chance of getting it wrong] (Field notes, 10.05.09, p. 5) .

Likewise, Mr. Scott frankly informed the three students that they were having a separate class to focus on the comprehension and writing because they had failed the G4LT:

> Standing, Mr. Scott began this teaching session by explaining to the three students that they were here because they did not pass the Grade Four Literacy Test, and the results showed that they had difficulties with reading comprehension and writing. All three students …. listened looking up at the teacher. He then gave each a paper. The students were sitting at a desk while I was sitting off [to] the side close by. On close examination the paper was a past paper from the Literacy Test of 2007 [Field notes, 10.02.09, p. 1].

Although from different schools and in different teaching roles Mrs. Tennant and Mr. Scott both made explicit references to the G4LT. And as illustrated above in the

section on content, these teachers tended to teach their struggling readers test-taking strategies or align their classroom activities with the test rather than curriculum content.

Mrs. Payne of St. Alphonso and Ms. Thwaites of Bedford Primary did not refer to the G4LT as much or as explicitly. Ms. Thwaites did not bring up the issue of the literacy test directly to the students. Once she did mention to them that they should practice their literacy and numeracy if they were to improve. However, on a few occasions she would explain to me that the reason she chose a particular activity was because of the literacy test. In two instances in the same lesson Ms. Thwaites mentioned to me (not to the students) that she was writing out the multiple choice options for the comprehension passage because as she told me:

> That is how it will be in the exam [and] she was writing the work on the board because she will need to do a lot of photocopying of material in November in preparation for the December test, and so she doesn't want to start photocopying for class work now (Field notes, 10.27.09, pp. 30-31).

Only once in my observations with Mrs. Payne's Near Mastery group did she allude to the test. The reference could be disputed. However, Mrs. Payne made a reference to the fact that the boys outnumbered the girls in her Near Mastery class which is an observation that is sometimes discussed in relation to literacy in Jamaica (Miller, 1994 ("Girls outshine boys in G4LT," 2007). Below is an excerpt from my field notes of Mrs. Payne about boys and literacy:

> Upon realizing that there were four girls she encouraged the boys [26 of them] to work hard as she told them that when it comes to literacy the boys are not doing as well as the girls. The boys then proceeded to read the first stanza of the poem (Field notes, 10.01.09, p. 2)

Mrs. Payne did not teach to the test, nor did she make explicit references to the G4LT based on my observations. One interpretation of the above anecdote is that Mrs. Payne was simply stating an obvious fact. Another interpretation suggests that the G4LT Discourse may have influenced what she noticed. As illustrated in the quotes below this difference between boys' and girls' performance in literacy tests formed part of the

textual discourse within government documents and within the *Conversations* of the print media. Below are two quotes about gender and literacy in Jamaica:

> Education task force report, 2004: The statistics further point to an even greater level of underachievement among boys. Janet Quello and Beverley Carlson in their Social Assessment of Rose II stated:….Poor reading abilities are concentrated among boys. By the time students reach grade 6, 30% of students read below their grade level. By grade 9 a huge divide has occurred – large numbers of students, especially boys, cannot read or write, while some are functionally illiterate. Because of their reading deficiency, they cannot learn the content of various subjects." (Davis, 2004, p. 95).
>
> *Observer*: Of concern is the fact that females continue to outperform males. The results showed that 57 per cent of the students achieving mastery were girls, compared to 43% boys. However, …the boys are actually improving (Douglas, 2009).

Certainly, Mrs. Payne was referring to the experience of many teachers and Education ministry personnel that boys were not doing as well as the girls in terms of literacy (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999; Davis, 2004; Miller, 1999; Morris et al., 2008). In the 2009 G4LT approximately 57% of those achieving mastery were females and 43% were males as indicated in the *Observer* quote above.

Themes

In closing this chapter, there are two themes that I would like to explore. One theme revolves around the issue of the power of the G4LT Discourse to influence the activities of the school. The second theme relates to the quality of the literacy intervention provided at the schools for their readers who struggled to pass the G4LT but failed.

From the perspective of Gee (2005), I contend that the Discourse of the Grade Four Literacy Test shaped the ways in which St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary "coordinated" their literacy support strategies for the students who failed the June 18, 2009 exam. Or in Fairclough's (2001) words the "power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful

participants" in terms of contents (what is said and done), relations and subjects (pp. 38-39). In this research study, the powerful participant is represented by the Ministry of Education, which has the authority to mandate policy changes regarding the Grade Four Literacy Test which in turn impacts the activities of schools. The non-powerful are represented by the schools, teachers and students who have little choice but to accept these policy mandates.

Within the two case study schools the Ministry of Education was able, through the Discourse of the G4LT, to constrain the very structure or format of the literacy intervention provided to students. The reading groups formed at St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary were largely based on the categories of readers as outlined in the Grade Four Literacy Test results: mastery for those students who passed the test; Near Mastery for those who failed one or two components of the test; and Non-Mastery for those who failed all three sections of the test, or broadly, those who failed versus those who passed the test. In other words the textual discourse of the Grade Four Literacy Test, as written in the Competence-based transition policy (2008), became a mechanism for organizing how literacy interventions were structured in the two schools.

To some extent the G4LT Discourse also influenced what teachers taught, and how they prepared the students to retake the literacy test in December 2009. Smith (1991) in her qualitative study of how elementary school teachers responded to mandated high-stakes achievement tests suggested that there are eight orientations describing teachers' behaviors: ordinary curriculum with no special preparation, teaching test-taking skills, exhortation, teaching content known to be covered by the test, teaching to the test in format and content, stress inoculation, practicing test or parallel items or cheating. Based on the literacy teaching vignettes provided earlier, most of the teacher participants taught content known to be covered by the test. Mrs. Tennant's teaching of blends was conducted because she knew that her group of nine students had failed the word recognition component of the G4LT and therefore needed to work on basic word

identification. In one lesson, Mrs. Tennant repeated that her class was a "crash program" to help them pass the test. Mr. Scott was focused on teaching test-taking skills and had the students practice on an actual past paper. Ms. Thwaites was less explicit than either Mrs. Tennant or Mr. Scott, yet I argue that the content of her teaching was informed not only by the grade five curriculum but by the pressures to have her students pass the December retake. Hence, Ms. Thwaites set out the comprehension questions and answers in a similar format to the literacy test, and confirmed this by telling me that this was her intention. Mrs. Payne, based on her style of teaching, could be included in the first category that Smith (1991) suggests – teaching the curriculum with no special preparation. Nevertheless, her exhortation to the boys to work harder in order to improve their literacy could be her response to the pressures of having her students perform well on the December supplemental test.

Yet, to suggest that the G4LT Discourse was overpowering to the extent that teachers had no sense of agency would be skewed (Holland, et al., 1998). Using a purely Faircloughian (2005) lens could tempt an analyst to assume a simplistic dichotomy between the powerful Education ministry and the powerless teachers. First, some authors contend that the research on how testing influences teachers' practices is inconclusive or more complex than other research suggests (Anagnostopoulos, 2005; Cimbricz, 2002; Firestone, et al., 1999). In her review of research studies related to testing and teacher behavior Cimbricz (2002) made the following comment:

> The studies reviewed suggest that while state testing does matter by influencing what teachers say and do, so, too, do other things, such as teachers' knowledge of subject matter, their approaches to teaching, their views of learning, and the amalgam of experience and status they possess in the school organization. As a result, the influence state-mandated testing has (or not) on teachers and teaching would seem to depend on how teachers interpret state testing and use it to guide their actions (p. 1).

That is to say, that the relationship between testing and teacher behavior is more complex and in fact mediated by the teacher's beliefs, prior practices, and school roles.

Take for example Mrs. Tennant and Mrs. Payne at St. Alphonso primary. On the one hand, Mrs. Tennant, in her role as the remedial teacher for the school, gets the students who are furthest behind in their reading. She has one school term, from September to December, to help these students pass the December supplemental test. Not surprisingly, she labels her lessons as a "crash program" and in fact "teaches to the test." On the other hand, Mrs. Payne - with her Masters in Literacy studies, her literacy training in the USAID's New Horizon and Expanding Education Horizon projects, plus her spearheading of the school's Knowledge Center – all shape her response to teaching her students who failed the literacy test. From my observations, Mrs. Payne taught lessons that were informed by the grade five curriculum, and encouraged her students to improve their meta-linguistic skills. In other words, although the G4LT Discourse dictated the organization of the literacy intervention, the Discourse did not monopolize the content of what the teachers said or did, but was mediated by each teacher's experiences and beliefs.

An alternative way of looking at the teachers' response to the G4LT retake exam is to view the test scores as a site of struggle within competing Discourse models (Gee, 2005). Gee explains that there are multiple Discourse models; that is, various and at times conflicting ways in which we interpret the world around us. As such, there is the Discourse model of the G4LT but also Discourse models that relate to how St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary operate as schools under the leadership of their respective principals and teaching staff. In other words, while Education ministry personnel use test scores to change and control the activities of schools, teachers use test preparation to control these test scores so as to be recognized as competent educators and thereby preserve autonomy over their classrooms as teachers. In her study Smith (1991) explained that district administrators used test scores to decrease school and teacher autonomy over curriculum and instructional process, and teachers used test preparation to exert power over test scores by ensuring that their students succeed in these tests.

As mentioned earlier, in one term teachers had to help their students pass the supplemental G4LT exam. Teachers had approximately four months to raise test scores from September to December 2009. Keeping in mind this time frame, what was the quality of the literacy interventions at St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary? According to Allington (2006) the best way to help struggling readers involves improving classroom instruction; offering expert, intense reading instruction outside the classroom; expanding available instructional time for reading; and improving the availability of support for older struggling readers. With regard to this study, I comment on the need to improve classroom instruction, the needs of older struggling readers, and the availability of expert reading instruction outside of the classroom. My comments are general rather than specific since this research was descriptive rather than evaluative in scope, and is also limited by what I was able to observe.

First, in terms of classroom instruction, there were many interruptions to the literacy lessons which translated to a loss of instructional time. As mentioned at the beginning, four 9 a.m. reading sessions were cancelled at St. Alphonso. Each cancellation meant that forty-five minutes of instructional time was lost for the day either for the entire grade five block or for a particular class whose teacher was absent. Even at Bedford Primary, Ms. Thwaites spent each morning sorting out lunch orders which at times encroached on her literacy development lessons. Noise from the students inside the class as well as in other classrooms was a problem in both schools, as well as the students' tendency to bicker with one another as illustrated in one of the excerpts from Ms. Thwaites comprehension/writing lesson. Although not included in the excerpts selected for this chapter, students were at times unprepared for class and spent time borrowing or sharpening pencils. This might seem rather petty, but it occurred often enough that I started recording this in my observations. Overtime, all of these various interruptions to classroom instruction depleted valuable instructional time during the 9 a.m. literacy sessions and Ms. Thwaites's literacy development lessons.

Second, the quality of the literacy support given to these older struggling readers was not as effective in some instances. Research suggests that older readers need literacy support in terms of explicit instruction of comprehension strategies, access to informational text, and more opportunities for writing (Allington, 2006, 2010; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Santa, 2006). During the period of my observations, I did not witness explicit instruction of comprehension strategies which is critical for older readers. For example, Ms. Thwaites in one of her lessons told students to simply read the passage carefully and demonstrated a few basic literal level comprehension questions in contrast to inferential level questions. Mr. Scott's approach to comprehension was by teaching test-taking skills. He encouraged students to eliminate obviously wrong answers and ensure that their responses were verified by what was written in the text. This was a step further than what Ms. Thwaites demonstrated to her students in that Mr. Scott's approach resembled Raphael's (Raphael, 1982, 1986) comprehension strategy of think-and-search in which "students search the text for information and think about the relationships that exist among the bits of information found"(Vacca, et al., 2006, p. 294). Mr. Scott did not name the strategy and focused solely on this single approach. Interestingly, Mrs. Payne had a poster (see Figure 9) of the Question-Author-Reader comprehension strategies on her literacy wall. Unfortunately, I did not observe her teaching any comprehension lessons, or writing activities because of scheduling constraints.

In terms of writing, students focused on filling out forms and writing letters which were part of the content of the G4LT. The writing lesson excerpt that I selected for this chapter was one of the few examples of extended writing that the students were able to do. At other times the students' writing activity consisted of filling out forms which asked for first and last name, date of birth, name of school etc. On the one hand, such writing tasks are practical given that in daily life individuals must complete one form or the other, for example, a membership club form, travel documents. On the other hand, this type of writing task does not give students practice in sentence construction.

Additionally, most of the texts read in these lessons were narrative stories. Perhaps, informational texts were used during lessons focused on Science and Social Studies but these did not appear to be integrated in the literacy intervention sessions I observed. However, research suggests that boys are more likely to engage in reading if they are given opportunities to read a variety of texts on a single topic (e.g., informational texts), or if they have the choice to select books that reflect their interests (Jenkins, 2010).

Third, the remedial reading teacher, Mrs. Tennant of St. Alphonso, often focused on "low level mastery of basic skills" rather than on engaging reading lessons which emphasized, for example, comprehension strategies, or reading books that matched students' reading level (Allington, 2010, p. 2). To a large extent then neither school had access to highly-skilled reading experts. Unfortunately, only those schools that scored below the national literacy average (67%) had access to literacy specialists who worked with the teachers to improve their reading and writing instruction. Both St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary scored above the literacy average and therefore did not benefit from the literacy specialists sent out by the Ministry of Education.

However, there were other instances in which the literacy lessons that I observed were engaging, aligned closely to the grade five curriculum and helped to foster students' meta-linguistic awareness. Mrs. Payne's two lessons using the poem and the crossword puzzles were such examples. Students, in both literacy activities, were eager to answer questions that Mrs. Payne posed. She motivated students by making home-school connections, for example, in the crossword puzzle activity she asked students to list what they ate for breakfast before having them fill out the puzzle. Rather than teach to the G4LT, Mrs. Payne also based her lessons on the grade five curriculum. Interspersed throughout her literacy sessions were mini-lessons about spelling, the differences between Jamaican Creole and Standard Jamaican English, and vocabulary. Mrs. Payne was helping her students to notice the world of words around them, in their environment, thereby developing their meta-linguistic skills. She also insisted that every child in her

class buy the *Children's Own* magazine, a children's newspaper that is printed by The *Gleaner* Company and is sold at the low cost of $15 Jamaican dollars (or 18 cents USD). Therefore, each child had reading material outside of their school textbook.

Ms. Thwaites had less teaching experience and qualifications than Mrs. Payne, but she too taught lessons that were at times engaging and aligned with the grade five curriculum. In her comprehension/writing lesson, she was able to accomplish her two goals of covering the curriculum and preparing the students for the literacy exam without teaching directly to the test. In this lesson the students enjoyed reading a familiar text and felt confident responding to questions as displayed by their eagerness to answer. Having the students read in pairs rather than as a whole class, was also valuable as it was easier to detect where students made errors while reading. When students made errors, Ms. Thwaites corrected them and later read aloud for the students so that they could hear fluent reading. Students also had the opportunity to engage in extended writing when they wrote a letter to a friend describing a particular character in the book. What would have made this lesson even more effective was if Ms. Thwaites could have assessed students' reading during the pair reading exercise – not all students but a few for her records to inform further instruction. Rather than have the students write a letter to an imaginary friend, they could have written short book reports to be read to another class about their favorite character thereby making the activity more meaningful. Nevertheless, I argue that the choice of writing task was limited not only by the curriculum but by the content of the G4LT.

Concluding remarks

During informal phone interviews with the principals of St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary schools I was able to gather information about the students who had to retake the literacy test in December 2009. I was also able to follow up with a few of the students selected for the study as well. Based on the principals' reports a total of 59

students in the two schools had to retake the literacy test in December 2009 (33 students from St. Alphonso Primary School and 26 students from Bedford Primary School). A total twenty-six students from both schools passed the test and are now eligible to sit GSAT in 2011. However, thirty-three students failed the literacy test. That means that just over half of the students who had to resit the supplemental G4LT failed, and the majority of those (about 82%) were male students. More specifically, Yanike and Gary of St. Alphonso were successful, as well as Tarik of Bedford Primary. These three students are now eligible to sit GSAT in 2011. Charlie, from St. Alphonso, and Benjamin from Bedford Primary, will have to wait until June 2010 to sit the G4LT for the third time. If Charlie and Benjamin do not pass this third sitting of the G4LT then, based on the Competence-based transition policy (2008), these students will be placed in Alternate Secondary Education Programmes.

CHAPTER VI

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL DISCOURSE OF THE GRADE FOUR LITERACY TEST

Introduction

While in Chapter V I looked closely at the literacy activities of the two case study schools, in Chapter VI I examine the perspectives of several research participants with regard to issues of literacy and identity, their views on the Grade Four Literacy Test, and their recommendations for improving literacy in elementary schools across Jamaica. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I argue that participants' definition of literacy and their views about the relationship between literacy and development help to illuminate the different subject positions that participants believe are available for literate and non-literate students. Recall that Fairclough (2001) suggests that as social subjects, individuals are "constrained to operate within the subject positions set up in discourse types" (p. 32). Within the context of the research study the discourse type is the interview. I argue that each participant's interview response reflects the subject positions that they construct or envision for students as literate individuals depending on their social roles as principals, administrators or academics. In the second and third sections I provide summaries and quotations of the responses from the seven participants with regard to their views about the G4LT and the factors they think the Education ministry should consider when improving literacy at the primary school level in Jamaica.

Of the twenty-two adults I interviewed, I selected seven participant interviewees to examine their opinions about the 2009 nationalized Grade Four Literacy Test. Specifically I chose the two principals of the case study schools, three administrators from the Education ministry, and two academic researchers from a prominent university in Jamaica in order to document perspectives from key stakeholders within the education

system. Each of the academics and scholars has played pivotal roles in different literacy and language polices and projects in Jamaica between 1999 and 2009. Additionally, I wanted to include the viewpoints of persons from the school as oftentimes in education policymaking "select policy players and policy informants [take] center stage while parents, teachers, administrators, taxpayers, and students [are] pushed to the margin" (Woodside-Jiron, 2004, p. 202).

Throughout this chapter I also refer to various newspaper articles which will serve as an index to the perspective at the societal level. Hence, I am able to explore multiple perspectives from the situational level as reported by school principals, the institutional levels of the government and academia through the viewpoints of the administrators and researchers, and the societal level as indexed by newspaper articles (Fairclough, 1995, 2001; Richardson, 2007). For this chapter I focused on the participants' responses to four questions: How would you define literacy? What role does literacy play in Jamaica's national development? What are some of the major factors that the Ministry of Education should take into account when thinking about improving literacy in Jamaica? What do you think about the Grade Four Literacy Test?[45]

The seven interviewees

The seven participants[46] were willing to be interviewed and tape recorded, with the exception of Mrs. Hammond, the national literacy supervisor. She was willing to be interviewed but preferred not to be recorded. Perhaps her social role as the literacy

[45] The first three questions were used as is, but the fourth question is a composite of different questions, specifically: Do you think the G4LT is an effective means to improve literacy in schools in Jamaica? Why/why not? In what ways do you think the G4LT has helped to improve literacy at your school? What do you make of the G4LT? In what ways is the new G4LT different or similar from previous literacy initiatives in Jamaica?

[46] All of the names are pseudonyms.

coordinator made her wary of divulging information that could be captured, digitized and made into media sound bites. The two principals and the two academics appeared comfortable with the tape recorder. In fact, Dr. Dexter, a professor of linguistics, said he expected me to record the interview. Perhaps because of his role as a researcher, interviews were non-threatening. Regardless of whether I was recording the interview or not, I took notes of what the participants said in order to capture the gist of their comments. On most occasions the interviewee had a copy of the interview questions. (For a complete list of all interview questions see Appendix A). There were some questions that were universal to all the interviews and other questions that were specific to the individual's social role. For instance, all participants were asked to define literacy, but I asked the principals specific school related questions. With the exception of Dr. Levy, an advisor to Education minister Holness, all of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and took place in either an office, home or computer lab. The interview with Dr. Levy was conducted over the phone as she had a hectic schedule. Below is an excerpt of an interview with Mrs. Radcliffe, the principal of St. Alphonso, followed by brief portraits of each of the seven participants. I specifically chose to describe the interview with Mrs. Radcliffe because it best illustrates the busyness which characterized many of the respondents' social roles. In this excerpt I had an interview appointment with Mrs. Radcliffe at St. Alphonso, just before the beginning of the school day and had just called a cab to pick me up at home:

> The taxi came quickly when I called, within 3-5 minutes. There was hardly any traffic on the road at that time, just before 7:00 am. By 10 minutes past 7 a.m. the principal arrived. But as soon as she arrived she was swirled up into different requests of one kind or another - whether from a teacher, the garbage man who came to collect the money for his services, students or parents. The secretary, Ms Black, had not yet arrived. Mrs. Radcliffe told me to wait and that she would be with me shortly. I sat on the green coloured couch. While I was waiting I could hear the grade two students sing the devotional song, 'Take a grip/ Take another grip sister/ Hold on and never let go/ No matter what the people and the world may say/ Hold on and never let go'.

> By about 7:20 a.m. the principal had sorted out some of the requests and was ready for the interview. It took place in the computer lab which has 10 computers and a huge television that is on [a cart with] wheels. It was a small square room with air conditioning. The interview started from 7:25 a.m. and ended at 8:10 a.m. There were only three interruptions - the vice principal, who peeped through the door to say hello; her cell phone rang about a meeting; and a teacher came in about a particular request which she had to go outside of the room to deal with. (Field notes, 10.30.09).

School principals	
Mrs. Radcliffe (St. Alphonso Primary)	Principal for just under 4 years. Ten years of teaching, from 1993-2003, were at St. Alphonso as a grades 2/3 teacher. First degree in Education & Diploma in primary education.
Mrs. Carr (Bedford Primary)	Principal for two years. Just completed her first degree in primary education & already has a diploma in education. Taught for eleven years; nine of those years at Bedford Primary.
Ministry of Education administrators	
Mrs. Hammond (Senior literacy supervisor)	In charge of training and supervising literacy specialists. These specialists help teachers with literacy interventions in schools which have a low literacy low rate.
Dr. Levy (Education advisor)	Works in the Ministry of Education advising the Minister about early childhood and parenting issues. Received her doctorate from a US university, and writes children's books.
Mr. Bartholomew (former Education officer)	Worked as a high ranking official in the Ministry of Education from 1989 to 2004. He is retired but does consultancy work for one of the teachers' colleges and writes for one of the newspapers.
Academics	
Dr. Barton (professor, Literacy studies)	Received her doctorate from a university in England. Heads the department of Education at one of the prominent universities in Jamaica. Consults for the Education ministry.
Prof. Dexter (professor, Linguistics)	Received his doctorate from a university in England. Received full professorship in 1998. An advocate for full bilingualism in Jamaica.

Table 17. Brief description of seven interview participants.

Above are brief descriptions of each of the seven interviewees. In their social roles, each participant leveraged a certain amount of power or rather, authority, within his or her own sphere of influence – whether it was the principals who spearheaded the implementation of literacy initiatives in the schools, the administrators who influenced policy decisions and projects regarding literacy, or the academics who conducted research that could inform policy about language and literacy in Jamaica.

Analysis of the interviews

For the analysis of the interview transcripts I applied two of Gee's (2005) *building tasks* (activities and identities) and Fairclough's (2001) *experiential values of words*. In some cases, however, I simply provided summaries of and quotes from the participant interview to illustrate their perspective. Specifically, I applied Gee's *activity* and *identity* building tasks when analyzing the questions about defining literacy and the link between literacy and development. These two elements were helpful in examining the types of literate identities constructed by participants during the interview. I conceptualized these literate identities as *scripts*. Scripts represent the social roles that individuals perform within their daily activities and relationships (Fairclough, 2001, p. 132). For instance, in defining literacy, participants listed activities literate individuals should be able to perform and by extension non-literate individuals would have difficulty accomplishing. In discussing development, participants expressed the values they attached to the performance/non-performance of literate activities. Hence, I analyzed the transcripts asking the following questions – What activities get recognized as literate/non-literate? What identities are being constructed within this interview response?

Views about literacy and literate identities

In this section I describe the participants' responses regarding the definition of literacy, and what role they believed literacy played/ought to play in Jamaica's national development. Participants' definitions of literacy and their discussions about literacy and development influenced how they constructed the identities of literate and non-literate students/persons. As mentioned above, I applied Gee's building tasks of activities and identities as analytical tools, as well as Fairclough's experiential values of words to illustrate the subject positions constructed by the participants.

Initially, the connection between literacy and identity may not be apparent. However, if one traces the definition of literacy over time, it becomes clearer that literacy has moved beyond its narrow definition of reading, writing and arithmetic to include other features, such as identity. Looking at several definitions of literacy as provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a good starting place since this internationally powerful agency plays a critical role in influencing, or sponsoring the Discourse about literacy worldwide (Brandt, 2001). With a current membership of 193 nation states worldwide, UNESCO's influence regarding educational goals is global. Interestingly, Jamaica has set 2015 as the year it hopes to achieve 95% percent literacy - the same year that is targeted for achieving UNESCO'S Millennium Development Goals ("95% mastery by 2015," 2009; UN, 2009). As a sponsor of literacy, therefore, how UNESCO defines literacy sets the tone for the various projects that many member nations initiate and implement.

In 1958 the UNESCO definition of a literate person was defined as "one who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his or her everyday life" (UNESCO, 2004, p. 12). In 1970 the definition changed slightly to reflect the

importance of the community: "a functionally literate person is one who [uses] reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development" (UNESCO, 2004, p. 12). By 2004 the UNESCO definition of literacy was seen not as a "generic set of technical skills", but a "plural notion" which now recognized the importance of cultural identity (p. 13). Similarly, as highlighted in Chapter IV, the definition for literacy advocated by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica changed with the passage of time as outlined by Bryan and Mitchell (1999) in the Literacy Improvement Initiative. Hence, I argue that how persons define and value literacy (Brandt, 2001) through discourse, especially the institutional discourse of organizations like UNESCO, the Ministry of Education of Jamaica, and research universities, help to shape the literate identities possible for students.

Identities of literate and non-literate students

Principals

For both the principals of St. Alphonso[47] and Bedford Primary a literate student should be able to read, write, and comprehend. Mrs. Radcliffe of St. Alphonso included listening as an activity that the literate student should be able to do, while Mrs. Carr of Bedford Primary stressed the importance of comprehension. Mrs. Carr constructed the following script of a literate person when she emphasized that, "literacy is the ability to read and to understand what is being read. It's also being able to write for people to understand what is being written. So comprehension is the major part of literacy for me.

[47] To save on time I did not ask Mrs. Radcliffe from St. Alphonso the question about literacy and development; hence I focus more on Mrs. Carr who answered that question in her interview. It was not until later in the study that I realized how pivotal the development question was, and so ensured that from that point on I asked that question and excluded another if time became an issue.

You must understand, and it *mus mek sens* [and it must make sense]." A literate student was not simply one who was good at "calling out words" or decoding, but a pupil with a high level of comprehension added Mrs. Carr. Being literate would allow Jamaicans, whom she described as "naturally talented, gifted, and innovative people" to solve the problems plaguing the nation more quickly. Thus, there was a problem solving dimension that she attributed to being literate. Because of the low comprehension or reasoning ability of some Jamaicans, the problems of the country were not being solved.

For Mrs. Carr the script for a non-literate person was defined by someone who could decode words but had "weak" comprehension skills and "poor" reasoning ability. Such persons who left secondary school "barely reading" would be jobless and excluded from mainstream society and eventually "left by the wayside." Mrs. Carr associated such non-literate persons with "lawlessness and non-productivity." However, she was hopeful and felt that the school system could get "the people of our country literate, [that is], reading with understanding." Through adult training programs secondary school students who graduated barely literate could improve themselves and get jobs: "Ahm, and a lot of these persons once they go through these training agencies they tend to improve, they actually get good jobs, right, and they usually work to develop themselves better." For Mrs. Carr, then, the value of literacy lies in its economic benefits and its power to confer on literate individuals the right to participate in society, as without literacy an individual is left by the "wayside." However, Mrs. Carr does not assume that literacy/illiteracy is a fixed state, but that individuals, with support of education programs, can become lawful, economically stable and productive citizens.

Ministry of Education administrators

The three education administrators – the senior literacy supervisor, Mrs. Hammond; the special advisor on education, Dr. Levy; and a former education officer, Mr. Bartholomew - constructed three inter-related scripts for literate students.

In the first script the senior literacy supervisor identified a literate student by his/her ability to "read simple narrative, expository text and formatted materials, and communicate in a way that's understood by others". This she said was based on the ministry's definition of literacy which in turn was taken from UNESCO's definition of literacy but redefined to suit the Jamaican context. Of the three definitions of literacy that each administrator described this paralleled the content of the Grade Four Literacy Test closest. For instance, the literacy test includes a comprehension passage and related questions ("the ability to read narrative, expository text"), a set of questions based on a timetable or graph ("formatted material"), as well as a written component which is usually called the 'communication task' ("communicate in a way that's understood by others").

In the second script, the former education officer, Mr. Bartholomew, identified as literate, a student who was able to use "reading, and writing and comprehension in solving one's everyday problems." This second administrator made a distinction between reading literacy and general literacy as the latter he said included a plethora of other types of abilities such as cultural, information, and other types of literacies. For him reading literacy served as a foundation to learning which allowed the individual to become more competent in the other types of literacies; hence his focus on reading literacy. From the perspective of Mr. Bartholomew reading literacy moved beyond the classroom and helped the student to solve problems in his or her everyday life.

In the third script, which could be seen as an extension of the first and second scripts, the special advisor, Dr. Levy, identified a literate student as someone with the "ability to read, write, compute and comprehend" and added that "in order to be able to function in such a global economy an individual has to be able to convey ideas." Additionally, she included numeracy, cultural literacy and information literacy in her interpretation of literacy which she said was based on one of UNESCO's definitions of literacy.

Each script described three inter-related subject positions based on the definitions of literacy provided by the administrators. The first script described a student who could master the G4LT, while the second script moved beyond that to describe as literate the student who was a self-motivated learner and problem solver in his or her own everyday life. The third script encompassed the previous two profiles to describe a student who would not only pass the G4LT, but an individual who could successfully maneuver through the many Discourses within the global economy. On the one hand the three scripts seem distinct and separate. The senior literacy supervisor, Mrs. Hammond, focused on student mastery of the G4LT. Mr. Bartholomew described an individual who could function within his/her community. The special advisor, Dr. Levy, constructed a script in which the literate individual had a strong semblance to Gee's "shape-shifting portfolio people", that is, "people who gain many diverse experiences that they can use to transform and adapt themselves for fast-changing circumstances throughout their lives" (Gee, 2004, p. 4). On the other hand, when laid side by side the three scripts portray an ideal progression of literacy development for the Jamaican student – from passing the exam to problem solving in one's everyday life, to participating within the global economy.

In their responses the three administrators also constructed scripts for non-literate students that ranged from descriptions of an "illiterate" person as a social burden to an individual who was alienated from society and unable to fully participate within the global economy. Mrs. Hammond described illiteracy as a "scourge" on society and felt that without literacy growth Jamaica would be unable to advance. Mrs. Hammond felt that on an individual level a person without literacy would be "existing without a purpose." Although this particular point of view holds a rather narrow perspective of individuals who are not literate, it does demonstrate the theme of participation and productivity within the global economy which literacy permits for individuals (Brandt, 2001). This theme of participation within and exclusion from the global economy was

reiterated by the special advisor, Dr. Levy, who mentioned that "without literacy a nation cannot reach its full potential particularly in a global word." In other words, without literacy Jamaica will be unable to fully participate within the global marketplace. However, it was Mr. Bartholomew who constructed, through his discourse about literacy and development, a script for a non-literate student that most accurately described, according to Allington (2006), the feelings of exclusion a student can experience. He mentioned that persons can "feel alienated from others when, you know, they cannot read, there's a sense of embarrassment, there's a sense of being less than others when you cannot read, and write, and comprehend simple words, so there's that social aspect."

In pulling together the perspectives of the three administrators then, the non-literate student would have lacked confidence at school because of his/her reading and writing difficulties. Most likely this student would have failed at least the first sitting of the Grade Four Literacy Test. Continuing to perform poorly in school, this non-literate student would be largely unemployable upon leaving school and excluded from productive participation in society and the global economy. Eventually he or she would be on the margins of the literate society both locally and globally. The non-literate person is, therefore, stigmatized as a burden to society.[48] While this analysis is speculative on my part, this interpretation does echo what Stanovich (2000) described as the 'Matthew effect' in which poor readers eventually became poor learners over their school careers. And if (school-based) literacy is the valuable "property" that Brandt (2001) argues it is, then low literacy places an individual at a social disadvantage in which he or she is excluded from the "literate" world.

[48] This description of the non-literate person is not the perception of all members of the MOE, but is my own interpretation of how participants judged non-literate persons based on the interview data.

Academics

Dr. Barton, an education professor at a prominent university, stated that the definition of literacy had moved beyond the ability to read and write and encompassed "the ability to understand and use symbolic systems of the culture." This meant not only understanding written language but other types of symbol systems as well, for example, images or numbers. Defining literacy this way, she clarified, also assumes the student would be proficient in both the official and the vernacular languages spoken within the specific community. Barton added that literacy is cognitive and includes critical thinking, and problem solving skills. Literacy is "complex, situated, dynamic, every-changing…lifelong and…political."

To a large extent this definition extended the previous meanings of literacy described by the three education administrators by including the bilingual, developmental and political nature of literacy in Jamaica. By bilingual Barton was referring to the need to train teachers to teach English literacy using some form of bilingualism. Later during the interview, Dr. Barton said that an island-wide bilingual policy was "politically too charged" but a school-based language policy which took into account the two languages was less contentious. That it so say, figuring out "what we do in schools and how we use the two languages" in education was a more effective approach. By developmental, Barton was indicating that literacy is not static, and that the individual is always learning, that is, literacy is "life-long." By political, Barton emphasized the idea that the literate individual is able to "understand, manipulate, you know, the knowledge and information-generation within [the] society which makes you very powerful…literate populations can actually challenge what is…." In other words, Barton's literacy definition constructed a script in which a literate student would not only master the revised primary curriculum and the Grade Four Literacy Test, but such a student would be comfortable using the discourse of either Standard Jamaican English or Jamaican Creole (Pollard, 1998). Such a student would be continually learning over his or her lifespan and adjusting to the

various demands of the workplace – similar to Gee's (2004) "shape-shifting portfolio person" (p.4). According to Gee (2004) shape-shifting portfolio people adapt themselves to fast-changing circumstances throughout their lives. Such a student would also be critically aware of issues of power affecting him/her within the community (Fairclough, 2001; Friere, 2000). In summary, the script constructed for a student based on Barton's definition of literacy would include a bilingual shape-shifting portfolio student with critical thinking skills.

Yet, Barton is not merely concerned with the formal aspects of literacy. In her response to the question about literacy and development Barton mentions that reasoning, affect and respect are part of the literate identity:

> I think the kind of formal literacy we seem to have an abundance of because we [are] always chasing down the subjects and the degrees and the certificates and pieces of paper, but I don't think that necessarily makes us anymore…it's not going to increase our GDP or makes us anymore advanced. I think what makes us advanced is when you deal with some of the less obvious features like the reasoning, like the affective, like the way we work with each other, like the way we respect - whether we respect each other, respect ourselves. Yes, so I think those are the qualities and are part of a literate individual that we have to try and promote.

Using Fairclough's experiential values of words helps to convey the distinction that Barton makes between formal literacy which, she argues, preoccupies Jamaicans in contrast to the less formal features of literacy such as affect. Recall that experiential values indicate the "knowledge/beliefs" that are coded in vocabulary (Fairclough, 2001, p. 94). Words and phrases like "subjects and the degrees", "certificates" and "pieces of paper" contrast with phrases like "reasoning", "the affective", and "respect." In the first list Barton uses phrases which suggest a formal type of literacy achieved through education institutions, while in the latter list the words connote an informal type of literacy which is less easily measured and which is not necessarily school-based. Yet, this second list ("reasoning", "affective", and"respect") describes traits of a literate identity. The script constructed here for the literate student is one in which the student is

not only competent in terms of school-based literacies, but an individual who demonstrates respect for self and others.

For Barton, then, the script for a non-literate student is not simply the opposite of a "bilingual shape-shifting portfolio student with critical thinking skills." Rather the non-literate student is unable to resolve conflicts peacefully. She made this point during the interview when she said the following:

> In spite of all that I said that I didn't make clear that I want to bring up again is that literacy has been about reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking. I think that… to be truly literate you have to display those qualities and those abilities. And sometimes I think unfortunately in our country we don't always display that. I think part of the way in which we see…is a violent, crime-ridden society…that it hasn't been reasoned out what are the actual results of action that you take, you know, that people flare up, they don't argue and talk through and try and work out what it is their difference, there's not enough conflict resolution, I think that's a very important part of national development.

Although I would argue that Barton is not making the claim for causality between low literacy and violence/crime[49] in Jamaica, her statement does imply that there is a correlation between the two. That is to say, the individual who does not portray the qualities of a literate individual which she details as "reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking" is more likely to "flare up" and not resolve conflict amicably. This theme was reflected in the interview with the principal of Bedford Primary, Mrs. Carr, who also made a link between low literacy levels and "lawlessness" in the country. Similarly, in a *Gleaner* article, *'Education the cure for violence'*, Education minster Andrew Holness was quoted as saying, "The challenge is how to take the guns out of the hands of these young men and put education into their brains ("Education cure for violence," 2008)." Like Barton's opinion about literacy and development, this article quoting the Education minister's speech reflected the hope that many Jamaicans placed

[49] In 2008 there were 1,611 homicides in Jamaica (Levy, 2009, p. 51).

on literacy as a solution that would alleviate some of the nation's social ills including crime ("Poor education driver of crime," 2008).

Unlike the other participants Professor Dexter refused to "add any kind of moral value" to defining literacy or explaining its role in national development. According to Dexter, the script for a literate student is not "superior" to the script for a non-literate individual. In keeping with how he defined literacy and his beliefs about literacy and development, the literate student is someone who can communicate in writing and reading and yet is not necessarily more intelligent than someone who is orally literate. Dexter described the person who is not literate, for instance in English, as simply equipped with another form of communicating and remembering information. For instance, he or she may rely more on memory rather than on confining ideas to written form on paper. Literacy, from Dexter's perspective, makes one neither good or bad, nor more or less intelligent. He defined literacy as the "ability to represent spoken language in a written form and in turn the ability to convert, to read text in language" either aloud or silently. Further, he explained "writing simply becomes part of the network of language use, language transmission, [and] storage of knowledge." From Dexter's perspective literacy, therefore, is not superior to other forms of language use, for instance the memorizing of information in many oral cultures; literacy is simply another form of transmitting and storing information. Dr. Dexter stated this clearly when in responding to the question about the relationship between literacy and national development when he stated that literacy should have:

> …no more special a role than as another element in the network of language use meaning that there is a cultural predisposition to assume that if you can write then you have some superior, intellectual something or the other. If you can write you have a different way of processing information, right, because the written text produces a kind of way of order, ordering and so on. It reduces the usefulness of memory, so cultures that are literate will tend not to have people memorize long lists of genealogies, or long lists of whatever. But rather they will confine that to paper and use a lot less memory and you will use your …you process information in a different way.

Again using Fairclough's experiential values of words we can identify the phrases/vocabulary that he collocates with literacy: "another element", "a different way of processing information", "reduces usefulness of memory", "you process information in a different way." Simply put, literacy for Dexter is just another way to process information which is different from how persons in oral cultures process information. Dexter contrasts this perspective with what he terms as a "cultural predisposition" or an ideological assumption that being literate is somehow more advanced than other forms of language use, namely oral language use. However, Dexter did state that there is some amount of efficiency that comes with literacy, but again he hedged this by saying that literacy is not necessarily "special" and he was not "giving it any kind of moral value" (Gee, 2008).

Further, Dexter articulated the view that there are power related problems in contexts in which the "dominant culture is literate but subordinate ones [are] not" partly as a result of these competing literate and oral traditions. Within colonial Jamaica (1655-1962) the power divide between the English literate planter class and the Creole-speaking black population was much clearer (Roberts, 1988). However, in recent decades the neat dichotomy between the Creole-speaking majority on the one hand, and the elite and those literate in English on the other hand, has been obfuscated due to the increasing numbers of Jamaican Creole (JC) speaking persons at the same time as there has been a growing acceptance of Jamaican Creole in public spaces in Jamaica (Carrington, 2001; Shields-Brodber, 1989, 1992). Nevertheless, some would argue that Jamaica's language situation could still be described as diglossic, meaning that one language, SJE, has a higher status and is used in formal settings while the other language, JC, has a lower status and is only used in informal contexts (Devonish, 1986; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

In summary, each of the seven participants interviewed constructed a script of their understanding of what a literate and non-literate student should be able to do, or not

do. This script was constructed in response to the questions about defining literacy and the connection between literacy and development. In responding to these two questions, participants tended to describe their expectations for literate students, and the benefits and drawbacks of being literate or not. Recall that scripts "typify the ways in which specific classes of subject behave in social activities" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 132). That is to say, there are certain expectations that principals, Education administrators and academics might have for what students should be able to do when engaged in the social practice of school-based reading and writing. With the exception of Dr. Dexter, the other interviewees constructed a script for a literate student that was based on his/her ability to pass the G4LT, use literacy as a problem solving tool in daily life, adeptly converse in JC and SJE when appropriate, and successfully participate in the local and global economies. For the most part, illiteracy was not seen as permanent, but was associated with unemployment, social burden, lawlessness and exclusion. In keeping with the trend of his argument, Dr. Dexter, refused to attribute any moral value to either literacy or illiteracy and instead pinpointed how literacy could be a stratifying tool in society.

In the next two sections of the chapter the seven interviewees shared their views about the Grade Four Literacy Test, and listed recommendations about what the Ministry of Education should do to improve literacy. Analysis in these sections was done by creating categories and comparing each group's response (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glesne, 2006). I compared each group's response to ascertain whether the particular item was listed by all three groups, two groups or just one group (principals, administrators, or academics). My purpose in this analysis was to illustrate points where the participants' opinions converged and where they diverged in order to establish viewpoints/recommendations that were unanimous or distinct.

Views about the Grade Four Literacy Test

Principals

Mrs. Radcliffe, principal of St. Alphonso, and Mrs. Carr, principal of Bedford Primary, felt that the Grade Four Literacy Test was "just another one of those standardized tests" and that in and of itself it could not improve literacy. Both principals used the word "just" in their description of the Grade Four Literacy Test as if to suggest that the literacy test did not interfere with the daily activities of the school but could easily be absorbed into the daily rhythms of the school. Perhaps the culture of examination has become so rooted in the Jamaican education system – a kind of accepted status quo or taken for granted Discourse model – that these assessments are not much resisted since they have become a "naturalized" part of the system (Fairclough, 2001). Naturalization, Fairclough (2001) explains, occurs when a set of discourse and activities ceases to be seen as one of many possibilities and instead becomes seen as "natural, and legitimate because it is simply the way of conducting oneself" (p. 76). In other words, the G4LT Discourse becomes an invisible and accepted part of the life-cycle of the school calendar.

Yet, the two principals believed that the nationalized G4LT did have important benefits. Mrs. Carr commented that the test was beneficial in that it focused the teachers' attention on teaching reading:

> Ahm, I think it has given the teachers a sense of focus based on the components of the exam, sight words, ahm, the reading comprehension and then the writing task. You can have a focus, right, how to deliver their language arts lessons. Ahm, and it also forces them to teach reading component. I think that was also a missing factor, it's missing in many schools. They don't teach reading, they just tell the children to read. They don't teach them all the mechanics associated with reading, how to read and comprehend. Right, so I think the test in itself, I mean, is not all bad, it gives us a focus, right (Interview, 11.03.09).

Mrs. Radcliffe also mentioned that knowledge of the literacy results motivated teachers who worked hard to ensure that St. Alphonso's result was above the national

average; hence teachers worked hard to "maintain excellence." Indeed, in the 2009 national literacy test St. Alphonso obtained 78% student passes which was eleven percentage points above the national literacy pass rate of 67%. Mrs. Carr explicitly stated that she did not encourage the teachers to "teach towards the exam." Mrs. Radcliffe stated that preparation for the literacy test at St. Alphonso began from grade one, that is, "it doesn't start at grade four, it starts at grade one, so the grade one teachers know they have to start right away because if you wait till grade four to get them ready for [the] grade four literacy [test], it's not going to happen." From the principals' perspectives, then, they discouraged teaching to the test, but encouraged a focus on literacy in their schools from as early as grade one.

Nevertheless, both principals questioned the validity of the exam as well as the drawback of comparing schools based on the literacy test results. Mrs. Carr wondered if the literacy test was truly fair given the fact that some children while "brilliant students…just don't do well on school tests and exams. Does it mean that they are not literate?" Although she insisted that tracking the results over time was useful, Mrs. Radcliffe was more concerned about how the results were being used to compare schools which had vastly different student populations:

> So with us knowing our results, the tracking, we realize that we need to improve and the comparison with other schools has its positives and also its negatives. The Minister [of Education] now is publishing as you saw publishing the results of all the schools. But they are different factors that he needs to look at and don't just do this big comparison and say this school is getting 85 so why all school[s] can't get 85 but we are in two different areas and we [are] getting completely different children. One school is getting children from good family life, parental support and another group is getting children from single parents, no food, nothing at home. All they do is watch DVD and see what is happening in the community, two different structures so you can't really compare an inner-city school with [an] uptown primary school.

Here, Mrs. Radcliffe highlights the fact that even within public schools there are vast differences with regard to student population in terms of family life, poverty, and exposure, which in her mind, influence literacy learning.

Ministry of Education administrators

The senior literacy supervisor, Mrs. Hammond, stated that the Education ministry was somewhat apprehensive about the results for the 2009 nationalized G4LT, but in the end were "encouraged but not satisfied" by the results. In my notebook I carefully jotted down what she said:

> This was the first time it was being externally invigilated. At first the MOE was concerned about whether there would be a drastic drop in the results. Last year [2008[50]] it was 71% and this year it was 67% which is a drop of only 4%. For the 'most part [the Ministry of Education was] encouraged, but not satisfied' there is still 33% that still need support.

One interpretation for the Education ministry's sense of relief over the G4LT results was that they were worried that during the years 1999 to 2008, when the literacy test was internally invigilated, schools may have inflated the test results. However, the slight decline in the results suggested that schools were not necessarily padding their test scores. Additionally, all three Education administrators agreed that the G4LT raised public awareness about the importance of literacy noting that "parents are more engaged", "teachers and parents value the importance of literacy at the primary level", it has "signaled to the wider community the importance of reading literacy…more students are recognizing that it is going to be crucial for their future." The senior literacy supervisor linked this awareness specifically to the publication of the G4LT results when she said that "the test has raised public awareness of all – the private sector, public, [and] parents – to the importance of achieving literacy especially now that the results are published in the newspaper."

Each of the administrators reminded me that the G4LT was part of a wider literacy campaign which started in the 1990s and developed as part of the Ministry's

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[50] In 2008 the Grade Four Literacy Test was still internally administered by the schools until 2009 when it was nationalized.

strategic assessment tool to improve literacy. Mr. Bartholomew, who was an education officer in the Education ministry from 1989 to 2004, recounted his involvement in overseeing the team that wrote the Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999), as well as the establishment of the National Assessment Program in 1999 in which five assessment instruments were developed including the Grade Four Literacy Test. These assessment instruments, he said, were to "provide more information on the functioning of the education system." However, he stated that he was not necessarily in favor of tests and that there was "too much hype even about the Grade Four Literacy Test…and [that] people may be induced more to study for the test instead of, you know, learning." Instead, he would advocate for "a set of diagnostic instruments that would not be sort of high profile…just instruments that the teachers have available to them."

The special advisor to the Education minister, Dr. Levy, provided some insights into the current educational changes that the ministry was considering with regard to improving literacy. Prioritizing the Grade Four Literacy Test was part of the Education ministry's "literacy thrust" in which, after a decade since 1999, they were reviewing the different assessment instruments within the National Assessment Programme. In addition, the Education ministry was spearheading a public education literacy campaign, and assigning literacy specialists to work alongside teachers to support those students who failed the literacy test. However, Mrs. Carr, principal of Bedford Primary, reminded me that only those schools that fell below the national literacy average (67%) benefited from literacy specialists. Other schools, like St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary, which scored above the national literacy average, had to create their own plans for improving the literacy of students who failed the Grade Four Literacy Test in 2009.

In terms of policies, Dr. Levy mentioned the Competence-based transition policy (2008). She said the policy provided students with "multiple chances to sit the Grade Four Literacy Test" noting that students "cannot sit the GSAT exam until [they] passed the G4LT." The ministry, she said, was also considering "revising the GSAT [Grade Six

Achievement Test] which has been around for the last ten years; one consideration is to use a percentage of the G4LT in the GSAT score. In that way the GSAT would be more of a continuous assessment." That is to say, the Education ministry was on a campaign to shift focus away from the GSAT exam towards the G4LT thereby signaling to parents, students, the schools and wider public that literacy was and is to be a critical component of the education system. One day prior to the administration of the nationalized G4LT, the Ministry of Education released an article explaining the literacy test. The title was *The Grade Four Literacy Test – focal point of primary education* (MOE, 2009b). I argue that the purpose of this article was not only to explain to the public the components of the literacy test, but to effect change through the discourse of the Ministry of Education that the nationalized G4LT was to mark a shift in focus or paradigm change in Jamaica's education system. As Education Ministry Holness said in a *JIS* article, "Every parent must know, don't worry about GSAT, shift the focus. Worry about your child being literate and numerate," (*JIS*, 2008c).

Academics

Like the principals and administrators, Dr. Barton felt that "what the Grade Four Literacy Test did was for the first time focus on literacy." Prior to the Grade Four Literacy Test in 1999, there was no assessment that measured literacy in schools at the elementary level in Jamaica. Under the Ministry of Education's National Assessment Programme (NAP), however, the Grade Four Literacy Test along with three other assessments were created and piloted in the late 1990s. Barton attributed this interest in literacy in the 1990s in part to the work Mr. Bartholomew (whom I interviewed for this study), and other colleagues in the Education Department. As the millennium approached international bodies, namely the United Nations with its Literacy Decade (2003-2012) and USAID with its New Horizon and Expanding Education Horizon projects continued to provide literacy targets for its member states like Jamaica. In other

words, the institutional sponsorship of the Education ministry, academia, as well as the international backing of UNESCO, and the financing of international agencies like USAID helped to shape the Discourse about literacy in Jamaica in the late 1990s and onwards.

Professor Dexter held contrasting views. Throughout the interview he argued that the "language issues of Jamaica have been progressively redefined in terms of literacy" and that if bilingual teaching methods were adopted, the literacy problems would largely be resolved. While working on a recent bilingual project, Dexter observed that there was an "amazing lack of correspondence between the Grade Three Diagnostic and the Grade Four Literacy Test"[51] which hindered how well teachers/administrators could really track the literacy development of the students over time as they progressed from one grade to the next. He insisted that although there was an "overlap" between these two NAP (National Assessment Programme) tests they were "testing in large measure different things." The two tests were, therefore, not aligned, making the comparison of students over time less valid.

Of greater significance to Dr. Dexter was his argument that successive education administrators ignored the language issues in Jamaica. In fact in 2000 then Education minister Burchell Whiteman "warned" Caribbean linguistics scholars "to make sure that any move towards including Creole in the curriculum of schools would not mean isolating students from mainstream society" ("Minister urges care in use of Creole in schools," 2000). That statement was made in 2000. By 2001 the Language Education Policy was drafted which was much more moderate in its recommendations than Dexter's advocacy for full bilingualism in schools across the island. However, by 2004, the Education ministry was more accommodating and authorized the Bilingual Education

[51] Both the Grade Three Diagnostic and the Grade Four Literacy Tests are part of the National Assessment Programme developed in 1999.

Project, a research study that implemented full bilingual instruction in three primary schools in Jamaica over a four year period from 2004 to 2008 (Devonish & Carpenter, 2007; Francis, 2008).

In summary, all three groups mentioned that the Grade Four Literacy Test helped to focus attention on literacy issues at the elementary level. The two principals felt that the G4LT brought attention to the importance of teaching reading in schools, while the Education administrators and Dr. Barton indicated that the test raised public awareness about literacy. Only Professor Dexter was not convinced about the usefulness of the test since it did not align with other NAP tests in his view. In terms of specific group opinions, the principals felt that the G4LT was "just" another test, and that it was unfair to use the results to compare schools with different student populations. Of the three administrators, only Mrs. Hammond mentioned that the Ministry of Education was initially apprehensive (but later relieved) about the results from the June 18th Grade Four Literacy Test.

Recommendations

The interview participants made suggestions about what areas the Ministry of Education should focus on in its goal to improve literacy in Jamaican primary schools. While reviewing the data I noted how often the suggestions of the participants overlapped. Starting literacy support earlier during kindergarten, combating poverty, supporting family literacy, and providing better resources were mentioned by all groups as areas to tackle if literacy is to be improved. Reducing class size, improving teacher training, and focusing on bilingual education were mentioned by two of the three groups. Providing literacy resource specialists in all schools/cluster of schools was mentioned only by the principals, while Dr. Levy felt that early identification of students with special needs and further research needed to be conducted. Below is a bulleted list of the participants' recommendations.

1. Earlier intervention
2. Reducing poverty
3. Supporting family literacy
4. Providing better literacy resources
5. Reducing class size
6. Improving teacher training
7. Focusing on bilingual education
8. Providing literacy specialist in all schools/ clusters of schools
9. Early identification of students with special needs
10. Further research

Table 18. List of recommendations suggested by the seven interview participants.

Principals

Mrs. Carr of Bedford Primary echoed the sentiments of several letters to the editor when she suggested that the Ministry of Education should concentrate their efforts in the earlier grades if they wanted to improve literacy. In the interview Mrs. Carr said,

> Well I think they still need to put more attention and emphasis on the early childhood level, right, not just the early childhood institutions but the early childhood level of even primary education. Ahm, we have been looking at a lot of trends. What we found out is that most of the students who come to us from the basic schools or the infant schools they have no phonetic awareness, they don't know sounds of letters. They know their sight words, they know words by rote but if they can't break these words apart and give me the individual sounds, the phonemes, they don't know that. Right, so for them to construct their own words, that's where I'm having a problem. For them to learn new words,

> they don't know how to sound the letters and put them together to get these new words. (Interview, 11.03.09)

Captured in this quote are the sentiments of a few persons who wrote to the *Gleaner* in 2009 with regards to the Grade Four Literacy Test. Between June and July 2009, three letters were written which were all inter-textually related: *Distressingly low literacy rates* (Pinnock, 2009), *Arrest literacy problems early* (T. Morris, 2009) and *Start remedial programme earlier* (Johnson, 2009). In one accord all three members of the public echoed the need to start literacy intervention earlier. The first letter, *Distressingly low literacy rates*, was written by T. Pinnock who described her experiences proctoring the G4LT at an elementary school on the June 18, 2009 exam. At one point in the letter she wrote,

> As I walked through the rows and glanced at some of the errors they had made, I could not help but sigh, asking myself how they got here, to this level?...It is absolutely ludicrous to have students in grade four who cannot even spell 'fail' or know what the word 'fine' means…they did not know that in the example cited 'fine' referred to the cost or penalty for the damage done…. (*Gleaner*, 6.25.09).

In response to Pinnock's letter another member of the public wrote, *Arrest literacy problems early* (Morris, 2009). Morris argued that the Education ministry would be better advised to focus on the earlier grades it if wanted to improve literacy. The writer posed the question, "Why wait until grade four when research has shown that students who leave grade one as poor readers are more likely to also leave grade four as poor readers?" In closing, Morris recommended that instead of certifying students to be literate at grade four, the Ministry should certify students to be ready for grade one using the Grade One Readiness tool, another test within the National Assessment Programme.

Approximately one week later, C. A. Johnson wrote a letter to the editor, *Start remedial programme earlier*. Johnson made reference to Morris's earlier article, *Arrest literacy problems early*. Using a metaphor to support Morris's advocacy of early intervention, C.A. Johnson writes, "Why wait for the sapling to become a tree before the shaping takes place?" In other words, the Education ministry should focus on providing

the basic literacy skills at grade one and getting that right, rather than wait until grade four to assess students whose reading difficulties have become ingrained. Johnson closes his/her letter by posing yet another question to Education minister Holness, "Could I implore the minister of education and his administration to "change course" and shift the emphasis from grade four to grade one?" Indeed, as I mentioned before in Chapter IV, research suggests that readers who struggle with reading in the early grades and who do not receive appropriate intervention, will continue to do poorly in later grades (Stanovich, 2000). Hence, Mrs. Carr and the public have a point when they argue for early intervention.

Both principals felt that the Education ministry should focus on parents. Mrs. Radcliffe felt that the government needed to put "put something in place for the parents" because from her thirteen years of experience at the school (as a teacher and now as a principal for three years) students from families which were not stable did not function well at school. Parents, she felt, "left everything up to the school" and some did not provide the books, or did not check children's homework. Later in the interview she mentioned that students' behavior was a challenge at St. Alphonso and pointed out that "some teachers would prefer to have a slow learner who is well behaved than a student who is just bright but has no behaviour." Mrs. Carr felt that the "high illiteracy" rate of parents inhibited them from helping their children at school. In response to this need, Mrs. Carr said that the school had set up an after-school program to help parents understand their children's schoolwork. The principals also felt that the ministry should strengthen the nutrition programs in the schools, reduce class size, and provide literacy resource teachers for all primary schools and not just for those schools which scored below the national literacy average.

Ministry of Education administrators

All three public administrators indicated that the Education ministry should focus on teacher training as a factor in improving literacy. The literacy supervisor, Mrs. Hammond, described some of the primary school classrooms as "dull, dead and dry" and that in some instances a "print rich environment [was] lacking". She also mentioned that there was too much "chalk and talk" and busy school work, and that many teachers did not know how to teach the skills of reading. In other words, teachers were sometimes using inappropriate methodology to teach. The teacher training institutions, she complained, were heavy on the theory but light on the practical aspects of how to teach reading. The special advisor, Dr. Levy, corroborated this point when she said that "not all teachers are taught how to teach reading." Likewise, the former education officer, Mr. Bartholomew, emphasized the need for training specialists in reading literacy and added that persons often oversimplified the complexity of teaching reading believing that it was just teaching students how "to recognize words." During the interview he mentioned how he along with academics from local and US universities worked in the late 1990s to establish literacy centers within the teacher training colleges which would offer specialized programs in literacy.

Another prominent theme was the lack of resources, especially reading materials, which the administrators thought curtailed reading development. Dr. Levy mentioned that although the revised primary curriculum was now a "child-centered, thematic based early childhood curriculum that encourages reading" it was "hampered by a lack of reading materials at that level." The ministry needed to supply more teaching supplies, and schools that had libraries needed to maintain them. Both Mrs. Hammond and Mr. Bartholomew also commented that reading materials needed to be matched to students' interest. It was important to flood the schools with books but "not just books, interesting books" commented Mr. Bartholomew.

Among the administrators, only Dr. Levy mentioned the issue of students' language as one of the factors that the ministry should take into account when working towards improving literacy. Explicitly she stated that,

> In Jamaica two languages are spoken, where most persons are conversant in both but write only in one, English. Persons move back and forth between the two languages. At home patois is spoken…Yet, this idea of Jamaica having two languages is a very politically contentious issue. Most students are being taught in English but they are not hearing it at home. Because our Creole is English based the distinctions between Jamaican Creole and English are sometimes not easily made. The language situation is not being tackled.

As Dr. Levy mentioned, bilingualism is a "politically contentions issue" in Jamaica. This might explain the principals' silence about bilingualism. In fact, whenever student characteristics were mentioned, the principals identified reading competence, behavior and home/community socialization, but not language. Perhaps, the principals' silence about bilingualism was not so much linked to their disagreement with it, but the weight of the pressing challenges listed above. Another interpretation is that the Discourse model surrounding bilingualism in Jamaica is a minority opinion advocated by a few without full institutional support.

Of interest was also the silence from both principals as it related to teacher training. One explanation for this is that the principals believed they had qualified teachers in their schools. Mrs. Radcliffe mentioned this when she said, "We have excellent teachers…." Another explanation is that teachers often receive the brunt of the blame whenever poor student performance is discussed, and so these principals may have been on the defensive particularly in light of the challenges teachers face in producing high results with limited resources. Recall Mrs. Carr's letter to the editor, 'Challenges & victory for Bedford Primary', in which she praised her teachers for their often unappreciated efforts.

Other factors that the administrators pointed out included the need for earlier assessment, reduction in class size, more special education programs, public awareness of

and stakeholder partnership in literacy education, enhancing student responsibility and gender as it related to boys' underperformance in literacy, as well as the need for more research. Poverty, as a major issue, was also spoken about as indexed by poor school attendance, poor nutrition and students not having lunch money. The administrators, however, felt that poverty was not a factor that the Education ministry should undertake by itself, but was a national challenge that should be tackled by the larger Jamaican government.

Academics

Dr. Barton stated that the Education ministry was "beginning to take account of some of the things we've been advocating…to take account of the language background of the learners…we didn't see the ways in which it could be used to as an asset in the basic way you talk about activating prior knowledge…." Looking at literacy through the lens of the "language background of learners" Barton also stated that it was important that students' oral skills, regardless of language, be developed, and that using the vernacular within schools could be harnessed as a source of motivation and used in contrastive analysis to distinguish Jamaican Creole from Standard Jamaican English (Bryan, 2004a; Pollard, 1993):

> When you [are] talking about learning you always say you start from where the children are at and you use what it is that they know. So in developing literacy and getting them to understand you have to use what we say is their intuitions about language - their sense about how language sounds, their understanding about phonological awareness, all of those things are there and can be taken into account no matter what language that you speak. The fact that they get excited when they hear their language in the classroom; again you can use that as a kind of motivation. Also you can use that as a kind of contrastive analysis, you comparing one language with the other. So I think that's something we should take into account more seriously (Interview, 6.11.09).

With regard to poverty Barton mentioned that it was a major challenge which plagued the education system. Poverty, she explained, affects education in two ways:

poverty of resources and poverty of experiences. First, the quality of the books in terms of production was quite poor and there were at times when one book was shared among eleven students. However, with the Literacy 1-2-3 program (*JIS*, 2008a) school textbooks written by Dennis Craig and Don Wilson, which recognized the language and cultural background of the children, were revised and made more attractive for the students. All three education administrators also mentioned this poverty of resources.

Second, there is the poverty of experiences. Barton argued that children who live in neighborhoods prone to violence are "trapped in communities and don't get access" to other experiences/Discourses outside their immediate surroundings. "You can't spend every day writing about gunshot…you want to know you can go and see a fountain in Emancipation Park," Barton added. Mrs. Carr, principal of Bedford Primary, also mentioned this poverty of experiences and her school's efforts to rectify this through implementing more school field trips. In fact, Mrs. Carr noticed that during the year that the school started promoting class trips in 2007, the standard of the students' writing improved drastically as now they had a wider array of experiences to write about:

> I think we take it for granted that every child [in Jamaica] has been to the beach and we give them these essays in the exam to write, a day at the beach. Some of them have never been, so they honestly can't write. So I think the fact that we are taking them out, giving them fresh exposure… (Interview, 11.03.09).

Contrary to other participants, Dexter did not list parenting, resources and teacher training as factors the Ministry of Education should consider with regard to improving literacy. For Dexter, if the language issues were tackled, the Jamaican students would be literate in both Jamaican Creole and Standard Jamaican English. On face value Dexter and Barton acknowledged the importance of students' home language, but there is a critical difference. Whereas Barton's perspective is influenced by an ideology rooted in research in literacy studies, Dexter's ideological framework is shaped by his linguistic training and background. In light of his perspective, Dexter pointed out that the language

issues of Jamaica have been "obfuscated" by literacy issues and as such persons blamed "the backwardness of parents, poor quality textbooks and [the need to] train the teachers better" for low student literacy. By implication Dexter contended that the Education ministry needed to focus on having programs, as evidenced by the Bilingual Education Project (2004-2008), in which Jamaican students were made literate, first in their mother tongue and then also in English:

> Ahm, literacy does not exist separate and apart from language, and so the solution to the literacy issue in Jamaica is ultimately based on a solution to the language issue which is why the bilingual education project sought to address….This is not even revolutionary linguistics, Dennis Craig whose work we use heavily, right, is the most linguistically conservative person that you can find in the sense that he accepted the status quo that there was not much value to literacy in Creole languages but he emphasized that it was important for the children's cognitive development to continue to use their language alongside English right through the system (Interview, 6.18.09).

The Bilingual Education Project lasted for four years between 2004 and 2008, and was implemented at the grade one level in three schools in Jamaica. It was informed largely by the work of Dennis Craig who held that teaching students in their mother tongue would enhance students' cognitive development (1999, p. 38). The data from this project showed that the students in the BEP research study did as well as and in some instances better than the students in the English-only control group on the project's English and Creole versions of the G4LT (Devonish & Carpenter, 2007). In other words, those students who were taught using bilingual approaches benefitted from these teaching strategies (Francis, 2008). Dexter pointed out that these results provided evidence that bilingual instruction is "workable" in Jamaica. He also mentioned that research on bilingual education shows that "in about the fifth to sixth year…bilingually educated children will pull ahead of the ones in monolingual programs." However, based on restrictions from the Ministry of Education the Bilingual Education Project was not implemented for five years as the MOE felt that the project would interfere with the

preparation for the Grade Six Achievement Test which starts at grade five; hence the BEP went for four instead of five or six years.

On the one hand, the Education ministry can be lauded for granting permission for what some would deem a "politically contentious" project. On the other hand, the reluctance of the ministry to allow the project to last for five or six years as research advocates, underlies the weakening but persistent ideology that Jamaican Creole is not of value within formal settings such as schools. As Dexter puts it, "if you define it as a language issue you are throwing in the face of the establishment that it is a bilingual [issue, with] all the social issues [and] political issues." That is to say, by identifying the country as bilingual, the establishment would have to acknowledge that language provides another social barrier between those that are literate in English versus those that are not literate in English but orally competent in Jamaican Creole.

Concluding remarks

I specifically chose to interview participants from key institutions within the educational system. Hence, I selected to interview administrators from the Ministry of Education who had knowledge about literacy policies and projects in Jamaica. I also interviewed academics who had conducted literacy and language research in Jamaican schools. Based on my readings I was aware that Dr. Dexter held views that were divergent from the other participants, and therefore I felt it was important to include his opinions. And last but not least, I wanted to document the perspectives of the principals as representatives of the schools. Too often in research the voices of those within the schools are excluded. In the chapter to follow, that is, the Conclusion, I provide a brief summary of the study and then discuss general themes and implications.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research study was twofold. The main purpose was to trace the development of the discourse/Discourse that surrounded the Education's ministry decision to transform the classroom-based Grade Four Literacy Test into a national high-stakes test in 2009. A secondary aim of the study was to document how two schools responded to the change in the procedures regarding the G4LT. The overarching research question was: How did the Grade Four Literacy Test, which was once a classroom-based assessment for a decade, become a national high-stakes exam in 2009? This main question was subdivided into three other questions: How did the Discourse about the Grade Four Literacy Test change between 1999 and 2009 in specific government documents and in the print media? What did schools do to prepare the students who failed the revised Grade Four Literacy Test in June 2009 and had to retake the test in December 2009? What were the perspectives of participants with regard to the change in the G4LT? Each sub-question related to a particular chapter which I summarize below.

Chapter IV, Societal level Discourse surrounding the G4LT, focused on how the text discourse in the government policies shaped the broader Discourse about literacy at the elementary level in Jamaica over the period 1999 to 2009. The main data sources for this chapter were documents, primarily Ministry of Education policy drafts and reports as well as newspaper articles. I identified relevant segments of a particular document or newspaper article as a frame or a snapshot of ideas. In the government documents I examined how the authors used phrases such as "literacy", "assessment", "accountability" and "bilingualism." In the newspaper articles I focused on analyzing the vocabulary choices and deciphering the author's ideological perspective using Fairclough's approach to analyzing discourse.

One of the themes to emerge from Chapter IV was the pervasiveness of the Grade Four Literacy Test Discourse at the institutional, situational and societal level given the relative suddenness of its change from a classroom-based assessment to a high-stakes national exam. Although the Education task force report (2004) had recommended that the G4LT be modified to become a national exam, it was not until 2008, shortly after the JLP party won the election in September 2007, that discussions about nationalizing the literacy test became publicized in the media. Indeed, the Ministry of Education, especially under the helm of Andrew Holness, used every opportunity to broadcast the revised G4LT in the print media. There was little resistance to this test-taking accountability agenda. Moreover, I note that as accountability grew stronger as an ideology within education in Jamaica, the recommendations of classroom-based assessment and bilingual education were increasingly sidelined in policy documents and in the media. Thus, the Discourse of accountability seemed to trump discussions of classroom-based assessment and bilingual education, both of which were included in the Literacy Improvement Initiative in 1999. Further, the notion of literacy certification is a predominant feature in the Competence-based transition policy (2008) and was highlighted in several newspaper articles. This idea that literacy can be certified is an interesting notion and has implications for how Education administrators, school personnel, scholars and the general public construct identities for what students should be able to do as readers and writers. As Enciso and her colleagues point out, "assessment is political, ideologically informed, and rooted in belief systems about who we are and how we want our world to be. Given this view, assessments used in our classrooms represent a projection of what it means to be a competent, literate member of our society" (Enciso, Katz, Kiefer, Price-Dennis, & Wilson, 2009).

Chapter V, Situational level Discourse surrounding the G4LT, focused on the two case study schools, St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary, and their response to the changes

in procedure of the nationalized G4LT. Data for this chapter were gathered from classroom observations and supported by interviews with teachers and students. Each literacy observation was conceptualized as a schema, or a set of predictable activities (Fairclough, 2001). Six schemata were selected in which literacy activities were taught to students retaking the G4LT in December 2009.

There were a number of challenges that impeded the students' learning such as the loss of instructional time. One way to describe the timetable at St. Alphonso is fluid. During the course of the study, the early morning reading session was cancelled four times within three weeks. Also, there was time wasted in getting the children to and from their classrooms to the respective literacy teacher's room. At Bedford Primary Ms. Thwaites spent time taking lunch orders which encroached into her Literacy development instructional time. And at both schools the behavior of the students, in some instances, disrupted valuable instructional time. The noise levels emanating from within a class, or from another classroom was also a distracting factor (Wilson, et al., 2001). So, while the school plan was well-intended, its implementation reflected the realities of effectively using resources (time, money etc.) to bring about change. Allington (2006) suggests that one way to improve the reading of struggling students is to invest greater instructional time to reading. If both schools are to make further improvements, then the administration has to brainstorm ways to enhance the smoother and efficient implementation of the timetable.

The quality of instruction that the struggling readers received in both schools was at times effective, and at times not. In the nine-week long case study research of the schools, I observed a range of instruction offered by teachers who reflect a range of experience and preparation levels. Both Mrs. Tennant and Mr. Scott tended to teach to the test. While Mr. Scott utilized a G4LT past paper and taught test-taking skills, Mrs. Tennant gave students work which was similar to the format of the literacy test, and used worksheet drills. In conducting the literacy intervention in this way, Mrs. Tennant and

Mr. Scott exposed the students to a narrowed grade five curriculum and also indirectly taught that literacy was about passing a test (Smith, 1991). As a novice teacher, Ms. Thwaites had a challenging time balancing the need to have the students pass the literacy test, on the one hand, with her desire to complete the grade five curriculum, on the other hand. The comprehension lesson I observed was less effective as Ms. Thwaites did not demonstrate knowledge of different comprehension strategies; she simply told students to read the passage before answering the questions as if reading would automatically translate into comprehension. Ms. Thwaites's writing lesson was more effective as the students wrote extended text about a book they were familiar with and enjoyed reading. In this lesson Ms. Thwaites was also able to balance the test-taking and curriculum goals.

However, it was Mrs. Payne's literacy teaching that I identified as effective literacy instruction based on the literature regarding struggling readers. One way to summarize Mrs. Payne's teaching was that she helped her students to notice and become more aware of the world around them through language (P. Johnston, 2004). She did this by tapping into the students' background knowledge, giving them the freedom to express themselves in whatever language they chose and thereby honoring their voices, and encouraging lively discussions in class (Craig, 2006a; P. Johnston, 2004; Santa, 2006). Pinned up on her classroom wall was also a chart of the Question-Author-Reader comprehension chart which indicated her knowledge of comprehension strategies (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Raphael, 1982, 1986). Literacy was very important to Mrs. Payne who had a Masters in Literacy Studies and attended a number of professional development sessions on literacy hosted by USAID's New Horizon and Expanding Education Horizon projects. Mrs. Payne was also instrumental in the establishment of the Knowledge Center at her school in which students, like Yanike, had the opportunity to attend field trips and journal about their experiences. Students in Mrs. Payne's class therefore had a rich literacy experience that went beyond learning to read to an appreciation of reading and writing to learn about their lives and the world around them. Further research should

focus on efforts to capture and document such examples of effective literacy teaching in Jamaican elementary schools (Bryan, 1997, 2004b). Perhaps case studies of instruction can serve as models for teachers focused on addressing students' literacy instruction.

Teachers, however, had one term to help students improve their literacy scores and pass the G4LT. Given the challenges of multiple interruptions to instructional time and literacy teaching that was not as effective, what was the probability of students actually passing the supplemental literacy test in December 2009? Research suggests that preparing and practicing for a test can improve test scores (Linn, 2000). Yet, the question always remains, what percentage of those passes are due to improvement in learning and what percentage is due to test preparation? Clearly, the focus must be on improved learning and the Ministry of Education should devote its effort on improving teacher training (both pre-service and in-service) in bi-literacy instruction, comprehension instruction and classroom-based literacy assessment.

Chapter VI, Institutional level Discourse surrounding the G4LT, explored the views of key participants in the study regarding literacy and identity, their understanding of some of the challenges impeding literacy in Jamaica and their recommendations. The main data sources for this chapter were gathered through interviews of participants at the situational level of the school and the institutional level of the Education ministry and academia. Using Fairclough's concept of script I analyzed how each participant constructed identities for the literate and non-literate student. Gee's building tasks of activities and identities and Fairclough's experiential values of words helped to tease out the ways in which the participants constructed the scripts for literate/non-literate student identities.

Participation and access emerged as an important theme in Chapter VI. Interview respondents expressed the view that literacy conferred on an individual the benefit of engaging productively in the wider community. Without literacy skills a student is "left by the wayside" explained Mrs. Carr of Bedford Primary. In the minds of most of the

interviewees literacy allowed persons to successfully participate in the economic marketplace by augmenting their employability. No longer is signing one's name, reading and writing simple sentences adequate requirements for participation in the local economy, and even more so within the global market (Brandt, 2001). Comprehension, critical thinking skills, engaging in multiple modes of communication and respect are attributes of a literate student (C. B. Cazden, et al., 1996). Being bilingual in Jamaican Creole and Standard Jamaican English was listed as a desirable attribute by at least three of the seven interviewed participants, of which Dr. Dexter was the most ardent proponent. However, it was fluency in Standard Jamaican English that was implied as having greater value in ensuring one's successful participation in the formal institutions of society such as schools. As Fairclough (2001) explicitly states, "Standard English is an asset because its use is a passport to good jobs and positions of influence and power in national and local communities. This applies naturally enough to standard English as a written form, but also to standard spoken English…" (p. 48).

Although some participants described particular challenges and suggestions, there was a general convergence of ideas when it came to what participants felt about the G4LT and their recommendations to improve reading and writing in schools. Overall, there was consensus that the G4LT raised greater public awareness about the importance of literacy. The senior literacy supervisor, Mrs. Hammond, was explicit in stating that the publication of the G4LT results contributed to this greater awareness about literacy. As reported by the principals, increasing the stakes of the G4LT by publishing the results made the teaching of reading and writing skills a priority for most teachers. Dr. Dexter, however, felt that the literacy problem in Jamaica could be resolved by adopting full bilingualism in schools.

Each chapter of the thesis provided a lens through which to assess literacy in Jamaican elementary schools. By examining documents, newspaper articles, observing literacy support lessons and interviewing key stakeholders, I was able to gain

understanding about some of the context that shaped the G4LT becoming a nationalized exam. As well, I was able to examine how two promising primary schools responded to this change in the G4LT. Yet, given the school descriptions I provide and my analysis of government and news texts, I discuss below the major themes to emerge from this study regarding the nationalizing of the G4LT.

Major Themes

The usefulness of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is well poised, as both a theory and a method, to examine how Discourse models shape in part what we say and how we behave (Luke, 1997; Rogers, 2004). Recall that Gee (2005) explains that "Big D' discourses are always language plus other stuff" (p. 26). This "other stuff" involves, at times, how individuals and groups get recognized performing certain activities and identities, and the means for coordinating these activities and people. Yet, the ability to get recognized as portraying a particular identity and the facility to coordinate activities implies power. In the context of this study, power is illustrated in numerous ways including the authority to institute changes in the G4LT by policy makers, the ability to use literacy Discourse to further one's own political agenda for career politicians, and also the aptitude of achieving mastery in the G4LT. Unlike Gee (2005), Fairclough (2001) is more explicit about issues of power in discourse. "Ideological power, the power to project one's practices as universal and 'common sense', is a significant complement to economic and political power, and of particular significance here because it is exercised in discourse" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 27). Therefore, language is more than the spoken or written word. Indeed, "language has a magical property: when we speak or write, we design what we have to say to fit the situation in which we are communicating. But, at the same time, how we speak or write creates that very situation" (Gee, 2005, p. 10). In this light,

language does not merely reflect society but is also "constitutive of social life" (Wetherell, 2001, p. 16).

To put it in context, then, the discourse texts of the various education policies in the late 1990s in Jamaica were crafted to address the problem of less than desired English literacy performance in schools, while government and media texts in the millennium forged new forms of literacy activities and literacy identities for students. Applying discourse analysis then involves moving from context to language and language to context in order to explore the complex relationship between the two and how issues of power complicate both (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005). The concepts and constructs within CDA are well suited to investigate this intersection between language, Discourse, and power. The results of CDA shed light on more focused qualitative and quantitative research studies that will illuminate literacy education in Jamaica.

The pervasiveness of the Grade Four Literacy Test Discourse

The power of a particular Discourse model (since multiple Discourses exist) lies in its power to permeate society and to convince persons of its reasonableness. Fairclough (2001) would describe this as the process of "naturalization" in which a dominant discourse appears as a "natural…legitimate way of conducting oneself" and coordinating things (p. 76). As evidenced by the qualitative data gathered and examined in this study, the Discourse of the G4LT has become a powerful Discourse model in Jamaica's education system. The G4LT Discourse that I describe here is one that is characterized by a nationalized high-stakes test, the publication of test results, multiple chances of sitting the test, GSAT consequences of not passing the literacy test, and school-based literacy intervention strategies. This new Discourse for the G4LT currently excludes the use of classroom-based assessment and summer literacy programs which used to characterize the literacy test (MOE, 2007). I argue that the new G4LT has been

shaped by an historical culture of examinations (Whyte, 1983), local political interests (Linn, 2000), overseas sponsors (Craig, 1980b), and an accountability ideology that has become prominent in the United States as epitomized in NCLB (Bush, 2001; Sadovnik, et al., 2008). As Johnston & Costello (2005) highlight, "assessment discourses distribute and sustain power relationships" (p. 263). Currently, summative assessments are considered more authoritative than formative assessments (Peter Johnston & Costello, 2005). That is to say, the nationalized high-stakes G4LT is perceived as having greater validity and more accountability than when it was administered as a classroom-based test.

Examining the changes in language within the four government documents helped to illuminate how the Discourse about literacy assessment changed from 1999 to 2009. The Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999) and the Language Education policy (2001) highlighted the importance of teacher training and classroom-based assessment, while the Education task force report (2004) and the Competence-based transition policy (2008) focused on improving student performance primarily through testing. *Conversations* in the print media circulated about this new G4LT Discourse thereby reinforcing the ideas that accountability through testing was the most effective way to increase students' test scores in English literacy. The activities of the teachers and the identities of students were all influenced by the G4LT Discourse (Anagnostopoulos, 2005; White & Rosenbaum, 2008). Teachers had to carefully negotiate the demands of covering the grade five curriculum, as well as implementing literacy support strategies to prepare students who had to retake the G4LT in December. Students' identities were also shaped by the rhetoric of the G4LT Discourse and "certified as literate" depending on whether they passed the literacy test or not.

However, to say that G4LT was accepted without opposition would be to tell only part of the story. A few writers to the *Gleaner* newspaper criticized the government for not starting literacy interventions earlier at the grade one level, and both principals complained that it was unfair to compare schools' based on the G4LT scores without

regard for the student composition of the schools. One Education administrator bemoaned the fact that the nationalized G4LT could lead to teachers teaching to the test (Smith, 1991; Wright, 2002).

Sponsors of literacy

Another major theme was that of literacy sponsorship. Brandt (2001) describes sponsors as "agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 19). In this study I have hinted at both concrete and abstract forms of sponsorship that have played a part in underwriting the formation of the G4LT Discourse. All the government policy drafts that were written were authorized by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica in collaboration with literacy scholars, educators and Education administrators. In addition to the Ministry of Education financing literacy activities, overseas lending agencies, such as the World Bank and USAID, helped to fund literacy projects. At the abstract level, an ideology of accountability also contributed to the transformation of the G4LT from a classroom-based assessment to a high-stakes test. Although I do not have evidence to show causality, certainly US ideas about education have influenced education projects in Jamaica (King, 1998). And last but not least, UNESCO continues to play a significant role in setting global goals that member nations aspire to achieve, such as the improvement of literacy rates by 2015 (UN, 2009). Noticeably, the Ministry of Education has set a target of 95% literacy pass rate at the primary level by 2015 ("95% mastery by 2015," 2009).

Indeed, sponsors have played a critical role in Jamaica's literacy development, but not always to the nation's advantage. One of the dangers of sponsorship is that the sponsor at times, knowingly or unknowingly, can sideline the opinions and genuine needs of the sponsored. Craig (1980b) makes a convincing argument when he states that:

> …in attempting to implement educational innovations, territories are sometimes forced to rely on financing and personnel from

> outside of the West Indian region, or on West Indian personnel with an outside orientation to local problems. The result is that educational models and procedures which take inadequate account of the unique aspects of West Indian language situations are sometimes applied: like early education programmes that ignore the home language of the child, developmental and diagnostic tests that do the same, reading programmes that have no control of morphology and syntax to match the English-Language learning of the child, and the English language programmes that follow either a native-language methodology or an unmodified foreign-language methodology, both of which are inappropriate for West Indian situations (p, 15)

That is to say, sponsors have at times ignored the recommendations of Caribbean linguists who have long advocated for bilingual literacy instruction in Jamaican Creole and Jamaican Standard English. In fact, other researchers such as Labov (2003) contend that the linguistic differences between the home language of the children and the first language of reading instruction poses a challenge for African American Vernacular English speakers, immigrant Spanish speakers in the US and Caribbean students whose mother tongue is Creole. Hence, linguists propose some form of bilingual instruction (Bryan, 2001; Christie, 2003; Craig, 1976; Labov, 2003; Pollard; 1993)

I also argue that many of these literacy agents are seeking to benefit from the G4LT Discourse. If literacy (improvement as indicated by test scores) is indeed a social good then it can be bartered and exchanged for something of value in this case the public image of the sponsor. Take for instance the Ministry of Education as an arm of the government. One of the themes that emerged from the analysis of the policy documents and the newspaper articles was the correlation between the rise of a political party in power and a particular reform in education. I contend that education reform, in this case the nationalizing of the G4LT, forms part of the current ruling party's ongoing political campaign to demonstrate its effectiveness at governing the country. Assessment in the form of test-taking is appealing to politicians/policy-makers for several reasons as explained by Linn (2000). First, tests are inexpensive when compared with substantial reforms such as improving teacher training and enhancing professional development. Second, tests "can be externally mandated" in contrast to taking "actions that involve

actual change in what happens inside the classroom" (p. 4). Third, testing "can be rapidly implemented…within the term of office of elected officials" (p. 4). And finally, results are visible:

> Test results can be reported to the press. Poor results in the beginning are desirable for policymakers who want to show they had an effect. Based on past experience, policymakers can reasonably expect increases in scores in the first few years of a program (see, e.g., Linn, Graue, & Sanders, 1990) with or without real improvement in broader achievement constructs that tests and assessments are intended to measure" (p. 4)

In other words, the current government through the Ministry of Education has vested interest in the construction of the G4LT Discourse in order to promote an image of effective leadership which in turn can translate into votes.

Is literacy all it's touted to be?

Brandt (2001), however, cautions her readers about believing the myth that the attainment of literacy is a panacea for individual mobility and social progress (or even political votes). Poignantly, she explains that "acquiring the resources of reading or writing, even in ample amounts, cannot guarantee desired ends. Nor does gaining literacy inoculate against discriminations of various kinds" (p. 5). The reason for this, Brandt explains, is that "what [literacy] counts for, and how it pays off vary considerably" (p. 5). For example, the student who is certified as literate based on the G4LT is eligible to sit the Grade Six Achievement Test, the main placement exam to secondary school. The student who fails the G4LT on his/her third chance will not be certified as literate, will not be able to sit the GSAT exam and instead will attend an Alternate Secondary Education Programme (ASEP). For example, if Charlie of St. Alphonso and Benjamin of Bedford Primary do not pass the G4LT on their third chance in June 2010 they will not be eligible to sit the GSAT and will be transferred to an ASEP. Passing the G4LT then pays in terms of further academic progress.

But what about the student who passes the G4LT but whose reading and writing skills are still not adequate enough to acquire the knowledge and disposition needed to gain high scores on the GSAT exam to transition to one of the top secondary schools? Although such students (those who pass the G4LT but still struggle in reading) were not the focus of this study, this was an issue that emerged particularly in my observations at St. Alphonso. Recall that St. Alphonso had a group of students who passed the G4LT but were reading below the grade five level according to the Mico Diagnostic Test (see Chapter V). Gee (2004) provides a useful explanation for this type of literacy level that does not pay in the long run:

> While a stress on phonological awareness and overt phonics instruction does initially help "at risk" students, it does not bring them up to par with more advantaged students. In fact, they tend eventually to fall back, fueling the phenomenon known as the "fourth grade slump"….The "fourth-grade slump" (Chall et al. 1990) is the phenomenon where some children seem to acquire reading (i.e. pass reading tests) fine in the early grades, but fail to be able to use reading to learn school content in the later grades, when the language demands of that content (e.g. science) get more and more complex. The fourth-grade slump is made up of kids who can "read," in the sense of decode and assign superficial literal meanings to texts, but can't read in the sense of understanding, in any deep way, informational texts written in fairly complex language (p. 15)

Although the students observed in the study were in grade five, this quotation still provides an apt explanation of what these students may be experiencing. GSAT is a curriculum-based examination and therefore passing the G4LT (a minimum competence test) does not necessarily guarantee that these students will acquire the ability to read in a deep way so as to grasp the concepts needed to pass GSAT and transition to a top secondary school. Having passed the supplemental G4LT in December 2009, I would place Yanike in this category of students who pass the literacy test but are still behind academically. Based on my observations of her reading, Yanike has not yet reached the stage of reading deeply enough to learn content needed to pass GSAT. Indeed, further

research is needed to examine the progress of students like Yanike who pass the G4LT but who read below their grade level.

Another issue that emerged from the study was the question of the Alternate Secondary Education Programme for those students who failed all three sittings of the G4LT. While it might appear reasonable to divert students who consistently fail the G4LT to an ASEP, it can become problematic if Creole-speaking male students from poor families, like Charlie and Benjamin, are consistently placed in these ASEP schools. On the one hand, there are some students[52] with learning disabilities who need special education classes and ASEP schools might be useful. On the other hand, one has to question the equity of a system when one group of children is consistently categorized as having reading problems. Certainly, children from poor families, whether male or female, are not intellectually inferior to children from middle class homes (Gee, 2004; W Labov, 2003). Rather Gee (2008) argues that "talk about 'literacy' and 'literacy crises' is often a displacement of deeper social fears, an evasion of more significant social problems" (pp.31-32). In the context of Jamaica's education system, which has historically been described as a two-tiered system, one questions whether the Discourse about the G4LT is not a distraction from the deeper social inequities between schools. This is not simply a radical suggestion when one considers that in the 2009 sitting of the G4LT 93% of students from private elementary schools passed the exam compared to 67% of students who attend public elementary schools (Luton, 2010). In other words, there are historically rooted differences between schools that cater to the poor and schools which serve the rich in Jamaica. Given the criticisms of high-stakes testing that

[52] In this study I did not distinguish between students with learning disabilities and other students who simply were behind their peers in reading but had no learning disabilities. This is because I defined struggling readers based on the G4LT results. The G4LT is a minimum competence test and not a diagnostic tool and does not test for learning/reading disabilities.

Linn (2000) explained, it is doubtful that nationalizing the G4LT will bridge that social divide.

Concluding remarks

Like most of the participants I interviewed I agree that nationalizing the Grade Four Literacy Test has led to greater awareness in the public's eye about the importance of literacy at the elementary level of education in Jamaica. Yet, I do not believe that creating another high-stakes test is the most effective way to pursue real improvement in literacy teaching and learning in schools. Rather, I contend that with better teacher training, better teaching methods and resources, intellectually able students in poor inner city schools can form identities of life-long literacy learners without another high-stakes test. Moreover, much of the rich research that Caribbean linguists have conducted from the 1960s onwards has been sidelined by the agendas of literacy sponsors as well as this current accountability ideology as indexed by the high-stakes G4LT. As a result, the teaching of literacy using bilingual approaches suited to the region has largely been ignored. Even the teaching of effective comprehension strategies and classroom-based literacy assessments have not received sufficient focus.

There is also need to be vigilant that the Alternate Secondary Education Programs do not become another means of tracking students from low socio-economic families in Jamaica. Schools, unfortunately, at times reflect and perpetuate societal class divides. Indeed, the G4LT has not only highlighted the need to improve literacy learning at the elementary level, but has revealed once more that children who attend some public schools are likely to receive a less-than-desired quality of education. Therefore, while I am not negating the value of accountability – for it is important that schools give an account of the time spent teaching Jamaica's children – it is also critical that we do not become swayed by the wave of high-stakes testing that is currently popular in the United States. This accountability agenda can often mask real social problems. Rather, both

pre-service and in-service teachers should be trained in appropriate bilingual and comprehension strategies and various classroom-based literacy assessments to help inform their instruction. This will improve the level of literacy teaching as evidenced by Mrs. Payne's effective literacy instruction at St. Alphonso. Additionally, funds should be allocated to allow all schools to have access to literacy specialists, even those schools which score above the national literacy average.

Yet, to assume that improving literacy translates into fixing Jamaica's social problems is at best faulty. Brandt (2001) clearly warns her readers that the attainment of literacy is a double-edged sword: "Expanding literacy undeniably has been an instrument for more democratic access to learning, political participation, and upward mobility. At the same time, it has become one of the sharpest tools for stratification and denial of opportunity" (p. 2). In other words, literacy can contribute to higher productivity, higher social mobility, and broader social, educational, and cultural consciousness on the part of the individual. Yet, poverty and social inequity are among the factors which complicate school-based literacy attainment. But paradoxically low literacy itself is oftentimes a symptom of poverty and social inequity. As such, it is crucial that as teachers and academics we continue to look behind the veil of literacy and critique Discourses that seek to simplify literacy attainment.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Principal interview

Socio-demographic questions:

11. How long have you been the principal of this school?
12. What are your qualifications as a principal?
13. What are your qualifications as a teacher?

General literacy questions:

14. How would you define 'literacy'?
15. What are some of the major factors that the MOE should take into account when thinking about improving literacy in Jamaica?
16. In your opinion, do you think the Grade Four Literacy Test is an effective means to improve literacy in schools in Jamaica? Why or why not?

Specific school related questions:

17. Did your school have any staff development workshops on literacy recently? When and where?
18. Tell me about your school's involvement in the New Horizon Project
19. What is your school doing to assist the students who failed the Grade Four Literacy Test in June '09?
20. Why did the school decide to separate the students between the two grade 5 classes/have a 9 am reading session? Who initiated the idea? Why were teachers selected to teach specific reading groups?
21. What are some of the specific challenges you think your school faces as it relates to improving literacy?
22. In what ways do you think your school has made improvements in terms of literacy?

23. In what ways do you think the Grade Four Literacy Test has helped to improve literacy at your school?
24. What do you think the Ministry of Education could do to support your school to improve literacy?

School history & Literacy data:

25. Tell me some basic facts about your school – date started, government or religious, school enrollment, school attendance, school population ….
26. Do you have any data on literacy in your school that I could obtain?

Teacher interview

Socio-demographic questions:

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. How long have you been teaching at this school? How long have you been teaching grade 5?
3. What are your teaching qualifications?
4. What are your other duties at the school in addition to teaching?
5. Do you teach extra lessons? When and where (and what is the cost)?
6. Did you take courses on reading and writing instruction during your teacher education preparation OR as a staff development workshop? When and where?

General literacy questions:

7. How would you define 'literacy'?
8. What are some of the major factors that the MOE should take into account when thinking about improving literacy in Jamaica?

Specific school related questions:

9. What is your school doing to assist the students who failed the Grade Four Literacy Test in June ’09?
10. Why did the school come up with the 9 am daily reading sessions? Who initiated the idea? Why were certain teachers selected to teach specific reading groups? OR Why did the school decide to separate the students between the two grade 5 classes? Who initiated the idea? Why were teachers selected to teach specific reading groups?
11. What are some of the specific challenges you think your school faces as it relates to improving literacy?
12. In what ways do you think your school has made improvements in terms of literacy?
13. In what ways do you think the Grade Four Literacy Test has helped to improve literacy at your school?
14. What do you think the Ministry of Education could do to support your school to improve literacy?

    Specific to your classroom & teaching:
15. As an example, describe how would plan for a particular communication task activity. Walk me through from the idea of the lesson to the actual teaching, and grading of student work.
16. Give me another example for the 9 am reading session.
17. In your classroom, how do you assist students who have difficulties with reading and writing?
18. Are your students placed in groups? Why? And if yes, are these groups based on their reading level?
19. Why have you remained in teaching for….number of years?

Student interview

Group questions:

1. Describe what you did on the day you took the Grade Four Literacy Test in June.
2. How did you feel when you took this exam?
3. Tell me who is a good reader in your class. How do they read?
4. Tell me who is a good writer in your class. How do they write?

Individual interview:

5. Describe what you did on the day you took the Grade Four Literacy Test in June.
6. How did you feel when you took this exam?
7. Who told you that you passed/did not pass the Grade Four Literacy Test in June?
8. How did you feel when you heard that you passed/did not pass the Grade Four Literacy Test?
9. What does your teacher do to help you be a better reader?
10. What does your teacher do to help you be a better writer?
11. Who helps you with reading at home?
12. Tell me the books that you can read.
13. Show/tell me what you do when you don't know how to read a word.

Non-teaching participant interview

1. How would you define 'literacy'?
2. What role do you think literacy plays in Jamaica's national development?
3. Which agencies inform literacy policy and planning in Jamaica?
4. What are some of the major factors that the MOE should take into account when thinking about improving literacy in Jamaica?
5. What are the various agencies that help to finance literacy initiatives in Jamaica? Which agencies are funding and supporting the new Grade 4 literacy initiative?
6. Why has the MOE decided to focus on grade 4?

7. How much consideration is given to international research with respect to literacy planning and initiatives in Jamaica?
8. In what ways do you think the Grade Four Literacy Test has helped to improve literacy in primary schools in Jamaica?
9. How much consideration is given to local research with respect to literacy planning and initiatives in Jamaica?

USAID project Interview:

1. Describe the New Horizon Project & the Expanding Educational Horizon Project.
2. How would you define 'literacy' from the perspective of the New Horizon Project and the Expanding Education Horizon Project?
3. How much local and/or international research informed the NHP and the EEHP?
4. Describe the involvement of St. Alphonso and Bedford Primary Schools in both projects.
5. Describe the literacy workshops that were conducted within these projects.
6. Is there data on literacy for the participating schools that I can access?
7. What role do you think literacy plays in Jamaica's national development?
8. What are some of the major factors that the MOE should take into account when thinking about improving literacy in Jamaica?

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLES OF DATA ANALYSIS TABLES

Analyzing definition of literacy used in Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999)

The definition of literacy used by the MOE&C in PEIP II (p. 14)

A Jamaican child leaving primary school should: At least be able to read and understand simple narrative and expository texts and practical formatted information; and to write simple stories, reports and lists for a specific purpose which can be understood by others Normally be expected to be able to read and understand narrative books, books of expository prose, simple newspaper articles suitable for their age-group and more complex formats; and to write stories which engage the readers, explanatory reports and sets of instructions which can be understood by others.

As we now look at a definition that includes adults, we will see a burgeoning field of definitions available: visual literacy, information literacy, health literacy, computer literacy and family literacy etc. The definition that follows draws on the definition used by the Quebec Centre for Literacy and therefore, significantly, comes from a bilingual environment. It also draws on the UNESCO, the OECD and the MOE&C Grade 6 definitions (p. 15)

A **dynamic** definition of literacy Literacy refers to a complex set of abilities to understand and **use** the **dominant** symbol systems/language of a culture for individual and community development. In a technological society the concept of literacy is **expanding** to include the **media** and **electronic** text, in addition to **alphabet and number systems**. Literacy includes critical understanding, problem-solving abilities, and oral/aural abilities. Literacy abilities are not static and will vary according to contexts and need. They begin with the child's acquisition of his/her first language and the intuitions developed about the way communication works in natural settings. To continue on-going growth in literate behaviour, individuals should be given **life-long learning** opportunities to develop all aspects of their literacy potential.

Data analysis table:

Literacy Improvement Initiative (1999)	**Frame: Define literacy (p. 15)**
What's going on?[53]	Authors proposing a "dynamic definition of literacy" and listing different influences for this definition.
Who's involved?	Authors, Quebec Centre for Literacy, UNESCO, OECD; MOE
In what relations?	Sponsors of literacy
What's the role of language?	To advocate a new definition of literacy
General observations	-This definition includes adults; lists different types of literacies; draws on Quebec Centre for Literacy which focuses on bilingual environment; incorporates current official definition of literacy.
Words collocated with literacy (words in bold done by authors)	Words in bold: dynamic, use, dominant, expanding, media, electronic, alphabet and number, life-long. Words not in bold: complex
Experiential values of words	Dynamic, use, complex, dominant, expanding, lifelong
Intertextuality	MOE definition on page 14
Presuppositions	Background knowledge of research on literacy
My questions	1) What makes this definition different from MOE's definition? 2) -What is the significance of the words in the experiential value row?
My response to questions	1) This definition incorporates literacy outside of school context as includes adults; responsive to the present context of technological advance; encourages lifelong learning. Official definition narrow. 2) -Dynamic: underpins authors' point throughout this section that definition of literacy is always changing. Complex: implies there is no simple solution to improve literacy. Use: literacy not a state but an activity. Dominant: JC dominant in terms of numbers of speakers, & SJE dominant in terms of official status. Expanding: undergirds the changing nature of literacy & its responsiveness to incorporate technological changes. Lifelong: supports literacy as dynamic and literacy not simply school-based but learned throughout lifespan.

[53] All of these questions are variations of Fairclough's (2001) set of description questions used to analyze texts. See chapter 5 of his book.

Data analysis of a literacy lesson

Date: 10.01.09 **Time: 9 a.m.**	**Schemata: Near Mastery students practicing word identification skills through a poem**
What are the sub-activities that make up this schema?	Transition to Near Mastery class, read poem, integrated mini-lesson, read poem, assign homework, transition to next class
What actions compose these sub-activities?	Students: waiting at the grill door, movement along corridor, took out books, figure out if captain in poem has a name, vote, answers questions, locate /bold/ in the dictionary, different students share their definitions, students guess words, blurted out answers, hitting, female student moves, boy stares, students come to the board & write words, male student misspells /captain/ by leaving out /a/, students undecided about spelling, male student reads out words from blackboard, boys read first stanza of poem, girls read second stanza, each girl reads second stanza individually, girl reads softly, fellow students ask girl to read louder, girl rereads poem, some students giggling, male student answers that girl has improved, students remind her no class on Friday, Mrs. Payne: did a number of activities - word identification, pronunciation, reading aloud, parts of speech-, asks question about character in poem, asks why, asks meaning of /bold/, asks them for meaning of /confidence/, asks students to pronounce adventurous correctly, mini lesson on difference b/w /us/ and /ous/ in words, write parts of words on board, ignores hitting, looks at student, teacher points out incorrect word and asks class to spell it, reinforces correct spelling, tells students that English language has peculiar spelling, asks student to read out words on blackboard, points to word to verify student identifying correct word, asks students to applaud student, praises male student, asks boys to stand, encourages boys to improve in literacy (only 4 girls in NM class), asks soft-spoken student to turn & face classmates vs. whiteboard, asks students to clap soft spoken student, asks students why soft spoken female reader deserves a clap, gave hw orally - read poem etc
What types of knowledge are relevant here?	Students need to know the difference between

	nouns and adjectives, how to spell words from particular poem, how to pronounce words from the particular poem, the English language has peculiar spelling
Assuming literacy attainment (passing G4LT) is a social good, how is it made relevant here?	No explicit mention to G4LT/GSAT or to testing. The format of this lesson did not overtly resemble any segment of the G4LT although the lesson focused on word identification by using activities that encouraged the students to notice the words in the poem. The question about the name of the captain could be seen as a comprehension type question. However, Mrs. Payne does encourage the boys to improve in their literacy which is a direct response to the gender challenge in Jamaica where boys are behind girls in literacy.

Data analysis of interview transcript regarding subject positions of literate student

Mrs. Carr's interview transcribed:

[2:29-2:56] **Definition of literacy**: Literacy is the ability to read and to understand what is being read. It's also being able to write for people to understand what is being written. So comprehension is the major part of literacy for me. You must understand, and it mus mek sens. [23:22 - 26:22] **Literacy & development**: Well if you look at what's happening in the country now, ahm, so many students are entering the, the secondary level illiterate or barely literate. These students leave those institutions in the same state or marginally improved. These are the people who can't get jobs, ahm, and I mean these are the people who spiral out of control because there's really no where to fit them in anyway, right. Ahm, I know that the HEART/TRUST through the HEART programs, the training agencies they're really trying to help, especially those persons who left the secondary level not qualified, ahm barely reading, barely numerate, right. Ahm, and a lot of these persons once they go through these training agencies they tend to improve, they actually get good jobs, right, and they usually work to develop themselves

better. But then when you have those who are left by the wayside these are the same persons who seem to be the majority in our country, when it comes to lawlessness, and ahm, non-productivity, right. But ahm I think if we can get the people of our country literate, reading with understanding [25:01, laugh], not just calling words, but develop a high comprehension level then I think we'll be able to solve a lot of our problems very quickly, very, very, very quickly because I mean the comprehension skills are so weak, reasoning levels are so poor that, I think that's why a lot of our problems are not solved, it's not that they are unsolvable, but [laughs] people not thinking, they don't have no skill, right. Our country can do very well; we are talented, naturally talented, gifted people, innovative people. But to link the innovation now with writing a business plan to get the funding is where the challenge lies. So we need to bridge that gap. So it's not that they can't do well and we can't be more productive, but there's a missing link. [25:54, not clear] They don't have the funding, they don't have the capital but then they don't have the skills to apply for that funding, or how to lay out the thing in a sensible way so that you see a plan, you see a goal, and you see future in this thing. We don't have that part of it, we just have an idea, and everybody's hustling (laughs), we are hustlers.

Mrs. Carr's interview, Principal of Bedford Primary	
Activities of literate individual	Read, understand what is read, ability to write for others to understand.
Script of literate person	Problem solver, high comprehension & communication skills, access to jobs, law abiding, productive
Activities of non-literate individual	Jobless, spiral out of control, nowhere to fit them in, left secondary school not qualified, barely reading, barely numerate, left by the wayside, seem to be the majority in our country, when it comes to "lawlessness and non-productivity". Comprehension skills are weak, reasoning levels poor
Script of non-literate individual	Excluded from productive/ law-abiding society; weak comprehension leads to lack of fast problem solving. But training equals self-improvement & access to jobs.

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Merriam (1998, pp. 97-98) suggests the following as an observation checklist:

Physical setting:

- What is the physical environment like?
- What is the context?
- What kinds of behavior is the setting designed for?
- How is space allocated?
- What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting?

The Participants:

- Who is in the scene and what are their roles?
- How many people?
- What brings these people together?
- Who is allowed here?
- Who is not here who would be expected to here?
- What are the relevant characteristics of the participants?

Activities and interactions:

- What is going on?
- Is there a definable sequence of activities?
- How do people interact with the activity and with one another?
- How are people and activities connected or interrelated, from participants' point of view or from researcher's?
- What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions?
- When did the activity begin?
- How long does it last?
- Is it a typical activity, or unusual?

Subtle factors:

- Informal & unplanned activities
- Symbolic & connotative meanings of words
- Nonverbal communication - dress, physical space
- Unobtrusive measures, e.g., physical clues

My own behavior:

- How is my presence affecting the scene?
- What do I say and do?

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