“I CAN’T SAY THAT I HATE IT”: READING AND ELA TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES WITH SCRIPTED CURRICULUM

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, Denise Wilburn. I swore I would never become a teacher, but you blazed too ardent and intentional a path for me to do anything but follow!

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Allen and Clementine Rigell, I love you. Thank you for your unflagging belief in me and for loving teachers as much as I do.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers implemented, modified, or resisted the implementation of a scripted English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. This critical case study used qualitative interviews to investigate reading and ELA teachers' experiences with implementing a scripted ELA curriculum in a single school district. Findings include teachers' observations about the role of the curriculum in their teaching, the role of their self-efficacy as teachers, the role of reciprocal trust between administrators and teachers, and the role of power in the adoption and implementation of the curriculum. These findings may be of interest to school and district administrators, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and educational researchers.

Overall, study participants viewed the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum favorably. They cited its recursive design as a way to allow all students access to classroom discourse and questions that require high level critical thinking. Some participants said it raised their expectations for students. Participants overwhelmingly said that their trust in the district administration and their freedom to modify the curriculum was essential for their satisfaction with it or their willingness to use it. District administrative structure and the role of academic coaches was central to mediating conflict between teachers and curriculum. Participants noted that the curriculum offers vertical alignment and stylistic consistency to mitigate intra-district transience and pandemic disruptions to the instructional calendar. Many participants struggled with the loss of autonomy and creativity of building their own curricula. Within my analysis, I noted teachers' lack of knowledge and control of the adoption process and what that may suggest about power and curricula in schools. For example, teachers were expected to teach 90 minute lessons in 70-

minute class meetings. The power imbalance implicit in this expectation directly impacted their classroom practice.

Based on these findings, I suggested implications for teachers, school and district administrators, educational researchers, and educator preparation programs (EPPs). Implications include an ongoing examination of how curriculum is defined and how standards-driven discourse influences classroom instruction, as well as suggestions for teacher resistance and EPP advocacy for teacher autonomy.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I sought to understand the experiences of K-8 reading and English/language arts teachers in a school district that mandates the use of a scripted literacy curriculum through a critical case study, presented here. The impetus for this study was a variety of tensions I experienced in ongoing conversations about the imposition of scripted curricula in K-12 reading and ELA classrooms. In this introductory chapter, I outline those tensions in the context of my experiences as a teacher and early-career education researcher. I also present a statement of the research problem and the research question the study was designed to answer.

Background

During the thirteen years I worked as a secondary English language arts (ELA) teacher, I was given autonomy in designing curriculum for my students. My curriculum design was based on the state standards for ELA, the collaborative decisions made by my grade level instructional team, and the needs of my students. Since leaving the K-12 classroom in 2018, I have been dismayed by the widespread adoption of scripted curricula in K-12 schools, as both a former classroom teacher and an education researcher. These scripted programs are poised to rob teachers of their autonomy to incorporate students' funds of knowledge in their classroom. They may also impede teachers' work in differentiating across content, process, and product in meeting students' diverse learning needs. However, I can also remember years during my teaching career when a great degree of autonomy in planning my year-long curriculum left me feeling adrift. I was often uncertain of how effectively I was addressing statewide curriculum standards. In other words, I can understand the need for instructional scaffolding for teachers in the high-stakes standards-based accountability climate of public education, despite my lack of

faith in scripted ELA programs as the foundation of any teacher's classroom instruction. As a result of my disparate reactions to the use of scripted curricula in English Language Arts, I became interested in how public school teachers navigate the use of scripted curricula, particularly when such curricula conflict with their beliefs about best practices in teaching.

The Problematic Prevalence of Scripted Curricula

Scripted curricula are being adopted and implemented widely in the U.S., with many school districts mandating their use (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2017). Scripted curricula are bundled resources (e.g., textbooks, workbooks, and software) that school districts purchase and often require teachers to implement with fidelity (i.e., verbatim). Research shows that such curricula often infringe on teacher autonomy (Barrett et al., 2018; Carl, 2014; MacGillivray et al., 2004; Owen, 2010; Valencia et al., 2006). Furthermore, they are inequitably implemented in schools: teachers who work in low-income schools are most likely to face mandated use of scripted curricula (Kavanaugh & Fisher-Ari, 2017; Beatty, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ede, 2006). Perhaps most significantly, there is little evidence that scripted ELA curricula have had lasting positive effects on national reading achievement or on racial or ethnic "achievement gaps" in reading (Hansen et al., 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Centering Teachers' Voices in Research About Scripted Curricula

The idea of talking to teachers about how they navigate using a scripted curriculum in their classrooms arose from two specific moments of tension. The first was the tension I felt when I spoke with a close professional colleague about curriculum adoption in a middle school. She is a former coworker of mine, a brilliant educator, an instructional coach, a librarian, and a

National Board Certified Teacher. When she spoke positively about a scripted curriculum she had seen implemented in another middle school, I expressed skepticism. After some back and forth, she eventually said something like, “Honestly, Amanda, some of these teachers I’m working with would be lost without this curriculum. They just wouldn’t have any idea what to do.”

I had designed lessons, unit plans, and grade-level assessments with this colleague, and I know her competence as an educator as well as her student-centered teaching practices in the classroom. My own students had benefitted from her expertise as a teacher and as a librarian many times when we worked together. So her defense of a scripted curriculum gave me pause, and made me reflect on moments in my teaching career when I was (poorly) making up the curriculum as I went along. Since my induction into the teaching profession, I have perceived scripted curricula as a slap in the face to teachers—a dismissal of their content knowledge, craft knowledge (Murphy, 2019), and autonomy. Craft knowledge is “understanding gathered over time by participants” (Murphy, 2019, n.p.). Autonomy as discussed in the present study is defined as “teachers’ degree of given professional discretion” (Nyguen et al., 2021, p. 2). In my perception, a scripted curriculum would undermine or dismantle these aspects of teacher expertise.

However, thinking more objectively, my colleague’s comment made me realize it was incumbent upon me to explore my reaction to scripted programs by privileging and centering the voices of teachers who are mandated to use scripted curricula in their classrooms, in order to try to understand their experiences more fully.

Shortly after that conversation, I took a Cultural Studies in Education class that introduced me to foundational readings about critical race theory (CRT). These readings led to a second moment of friction that deepened my curiosity about scripted curricula. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) wrote, “Critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (p. 18). Her assertion made me curious about what *exactly* scripted curricula are scripting in K-12 classrooms, and what lessons about race and power might be embedded in that script. I spent the next two semesters working with a team of faculty and fellow graduate students to write an analysis of a nationally adopted scripted curriculum, *Wit and Wisdom*, through a lens of Critical Anti-Racist Discourse Analysis (CARDA) (Laughter & Hurst, in review). That analysis revealed a curriculum that was color-evasive (Annamma et al., 2016) at best (it avoided talking about race, color, and ethnicity altogether or through the use of euphemisms about race instead of plain language), intentionally suppressive of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) voices at worst, and was published in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (Rigell et al., 2022).

These conversations and experiences raised questions for me. What do teachers do when their district or school administration tells them they must use a scripted curriculum? What do they do when they disagree pedagogically with what the curriculum tells them to do and say? What do they do when they oppose what the curriculum is teaching?

Because I have no direct experience with teaching from a standardized or scripted curriculum, I wanted to center the lived experiences of teachers who have done so in my dissertation study. I also wanted to interview teachers who were using the same scripted ELA curriculum I had spent time reviewing and analyzing, in order to have a better understanding of

the packaged product they had been required to implement in their classroom instruction. Those reasons led me to interview teachers in a small district in my region that adopted and implemented the *Wit and Wisdom* ELA curriculum four years ago.

Statement of the Problem

Three facts serve to problematize the implementation of scripted reading and ELA curricula:

1. Little research exists to support the use of scripted curricula in reading and literacy classrooms (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). Such curricula have been implemented as part of a political and politicized movement, neoliberalism, which seeks to maintain culturally, religiously, and politically conservative interests alongside White hegemony (Au, 2011; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Sleeter, 2012).
2. Scripted curricula are more frequently mandated in schools that serve high-poverty communities and BIPOC students than in White and affluent schools (Beatty, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ede, 2006; Kavanaugh & Fisher-Ari, 2017).
3. Scripted curricula prevent or impede culturally relevant pedagogy (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2017; Milner, 2013; Sleeter 2012) despite being implemented in schools serving increasingly diverse students (Benegas, 2019; MacGillivray et al., 2004; Valdez, 2020). Conversely, a substantial body of research indicates that culturally relevant teaching that honors students' interests, cultures, experiences, and funds of knowledge consistently benefits students across cultural and socioeconomic groups (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; de los Rios et al., 2015; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter, 2012; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

Politicization of Curricula

Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, published in the 1970s, holds that a 'historical bloc' of ruling-class groups wields social authority over subordinate classes or groups through force and consent. In its contemporary use in cultural studies, however, the concept of hegemony "connotes an undesirable 'imposition' disguised as widespread consent" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 80). As the concept of hegemony relates to scripted curricula, Au (2011) posited that neoliberal political groups function as a bloc in stripping away teacher autonomy and supplanting responsive teaching with imposed scripted programs.

The prevalence of scripted reading programs in U.S. public schools is part of a larger neoliberal movement for school reform (Beatty, 2011), particularly reading reform initiated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The National Reading Panel's (NRP) report in 2000 highlighted the positive impact of explicit and systematic phonics and phonemic awareness instruction in learning to read (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020); NCLB used the findings in this report to mandate the use of scientifically-based reading instruction programs to receive federal funding. This mandate led low-income schools to implement approved scripted programs to continue to receive Title I funding (Ede, 2006). NCLB also mandated national high-stakes testing, which led to the widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). As a result of the adoption of these national standards, implementation of scripted curricula accelerated nationwide (Barrett et al., 2018; Timberlake et al., 2017). More information about the history of scripted curriculum implementation in U.S. schools is provided in Chapter 2.

In the sequence of events outlined above, a hegemonic "historical bloc" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 75) of school accountability lobbyists and policymakers used high-stakes testing to

establish public education as a failure only correctable by a reform movement seeking to both privatize and standardize education, destroy teachers' unions, and structure school knowledge according to conservative ideologies (Au, 2011). Scripted curricula deemphasize teacher knowledge and expertise, as there is no room for teachers to personalize lessons or make their own curricular decisions (Carl, 2014; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Timberlake et al., 2017). Scripted curricula's explicit alignment to the tested standards on high-stakes assessments is an implicit suggestion that any teacher, regardless of experience, content knowledge, or pedagogical knowledge, can use the curriculum successfully (Benegas, 2019; Carl, 2014; Milner, 2013).

Fitz and Nikolaidis (2020) pointed out that research on the effectiveness of these scripted curricula is "indeterminate" (p. 198), but that many schools and districts continue to adopt such programs, even in the absence of financial coercion like the threatened withdrawal of federal Title I funding that was a hallmark of NCLB. They called for further empirical research around the motivations of school- and district-level administrations to better understand why scripted programs remain prevalent. As scholars continue to build that body of research, the imposition of scripted programs seems to be successfully disguised as "widespread consent" (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 80).

Inequitable Implementation of Scripted Curricula

Scripted curricula often focus attention on "explicit sets of instructional practices, rather than principles of instruction or pedagogical beliefs and frameworks" (Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2010, p. 386). While these resources are intended to support best practices in teaching, research shows that they often infringe on teacher autonomy and restrict teachers' responsive instruction, rather than functioning as scaffolds for teachers (Barrett et al., 2018; Carl, 2014; MacGillivray et

al., 2004; Owen, 2010; Valencia et al., 2006). Restricting teachers' ability to use responsive decision making driven by students' learning needs runs counter to decades of research on effective teaching (see: Allington, 2002a; Parsons et al., 2018; Vaughn et al., 2015). Impinging on teachers' freedom to make instructional decisions that best serve their classroom communities also leaves little room for culturally relevant pedagogy (Benegas, 2019; Delpit, 2003), because a scripted curriculum standardizes the literary culture of a classroom by prescribing its instructional texts as well as the activities students will use to think about those texts.

Implementation of scripted curricula demonstrates educational inequity based on race and class. Studies from as early as 1980 found that teachers of affluent students integrated students' languages and experiences into classroom lessons, while teachers in schools with more students in poverty and Students of Color often focused on rote, procedural instruction (Anyon, 1980; Bartolome, 1994). The same pattern of inequity has been borne out with the implementation of scripted curricula as well, with scripted or packaged programs implemented more frequently in low-income schools that serve BIPOC students (Beatty, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ede, 2006; Kavanaugh & Fisher-Ari, 2017). This pattern of implementation is not supported by quantitative or qualitative research. Two decades after the policy decisions that precipitated widespread implementation of scripted reading curricula, there is little evidence they have had lasting positive effects on national reading achievement or on "achievement gaps" in reading across racial and ethnic lines (Hansen et al., 2018; Vaughn et al., 2021).

Scripted Curricula and Culturally Relevant Teaching

In contrast to a small body of research reporting the mixed and indeterminate impacts and influences of scripted curriculum (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020), a substantial body of research has

found that culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), culturally relevant education (CRE), and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) support positive academic outcomes for students from all racial and ethnic subgroups (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Sleeter, 2012; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Sleeter (2012) argued that culturally relevant pedagogy was marginalized by elite and White fear of losing hegemonic control, and that neoliberal reforms resulting in implementation of scripted curricula were "deliberately context-blind" (Sleeter, 2012, p. 565). These curricular adoptions, she wrote, negate "the central importance of teacher professional learning, as well as context, culture, and racism, [and they] reverse the empowered learning that culturally responsive pedagogy has the potential to support" (p. 563). Sleeter's findings are particularly important in the context of decades of research studies which indisputably demonstrate positive academic outcomes for students when culturally responsive pedagogy is used effectively (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

In their review of research on culturally relevant education (CRE), Aronson and Laughter (2016) found 39 empirical studies that demonstrated measured positive outcomes for students across content areas; 13 of the studies were specific to culturally relevant English Language Arts (ELA) instruction. Positive outcomes across the reviewed studies included greater word recognition, reading comprehension, story retelling, increased engagement and motivation in reading, and an increase in cross-racial friendships. These studies demonstrate that the imposition of scripted curricula serves hegemonic purposes of fulfilling curriculum standards developed by private companies with capitalist interests (Layton, 2014). Scripted reading instruction lacks an evidence base; culturally responsive teaching does not. Testing and standardization initiatives are the forces driving the implementation of scripted programs at the

expense of teacher autonomy and culturally relevant teaching (Au, 2011; Milner, 2013; Sleeter, 2012). Companies that produce standardized or scripted curricula to meet the standards benefit from the widespread adoption of their products at the district and state levels. For example, despite the lack of evidence supporting large-scale implementation of scripted reading instruction, popular scripted reading and math programs from companies like Great Minds and Amplify garner anywhere from $119 million to $215 million dollars in annual revenue (ProPublica.org, 2021; Dun & Bradstreet, 2021).

Significance

The purpose of this study is to offer a critical case study exploration of teachers' use of scripted ELA curricula in K-8 reading and ELA classrooms. I investigated how such curricula intersect with teachers' needs, goals, and existing praxis, as well as how teachers understand the power structures that continue to lead to the implementation of scripted ELA curricula. I believe privileging in-service teachers' voices is a way to provide valuable insight about the effects of mandated scripted ELA curricula on teachers and their teaching.

The significance of this work lies in its contribution to the small body of research that examines teachers' perceptions of scripted ELA curricula they are required to use. In particular, this study focuses on how participants navigate implementation of a scripted ELA program as it aligns or fails to align with their beliefs about good teaching. In the review of the literature, I found few rigorous published studies that researched in-service reading and ELA teachers' experiences with scripted curricula, although a number of recently completed doctoral dissertations focused on teachers' experiences with scripted ELA programs (Bailey, 2017; Pittman, 2020).

I interpreted the data generated during this study to understand how teachers experienced the mandated implementation of scripted curricula. I believe an effort to understand their perceptions, reactions, and decision making processes may have policy or programmatic implications for school districts, preservice teacher education programs, or both, as they seek to continue developing effective instructional design and curriculum adoption. Privileging teacher voice in this critical case study will be of utility to school and district administrators as well as teacher educators as they empower K-12 teachers to teach in a manner aligned with their pedagogical ideals, rather than fearfully aligning themselves with the commodified cultural artifact of a teaching script.

Thus, this study may contribute insight to two aspects of the implementation of scripted ELA curricula: teachers' perceptions of such curricula and their instructional practices with them. The proposed study may be of importance to school leaders, educator preparation programs (EPPs), and educational researchers as they seek to understand the intersection of education policy and teaching practice, as well as effective literacy instructional practices and differentiated instruction.

Research Question

The primary focus of this proposed study is to determine how teachers think about their decisions to follow, adapt, resist, or otherwise react to a scripted curriculum in their classrooms. The following question is the basis of the research:

1) What are ELA teachers' experiences with a scripted curriculum?
    a. In what ways do teachers' beliefs, values, and expectations influence ELA teachers' experiences with a scripted literacy curriculum?

Assumptions

This study investigates values, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of participants through the use of interviews and artifacts in the form of lesson plans or lesson plan annotations or amendments. I assume that all participants are giving accurate and complete information during their interviews. I will make clear to them that I serve in no evaluative role, nor will I discuss their interviews with anyone who serves in an evaluative role in their work.

Definitions

English/Language Arts (ELA) – an instructional content area, incorporating reading, writing, listening, and speaking competencies (CCSS, 2010)

Scripted ELA curricula / scripted ELA programs – these terms will be used interchangeably to describe curricular materials that pace and script teachers' instructional moves during planning, instruction, and formative assessment (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2010)

Adaptive teaching / responsive teaching – teacher decision making that drives instructional adjustments (Parsons et al., 2018)

Critical pragmatism – pragmatic inquiry seeks to carefully understand, study, and solve problems; critical inquiry seeks to name and frame those problems through a lens of understanding power structures; thus, critical pragmatism takes up a denaturalized, problematized view of inequality and asks questions about power and the status quo (Kadlec, 2007)

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the study in which I described current practices and policies around scripted curricula and the

research that suggests their implementation is problematic for students and teachers. I explained the purpose and significance of the study and identified the research questions, along with limitations, delimitations, and assumptions of the study.

In Chapter Two, I provide an examination of how curriculum may be defined and a brief history of scripted literacy curricula, followed by a review of research literature about teacher perceptions of scripted curricula. I also provide a review of research literature about ELA teachers adapting and resisting scripted curricula.

In Chapter Three I explain the theory of critical pragmatism and an explanation of its use as the theoretical framework for the proposed study. I also describe the methodology of the study in Chapter Three. The explanation of methodology and methods includes a description of participant recruitment, the artifacts and interview protocol to be used during interviews, and the data analysis that will be conducted.

In Chapter Four, I report the findings of the study as organized in accordance with my data analysis process. The themes are explained and illustrated by quotes from participant interviews and information about participants' educational backgrounds, beliefs, and teaching experience.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the findings of the study, their contribution to the research literature, and their implications for school leaders, teacher educators, and educational researchers. I also suggest directions for future research to enrich and extend the findings of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review includes research relevant to scripted ELA curricula and teachers' experiences implementing it. First, I provide a broad definition of *curriculum* and the critical stance two contemporary scholars have taken in describing the concept of curriculum and its influence on K-12 education. Then I provide a historical overview of scripted literacy curricula. The third section summarizes research literature about teachers' experiences with scripted ELA programs, identifying major findings from that group of studies. In the final section of the chapter I review and summarize research about teacher adaptations and resistance to scripted curriculum mandates in schools, particularly in reading and ELA classrooms.

Problematizing the Definition of Curriculum

Before reviewing the literature about teachers' experiences with scripted curricula, I want to first acknowledge the lack of a common definition of curriculum across governing bodies who drive school-level policy. For example, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) website defines *curriculum* in the context of its *raison d'etre*, the standards themselves:

> Education standards like Common Core are *not* a curriculum. Local communities and educators choose their own curriculum, which is a detailed plan for day to day teaching. In other words, the Common Core is what students need to know and be able to do, and curriculum is how students will learn it. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, n.p.)

The CCSS definition of curriculum is self-evidential and circular, so I searched for a definition of *curriculum* on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) website, because NCES develops and administers the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), which

measures student performance with an assessment developed by its own governing body. I also searched for a definition of *curriculum* on the National Education Association's (NEA) website, because my study is centered on teacher perceptions and the NEA is the largest national organization of teachers. No definitions were provided on either organization's website. Because curriculum adoption and implementation are state- and local-level decisions, I also searched the Department of Education websites for Tennessee, New York, and California, and no definitions of *curriculum* were provided there, either. I did find a statewide definition used by the Department of Education in Rhode Island (RIDE). That definition, too, was wrapped around the discourse of *standards*:

> Curriculum is a standards-based sequence of planned experiences where students practice and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills. Curriculum is the central guide for all educators as to what is essential for teaching and learning, so that every student has access to rigorous academic experiences…Curriculum must include the necessary goals, methods, materials and assessments to effectively support instruction and learning. (RIDE, 2022, n.p.)

However, curriculum theorists have rarely held such a narrow view of curriculum as the CCSS or RIDE. In 2016, Gloria Ladson-Billings wrote about curriculum for Educational Researcher and provided a historical overview of curriculum discourse by presidents of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). In her introduction to that overview, she wrote:

> Curriculum is the "stuff" of schooling—school subjects such as English, Spanish, geometry, world history, or physical education—as well as the connective tissue of co-curricular activities like band, sports, debate team—and… those things that are learned

> but not openly taught. For example, a student who walks into an urban school and passes through a metal detector may learn that the environment is perceived to be dangerous. On the other hand, a student in a suburban school with acres of land and state-of-the-art facilities may learn that the community embraces and supports her and expects her to succeed. Each of these things—the explicit curriculum, the co-curriculum, and the hidden curriculum—reflects what students can expect to experience under the aegis of the school. (Ladson-Billings, 2016, p.100)

In addition to re-defining curriculum as everything students experience at school, Ladson-Billings (2016) calls on educators to "defend the right for the curriculum to be fluid and changing rather than fixed and rigid," (p. 104) citing Dewey's conception of a curriculum "that emerges from the experiences of the learners" (p. 104). Indeed, Dewey saw little use in separating child from curriculum. He wrote:

> Just as two points define a straight line, so the present standpoint of the child and the facts and truths of studies define instruction. It is continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call *studies*. (Dewey, 1902, p. 29)

Ladson-Billings' (2016) call for educators and educational researchers to defend a Deweyan definition of curriculum stands in stark contrast to the scoped, sequenced, paced, and packaged curricula being marketed and adopted widely in U.S. K-12 schools today.

In 2018, Michael Apple also took up moral considerations of a narrowing definition of *curriculum*. He wrote:

> Such things as audit cultures, performance pay, never ending competition, privatization, attacks on teachers and teacher unions, raising standards while reducing support for public schools, a climate of anti-immigrant sentiment and white supremacy, a culturally restorative project to reinstall what is assumed to be high-status knowledge in schools, defining "important" knowledge as only that which serves the limited needs of economically powerful groups, and similar 'reforms' are increasingly transforming what counts as a 'good' school, a good teacher, a good curriculum, a good parent and a good student, a good community, legitimate culture, important evidence…Education has once again become a site of crucial struggles over authority and identity, indeed over both the very meaning of being educated and who should control it. (Apple, 2018, p. 685)

In other words, restrictions on the definition of *curriculum* also pave the way for curricula to be politicized, leveraged, and capitalized. Apple (2018) explained the role of educational researchers in understanding the control of discourse about curriculum this way: "We need to more fully understand the ways in which the curricular, pedagogic, and evaluative principles and practices that go on within schools are 'determined'" (p. 686).

The tension that Dewey identified in 1902 between child and curriculum has influenced the shape of literacy curricula for over a century. The political forces that Apple (2018) cautioned educational researchers about have accelerated the discourse from one about *curriculum* to one about *standardized* or *scripted* curricula. Since the mid-1990s, mounting pressure to establish a national curriculum has driven increasingly restrictive definitions of *curriculum* and forced the hand of school districts across the U.S. to adopt and mandate literacy curricula that are not only designed to be child-proof, but teacher-proof (Achinstein & Ogawa,

2006; Au, 2016; Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Vaughn et al., 2021).

As demonstrated above, definitions of *curriculum* at state and national levels wrap themselves around the standards. This standards-driven definition of curriculum has the potential to shape not only what students learn, but how they learn it. Models like the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focus on skills and knowledge rather than identity and criticality (Muhammad, 2020). They also emphasize leveraging text evidence to support argumentative claims rather than discursive exegesis or dialogic teaching (Gardoqui, 2018). Thus the language of uncritical and "identity neutral" standards impacts the scope and sequence of entire K-12 scripted curricula and the aims of classroom education in the U.S.

A Historical Overview of Scripted Literacy Curricula

The notion of a scripted literacy curriculum is not new; it originated over 200 years ago, with models of instruction that de-centered the teacher and centered instead the "course of study" (Kliebard, 1995, p. 2). Scripted curricula were first developed as a method of reading instruction and came about as a corollary instructional tool alongside the textbook (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). In the early to mid-1800s, highly structured reading curricula were detailed lesson plans with "suggestions for instructors" (Venezky, 1990). An explicitly scripted reading curricula was first written in 1888 as a supplement to the Monroe Reader and titled 'How to Teach Reading' (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). During the early twentieth century, scripted curriculum was associated with the notion of scientific management of education (Kliebard, 1995; Au, 2011).

More recent models of scripted reading instruction, like Direct Instruction and Success for All, were developed from the 1960s to the 1980s in order to target the perceived needs of struggling students (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020) These curricula were taken up as a component of

the school reform movement (Beatty, 2011), and their implementation was an essential school reform strategy when large cities like Los Angeles and New York required their use in low-achieving schools in the 1990s (Milosovic, 2007).

In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) conducted a review of literacy acquisition research that included roughly 100,000 studies (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020), though the methodology and applications of this study have been widely critiqued (Allington, 2002b; Almasi et al., 2006). The NRP reported that effective reading instruction included systematic and explicit phonics instruction. This definition of scientifically-based reading instruction determined what models of reading programs would get federal funding under the No Child Left Behind legislation (Coles, 2012). In response, curriculum publishers developed highly scripted phonics programs to satisfy the need for explicit and systematic instruction (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). These moves forced low-income schools to adopt approved scripted curricula in order to continue to receive Title I funding (Ede, 2006). In this sense, it is easy to draw a line connecting the widespread adoption of scripted reading curricula to the hegemonic forces that led to their implementation in U.S. schools.

However, it is less straightforward to understand how NCLB leveraged the NRP's report about systematic phonics instruction to dictate widespread adoption of scripted reading programs in upper elementary grades and secondary classrooms, where phonics instruction does not occur frequently or is not used widely. But the NRP report opened the door for "scientifically-based" reading programs to be marketed, and the NCLB legislation also exerted control over classroom instruction by mandating national high-stakes testing, even before the adoption of national curriculum standards (Au, 2011). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were published

and adopted in response to testing mandates of NCLB, then used by a majority of states as the standards for state tests. Thus implementation of scripted curricula both accelerated and widened: schools began using scripted programs for not only reading, but also math and social studies (Barrett et al., 2018; Timberlake et al., 2017).

The widespread adoption and implementation of scripted curricula is not grounded in robust research literature. Quantitative research on scripted reading instruction is limited, indeterminate, and focused on specific reading programs (i.e., Direct Instruction, Open Court, Success for All) (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). For example, Ryder et al. (2006) found that Direct Instruction benefitted suburban students but not urban ones, and that individual teachers' characteristics significantly influenced class reading achievement. In contrast, Stockard (2010) found that Direct Instruction positively influenced students' reading achievement from first to fifth grade. Several studies found statistically significant positive influences on reading achievement with Success for All, but the unpaid chairman of the Success for All Foundation, Robert Slavin, is a coauthor on all of those studies (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). Two studies of Open Court Reading conducted a decade apart first found statistically significant positive effects (Borman et al., 2008), then mixed positive and negative effects (Vaden-Kiernan et al., 2018). Even an analysis of phonics instruction—the primary lever in the NRP report that influenced the development of scripted literacy programs (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020)—found no significant difference in mean reading scores over two years in classrooms with a scripted phonics program (SRA Reading Mastery) versus a non-scripted one (McIntyre et al., 2008). The What Works Clearinghouse database indicates that Open Court, Success for All, and Direct Instruction have positive, mixed, and zero effects, respectively (Institute of Education Sciences, 2020.) In other

words, even according to the "gold standard" (Dillon & O'Brien, 2019) of randomized controlled trials that the Institute of Education Studies uses to select studies for funding, scripted reading programs do not demonstrate clear success or effectiveness.

In a qualitative study of the SuperKids scripted reading program, Bailey (2017) found that students were more disengaged from reading, that they preferred "authentic" (p. 30) texts to SuperKids texts, and that they lacked phonics and phonemic awareness skills after two years of SuperKids when compared to students who used authentic literacy practices in kindergarten. At the K-5 level, neither quantitative nor qualitative studies instill confidence in scripted literacy curricula, as the results vary widely and are narrowly focused on specific programs.

At the secondary level (grades 6-12), empirical research on the effectiveness of scripted reading curricula is even harder to find. Most research is qualitative and centers on teacher perceptions or adaptations of scripted reading programs (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). In one quasi-experimental study, Marentic (2019) found that non-scripted reading instruction resulted in significantly greater proportions of students scoring at the Meets/Exceed level in reading on the Nevada criterion-referenced reading test than the scripted reading program used with the treatment group.

The What Works Clearinghouse identifies only one scripted reading curriculum as having positive or potentially positive effects in grades 4-10: Scholastic's Read180. However, only two of six studies bolstering the WWC's claim of a positive effect of Read180 on comprehension meet its standards for study design and proof of effectiveness without reservations. This snapshot of a widely available and easily accessed research base like the WWC illustrates how murky claims of scripted programs' effectiveness may be.

Insight into the effectiveness of scripted reading programs offered by national reading assessment results is unclear as well. Gains in NAEP reading scores in fourth and eighth grades from 1998-2017 (the NCLB era) were more modest than those in math, and the "white-Black gap" (Hansen et al., 2018, p. 7) in reading has remained consistent for two decades. In other words, the era marked by increasingly widespread use of scripted curricula has had little impact on students' reading achievement, and none on closing the perceived reading "gap."

Finally, research literature regarding the cultural relevance of scripted programs paints a bleak picture of their effectiveness for a diverse nation of learners (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Sleeter, 2012; Sleeter, 2011). Systematic analyses of school curricula showed that Euro-American experiences and worldviews are predominant in K–12 curricula; the dominance of White-centric worldviews leads many students to disengage in classrooms where such curricula are implemented (Sleeter, 2011).

Teacher Perceptions of Scripted Curricula

Qualitative studies on teacher perceptions of scripted curricula depict real people caught in a hegemonic sociopolitical net (Bartolome, 1994). The titles of these studies describe teachers talking back to, negotiating, navigating, subverting, and adapting the *script* of scripted programs (Benegas, 2019; Wyatt, 2014; MacGillivray et al., 2004; Carl, 2014; Evans et al., 2010; Owen, 2010). Some teachers who were studied appreciated the perceived ability of a scripted program's high standards to remedy societal inequities (Timberlake et al., 2017). Some appreciated a scripted program simply because it provided necessary instructional material (Valencia et al., 2006). Other research literature reports that teachers seek to resist or adapt scripted curricula when they inhibit culturally relevant teaching or prevent them from differentiating instruction to

suit the needs of the individual students they teach each day (Benegas, 2019; Wyatt, 2014; Valdez, 2020; MacGillivray et al., 2004; Carl, 2014; Evans et al., 2010; Owen, 2010). Scripted programs enforce a "curricular sameness" (Timberlake et al., 2017, p. 51) already proven to be ineffective for many learners. In other studies, teachers decried, adapted or resisted scripted curricula based on their values and beliefs about teaching and its role in society. Moore and Clarke (2016) wrote that in many cases, "opposition appears to exist at a more profound level, in which teachers' very convictions and motivations, along with their broader social and ethical positionings … are felt to be challenged or undermined by central policy directives" (p. 667). Milner (2013) wrote that a scripted curriculum "does not allow or at best makes it difficult for teachers to respond to the sociopolitical context and realities of their work" (p. 166) by failing to make room for teachers to adapt it according to the needs of their students' environments. Across the research literature, teachers experience frustration with the imposition of curricula that fails to meet their students' needs. They also experience alienation from their students and their praxis (Owens, 2010; Valencia et al., 2006).

Benegas (2019) found that even early-career educators perceived and discussed negative impacts of scripted curriculum on their students. Her study followed four preservice teaching interns in a school with a newly-adopted a scripted curriculum. The lessons in the curriculum, which the participants were to use with English learners (ELs), were seldom culturally relevant; participants believed they caused students to disengage during class. Some lessons were significantly culturally mismatched to impede students' understanding of even basic vocabulary lessons. Teachers in the school grappled with administrator "non-negotiables" about how the curriculum was to be implemented and the resulting fear of facing disciplinary consequences if

they did not comply.

Teacher Noncompliance and Mechanisms of Policy Control

Noncompliance or the desire to be noncompliant with mandated use of a scripted curriculum is a theme across the research literature, as is the accompanying frustration and demoralization (Santoro, 2018) that teachers express in the face of restrictive district requirements. Carl (2014) found that monitoring and observation of Teach for America teachers required to use scripted English and math programs made them feel they had less autonomy and were less able to meet their students' needs. As a result, the teachers deviated from the curriculum or expressed their frustration at knowing the curriculum was inadequate without knowing how to best adapt it. In a case study with twelve expert reading teachers whose district implemented a scripted program called Read Well, Owens (2010) found that eleven of the participants decided that their students' instructional needs were not being met by the program, and chose to override administrative mandates and alter the program. Across these studies, teachers at all levels of classroom teaching experience described fear, frustration, or demoralization resulting from the mandated implementation of scripted curricula.

In their 2006 case study of two new teachers in California who resisted the implementation of the phonics program Open Court, Achinstein and Ogawa found that both teachers demonstrated "principled resistance" (p. 52)—resistance to the prescribed curriculum that was not rooted in a reluctance to change their practice, but rather in their professional principles and their beliefs about good teaching. The principled nature of their resistance allowed them to engage in sustained resistance over the course of two academic years. One case study subject was fired from her teaching placement; the other sought a new position when an

administrative change gave him less autonomy in designing curriculum and insisted he use the phonics program with fidelity. Achinstein and Ogawa's (2006) study is also important in the context of this critical study, because they examined mechanisms of power and control in the district where they conducted their case study. They wrote:

> The recent move toward greater instructional prescription and heightened assessment and accountability presents a potent control system. Rowan and Miskel (1999) explain: "As an institutional environment becomes more unitary, as rules about work in the technical core become more specific, and as these rules get attached to assessments or other inspection systems, institutional theory (like organization theory more generally) predicts stronger effects of institutionalized rules on work activities" (p. 373). The current policy environment is characterized by these very conditions of technical control. Federal, state, and district policies are aligned to form a unitary environment; instructional policies mandate prescriptive instructional programs; assessment and sanctioning mechanisms are combined in school accountability systems. Thus, it is difficult for teachers to resist instructional mandates, opening the doors of classrooms where teachers previously could resist with some impunity (Berman &McLaughlin, 1977; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

In other words, the forces of power and control that the case study participants sought to resist were entrenched at the school, district, state, and national policy levels, through a systematic tightening of "rules about work in the technical core" (Rowan & Miskel, 1999, p. 373). The *technical core* of K-12 teaching is classroom instruction and adaptive decision making—the very components of K-12 education that scripted programs are designed to standardize and mechanize.

Another important finding in Achinstein and Ogawa's (2006) study was that their case study subjects were influenced by supportive professional communities. Sue, the case study participant who was fired after two years, had a supportive mentor but little professional support beyond that. Rob, who sought a new position, was connected to a broader community of like-minded teachers through his mentor, and felt more able to sustain his resistance to the Open Court curriculum as a result. While their case study is not generalizable, their finding about community-supported resistance aligns with Gutierrez's (2016) creative insubordination strategy of seeking allies. Specific adaptations and resistance decisions have been reported in more recent studies of teachers who use scripted curricula; those decisions are discussed in the final section of this literature review.

Scripted Curricula's Influence on Pedagogy

Research literature reveals not only a range of teacher perceptions of scripted curricula, but also a pattern of influence that scripted programs have on pedagogy. Across studies, teachers' instructional practices became less student-centered and more program-centered. Owens (2010) reported that teachers' discussion of students' individual needs became less student-centered in progressive interviews; teachers used more program-centered language, suggesting that the scripted program alienated them from their students and their praxis. Valencia et al.'s (2006) findings align with this one as well: in a three-year study, they found that teachers using restrictive curricular materials were less able to adapt their instruction to student needs over time. In a large-scale study of early-career teachers spanning five years and over 200 interviews, Crocco and Costigan (2007) found that teachers noted a "shrinking space" (p. 521) for their instructional decision making under scripted ELA and social studies curricula. These

teachers felt that scripted curricula deprofessionalized their work by impeding the expertise they had accumulated through their EPPs, and further, that such curricula dehumanized their work by interfering in classroom relationships that might be fostered by student-centered pedagogy. Kavanaugh and Fisher-Ari (2017) wrote about their findings with a small case study of Teach for America-trained teachers who were required to use a scripted ELA curriculum. Participants described the same sense of restriction and lack of autonomy as Crocco and Costigan (2007) reported in their large-scale study a decade before. This group of studies emphasize the potential of scripted curricula to undermine student-teacher relationships and classroom community building.

Patterns of Praxis within Scripted Curricula

Finally, another group of studies has begun to describe not only teacher perceptions of scripted ELA programs, but also the behaviors they engage in in their classrooms as a result of a mandated curriculum with which they disagree. Costigan (2018) found that teachers using scripted curriculum in secondary ELA instruction realized they were not teaching the content they thought of as *English*, but instead asking students for "a devalued, decontextualized, and uncritical reiteration of prepackaged information and facts, without any meaningful engagement with the important issues they represent" (p. 225). In a five-year study of eight early-career teachers for in a range of settings, he found that adapting "high conformity" (p. 220) ELA curricula was a complex process, and characterized it as paradoxical. He found that "mandates that are designed for high conformity result in the very opposite of standardization and conformity as they require a creative, individualistic, and even idiosyncratic response" (Costigan, 2018, p. 220). In other words, the implementation of a scripted ELA curriculum led to a less-

standardized delivery of content than students might have experienced in a setting with greater teacher autonomy. Other studies bear out the notion of a mandated script that inevitably backfires, as well. Two studies in particular present broad categories of teacher responses to scripted ELA curricula. Eisenbach (2012) found that teachers in an informal case study positioned themselves as "the accommodator" (using the scripted ELA curriculum as mandated), "the negotiator" (using the scripted ELA curriculum strategically as part of a pedagogical toolbox), and "the rebel" (refusing the scripted ELA curriculum altogether and designing instruction independently). Findings in Pittman's (2020) recent dissertation study aligned with Eisenbach's (2012) archetypes of accommodator, negotiator, and rebel, but Pittman (2020) also reported a fourth category: teachers leaving the profession as a result of their loss of autonomy in a mandated scripted curriculum setting. She identified categories of teacher response to scripted curricula as *compliance*, *adaptation*, *rebellion*, and *departure*. Examples of teachers' adaptation of and resistance to scripted ELA curricula are presented in the next section.

Adapting and Resisting a Scripted Curriculum

Scripted ELA curricula are particularly problematic in the context of adaptive or responsive teaching (Parsons et al., 2018). Scripted programs become a de facto barrier to responsive teaching because they prescribe how teachers will carry out lessons and interact with students. The movement to standardize, prescribe, and script teachers' instruction serves as a barrier to their ability to teach responsively through autonomous teaching decisions. Meanwhile, decades of research on effective instruction demonstrates that responsive, adaptive teaching is essential for learning (Allington, 2002a; Griffith et al., 2013; Parsons et al., 2018; Vaughn, 2019).

In a review of the literature around adaptive teaching, Parsons et al. (2018) found that barriers that impeded adaptive teaching all fell into the subcategory of Curricula, Standards, and Testing (Parsons et al., 2018). The research team wrote that "lack of autonomy, in the expectation to teach developmentally inappropriate content (Madsen & Olson, 2005) or adhere to predetermined pacing (O'Brien & Norton, 1991) … were barriers to adaptive teaching" (Parsons et al., 2018, p. 226). Vaughn et al. (2021) describe a scripted curriculum as a barrier to adaptive teaching as measured by their Adaptive Teaching Inventory (ATI). The inventory has the potential to measure the degree to which scripted curriculum may impede teachers' adaptive teaching as they make decisions about including students' funds of knowledge in classroom instruction, scaffolding, resequencing, or re-pacing instruction to meet students' needs.

Adapting or Resisting Scripted Curricula to Meet Students' Needs

Recent research literature has begun to describe in more detail why and how teachers adapt or resist scripted or even unscripted-but-mandated curricula. These instructional decisions happen across grade levels and vary according to teacher experience, values, and beliefs. In a study of four elementary teachers in grades one through five, the influence of a scripted curriculum on a teacher's adaptive decision making was highlighted as the driving force in her adaptation of the curriculum. Huddleston et al., (2020) followed their participants in different settings over an academic year. One teacher in the participant cohort was working within the confines of scripted curricula, and she emphasized its limits on her decision making during specific aspects of her instruction and how she addressed this problem. She resolved this tension through supplementation. She reported that the scripted program took away time from guided reading and focused on phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight words, mandating isolated skills

practice with skills her fifth grade students were not struggling with. She explained that "what disturbed her the most was that the script limited the extent to which she could give thorough explanations to her students when they struggled with a concept" (Huddleston et al., 2002, p. 50). Decades of research on teacher decision making, evaluative frameworks, and teaching standards all contend that student-centered decision making in moments like these benefits students (Parsons et al., 2018; Vaughn, 2019; Griffith et al., 2013), and in this case, the teacher found the scripted curriculum was a barrier (Parsons et al., 2018) to her ability to make such decisions.

In a case study of early elementary teachers, Bauml (2016) found that teachers of young children (Kindergarten and first grades) believed it was necessary to adapt, augment, and extend the "intended curriculum" (p. 90) to promote students' academic proficiency. She reported that the eight teachers in her study modified the standardized (though not scripted) curriculum by adapting, augmenting, or extending it in order to change the amount of time they spent on required topics, to more adequately address material they knew would appear on standardized assessment, or to teach more clearly for student understanding. Teachers' adjustment of the provided materials—the "intended curriculum"—was ongoing, and teachers who adapted the curricular materials either adjusted the amount of time they spent on lessons or altered the lessons' sequence. These decisions were driven by teachers' desire to spend time covering topics they knew would be tested. Teachers who augmented the curriculum did so by adding or modifying activities and materials to promote mastery and understanding, prepare students for standardized assessments, and to challenge them. Most importantly, teachers who augmented the curriculum did so as an act of responsive teaching. They asserted that "their decisions to augment by adding/modifying curriculum activities and materials enabled them to meet their students'

needs" (p. 88). This finding aligns with Vaughn et al.'s (2015) conclusion that adaptive teachers know their students and constantly informally assess them. In another study conducted a decade before Bauml's (2016), Owens (2010) reported that expert teachers adapted the scripted Read Well program by adding reading material like trade books, creating their own supplemental reading guides, skipping sections or entire units, resequencing lessons, adding entire lessons, or moving students to new units of study even though they had not passed the end of unit assessments included in the program. Despite making these decisions in the best interests of their students, even the expert teachers in the study felt tension and discomfort about not implementing the program with fidelity. These findings support Parsons et al.'s (2018) conclusion that standards, curricula, and testing act as barriers to responsive or adaptive teaching, even for teachers who have demonstrated excellence in student outcomes.

Adaptive decision making in their classrooms is not the only factor that influences teachers' decisions to adapt or resist a scripted curriculum. In their qualitative study of 20 teachers from four districts in the same state who used a mandated school-wide writing curriculum, McCarthey and Woodard (2018) found a range of implementation with the curriculum. Four of the teachers were following the district-adopted curriculum with fidelity. Teachers who followed the curriculum were inexperienced writing teachers who had less access to professional development (PD) than other participants in the study. Four teachers rejected the curriculum entirely. Participants who rejected the curriculum disagreed with it and created their own curriculum from a variety of resources; however, the researchers found that their writing instruction lacked coherence. Twelve teachers modified or adapted the curriculum to meet their students' learning needs. However, students' needs were not the only factor that influenced their

choice to implement the curriculum faithfully or not. The majority of teachers who adapted the curriculum were experienced writing teachers, felt supported in changing the curriculum, and had greater access to PD. Eisenbach (2012) found that a teacher who wished to adapt the scripted program implemented at her school created a hybrid classroom by altering content, processes, and products provided by the curriculum. She selected content from the curriculum that she believed would benefit her students and used materials that she created for the "non-scripted gaps" (Eisenbach, 2012, p. 155). A teacher in the same school who completely rejected the scripted program said he did so because the way he was teaching his students resulted in good standardized test scores and therefore the school district did not pressure him to implement the scripted program. He used a literature-based approach with his students, balancing fiction and nonfiction titles. He also chose to be outspoken about the district's choice to mandate the use of a scripted ELA curriculum, asserting that he opposed the erasure of teacher autonomy and expertise at the hands of the superintendent more than the scripted curriculum itself. Pittman (2020) found that teachers who adapted a scripted ELA curriculum made the same instructional moves as participants in other studies: supplementing or modifying content, processes, or products. However, she also found that teachers sought reassurance, approval, or support as they worked to adapt the curriculum to meet the perceived needs of their students. They attended district PD in order to specifically ask what level of modification was "allowed," they worked with veteran teachers to gain confidence in adapting the program for their classrooms. In Pittman's study, eight years after Eisenbach's (2012), the teacher who most openly rebelled against the curriculum was viewed as a trouble maker. She challenged her literacy coach to provide evidence that the scripted curriculum was effective. The literacy coach failed to provide

any data, and asserted that the district expected implementation of the scripted program "regardless of what the data says" (Pittman, 2020, p. 97). These studies begin to reveal between-district or between-school differences that may mitigate or amplify teachers' experiences with a scripted ELA curriculum. In other words, these studies begged the question: what building-level or district-level practices allow teachers to feel supported in using a scripted curriculum not with fidelity, but as a tool within their larger praxis?

Adapting or Resisting Scripted Curricula to Retain or Regain Autonomy

While studies over several decades have illuminated the *hows* and *whys* of adapting and resisting scripted curricula (e.g., the types of adaptations teachers make to such programs and the forces that drive or impede those adaptations), few studies explicitly address teacher adaptation and resistance through a critical lens that examines power structures. In one critical study, MacGillivray et al. (2004) positioned their study of teachers using Open Court, a scripted reading program, in a critical framework of neocolonialism, and reported that teachers' professional identities were redefined, restricted, and subsumed by their district's mandates about teacher use of the curriculum. They found that teachers were given the "illusion of choice" (p. 140) by being rewarded monetarily for making the district's preferred decisions (e.g. attending specific professional development programs). The research team also found that many teachers critiqued (shared their frustration), tweaked (made small modifications or adaptations to Open Court like replacing short texts with ones that were more fun), took risks (made significant changes to the scripted program by including entire learning structures not called for in the script, such as guided reading and literature circles), and called for collective action (seeking a group of teachers to speak out in a manner that might influence district level curriculum decisions).

Across the research literature, teachers resist scripted curricula when they fail to meet the learning needs of their students (Benegas, 2019; Eisenbach, 2012; MacGillivray et al., 2004; McCarthey & Woodard, 2018; Owens, 2010; Pittman, 2020). MacGillivray et al.'s (2004) study also offers a template for a critical approach to not only the *whys* and *hows* of teacher adaptation and resistance, but also the question of *now what*? We know that teachers are resisting and adapting scripted ELA programs, so what information do they have about power structures that impose scripted programs and collective actions that can disrupt those structures? As teachers increasingly face pressures to conform to teaching to a script with fidelity, models of not only adaptation, but also resistance behaviors have begun to be identified and described by researchers, including creative insubordination *principled resistance* (Santoro & Cain, 2018), *subversive teaching* (Dyches et al., 2020), and *creative insubordination* (Gutierrez, 2016).

Santoro and Cain (2018) explain that teachers use principled resistance when they confront pedagogical, professional, and democratic ethical dilemmas in which tensions exist between their beliefs about their work and externally imposed expectations. More recently, Dyches et al. (2020) described a model of *subversive teaching* specific to the discipline of English Language Arts (ELA). They use the terms "subversive teaching" (p. 1) and "subversive disciplinary literacy" (p.1). The narratives included in their book explain "how teachers both satisfy and subvert a particular ELA disciplinary convention" (p. 2) in order to "open new possibilities for critical, social justice-oriented teaching in ELA" (p. 3). They offer examples of varied literacy practices (e.g., close reading, writing, and reading canonical curriculum) that teachers have taught subversively through their selection of texts or through their decision to have students read *with and against* the canon. Across the practitioner narratives presented by

Dyches et al. (2020), teachers identified a problem presented by a mandated curriculum and explained how they worked within the standards of their discipline to satisfy expectations for student learning, as well as subvert reproduction of dominant narratives that might erase students' identities or lived experiences. In all cases, reported student outcomes aligned with a freer and more democratic world (Dillon & O'Brien, 2019), whether students talked back to stereotypes, disrupted teacher assumptions, analyzed systemic racism over time, or planned community activism projects.

Creative Insubordination

Gutierrez (2016) leveraged explanations of resistance in her research on mathematics teaching. Through her work with Black and Latin@ teachers, Gutierrez (2016) developed a framework for resistance she calls "creative insubordination" (p. 54). She wrote that creative insubordination seeks to prevent policy directives from unfairly influencing teachers and students, while seeking to avoid backlash that might result from outright defiance.

A teacher using creative insubordination does so with an intentionality centered around a critical analysis and understanding of her context. Gutierrez (2016) writes that creative insubordination in mathematics teaching includes "decentering the achievement gap, questioning the forms of mathematics presented in school, highlighting the humanity and uncertainty of mathematics, positioning students as authors of mathematics, and challenging deficit narratives about students of color" (p. 54). For future research in literacy teaching, these tenets may be adapted without much revision, as many K-12 teachers are already advocating for "decolonization" of the literary canon in K-12 curricula and student co-construction of knowledge and content in the curriculum (Seward, 2019).

Gutierrez (2016) suggests specific strategies for creative insubordination in teaching. Some of these strategies are applicable for teachers during curriculum adoption cycles; others are applicable within an externally mandated curriculum. She suggests two preliminary discursive moves: *press for explanation* and *counter with evidence*. Both of these strategies require the advocate of a socially unjust policy to support their rationale, consider counterarguments and counter narrative, and buy the resistor time to continue to construct counterarguments. A third discursive move is to turn a rational issue into a moral one—in other words, to appeal to the morals of policymakers, particularly in public settings, where leaders may wish to be seen as doing "the right thing."

An adaptive strategy Gutierrez (2016) presents is *using the master's tools* (in reference to Lorde's (1984) claim that "[t]he master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"). Gutierrez argues that specific policies maintaining systemic power and privilege may be the master's tools, but that teachers seeking to resist those policies can use them in ways they were not intended–to the teacher's advantage. Gutierrez gives the example of mandated "test prep." A teacher hoping to "use the master's tools" might give students the answers to a set of test questions, then have them analyze how test questions are structured or try to understand how a test taker might choose the wrong answer. In an example specific to scripted curriculum, one middle grades teacher suggested that the essential question in a scripted ELA module, "What was life like for early Americans?" might be leveraged to discuss who early Americans really were—and they were not, she noted, the "settlers" who were the focus of the module (Matthews, personal communication, 2021). This problematizing analysis of the central essential question

for the module allows the teacher to approach it with a critical discourse frame, using language from the script itself—the master's tools.

A practical strategy Gutierrez (2016) suggests is *seeking allies*, not just for commiseration, but for strategizing, particularly prior to meetings in which policy (i.e., a scripted curriculum) will be discussed. Allies in this process can help consider beforehand what opposition they may face and plan what they will say in talking back to policymakers, drawing on their individual strengths to effect a united front. Her final practical suggestion is to *fly under the radar*. That is, when the stakes are too high (i.e., when insubordination is not in students' best interest), it may be best to practice nonconforming pedagogy and instructional methods in one's own classroom without seeking administrative permission until a pattern of success can be documented.

An important corollary to Gutierrez's (2016) assertion that teachers use creative insubordination to advocate for what's best for their students is her identification of three other influencing factors in choosing insubordination (Gutierrez, 2015): changing the beliefs and practices of others, projecting an identity in which they take pride, and modeling advocacy for others. She writes that

> These individuals tended to consider what kind of identity they were projecting to others, as well as whether their actions might provide an incentive for others to also speak up or advocate for historically marginalized youth and their rights to learn rigorous mathematics. …They [took a stand] knowing that their choice not to go along with the status quo was a means by which they could look [at] themselves in the mirror each day (p. 684-685).

Gutierrez (2016) also exhorts teachers to focus on identity in fighting for equity, to understand that all decisions are political acts, and to recognize that the work of teaching and its effects on students must be developed over time and measured over years, not days. The strategies she describes under the umbrella of creative insubordination take up the question of power structures and how to critique them.

Chapter Summary

Scripted curricula for reading instruction have existed for two centuries, but recent mandated implementation of them is driven by neoliberal political motives to standardize and privatize education. Decades of research literature describe the tension and demoralization (Santoro, 2018) teachers experience when required to implement scripted curricula in their classrooms. A growing body of literature is beginning to more clearly describe what teachers do in the face of this tension. Across these studies, teachers choose to implement scripted programs with fidelity, adapt the programs according to their beliefs about how to best meet students' needs, or resist scripted curricula and refuse to implement it to any degree. Several of the studies described in the research literature followed Teach for America graduates or very early-career teachers. Another widely-cited study is an informal case report that describes teacher archetypes in a scripted setting. This study addresses a gap in the research by seeking to understand the experiences of teachers with several or many years in the profession, as well as many participants with advanced teaching degrees from educator preparation programs (EPPs). This study also took place concurrently with the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the anti-CRT push from state governments (Schwartz, 2021), when a majority of teachers reported they would leave the profession sooner than planned (Kamenetz, 2022).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this critical case study is to provide a description of teachers' experiences with scripted ELA curricula to understand the tensions they face between the curriculum's aims and their own pedagogical beliefs and values. The first half of this chapter is an explanation of my theoretical framework, epistemology, and positionality. The second half of this chapter describes my proposed methodology, my proposed participant selection process, my proposed data generation methods, and my proposed data analysis methods.

The primary focus of this study is to determine how teachers think about their decisions to follow, adapt, resist, or otherwise react to a scripted curriculum in their classrooms. The following questions are the basis of the research:

1) What are ELA teachers' experiences with a scripted curriculum?
2) In what ways do teachers' beliefs, values, and expectations influence ELA teachers' experiences with a scripted literacy curriculum?

Theoretical Framework

I conducted a critical case study using a critical pragmatist theoretical framework. An understanding of critical pragmatism as a framework for this study is best constructed by defining frameworks of critical inquiry and pragmatism, and explaining how they work together in a critical pragmatist application.

Critical inquiry seeks to name and frame problems through a lens of understanding power structures. The power structures that undergird and are reinforced by scripted curriculum include: 1) political manipulation of metrics, data, and the methodologies of education research (Coles, 2012); 2) politically motivated fiscal manipulation of districts' abilities to make choices

about their curricula, thus impacting teacher autonomy (Au, 2011); and 3) White supremacy, by decontextualizing, whitewashing, and broadly standardizing school curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Dillon et al. (2000) suggested that questions should be selected for research with a sense of moral obligation; we must carefully identify and outline the problem we wish to study.

Pragmatism suggests that the struggle for social change (progressive democracy) is contingent on language and policy actions. It “envisages possible new and better ways of doing things” (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 626). A researcher working within a pragmatist paradigm views knowledge and “research results [as] useful to real people in real contexts” (Dillon & O’Brien, 2019, p. 582). Pragmatic inquiry is situational, grounded in problems, evaluative, and interrogates theory and practice; in education research, a pragmatic approach should not only examine what is achievable, but also what is collectively desirable (Dillon & O’Brien, 2019).

Critical pragmatism as a framework for research pairs the problem-solving stance of pragmatism with critical inquiry’s analysis of power structures. In this study, the “problem” is the imposition of a scripted curriculum on reading and ELA teachers. A Deweyan critical pragmatist stance (Kadlec, 2007) rests upon the understanding that schooling is a democratic social sphere (Dewey, 1916; Giroux, 1988). Critical pragmatism takes up a denaturalized view of inequality and seeks to expand inquiry about power structures as well as the status quo (Kadlec, 2007). Because adoption of K-12 curricula happens at a policy-making level higher than the individual teacher’s classroom, this study takes a critical stance as it examines a cultural artifact that is imposed on teachers by policymakers who hold power over them at the national, state, district, and school level. I wish to make explicit the intentional critical stance of this study in positioning teachers as intellectuals with expertise in not only delivering curriculum through best

pedagogical practices, but also designing curriculum that centers their students' interests, skills, and cultures (Giroux, 1988).

A critical pragmatist framework describing teachers' experiences with scripted curricula begins with "denaturalizing" inequities inherent in the implementation of scripted programs, asks questions about the power relations surrounding the implementation of curriculum, and seeks insight about how to solve the problems that scripted programs present for teachers and students. Who is dis/empowered in decisions about how curricular materials are selected and how they are to be implemented (e.g., flexibly or with "fidelity")? Power structures that a critical pragmatist framework might address include the euphemistic discourse of *high quality instructional materials*, teachers' loss of autonomy in a grossly standardized education climate, the relentless emphasis in K-12 schools on high-stakes testing, a lack of school- or district-level supports for teachers' professional growth, and the de-emphasis on reader identity in a choice-less reading curriculum (Au, 2011; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Timberlake et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2021) .

In a pragmatist framework, questions should be selected for research with a sense of moral obligation; researchers must carefully identify and outline the problem they wish to study (Dillon et al., 2000). An emphasis on considering questions and problems is particularly important to me as I undertake this study. Existing research already describes the problem-solving that teachers do when working in schools that mandate the use of scripted curricula. These studies demonstrate that teachers across contexts are critiquing, adapting, and resisting scripted programs to varying extents (c.f., Benegas, 2019; Carl, 2014; Costigan, 2018; MacGillivray et al., 2004; Owens, 2010). A content analysis (Rigell et al., 2022) of the scripted curriculum used by my participants problematized the curriculum for me in regards to both its instructional design

and its content. However, some teachers believe scripted curricula can be a source of equity in the classroom, thanks to their confidence in its alignment to disciplinary (i.e., content area) standards (Timberlake et al., 2017). I positioned myself as a researcher conducting an inquiry alongside practitioners who, in turn, study closely what works for their students.

Kadlec (2007) outlines the epistemology of critical pragmatism as "an intersubjective view of everyday experience as a common fund for the development of individual and social intelligence" (p. 13). In order to construct an "intersubjective" view of scripted curriculum in reading and ELA classrooms, I asked participants to describe their teaching identities, their long-term vision for their praxis, the structure and functions of their school and district administration, and their everyday classroom experiences with the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

In presenting the findings of this study, I read both *with* and *against* them (Janks, 2019) in order to better understand what perceived problems may be solved by the implementation of scripted curricula, as well as what power structures underlie their implementation and problematize teachers' experiences with them. In other words, I read pragmatically *with* the findings, and critically *against* them. For example, my contextualization of teachers' comments about the practical values of a scripted curriculum like vertical alignment of the curriculum or its potential to save them a great deal of time in lesson planning are part of my dominant (Learning for Justice, 2013) or with-the-grain (Janks, 2019) reading of the findings. My own understanding that the CEO of the corporation that publishes *Wit & Wisdom*, Lynne Munson, is a neoliberal advocate for cultural meritocracy is part of my resistant (Learning for Justice, 2013) or against-the grain (Janks, 2019) reading of the findings. For example, Munson (1997) suggested that museums should not be spaces for activism in American culture, but that their primary function

should be connoisseurship and cultural gatekeeping, which she terms “traditional” meritocracy (p. 61). She also serves on the board of the American Enterprise Institute, a right-wing think tank (Rubin, 2014).

In investigating why and how teachers implement, adapt, and resist scripted teaching programs, I set out to better understand how the power structures named above influence teachers’ lived experiences and what schools and districts can do to support teachers caught in the middle between power and pedagogy. I approached this dissertation study through a theoretical framework of critical pragmatism as a researcher seeking to collaboratively solve (Dillon & O’Brien, 2019) the problems presented by scripted curriculum mandates in public schools.

Positionality and Epistemology

In this critical case study, positionality is a significant consideration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011), as I take a critical stance toward scripted curricula as a pedagogical tool and strategy, and a pragmatic stance in understanding teachers’ experiences with it. My positionality has a role in my understanding of this work because of empathetic understandings (Kincheloe, 2002) I have constructed as a teacher and researcher. As a secondary ELA teacher for over a decade, I believed I had a moral mandate to deliver best pedagogical practices in my classroom, regardless of district or curricular mandates. However, the pressures of top-down administrations, high-stakes testing, the constant evaluation of normative student assessments in professional learning community (PLC) meetings, and my innate drive to compete with my peers threatened to override my values as a teacher. I acknowledge those pressures, and I acknowledge them particularly in cases in which the teacher is a sole or primary

household earner. The need to maintain employment may necessarily override pedagogical choices rooted in intellect, values, or beliefs about teaching, even for an experienced, expert teacher.

My research questions and methodology are shaped by my experiences as a teacher and student. Years of exegesis and literary criticism, first as a young adult reader, and then alongside my secondary ELA students, have helped me develop an interpretivist epistemology – one that "emphasizes the sense people make of their own lives and experiences [and in which] the researcher seeks out and interprets people's meanings and interpretations" (Mason, 2018, p. 8). This epistemology aligns with the critical case study design I am proposing, as I hope to construct meaning alongside my participants as they share their lived experiences working within the confines of a scripted curricula. The proposed critical case study, in other words, seeks to "do research *with* people, not *on* people" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The goal of critical inquiry is to challenge and analyze power relations in its findings or results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I seek to understand scripted curriculum as a cultural artifact that reproduces power structures through a critical pragmatist framework. I also seek to understand teachers' experiences in implementing, adapting, and resisting such curricula through a research design that prioritizes time spent talking with participants about the problem and the ways that scripted curricula are imposed on teachers and students. Privileging teacher voice in this critical case study will be of utility to school and district administrators as well as teacher educators as they empower K-12 teachers to teach in a manner aligned with their pedagogical ideals, rather than fearfully aligning themselves with the commodified cultural artifact of a teaching script.

Methodology

I conducted a critical case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to better understand the lived experiences of participants who teach in a school using a district-mandated scripted curriculum. In both the design and analysis of a critical study, the point is for the researcher to specifically examine the nature of power relations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, a critical approach is appropriate to this study because I wish to focus on societal power structures and inequities that may be reproduced by the imposition of scripted curricula on ELA teachers (Flyvbjerg, 2006; McCoy et al., 2020).

A case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 233). The unit of analysis in this study is the teacher using a scripted ELA curriculum called *Wit and Wisdom*. The case study was bounded by time (Stake, 2005), with participant interviews conducted during two quarters of an academic year (the second and third nine-week grading periods). Interviewees were chosen using purposeful, criterion-specific sampling (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Patton, 2015), based on the individual's experience using a scripted curriculum in their reading and ELA classroom. I only interviewed teachers who work in a district that currently requires teachers to use the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum. Miles et al. (2019) suggested that by studying a range of cases, "we can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" (p. 33). This case study included multiple cases in order to bolster the trustworthiness of its findings.

Methods

Context

School District. The geographical and demographic context for the proposed study is a local rural school district that mandates the use of the *Wit and Wisdom* ELA curriculum in its elementary and middle schools. Teachers have been using the curriculum district-wide for four years. The school district is a rural part of a larger metropolitan area in Appalachia. It includes several small communities, and its population center had just over 10,000 residents in 2019 (U.S. Census, 2019). The county in which the district is situated has a 15% poverty rate. Eighty-seven percent of adult residents are high school graduates or higher. As of the 2010 census, 91.6% of residents were White, 4.1% were Black, 3.2% were Hispanic or Latinx, 2.3% identified as people of two or more races, and 1.5% of residents were Asian. All other racial groups comprised less than 1% of the county population (U.S. Census, 2019). The county school district is home to nine elementary schools, four middle schools, two high schools, a vocational-technical high school, and a community school that serves grades K-12 (district website, n.d.).

Curriculum. Wit and Wisdom is an English/Language Arts curriculum published by the Great Minds corporation for grades K-8. Each grade level is organized in four modules. Each module, centered around an essential question like "How does food nourish us?" (second grade), is broken into lesson arcs of 3-6 lessons, arranged around subquestions to scaffold understanding of module concepts. Each module directs students to ground their thinking about its essential questions in core and supplemental texts. In the elementary grades, the core texts are primarily picture books or illustrated informational texts; in middle grades, the core texts are primarily

novels, plays, or nonfiction books. Supplemental texts include but are not limited to poems, songs, videos, news articles, photographs, and paintings.

Participants

Interviewees were chosen using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator selects a sample from which the most insight can be gained (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were voluntary respondents to recruitment emails sent to district elementary and middle-grades ELA teachers (see Appendix B), and interviews were conducted until saturation was reached (see Data Collection).

Eleven teachers and one academic coach participated in the study. Teachers from six of nine elementary schools and two of four middle schools in the district participated. Participants were voluntary respondents to recruitment emails sent to district elementary and middle-grades ELA teachers (see Appendix B).

Participants included 9 women and 2 men, with a range of years of teaching experience. The majority of participants had at least one master's degree at the time of the study. Information about participants' education and experience levels is included in Table 3.1.

Every participant in the study had more than one year of experience teaching with the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum. This aspect of participant demographics is important because *Wit and Wisdom* follows a multi-year (Manolis, 2021, n.p.) implementation cycle, according to its implementation support guide. Anecdotally, multiple participants reported that their district conveyed that the expected implementation cycle was three years. Therefore, participants' years of experience using the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum are also included in Table 3.1.

In addition to their vitae, teacher participants in this study provided statements about their

identity as teachers or vision for their teaching. These statements provided initial insight into how these teachers view their role in the lives of students as well as how they talk about curriculum when they talk about teaching. Those statements, as well as their self-reported fidelity to the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, are included in Table 3.2.

Data Collection

Data was collected through teacher interviews, content analysis of participants' lesson plans and CVs, and content analysis of the scripted curriculum itself. Data collection continued until saturation was reached. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) wrote that saturation appears in interview data as redundancy, which "means that you begin hearing the same responses to your interview questions […]; no new insights are forthcoming" (p. 101)

My primary method for data generation was participant interviews based on the individuals' experiences in implementing a scripted ELA program. Hatch (2002) wrote:

> Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds. These meaning structures are often hidden from direct observation and taken for granted by participants, and qualitative interview techniques offer tools for bringing these meanings to the surface. (p. 91)

Qualitative interviews are a best-fit method for this research project potential for generating rich description of the interviewee's experiences, including descriptions of their contexts, quotes from interviews, and field notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative interviews are also a best-fit method for this study because of the sometimes-invisible nature of teacher decision making. The process may be invisible to an observer because it is driven by teachers'

metacognitive reflection on students' needs before, during, and after instruction (Parsons et al., 2018). The ephemeral, dynamic nature of teacher decision making makes qualitative interviewing a valuable research method because of its potential to bring the metacognitive processes involved in decision making within the restrictions of a scripted curriculum to the surface (Hatch, 2002).

Participant interviews in this study were intended to 1) investigate meaning structures (Hatch, 2002) that teachers might be using to negotiate or navigate the alignment of their beliefs about good pedagogy and the cycle of praxis with the curricular mandates of their employers; and 2) gain insight into teachers' use of implementation, adaptation, or resistance strategies (see: Valencia et al., 2006; Eisenbach, 2012; Pittman, 2020) when required to use scripted curricula. Resistance strategies may include creative insubordination (Gutierrez, 2015, 2016), principled resistance (Santoro & Cain, 2018), subversive teaching (Dyches et al., 2020), or other approaches.

Data generated through interviews included interview audio recordings, interview transcriptions, and interview notes. The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with a prepared interview guide of open-ended questions (see Appendix A), which allowed me to use follow-up questions to prompt additional description and be responsive to each participant's worldview and ideas (Roulston, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews were conducted during the second and third academic quarters.

Interviews provide self-reported information about teacher behaviors and decision making, so teacher and lesson plans may also be used in order to help triangulate data collection by providing multiple data sources for this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lesson plans,

teacher annotations of the scripted lessons, or teacher-created supplemental materials can function as a tool for reflection that provides a way to look at a teacher's intentions for instruction in the context of her recollection of that instruction in an interview setting. Lesson annotations may also provide a way for me to compare the intended instruction of the scripted curricula to the adaptations or resistance decisions the teacher made in revising the curriculum and giving students an altered assignment. Annotations may also dis/confirm the level of conformity, adaptation, or resistance to the scripted curriculum that teachers report in their interviews.

Interview questions were designed to mitigate and minimize risk, using a combination of types of questions. Some were questions that elicited information about participants' perceptions of and experiences with the scripted curriculum—experience, behavior, opinion, and values questions (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Other questions in the interview protocol were included because they were helpful in supporting interviewees who are discussing sensitive or controversial topics—hypothetical, ideal situation, and devil's advocate questions (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). These questions were included because they allowed participants to discuss the implementation of a scripted curriculum in a hypothetical context or in terms that may help mitigate their risk in disclosing information specific to their unsanctioned resistance to curricular mandates in their classroom. Interview questions are presented in Appendix A. Data generation began after IRB approval. Interviews were conducted with participant consent.

Data Analysis

As a first phase of analysis, I completed analytic memos alongside the interview process in order to document my reflections on "how the process of inquiry was taking shape" (Saldaña,

2016, p. 44). These memos were part of my constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014) and allowed me to look for saturation in the data as well as begin to identify initial codes and categories. I used naturalized transcription choices in punctuating and paragraphing interview transcriptions, which were representational and interpretive (Davidson, 2009). I completed all interviews, then transcribed them, then began formal coding. Seidman (2019) suggests this technique of interview completion preceding transcription in order to "minimize imposing on the generative process of the interviews" (p. 122) what I may have learned from other participants' interviews. I used ongoing memoing during the interview and coding processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to track and document the recurrent codes that occurred across participants.

I conducted two cycles of coding. I used first cycle values coding (Saldaña, 2016), seeking to identify how participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldaña, 2016) align or mis-align with the scripted curriculum and its implementation in their school. Values coding is useful for research involving cultural values and belief systems, as well as intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions (Saldaña, 2016). Therefore, values coding is particularly useful for this proposed study, because teachers' resistance or adaptive pedagogical decisions are often reflective of their identities (Gutierrez, 2015) and their beliefs (Parsons et al., 2018). Following first cycle values coding, I used second cycle pattern coding (Miles et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2016) in order to construct explanatory codes that helped me identify the broad themes of the findings. During pattern coding, I built a codebook of the "meta-codes" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236) I identified. A codebook is a compilation of codes, their descriptions, and data examples (e.g., participant quotes) for each (Saldaña, 2016). These metacodes became the

subthemes and themes of my findings as I organized, reviewed, and reorganized them to construct a critical pragmatist (Kadlec, 2007; Dillon & O'Brien, 2019) analysis of the data. An example of the evolution from initial values codes to pattern codes to themes is provided in Table 3.

In order to analyze the data pragmatically and critically, I first read *with* the findings (Janks, 2019) to examine the practical pros, cons, and characteristics of the scripted curriculum according to the participants. Then I read *against* the findings (Janks, 2019) in order to consider what power structures might control the implementation of scripted curriculum in this district.

Trustworthiness

To support the trustworthiness of this study, I completed a bracketing interview to document my beliefs about scripted curricula, teacher identity, and teacher resistance prior to conducting interviews. This bracketing interview served to make explicit my assumptions (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011), about teaching with a scripted curriculum, because I am privy to the "inner world of experience" (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 54) of a secondary ELA teacher.

One of the study participants was an academic coach with 27 years of experience working in many different schools in the district. Her interview served the purpose of adding to participant data collected during the course of the study, and my contact with her also served as a source of triangulation. Her interview and the follow-up questions I asked her at the conclusion of the study were particularly helpful in cross checking participants' comments about pacing, fidelity, and district expectations for implementation of the curriculum.

Trustworthiness in this study was also bolstered by peer examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Peer examination is when a colleague scans the study data and determines whether the

findings seem plausible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, peer examination took place through conversations with clinical and tenure track faculty in my department, my doctoral candidate peer with experience in classroom teaching in ELA, and a former administrator in the school district where I conducted the study.

I also sought peer examination in the form of critical feedback from peers and professors across departments in constructing and revising my interview guide to “help [me] think about the complexity and ethics of the work” (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 28). I engaged in ongoing peer examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) throughout the interview process as part of my intention to develop a study that is transparent and trustworthy. The process of ongoing reflective memoing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) also helped me maintain my inquiry stance as a researcher while conducting interviews in a familiar setting. Peer debriefing and reflective memoing provided reflexive spaces that allowed me to check for consistency at junctures throughout the research process (O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

Finally, I used member checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to support the trustworthiness of the study. During member checks, I shared my interpretation and analysis of three participants’ responses with them to ensure they agreed that I captured the essence of their observations, reflections, and assertions. I selected participants who expressed mixed or negative feelings about the scripted curriculum to prioritize the mitigation of risk to them in disclosing dissatisfaction in their district or building administrators’ choices. None of the participants requested revisions of my interpretation, analysis, or their transcribed interview quotes. One participant, Leo, replied, “I have read through this and think it all sounds great.”

Chapter Summary

I conducted a critical case study of reading and ELA teachers' experiences with a scripted ELA curriculum. Following IRB approval, I will begin recruiting participants from a district that mandates teacher use of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

Critical pragmatism provides the underlying theoretical framework for this study. Critical pragmatism seeks to denaturalize the power structures that we may assume are "just the way things are"—the ways that curricula are published, adopted, and required by school districts. This framework prioritizes participant voice as it seeks to understand and solve the problems its participants face. In this study, the "problem" is the imposition of a scripted curriculum on reading and ELA teachers. A Deweyan critical pragmatist stance (Kadlec, 2007) will frame the study, and it rests upon the understanding that schooling is a democratic social sphere (Giroux, 1988). As a framework grounded in democratic principles, critical pragmatism offers a foundation for examining how scripted curricula might undermine an equitable approach to teaching that seeks to meet the needs of all learners, rather than expect them to conform to a one-size-fits-all program.

I analyzed data collected from multiple sources, including transcriptions of iterative semi-structured interviews, teacher CVs, lesson plans, and interview notes. I used iterative rounds of coding as defined by Saldaña (2016). Trustworthiness for the study was grounded in a researcher bracketing interview, a triangulating interview with a district academic coach, ongoing reflective memoing and peer debriefing, and member checking with participants.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Values and pattern coding allowed me to better understand how participants perceived the scripted curriculum that their district requires them to implement. During data analysis, I assigned participants' responses to three large themes: *the role of the curriculum*, *the role of reciprocal trust between teachers and administrators*, and *the role of teacher self-efficacy in mediating the implementation of the curriculum*. When I read "against" their responses to questions about the mechanisms behind curriculum adoption and implementation, I identified a fourth theme: *the role of power* in the implementation of the curriculum. Within each theme, participants made comments and observations that were coded into smaller, more specific sub-categories.

Role of the Curriculum in Influencing Teacher Praxis

Great Minds states on its website that *Wit and Wisdom* requires "multi-year" implementation (Manolis, 2021). In the case study district, participants were able to reflect on a complete implementation cycle of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum because I interviewed them during the fourth year of its district-wide implementation. However, several participants made qualifying statements about the nature of the implementation cycle during COVID-19, commenting that "I don't know if you count COVID year," or "it depends if you count COVID."

All participants said they regarded the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum favorably. Leo stated at the outset of the interview that he would be "pretty critical" of the curriculum, but the participant made nearly as many positive comments about the curriculum as negative ones. While all participants made negative comments about certain aspects of the curriculum, nearly all of them said they would advocate for it in another curriculum adoption cycle.

Each participant gave specific rationales for their positive perception of the curriculum that described the specific role it played in their instruction. These rationales included the access *Wit and Wisdom* provides to classroom discourse for all students, its influence in raising their expectations of students, and its utility as a resource for new teachers. Participants' explanations of their positive perceptions of the curriculum served to create a rationale for its use that was pragmatic, consistent with their values as teachers, and situated in their professional understanding of the curriculum as a guide rather than a script.

Provided Access to Grade-Level Classroom Discourse for All Students

Participants asserted that the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum offered all or most of their students greater access to grade-level classroom discourse through improved understanding of the texts and the essential questions of the instructional modules. They credited the recursive nature of the program, its affordance of vertical alignment of instruction across grade levels, and its utility in mitigating transience and pandemic-era disruptions to teaching and learning.

Maggie stated that she hated the idea of a scripted curriculum when it was introduced in the district, and that the concept of such a program was counter to everything she had been taught in her educator preparation program (EPP). Over the course of the curriculum implementation, she began to change her mind thanks to what she perceived as her students' ability to participate more fully in discussions about texts:

> I have seen the beauty of *Wit and Wisdom*. After implementing it for a while, our kids are much better thinkers…it really gives the opportunity for even my lowest students to have conversations about books, and novels, characters, just different things. They are given that opportunity, because when I say that we beat something to death, we beat it to death.

> It’s like, “Whew, ok! We’re done with this.” But it's for that purpose, so that those kids have that opportunity. So that has been huge.

Fern made a similar comment about the value of the curriculum as an equalizing tool in her classroom:

> These are the texts that I talked about having, complex texts, and making them accessible for these kids. Like, some of these texts that we read are really an independent, middle-school level book. So they're harder than what all of my kids can read. And being able to make that content-appropriate book accessible for even my striving readers, I think has been really valuable. Even if they can't decode the word on the page, when we're reading it together, and we're talking about it, they can still participate and have an opinion.

Fern’s comment about students’ inability to decode the words in a core complex text from the curriculum is linked to the district’s categorization of *Wit and Wisdom* as a comprehension tool. Katherine, an academic coach with many years of experience in the district, explained: “We use *Wit and Wisdom* as our core [curriculum] and guided reading as intervention or small group [curriculum]. One is used for comprehension and one for process reading.” In other words, the Wit and Wisdom curriculum is used to more holistically analyze and discuss the ideas and concepts in texts, and small group reading is used to help students develop discrete skills that support reading comprehension, like decoding, vocabulary building, and fluency practice.

Even at the middle grades level, Lyra’s comment supported the notion that the texts within *Wit and Wisdom* have different roles as reading materials in her classroom—some for comprehension and analysis, others for skill-building, and that her perceived purpose of the core texts was not necessarily independent grade-level reading. She gave a specific example:

> We're currently in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and that is much harder. So I don't have a particular drive that you have to read this independently. Because I feel like there's other ways that I can reach that goal, their independent reading, you know, where they get to choose whatever they want to read. I feel like that's a more fruitful place for me to try to cultivate those skills. This text [is] digging into some really deep ideas and this is a very good text to do some heavy lifting within class...So that goal of can they read it independently changes as the texts change, is why I appreciate the different kinds of texts that they have [in the curriculum].

Lyra's explanation of the ways she decides to leverage core texts for discussion versus "other ways" for her students to read independently is connected to a school-wide initiative to increase reading motivation and engagement that she believes has been embraced by the school community: Miller's (2009) Forty Book Challenge. This perception aligns with Katherine's assertion that *Wit and Wisdom* is viewed as a comprehension rather than a process tool, and also aligns with the district's long history with Balanced Literacy professional development.

Critical Thinking Skills. Participants frequently described the curriculum as one that centers or prioritizes critical thinking or high-order questioning. Emmett said, "It's not just mechanical, here are your skills and you put your skills together and then you understand the thing you read. It's very holistic. It's about meaning and understanding and thinking deeply."

Even Leo, who said he would be "pretty critical" of the program, praised its level of questioning:

> One of the things I studied in my Master's program actually was the zone of proximal development. I'm really interested in allowing space for kids to freely write and freely

speak, and get ideas out and have discussions. And within *Wit and Wisdom*, I'm gonna throw that out there– there [are] a lot of great questions. So that's one of the things I do like about it. It embeds questions that *do* work for the way I like to do things.

Kelsey and Naomi also talked about the meaningfulness of the curriculum. Kelsey said that even when students were engaged in modules with central topics that were not automatically engaging for them, "They're still thinking and, like connecting and just doing some like, good social, emotional things, understanding other people's viewpoints and backgrounds and stuff like that." Naomi said, "I think it's a good program. I think it has a lot of meaning. I think our district does a great job of implementing it."

Across all participant responses, participants consistently mentioned student thinking and meaning-making as a positive aspect of the curriculum. While some participants took issue with the pacing and repetitiveness of concepts, they also acknowledged how such recursiveness supported their students' learning.

Recursive Instruction of Standards. Participants frequently said the curriculum gives students greater access to conversations about big ideas and text analysis through its recursive design. In addition to viewing its recursiveness as an equalizing force, participants also viewed it as a safety net for covering the standards they are expected to teach.

Lyra discussed her instruction of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, saying that the module's questions are "deep" and not simple one-off discussion concepts. The recursive nature of the curriculum reassured her. She said, "It's very circular…which is a little bit freeing, because you don't have to feel like, 'Oh, if they didn't get this idea with this text, then I failed.'…Because

I know we'll come back around, we'll get back to it.” Her sense of reassurance allowed her to move forward through the module more confidently.

Participants also described the curriculum’s recursive nature as a tedious aspect of it at times. Leo responded, “I never on my own could have so intricately designed a series of questions and activities that really do get to the standard in such a way. But it's kind of a slog. At some point, you're just… dragging.” Leo acknowledged that he would significantly compress the opening module of the eighth grade curriculum in subsequent academic years to avoid the feeling of dragging his students through it.

While Lyra and Leo explained the value of the curriculum’s recursive instruction in teaching the standards, Maggie explained its value for her in reaching all students. Her explanation contextualized the recursiveness of the lessons. She gave a specific example from her classroom to explain what made space for her to change her mind about *Wit and Wisdom* after initially feeling very resistant to its implementation:

> Just little snippets of class where you know, I have a student right now who reads on a [guided reading level C] and he's in fifth grade. He is able to discuss a book that's on like a seventh grade level. That-- that's huge. Whereas before I don't know that I would have been equipped to get him to that place without some of the things that *Wit and Wisdom* does. And when it seems like “my word we have talked about the same thing for four days,” that's for-- for [that kid] to be able to participate with his classmates and be a fifth grader for a minute, and not be pulled out or have somebody sitting with him.

Participants who valued the recursive design of the curriculum noted that ELA standards cannot be taught in one-shot lessons or in isolation, and explained that the curriculum offers ongoing spiral review of concepts as students build their understanding throughout the academic year.

Vertical Alignment Across Grade Levels. Another aspect of the curriculum that participants believed benefitted their students is its allowance for vertical alignment across grade levels. They explained that vertical alignment included a common vocabulary for activities across grade levels, as well as a consistently guided, structured thought process that empowered their students. Maggie said:

> It kind of creates that structure that kids crave and thrive in from grade level to grade level and day to day in my classroom…[with] the structure looking similar. All teachers have different things that they do in their classroom but calling it a 'Notice and Wonder' chart or saying 'Hey guys, we're gonna get in a Socratic circle,' …It kind of gives kids confidence because they know what to expect.

In addition to Maggie's observation about classroom expectations and norms, Naomi, an early career teacher, offered a perspective that emphasized the critical thinking skills practiced in curriculum activities. She began teaching in the district as *Wit and Wisdom* was being initially implemented by teachers. She said, "Now we're at the point where all the kids I have in class have had it. So they're in that idea of what *Wit and Wisdom* is asking them and in that [critical] thinking process, and I think that's really great."

Lyra acknowledged that the school district underscored vertical alignment when pitching the curriculum to teachers during the piloting process, saying: "[T]he way it was sold to us was…the kids who are in kindergarten, by the time they graduate, will have been doing this the

whole time. So they'll totally understand the system, the mindset behind it." The teachers who commented on vertical alignment as a benefit of the program agreed with the district's assessment that students demonstrated greater conceptual understandings of the curriculum's structure in the current fourth year of its K-8 implementation district-wide.

Mitigated Intra-District Transience and COVID Disruptions. Finally, another measurable component of the curriculum's value to teachers in the study was its utility in alleviating the district's concerns about students who move to different schools in the district frequently. They also named its usefulness during COVID-19 disruptions, particularly after Great Minds launched "Learn Anywhere Plans" designed to support virtual or hybrid teaching. Four participants specified transience as a concern; five participants specified the value of instructional consistency through COVID disruptions or Great Minds' response to pandemic-era needs. Nine of twelve participants said the curriculum's consistent implementation across schools alleviated district concerns about transience or COVID-19 disruptions. Leo's comment is representative of what teachers said when they addressed both transience and pandemic concerns:

> We have a lot of kids in our district that are pretty transient…so there is a lot of value in that if they leave [school X] and come to [school Y], they're going to have the exact same curriculum…[M]y kids that I had learning over Zoom did great. And my testing last year [during COVID disruptions] was fine.

Through their comments about the curriculum's usefulness as a comprehension tool that allowed students greater access to classroom discourse and analysis of complex texts, their observations that the curriculum's recursiveness offered such access, their enthusiasm for the

curriculum's potential for vertical alignment and mitigation of transience-related learning loss, teachers began to construct a pragmatic framework around the curriculum's role in their classrooms. In other words, the curriculum offered practical solutions to problems of access to discourse, vertical alignment, and transience, and participants saw the value in that.

Raised Teachers' Expectations of Students

Participants did not only view the curriculum favorably for practical or pragmatic reasons, though. Participants said their use of the curriculum had raised their expectations for students. Some participants already valued high expectations and included high expectations as part of their description of their teacher identities. Within participants' responses about their shift in expectations for students, they named scaffolding, vertical alignment, rigor, and text selection as reasons for the shift. Some of their responses revealed not only their thoughts about the curriculum, but also their sense of instructional self-efficacy (Fackler et al., 2021) in leveraging the curriculum to help their students achieve.

Maggie discussed the importance of scaffolding to support students in meeting the expectations inherent in the curriculum, saying:

> But it's been also kind of an eye opener for me, I have seen that my students can do more than I even think they can. With the correct supports and the right scaffolding they can get to where *Wit and Wisdom* wants them to be. Sometimes I just have to use my knowledge of what they can do to get them there. And it may not be [*Wit and Wisdom's*] supports that I provide for them… So that has been some of my learning when I was like, "Oh, I don't want to do any of this. This is terrible. And I hate it." It was really eye opening for me to see that they *can* [do it].

Maggie's transparency in describing the shift in her own expectations revealed her sense of self-efficacy in using her knowledge of students, as well as her ability to scaffold for them on her own. She also claimed high expectations as part of her teacher identity before discussing her implementation of the curriculum and how it impacted her expectations.

Naomi offered a specific scenario as an example for how her expectations of students had changed over the course of implementing *Wit and Wisdom*. She credited vertical alignment of curriculum in the district with a year-over-year shift in her mindset about students' ability to answer hard questions:

> My first year or two I was struggling, because I wasn't used to those types of in-depth questions. And I was like, "Oh, these sixth graders will not be able to answer this." And then they could and I was just blown away by their thoughts. Our last module [asked] "What were some hardships in life that you had to go through? And how did that help you grow?" And … [it's] so crazy that they can just spout these things off. I do think that having *Wit and Wisdom* over the years has helped them develop that [higher level thinking].

Naomi's emphasis on high-level questions and their impact on her expectations for students aligned with many other participants' comments about the questioning and critical thinking embedded in the curriculum.

Chloe spoke more generally about the rigor or intensity of the curriculum, although she named high expectations as part of her teaching identity early in our interview. She said, "The intensity of the curriculum has made me realize they are capable of harder things...So it has kind of shown me that even though it's harder, the kids can totally understand it if I explain it a certain

way.” She added that she believed all of her young first grade students with and without specific learning disabilities could think and talk about concepts in the curriculum successfully.

Emmett shared a student-specific anecdote to illustrate a shift in his expectations of students:

> I wouldn't have tried *Hatchet* in fourth grade. But by golly, it works. And not just for the thriving kids. But the middle of the road kids. One of them turned himself into a Gary Paulsen expert. He read like ten more Gary Paulsen books. And this was not a kid who you would walk into the room and go, “Oh, there's your Reader.” You’d go, “You look like a little boy without a lot of resources.” And that's exactly what he was. But it worked for him.

Emmett stated that he had great success as a teacher implementing a Balanced Literacy framework in his classroom when the district provided Balanced Literacy PD in the early 2000s. His anecdote about matching a reader and texts aligned with his passion for a Balanced Literacy philosophy.

Teachers who said the curriculum raised their expectations were constructing a values framework around the curriculum as a tool for student thinking and questioning. This framework was built around components of the curriculum that shifted not only their classroom instructional practices but also the way they perceived students’ cognition or abilities as readers. This shift aligned with many participants’ teaching identity statements early in our interviews, in which they named themselves as teachers who value having high expectations of their students.

Offered an Important Scaffold for New Teachers

Finally, new, early-career, and experienced teachers talked about the value of *Wit and Wisdom* for new teachers. They had either observed preservice teachers' success with the curriculum, experienced their own success as new teachers, or theorized based on their historical experience that new teachers would benefit from a curriculum like *Wit and Wisdom*.

When Maggie, a teacher with nine years of classroom teaching experience, explained her initial discontent with the program, she noted that preservice teachers did not seem to have the same struggle. She said, "I think it all depends on what your previous experience was. Like our interns, they do great with it. They really can take that lesson and roll with it from *Wit and Wisdom* and make it their own." Maggie was mentoring an interning preservice teacher at the time of our interview.

Naomi spoke about her personal experience as a new teacher using the curriculum, and why she ultimately viewed it as a valuable resource rather than a restrictive force:

> I was not a veteran teacher. Walking in day one, I had no idea. I didn't know how to meet my standards. And so learning how to really like– what was a quality lesson that was to hit the depth of knowledge that they need to on their standardized tests? Because I mean, we all can sit here and say that standardized tests don't matter. But I mean, at the end of the day they do. I don't know if I would know how to make a lesson that would hit those depths of knowledge…if I didn't have some type of guide.

Like Lyra's relief at the recursive nature of the lessons in the curriculum, Naomi felt reassured that the curriculum as a whole was a resource to help guide her in preparing her students for high-stakes, standards-based tests.

Chloe and Emmett, who each had over ten years of classroom experience at the time of the study and a history with Balanced Literacy training, also felt that *Wit and Wisdom* was a valuable resource for new teachers. Chloe said, "I feel like it's great for new teachers, if they will just embrace it and do what it says to do, it will guide you along…I feel like it's a great tool." Emmett said, "That's one of the things I think [people] should be doing with *Wit and Wisdom*–for a teacher who's brand new, and doesn't know what's going on, there's a lot in there to lean on."

Across responses, experienced participants viewed the curriculum as a guide rather than a script, describing its value in showing new teachers how a meaningful, standards-based lesson is constructed. Their perception of the curriculum as a support rather than a restriction allowed them to create a professional framework around its implementation. Their responses illustrated participants' construction of their understanding of the curriculum as a navigational tool, rather than, as Maggie said, "a straitjacket."

Role of Teacher Self-Efficacy as Mediator of Policy and Power

A theme across cases that helped explain teachers' ability to view the curriculum as a navigational tool was the role of their self-efficacy as a mediator of policy and power. The self-efficacy of teachers across the study appeared in their confidence as modifiers of the curriculum, as well as their expressions of loss when they described their decreased autonomy and creativity.

Freedom and Ability to Modify the Curriculum

Participants' comments about their freedom to modify the curriculum to meet students' needs or to adjust lessons for allocated time appeared in every interview. Overwhelmingly, teacher participants felt they could and should modify the curriculum in order to meet the needs of the students in their classrooms. The value they placed on their freedom to modify the

curriculum highlighted their sense of self-efficacy in our interviews. They discussed their self-efficacy directly or indirectly when they explained how they knew what modifications served their students best.

Leo explained how the district created an expectation for freedom to modify when the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum was introduced, as well as the importance of understanding school- or "building"-level expectations around fidelity. He said:

> At first, they really wanted us to, you know, just do it with fidelity…. With the understanding that once we learn it and get used to it, in my building, it would be okay to …play around within the lesson if you need to...My teaching partner and I, within that, we fiddle around and move things around. …Each arc of lessons has a focusing question. And at the end you write, there's a short essay or a narrative or something…. And so we play around with those. It seems like each school kind of has a little bit of a different expectation of how much fidelity they want you to use it with… [I]n my school, I feel pretty free to use the curriculum, but I can fiddle with it a little bit if I need to.

Maggie and Lyra made comments confirming Leo's explanation of building-level expectations. Maggie said, "We have the ability here, where it's not a– you know, they want us teaching it with fidelity, but also monitoring what our students need and kind of going off that." Lyra said, "At my school, I was allowed to implement *Wit and Wisdom* in a way that made sense to me. Like I was told, 'You do it with fidelity. But also do what's best for our kids.'"

Maggie, Leo, and Lyra's comments indicate that, at least within their respective schools, the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum was expected to be used by effective teachers who are knowledgeable in differentiating instruction to meet students' needs.

Kelsey, Talia, and Naomi described their freedom to modify *Wit and Wisdom* for their students while working within the district expectation to teach "the standards." Kelsey put it this way: "I see the standards and I know what my students need to be taught. The district relies heavily on the standards."

Talia described the accountability inherent in following the scripted curriculum while differentiating classroom instruction. She too named the standards as a linchpin in the process. She said:

> I feel like it holds me more accountable [than other curricula]. I would say yeah, it's definitely more rigorous. But the biggest thing is it holds me a lot more accountable than just finding something on Teachers Pay Teachers. Like, because this [Teachers Pay Teachers lesson] goes with spiders, even though I'm still doing the standard of comparing and contrasting– [with] *Wit and Wisdom*, I know it's standards-based. And then I just have to break it down from there to meet my kids' needs.

Talia's comment highlights the distinction many participants talked about between teaching the curriculum and teaching the curriculum to "their kids."

Naomi described the freedom to modify the curriculum concurrently with her development as an early-career teacher understanding how to teach to the standards. She said:

> I was just so scared of, you know, making sure I was hitting my standards…So when they, you know, asked me, they're like, "Would you like to [try the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum]?" And I was like, "Yes, please!" …And I was scared of the scripted part. But I also understood that, like, the scripted part– I don't carry my book around and say it

> word for word. I mean, this is year three. It helped me understand like, this is the right answer. And this is what they want the kids to get to.

In other words, Naomi's perception of the curriculum as a restrictive force shifted as her confidence in using it grew. Her self-efficacy increased, and she began to view the curriculum as a guide rather than as a script.

Kelsey, Maggie, Daisy, and Lyra all talked about specific types of modifications they made to the lessons within the curriculum or to components of the curriculum. Kelsey described writing instruction and said:

> The curriculum is written in a very formal way. And sometimes the wording is too much for our students. And sometimes the activities are too much for our students. Sometimes they just put a lot of activities into one lesson, and there's no time. So we're either cutting out stuff, or rewording things…At first, we had to teach with fidelity…Now they've kind of gotten off track and said, "Teach what you need to teach and change what you need to." [The writing instruction is] a part that I adapt a lot. They sometimes give them a planner, and students are supposed to work with a partner to do the planner. That would be a disaster with these particular students, so we work through the planner together, and we do our writing together…So we accommodate a lot there.

Other participants described their distaste for the writing components of the curriculum and described modifications they made specifically in writing instruction.

Building background knowledge in order to support students in the curriculum's lessons was another frequent comment by participants. Like Kelsey, Maggie acknowledged the

importance of freedom to modify in her school building when she talked about modifying to build students' background knowledge:

> [O]ur principal is really great about, at the end of the day, we're supposed to teach the standards. And if *Wit and Wisdom* doesn't lend itself to that, then she's totally fine with us altering, adding, changing the lesson, in order to make sure that our kids are meeting the standards. A lot of times also there's a lot of prior knowledge or prior learning that our kids don't have, [the curriculum] takes for granted that they may not have learned this [material yet], or they might have been virtual last year. So we have to do a lot of frontloading, in order for them to understand the *Wit and Wisdom* lesson just flat out.

Daisy gave a specific example about building background knowledge, then formatively assessing comprehension of a difficult topic right away. She said, "For example, my class…recently discussed the Boston Tea Party. It was a harder lesson so I added a reading comprehension passage with questions at the beginning of the next lesson to give the students extra support."

While Daisy talked about the informational scaffolding of building and checking background knowledge, Lyra talked about resequencing and scaffolding to build conceptual knowledge. She illustrated her point by showing me an annotated lesson plan about identifying a theme in a text. She pointed to her annotations (see Figure 4.1) and said, "See where you need to identify theme before you do this [activity]? And they didn't do that clearly. So I had to add in that scaffolding." Lyra's example illustrates the nexus of a teacher's content knowledge, knowledge of students, and analysis of the curriculum's approach to a concept.

Lyra also reflected on her broader approach to modifying the curriculum after the multi-year implementation cycle. She said:

> And so my sort of way of thinking about it is, if it doesn't align to a focusing question task, or the end-of-module task, or if it's not fun–because there are some things that are just fun to do, and I want to keep those even if they don't 100% align or help–I tend to skip them.

Like Lyra, Daisy, Maggie, and Kelsey, all eleven teacher participants discussed modifications within their own classrooms. However, Emmett also identified the schoolwide initiative of Miller's (2009) Forty Book Challenge and its impact as a large-scale supplement to the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum:

> The other thing I think is a huge limitation [of *Wit and Wisdom*] is the lack of leveled reading, for students to build fluency reading at their own level. It's not even like suggested as a sidebar, do this in your extra time. That's something that's really missed, and I'm glad our school does the Forty Book Challenge.

Within this group of participants, teacher self-efficacy mediated the impact of mandated curricular policy, because teachers felt confident in modifying the curriculum to meet the learning needs of their students. They discussed the importance of their freedom to do so. They gave examples of modifications to the curriculum at lesson, module, instructional component (e.g., writing instruction), and programmatic (e.g., Forty Book Challenge) levels.

Loss of Autonomy and Creativity

While their self-efficacy mediated the impact of the required curriculum on participants' perceptions of their success as teachers, it also served as an emotional filter for the district's choice to implement a scripted ELA program. Many participants expressed sadness or frustration at the loss of their autonomy and creativity in the curriculum design process.

Naomi, an early-career teacher who expressed her teacher identity in one word, *creative*, quickly backtracked in the beginning of our interview, before I asked any questions about *Wit and Wisdom*. When I asked, "How would you describe your identity or style as a teacher?" She responded, "Very creative. Or, I try to be creative. But I teach to the curriculum, so I try to be as creative as I can with the curriculum." Her use of the *but* conjunction quietly illustrates the inherent conflict between scripted curricula and creativity in her instructional style. Maggie expressed frustration about loss of both creativity and autonomy, saying:

> I feel like it takes away some of my autonomy to do what I want to do or what I think my kids need. Or if I have a struggling class, I mean, some of the books they want us to read are just incredibly hard. We spend all of our time like, "Okay, guys, this word means this. And this means this, and this, have you ever--?" you know, trying to get them to relate somewhat to the book…I also feel I'm not near as creative as I used to be. I think it's kind of robbed me of some of my creativity, just the activities that I would plan or, you know, pulling in different read-alouds or having the time to do certain things. And it's just not there. Like it was before.

Fern echoed Maggie's expression of sadness and frustration at her loss of creativity too, saying:

> Learning *Wit and Wisdom* has made me-- I feel less creative as a teacher. When I graduated, I was like, "Oh, I can do any–" I didn't know I was gonna have a curriculum. And so I was ready to just take on my classroom with whatever I could find. And I talked with some of the girls in my [preservice teacher] cohort, too, that are also in [this district]. And they're like, "After three or four weeks of *Wit and Wisdom*, we were both just like, I could not come up with a lesson on the fly, if it killed me." Like, I feel like I'm

very sucked into the structure of it now. And like I couldn't just pick up a book and teach something about it. I'm very reliant on it now. At least having something to go off of. Obviously, I can make it appropriate for my kids and meet their needs with it. But yeah, the idea of not having a curriculum is very daunting to me.

Fern's comment illustrates the sense of loss that many participants expressed, as well as an understanding of *curriculum* as a product created outside a classroom or by someone other than the teacher using it.

Leo also expressed frustration at his loss of autonomy and creativity. He added that the twin losses impacted his ability to build knowledge of and relationships with students. He said:

> There are some lessons– I'm just like, "Man that's smart." Like the way they've circled around and then circled around again to the [question or standard]-- it is genius. And I probably never could have come up with it on my own. But at the same time, it's not leaving me room for …things I used to do that I prefer. And also things that helped me build relationships with kids. When I have a journal prompt at the beginning of class, that that I have made myself and that connects to the meat of the lesson, I would feel the same type of cleverness rush that I get out of some of these good lessons in *Wit and Wisdom*, but I did it myself, and that's even better. When you're having kids journaling or freely discussing ideas, you get to know them better. And so when the question is your question, it's just that much better for building relationships. When the question came from somebody else, and you're just delivering it, you don't get the same high off of it, I guess. The same feeling of accomplishment and relationship building.

Leo's assertion that creative and autonomous curriculum-building increases knowledge of students and helps build teacher-student relationships speaks to his perception of the importance of identity in teaching and learning. He also viewed the best curriculum as co-created with students as he followed their areas of inquiry and discussion over the course of a school year. The *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum felt less student-centered to him than his own previous curricular designs. He added:

> If you're a teacher, and you're just going through this curriculum, it's very wooden. It feels like I'm just a robot teaching a curriculum… The year before they pushed this on us, I had the best year of my career. Testing-wise and confidence-wise. My kids' test scores were awesome. And I felt good working every day. And I was doing pretty much everything that I wanted to do.

When Leo mentioned his students' test scores, I asked him what might convince him that Wit and Wisdom was working, or that it was an evidence-based curriculum. He said as far as he could tell, the curriculum had not had a significant impact on test scores for his school in terms of achievement, although individual teachers were all demonstrating student growth in ELA. But he also another, more anecdotal way would be, "Do my kids like my class? Do my kids like coming to my class? Do they like me? Do I like what I'm doing? Am I happy doing this? The short answer to that is not really."

Like Leo, Tabitha expressed mixed feelings about the implementation of the curriculum. She said she believed the district consistently made the best decisions for students and teachers:

> And that's not always comfortable for teachers, sometimes, because you want to do your own thing… As far as teaching the curriculum…I can't say that I hate it. I mean,

honestly, I can't say that I do, because I feel like that it gave me part of my life back that I didn't have before…I do feel like that the structure is there, you know, for [students] to get some real deep learning. … It's given us the opportunity within the district and within the school to have better conversations, because we all teach the same things…So kids are getting a real uniform education. But that's on positive and the negative, you know, getting a real, real uniform thing, but that's on the positive side and the negative side. So I do have mixed feelings about that.

Prior to the implementation of the scripted curriculum, Tabitha said, she spent long nights and weekends building her own text-based curriculum aligned to the ELA standards. She struggled with the loss of autonomy in teaching what she liked to teach her students as well as the uniformity and conformity of the scripted curriculum. She also acknowledged the depth and strong design of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum in considering whether she would prefer to return to creating her instructional curriculum herself. She said: "I'd have to think about that. [Could I] create [the] depth on my own that they've created for me? I don't know that I could without taking a year off from teaching and just working on the curriculum."

Leo and Tabitha's comments about grappling with well-designed nature of the curriculum in the context of losing their instructional autonomy were representative of many participants' feelings about their experiences with Wit and Wisdom. Participants' explanations of their ability and success in resequencing, supplementing, restructuring, or compressing the curriculum demonstrated their sense of self-efficacy in the context of curriculum implementation. Their self-efficacy also served as an emotional filter for their sense of loss around autonomy and creativity as they enacted a curriculum they had no agency in designing.

Role of Reciprocal Trust during Curriculum Implementation

A salient theme that appeared across each interview was the role of reciprocal trust between teachers and administrators during the curriculum implementation process. Teacher participants said they would approach their principal or academic coach with concerns about the curriculum without hesitation. Many participants used the word *trust* specifically when describing the administrative structure of their school or district. The academic coach I interviewed as part of the case study confirmed their assertions, saying that she believed teachers felt comfortable coming to her with questions and concerns about curricula and their teaching. Aspects of their experiences in the district that contributed to high trust were their beliefs that they were heard and protected by their administrators, that their teaching expertise was valued, that the administrative structure and the functions of administrators were clear, and that academic coaches held a central role in the support of teachers.

Teachers Felt Heard, Protected, Supported

Talia, an early-career teacher who was in her second year of using the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, and who experienced a high degree of frustration with differentiating it for students who tested multiple grade levels behind in reading, still felt supported by her school administration. She said their trust in her was the most important thing she felt about her principal and vice principal:

> The biggest thing that I feel about [my school] is they trust me…. So I feel like it is a very reciprocal relationship. And it's really made me feel, at least for my personality, more confident...I feel like they really stand up for us. And trust us.

Talia’s sense that her administrators trusted her empowered her to feel confident in differentiating for her students, as well as taking on a leadership role that she said had become inequitable. Her administrators noticed that she was struggling with the role, and began attending PLC meetings to help re-distribute teaching team responsibilities more equitably.

Maggie talked about a specific change in her building as well, driven by administrator responsiveness to teachers’ needs. Her school had adopted Eureka Math and *Wit and Wisdom* concurrently, and the dual implementation of curricula was overwhelming. Maggie said:

> They heard us. They listened to us when we said it was just too much. And the following year, they really worked on it. Fourth and fifth were departmentalized. And then I think the next year, we went down to where third and second [were departmentalized] because they just realized that this curriculum was so deep that it was virtually impossible to do both and to do them well.

Talia and Maggie’s examples of building-level administrators making teachers feel supported and protected exemplify the responses of many participants as they discussed the structure and function of school and district administration.

Kelsey made a broader statement about a culture of care beginning with executive leadership in the district:

> I feel like from our superintendent down, we're just really cared about. Dr. X is an amazing superintendent. And I feel like he always has teachers’ backs, no matter what. And he cares about the students. So it just feels nice to be cared about and heard. He’s in schools all the time. I don't feel like he's like an outside person who's making decisions for us. He's been in my room millions of times, and it just feels like a family.

Kelsey also shared an anecdote about the superintendent visiting her class and participating in discourse with students about traditions across generations in families and the value of different cultural traditions in a community.

Across participant interviews, reciprocal trust strongly influenced participant buy-in when the district positioned *Wit and Wisdom* as a curriculum to be implemented with fidelity during the first year. Tabitha put it this way when I asked her if she was expected to implement the program with fidelity:

> Kind of, but not in a negative way… It was just, it's the first time, you've just gotta get through it. I don't think anybody felt any kind of penalty if you didn't do a good job at it or anything like that, any sort of danger if you didn't do a good job at it. It was like, "You just gotta try it; it might not be good; it might be really good"…You know, a lot of people didn't like it, but everybody did buy into that. And I have to say that about [my district]. I feel a lot of safety, to be able to try things, you know, and if it works well, great. And if it doesn't work well— "Well, I know you're trying it. So let's just try it again." And I think that says a lot about [the district].

Reciprocal trust continued to influence teacher perceptions of the curriculum as they discussed not only their compliance with the initial implementation period, but also their freedom to modify and adapt the curriculum to meet students' needs.

Training and Teacher Expertise Are Recognized and Valued

In addition to reciprocal trust, participants asserted that their district valued training and teacher expertise. This belief appeared across interviews as teachers discussed how they would approach conflicts with the curriculum, as well as how the implementation was framed for them

at building and district levels as a tool to be used in addition to their training and craft knowledge. Katherine, the academic coach I interviewed during the study, said that from the beginning, "[The district's position] was, 'We're going to integrate what we believe with the curriculum.'" While it is difficult from an outsider's perspective to understand how teachers could feel their expertise was valued by a district that mandated the use of a scripted ELA program, participant comments revealed a more complete picture of the nuances of how the district helped keep teachers' sense of professionalism intact.

Emmett explained that his principal initially instructed teachers to implement *Wit and Wisdom* with fidelity, but that he differentiated individual administrative oversight for teachers according to their need and experience:

> We were given a stricter directive [at my school], okay. But privately, my principal gave me a lot of leeway. I had really been impressed with the Balanced Literacy training that our district did and invested in back in the early 2000s. And I learned so much about teaching reading from that, that I never learned from previous in-service or my college preparation. And so my principal understood that I was taking the things that I was already good at and seeing make a difference in students and working that in with *Wit and Wisdom*.

Emmett's experience aligns with Katherine's explanation of the district's gradual-release integrative approach to implementation. That is, the district expected fidelity of implementation initially, and over time teachers learned how to best use the curriculum to meet students' needs during a full (three-year) implementation cycle.

Maggie, who hated the notion of a scripted curriculum from the beginning, said she would only advocate for its use again if it was implemented the way it was in her school. She explained further:

> It is not a script, it is not a straightjacket, it is a tool, and I'm a professional, and I get to use that tool to meet the needs of my kids. If it's used in any other way, I think it can be kind of dangerous and kind of harmful to kids.

Like Maggie, Lyra spoke to the notion of scripted curricula as a deprofessionalization tool that might be wielded against teachers, saying that she did not feel her school or district used *Wit and Wisdom* that way. She said she was comfortable modifying the curriculum "because my principal will trust me. He hired me. He understands I know English. He understands, you know, if you could just hand a curriculum to someone off the street, there wouldn't be a need for [teacher] education."

Lyra's assertion that her principal understood the importance of safeguarding teacher expertise in curriculum implementation was confirmed by comments Leo made. Leo was the only participant who openly set out to criticize the curriculum. But he gave credit to his district for the value they placed on providing PD for teachers when they decided to implement *Wit and Wisdom*. He said:

> [T]hey were not gonna throw us out there and leave us high and dry with [*Wit and Wisdom*]. We do have a lot of support at the district level, and they did want us to really learn how to do it and do it right, and learn how it worked. I do feel good about that.

Leo's emphasis on learning how to "do it and do it right" appeared again in Naomi's interview. She talked about the implementation process in her school and the district's emphasis on fidelity as a matter of validity:

> Having the buy in of like, doing it with validity, doing it with purpose, I think that's important.... In our district it doesn't seem like it's—you know, it's not necessarily a choice, but they also want us to enjoy doing it and know the—because I think if you know the *why* behind doing it, it means a lot more.

While participants felt that the district would have likely chosen *Wit and Wisdom* without their input or buy-in, the district's emphasis on helping teachers understand the rationale for its adoption was something participants appreciated and helped maintain their trust in administrators.

Some participants said they would use questioning strategies if they felt a conflict with the curriculum. Across interviews, they explained that they would either ask why something was being mandated a certain way, or they would provide their own evidence to explain why they were taking a different approach to instruction than what the curriculum prescribed. Talia and Katherine, an early-career teacher and a late-career academic coach, respectively, talked about the district's valuing of teacher expertise and evidence when they discussed how they might approach conflicts with the curriculum. Katherine said, "Well, [my supervisor] listens. ...if there was something happening that I didn't agree with, I would feel comfortable going to her and saying, 'Listen can you give me the purpose behind this?'" Her comment indicated the culture of rationale-based practices in the district. Likewise, even as a teacher in her first year at a new school, Talia said of her administrators:

I would probably set up a meeting with them to ask them exactly why. And I would want them to kind of point out the difference between what I was doing and what they want me to teach and the difference in the purpose. And if all they could say was, "Well, we're just supposed to do it this way," I would go back to my student needs.

Talia's comment illustrates her understanding of the district's emphasis on understanding the rationale or the *why* behind instructional decisions, as well as the confidence reciprocal trust has instilled in her to develop a praxis based on clear rationales.

Across all participant interviews, teachers expressed that their professionalism was recognized and valued, even when they struggled with loss of autonomy or creativity with the implementation of a scripted curriculum.

Administrative Structure is Clear. When I asked participants to describe the administrative structure of their school and district, their answers were nearly uniform across interviews. Three examples are included below.

KELSEY (elementary level): Okay, we have a coach at our school. So we have one academic coach, who coaches teachers, and she kind of does like walkthroughs and evaluations and answers any questions that you might have, or she'll guide you to someone else who can answer that question. Above her is our principal. And then we have a director of elementary education. And then above her, we have our superintendent.

CHLOE (elementary level): We have [our superintendent] at the top, and then he has…people that are over elementary curriculum, middle curriculum, high school curriculum…And then we have our literacy coaches, they're not really like administrators, but they kind of are. …[W]e have our principal and then the staff here.

> But our literacy coaches are-- well I say literacy, they're academic coaches. They're for everything -- kind of our go-to in-betweens…curriculum wise.
>
> LEO (middle school level): Okay, so our building has our principal, we have two assistant principals, and then we have a curriculum coordinator, a coach… So our principal and coach and administration, they're under the deputy director of instruction for middle schools…So the decisions on standards and curriculum and things like that, start with her…and come down to the principals and coaches.

The consistent nature of participants' descriptions of the administrative structure of the district suggests that the control of decision making and the chain of command is clear to teachers. The clarity of the district's structural hierarchy is particularly important in the context of the finding that academic coaches and principals are central to mediating teachers' conflicts with the curriculum or its implementation, explained below.

Coaching Role is Central. The academic coaching role in the district (formerly *literacy coach*, as seen in Chloe's response above) is essential to teachers' implementation of the curriculum. Academic coaches monitor, evaluate, and support teachers in their instruction and assessment, and perhaps most importantly, serve as mediators for any problems teachers have with curriculum implementation or teaching. Seven of ten teacher participants said they would first go to their academic coach with a curriculum conflict. Katherine, the literacy coach I interviewed during the study, confirmed this finding anecdotally, saying, "They feel like they have a voice in-house with me."

In addition to naming their academic coaches as a resource, seven of ten teacher participants said they would go to a vice principal or principal for help with a curriculum conflict. Three of ten

said they would go to either their coach or their principal with the same level of comfort. Ultimately, ten of ten teacher participants said they would comfortably approach their academic coach, assistant principal, or principal with a curriculum conflict, and each provided a rationale for their answer.

Leo and Lyra talked about how they might think through a conflict with the curriculum and whom they would approach to discuss it. When asked what he would do if the curriculum required him to teach something he fundamentally disagreed with, Leo said, "If I was that worried about it, I would just go to my coach….and say 'I have XYZ problem with this. I'm not sure it's necessary. Is it okay if I skip it?' Lyra described different levels of conflict and how she would handle them. She said:

> If I had a moral or ethical issue with something smaller, like an article, I would just remove [it]. With a larger text, I would probably go to the academic coach first, just because it's a little bit easier to explain things to her… [than to] our principal.

Lyra's example of a large text versus an article illustrated her ongoing strategic thinking about the curriculum, the purposes of its texts, and the supports available to her when modifications or adaptations were necessary.

Kelsey offered some context for why academic coaches were important "go-to in-betweens," as Chloe described them. When asked how she would handle a conflict with teaching any material in the curriculum, she said:

> I would go to our academic coach and ask her what her thoughts are, because she sees other classrooms and how other classrooms accommodate issues like that. She talks with

> coaches from other schools; they have coaches' meetings every couple of weeks, sometimes more often than that.

In Kelsey's perception, the academic coach's role as a resource for multiple teachers as well as their interaction with other coaches across the district gave her the sense that her coach would be able to offer a unique and informed perspective on decisions about the curriculum.

Finally, Daisy and Emmett both offered specific examples of conflicts they had experienced with implementing the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum and how they handled those conflicts. Emmett approached his principal, and Daisy approached her academic coach. Emmett said:

> Well, I have [an example of a conflict]. I read *Woods Runner*, and it has some graphic violence. And I went to the principal, and I said, "I'm not comfortable with this for fourth grade." He read it, read the whole book. And he said, "Go with it." And okay, I did. And he was right. Nothing came of it. Kids didn't make a big deal about it. If anything, I think that made it feel more important to the kids–more like, this matters. And stuff like this really happens.

In Emmett's case, his conflict with the graphic violence in a core text led him to value the curriculum and his relationship with his administrator even more. The administrator demonstrated a high level of support by reading the entire text, and Emmett's engagement with the text in his classroom with administrator support afforded him the confidence to discuss complex issues with his students with a sense of safety and meaningfulness.

Daisy's example stood in contrast to Emmett's example in that she and her academic coach did choose to omit some heavy material from an arc of lessons. When asked how how she would respond if asked to teach something she strongly disagreed with, Daisy said:

> I would first figure out why I disagree and have evidence on my reasoning. I would then have a discussion with the person that I deal with the most when it comes to the curriculum, [my academic coach]. [For example, my students are] learning about the Civil War and we are reading a book called *The Boys' War* through our curriculum. There are a few chapters that are just too gruesome/graphic for some of my students. I have several students that have gone through serious life changes, especially this year, and those chapters just would be too much for them. I had a discussion with [my academic coach] and she agreed. We worked together to figure out how I can still teach the specific skills from that lesson without necessarily reading those chapters, and it worked out without any issues.

Daisy's response re-emphasized the district's valuing of rationales or evidence, as well as the academic coach's consistent role in helping teachers navigate the curriculum, even from year to year, as in the case of Daisy's vulnerable students.

Across all ten teacher interviews, participants expressed reciprocal trust with their district and building administrators. They expressed their belief that training and teacher expertise are valued in the district and that the curriculum is not being mandated as a tool of deprofessionalization at the district or school level. They understood the administrative structure of the district, and felt heard and supported by either their academic coaches, their principals, or

both. These beliefs were conditions for their willingness to implement the curriculum and to think about it critically and positively.

Role of Power in the Context of Curriculum Implementation

Unlike the roles of the curriculum itself, teacher self-efficacy, and reciprocal trust, the role of power was not openly acknowledged or named by participants in the study. Instead, the power structures that drove the implementation of the curriculum were implicit in teachers' lack of knowledge about and agency in the curriculum adoption and implementation. No teachers could clearly explain the curriculum adoption process. None had any knowledge about the publisher of the curriculum, or how the curriculum came to national prominence. Furthermore, a majority of teachers said when asked to choose a new curriculum, they voted for *Wit and Wisdom* over other curriculum products as a bounded choice presented by the district, because they believed *Wit and Wisdom* was better than the alternative programs being reviewed or vetted. Finally, a majority of participants discussed a mismatch between time allotments in the curriculum's script and the time they are allotted in their actual daily schedules. In other words, teachers in the study were being asked to implement a curriculum with prescribed time limits for lessons and activities, but were not allotted those amounts of time in practice. Some teachers said they worked to teach the curriculum's 90-minute lessons in 70-minute or even 50-minute blocks.

No Teachers Could Identify or Describe the Curriculum Adoption Process Clearly

When I asked teachers what they knew about the curriculum adoption process in their district, almost all of them had some sense of how the process typically worked. However, their responses about how *Wit and Wisdom* was adopted specifically were based on assumptions about what happened at the level of district-wide decision making. Chloe and Lyra both responded in a

way representative of most teachers' assumptions about the process. That is, teachers assumed that *Wit and Wisdom* was the frontrunner as the ELA curriculum to be adopted because it was created by Great Minds, the same publisher who produces *Eureka Math*, already adopted by the district years before. Chloe said:

> Well, usually, several teachers are put on a committee and they look at several different curriculums, and then they get feedback and then they decide from there, and they present it to the district. I don't recall that happening with *Wit and Wisdom*. I think what happened was, and this is just totally my opinion on this: I feel like they saw how well the *Eureka Math* was going and how well it did as far as test scores, I feel like they thought *Wit and Wisdom* would be equal to that. You know, it's the same company, same intensity, the same rigor is there. So I'm not quite sure that they actually had a committee.

Lyra had an additional hypothesis about what events preceded the adoption of *Wit and Wisdom* in the district, but the rest of her assumptions about its eventual required implementation district-wide aligned with Chloe's:

> My sense of how we ended up here is that we had some people who were at conferences out of state, I don't know what for, but [they] pretty much realized they were the only ones without a curriculum …So they started shopping around for different ones. And letting certain teachers test it out …The process felt very fast to me. And I'm still not sure if that timeline was the best way to go about it. But they didn't just completely jump into *Wit and Wisdom* right away, at least on the English side, we had some time to think about

> it … [I don’t know if] since Great Minds also does the math that we do, *Eureka*, if we picked this because both of those are together.

Unlike Lyra and Chloe, Emmett did not attempt to form a hypothesis about how the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum was adopted. He said early in our interview that he believed the current district-level administration was full of good people who put children first, but that he had not always felt that way, and that at times during his decades-long career the district had been led by people whose “ambition loomed larger than their intention.” When I asked him if he understood how the curriculum adoption process worked in the district, he said:

> I don't understand it now. Because I extracted myself from it. I used to get on as many of those committees as I could, because I wanted to have a say and make a difference. And then I was on a science textbook committee many years ago, when we adopted the book that was harder to read. Because the representative was somebody who used to work in our county, and we really liked her. I told my principals, “That's it. That's the last one.”

No teachers offered a clear or confident response to the question of how the curriculum adoption process worked when *Wit and Wisdom* became the required ELA curriculum of the district, suggesting an imbalance of power between teachers and administrators through hidden decision making.

No Teachers Had Comprehensive Knowledge About the Publisher

Teachers had limited or no knowledge about the curriculum publisher, Great Minds. Some teacher participants had some sense of how the curriculum might have originated. Some teacher participants had no information at all about the publisher. Some participants had tried to

find information about Great Minds before the district officially adopted it. Leo researched the company as part of a course assignment while working on one of his Master's degrees. He said:

> When I was trying to research things, about Great Minds and about the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, there was nothing there, there just was no research on it, no academic research at all. And nothing more than what amounted to a few paragraphs-long, like, book review that I found that was just praising it, you know. So there's not really any critical analysis of it that exists. Other than what Great Minds has done themselves.

While Leo had positive things to say about the questioning and "genius" design of the curriculum, he noted the lack of research base about the curriculum and the publisher as well as the lack of testing data to demonstrate its impact on his student or students in the study district at large.

Emmett, who self-identified as a teacher who thinks in a "diagnostic" way about instruction, also applied a critical lens to the curriculum when the adoption cycle began. He said, "I did a little digging at first, because everything's political these days. And so I thought, 'There's got to be– somebody's got to be grinding an axe somewhere.' And I couldn't really find anything." Emmett felt that the curriculum posed big questions without much of a political agenda, despite his inherent belief that everything is political.

Chloe shared an impression of the publisher that was echoed by several other participants, saying:

> As far as the actual company, I don't know a whole lot about them. I know that the free version of Engage NY was written by teachers in New York City …who [said], "We're gonna write this [curriculum]… to help our kids."

Chloe's background knowledge of the publisher's connection to Engage NY was similar to that of two other participants in the study. Five participants responded with even less information, saying they did not know anything about the publisher at all.

Teachers Selected Wit and Wisdom Above Other Curricula as a Bounded Choice

Teachers' positive perceptions of the curriculum must also be contextualized by the fact they were not offered an open choice of curricula, but a bounded choice of several selections the district asked them to pilot, vet, or review. When I asked the participants if they liked *Wit and Wisdom*, six of 12 replied with some version of the opinion that it was better than the alternatives. Chloe said, "I think for the most part, it's a pretty great curriculum, compared to some of the ones we had before."

Leo reflected about his thought process when different curricula were being vetted, and said:

> I voted for *Wit and Wisdom*. In retrospect, I might have voted for LearnZillion, which is from Louisiana …I tried a little bit of that, and I tried a little bit of *Wisdom*. It felt like [the district was] pushing *Wit and Wisdom*. And it is a lot clearer and kind of better organized than the other ones. And I thought, "Well, if we're going to do it, let's do the one that has the most organization." And in retrospect, I kind of would have liked less organization.

Leo's reflection about his thought process revealed the difference between how a teacher might evaluatively position a curriculum as a product versus how teachers feel when they are enacting an adopted curriculum in their everyday instruction.

Maggie, the teacher who said she strongly opposed *Wit and Wisdom* initially, said the curriculum was better than standardized curricula historically used in the elementary grades. When discussing *Wit and Wisdom*'s complex core texts, she commented, "That's what's so great about it, is it's much better than like, a basal reader." Katherine, the academic coach concurred. Because her role in the district requires her to coach teachers using the curriculum, she practiced teaching lessons from it. She said, "I [tried Wit and Wisdom] and it wasn't so bad. I like that it's books not basals. I love that. It's either that or we adopt some basal garbage, which I'm not a proponent of at all."

Katherine's assertion that the choice of curricula was a binary one between a scripted ELA program and a basal reader offers some insight into how school districts may be defining curricula: as a set of resources or materials created by curriculum designers, not teachers. Perhaps more importantly, even the teachers in the study who "voted for" *Wit and Wisdom* from a restricted list of choices, like Leo, did not know exactly how their votes were counted or by whom.

Time

The most important sub-category teachers discussed when describing the (unacknowledged) power structures underlying curriculum implementation mandates was time. In any traditional school setting, lessons must be planned and executed around specific blocks of time. The power imbalance in the implementation of *Wit and Wisdom* in the study district centered around the curriculum's allotment of time, the district's expectations for teachers' literacy instruction, and the constant juggling of state and local level initiatives teachers are asked to implement from year to year.

The district I studied has a long history with professional development in a Balanced Literacy framework. It still emphasizes the importance of guided reading groups for students to build their skills as independent readers, like vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and decoding in context. However, this historical emphasis complicates and is complicated by the implementation of Wit and Wisdom, and the tension impacts teachers' daily experience of literacy instruction. Fern described it this way:

> So *Wit and Wisdom* lessons are written to be 90 minutes, but I try to trim them down to be an hour, because it's like 90 minutes of whole group instruction…which is…not effective. We're also expected to do guided reading groups. So I have like a 30-minute window for guided reading groups. And we're supposed to be fitting in word study and phonics within reading groups...So it's frustrating, because we're kind of being pulled in two different directions. Like, we're expected to do *Wit and Wisdom*, but it's preached that growth occurs in guided reading groups. But the emphasis is not the guided reading groups. But then again, we're asked why kids aren't growing.

Fern's frustration with this circular logic was echoed by six other teacher participants who remarked that time was a problem in their teaching.

Chloe expressed her frustration quantitatively and qualitatively, saying that she added up the instructional time she was expected to use and the instruction time that she actually had each day, and found they were not equal. She described the implementation of new behavior initiative that required an additional fifteen minutes each day. She explained:

> I'm still struggling getting everything in in that set amount each day...So I sat down and I added up everything that we do in a day and the time that we're supposed to spend on it.

> And it was seven and a half hours. And we only have these kids for seven hours [...] I just feel like it's a continual cheating of sorts, that they're not getting everything that they're supposed to. So I just try to do my best each day. But then I have the district that says we have to teach this, we have to teach it with fidelity and do it like you're supposed to do. And I'm like, "When? When am I supposed to do it exactly like this lesson is laid out for me to do in that timeframe?"

Chloe said early in our interview that she tended not to think about the negative and stressful parts of teaching, and instead focus on making learning fun and having high expectations for her students, but expressed real frustration and concern that the time she was expected to use and the time that actually exists in each of her teaching days did not add up.

Talia expressed the same consternation as Chloe, even though they teach fifth and first grade, respectively. She detailed the lesson-level mismatch of time, saying:

> *Wit and Wisdom* is built around 90 minute lessons, and I have 70. And that's like, if they get in on time and all that. And then Wednesdays I only have 50. I mean, a lesson takes me two to three days…Because, like, how do you do *Wit and Wisdom* with fidelity when you have [fifth grade] kids who are on kindergarten and first grade [reading] levels in 70 minutes, or 50 minutes on Wednesdays?

The mismatch of expected and actual instructional time impacted Talia in every class period of each day, particularly because she pushed herself to consistently differentiate her instruction in ways she felt best met her students' needs. As a result, she said she followed the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum with 80 percent fidelity with her middle-high achieving students, and 30 to 50 percent fidelity with struggling students.

Emmett and Lyra both made representative comments about how time influenced their ability to teach the curriculum. Emmett said, “It's overstuffed. The time limits are ridiculous… I timed myself one day, and I wasn't done in the time limit they said my fourth graders would [read two chapters of *Hatchet*].” He lamented the overly full structure of the curriculum, because no teachers in the district were able to work through all four modules in any year of implementation so far. He believed that completing all four modules brought overarching concepts from each year of the curriculum together in a meaningful way that students would understand and appreciate. But the mismatch of curriculum pacing and district scheduling prevented teachers from teaching the entire curriculum as it is designed. Lyra articulated the struggle this way: “We've only got 70 minutes. And this is meant to be a 90-minute lesson plus a 15-minute Deep Dive. You've got to pick and choose…am I doing all of it? Or am I trying to keep with pacing?”

Kelsey commented on the problematic distribution of time that *Wit and Wisdom* created in her instruction, saying that the curriculum “is missing some components like phonics instruction. They don't do as much independent reading as maybe they should. We have centers time with guided reading [and independent reading] …we built that in ourselves.” She and her teaching partner had structured their instructional days around *Wit and Wisdom* by integrating science and social studies instruction with *Wit and Wisdom* and creating space for Balanced Literacy and foundational skills practice in addition to it.

Fern talked about the frustration that a recent statewide initiative emphasizing systematic phonics instruction had sparked for her. She said the training was helpful because her fifth grade

students still struggled with decoding, were not confident with vowel sounds, and had trouble spelling. The training did not frustrate her, but questions about how to enact it did. She said:

> I've been kind of frustrated throughout the training, like, this is great. But what am I supposed to do now? We're literally diving into novels. How am I supposed to fix all these phonetic gaps? I mean, I *know* what I can do, but there's no time.

Fern's frustration aligns with other participants' concerns about curriculum and schedule mismatch, new instructional initiatives, and serving students equitably.

Finally, seven of the 12 study participants indicated during their interviews that they defined or were beginning to define *curriculum* as a product to be sourced from outside their classroom, school, or expertise. When Maggie said, "The first five years I was a teacher, I had no curriculum," or when Chloe said, "We didn't really have much curriculum. We were Balanced Literacy," they equated *curriculum* with resources or materials they did not create themselves. Katherine, the academic coach I interviewed, indicated this new definition of *curriculum* was used at the district level too when she described it as separate from *beliefs*: "We're going to integrate what we believe with the curriculum." In her response, "the curriculum" was *Wit and Wisdom*, not the district's comprehensive plan to use *Wit and Wisdom* as well as small group guided reading instruction and systematic phonics teaching.

Chapter Summary

Overall, study participants viewed the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum favorably. They cited its recursiveness as a way to allow all students access to classroom discourse and questions that require higher level critical thinking. Many participants said it raised their expectations for students. Participants overwhelmingly said that their trust in the district administration and their

freedom to modify the curriculum was essential for their satisfaction with it or their willingness to use it. District administrative structure and the role of academic coaches was central to mediating conflict between teachers and curriculum. Participants noted that the curriculum offers vertical alignment and consistency to alleviate intra-district transience and pandemic disruptions to the instructional calendar. Many participants struggled with the loss of autonomy and creativity of building their own curricula, while also acknowledging that *Wit and Wisdom* was "deep," "smart," "ingenious" and "masterfully put together."

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this critical case study, I centered teachers' voices to explore their lived experience(s) of enacting a scripted ELA curriculum. In order to frame my discussion of the study, I wanted to read *with* and *against* my findings. Reading *with* a text means understanding the positions or arguments of the author (Janks, 2019) and reading in a way that is reinforced by the dominant beliefs of my culture (Learning for Justice, 2013). Reading *against* a text means to ask critical questions about power as we read (Janks, 2019), and to challenge dominant cultural beliefs (Learning for Justice, 2013). The discussion presented here reads *with* the findings through a pragmatic lens in order to construct an "intersubjective view" (Kadlec, 2007, p. 13) of them. In this "with" reading, I assert which findings I read as positive–meaning supportive of teachers or students. I read *against* the findings through a critical lens in order to think about how power influenced their experiences. In this "against" reading, I assert which findings reveal underlying power structures in curriculum implementation, whether openly acknowledged or implied by participants or context.

Findings: Dominant Reading

My analysis suggests that participants viewed the scripted curriculum favorably overall because it addressed the pragmatic concerns they confront in their classrooms every day. My analysis also suggests power structures at the local and national levels are implicit and complicit in impeding equitable reading instruction (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020) and adaptive teaching (Parsons et al., 2018).

When I read *with* the findings, I was surprised to read the relief teachers' expressed in feeling they were able to include all students in grade-level classroom discourse and analysis of

texts. I was also surprised to find that several teachers said the curriculum raised their expectations of students. These findings align with Timberlake et al.'s (2017) assertion that some teachers perceived a scripted curriculum's high standards as a remedy for societal inequities. Furthermore, several teachers were satisfied with the curriculum because, as Valencia et al. (2006) reported, it provides necessary instructional material and resources, as when Tabitha said that the scripted curriculum's wealth of instructional material "gave me part of my life back" since she was not spending long nights and weekends planning her own curriculum.

From a pragmatic stance, these findings were positive, particularly when teachers expressed that they felt self-efficacious enough to modify the curriculum to meet their students' needs. The curriculum's influence on their high expectations and ability to engage students in classroom discussions aligned with their stated teacher identities in many cases, and confirmed Fackler et al.'s (2021) finding that a constructivist approach to teaching correlates with high instructional self-efficacy. They prioritized relationships with students, discussion, and high expectations, and the curriculum allowed them to engage in all of these to some degree; therefore, their self-efficacy mediated the infringement on their autonomy and creativity.

Pragmatically speaking, the finding that the scripted curriculum eased district-level concerns about a high frequency of transience and pandemic-era disruptions were also positive: a consistent curriculum has the potential to pre-empt knowledge or skill deficits for students who have no control over where their families travel or in which school they are registered. This benefit of scripted curricula is not widely discussed in the literature and offers a strong response to critics in its potential to mitigate learning loss due to transience or absenteeism.

Beyond the practical value of the scripted curriculum in participants' views, they nearly universally described reciprocal trust between teachers and administrators. This finding sharply disrupted previous findings echoed across the literature about stringent policies of fidelity and ostracizing of resistant teachers, exemplified in Achinstein and Ogawa's (2006) case study:

> Thus teachers who question state-authorized and district-adopted programs are deemed "resistant" and deviant, and are pushed out of the profession or compelled to leave the school. Use of the term fidelity to characterize adherence to the literacy program suggests that dissent is an expression of "infidelity." Instructional policy environments that define professionalism in terms of fidelity and, thus, infidelity, do not leave room for dissent and disagreement. (p. 56)

Rather than this binary view of fidelity versus infidelity, participants in this study described the scripted curriculum implementation process in their district as one of "fidelity–for now." In other words, each participant understood that the program should be used with fidelity to the point of familiarity, then modified and adapted according to teacher expertise and student need. The ways that teachers in this study modified and adapted the curriculum aligned with the research literature, as well. They re-sequenced, supplemented, scaffolded, and changed the amount of time they spent on curriculum components (Bauml, 2016; Huddleston et al., 2020; Owens, 2010).

The majority of participants expressing reciprocal trust with not only their academic coaches, but also their principals and their district-level administrators is a significant and unexpected finding. Their responses about reciprocal trust answered the question I posed after reviewing the literature on teachers adapting scripted curricula to meet students' needs: *What*

building-level or district-level practices allow teachers to feel supported in using a scripted curriculum not with fidelity, but as a tool within their larger praxis? Teachers in this study felt empowered by reciprocal trust, a result of feeling heard, protected, and valued by administrators at every level.

In reviewing the literature prior to conducting this study, I did not review the literature on organizational trust or the impact of reciprocal trust on teaching or teacher effectiveness. However, Tschannen-Moran (2020) wrote that organization trust is vital in high-functioning schools. Schwabsky et al. (2019) found that faculty trust was essential not only in fostering teacher self-efficacy but also school innovation and "academic press" (p. 249) or emphasis on rigorous academic programming, growth, and achievement. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) found that teachers wanted principals "to be friendly, approachable, and open to input from teachers [and] to be aware of and deeply engaged in the instructional program of the school" (p. 82). All participant responses indicating they would approach their academic coach or principal with curriculum concerns, and thus feel reciprocal trust in their schools, bears out Tschannen-Moran and Gareis's (2015) finding.

Teacher participants in this study also believed the curriculum allowed their students greater access to critical thinking about texts. Every teacher participant either acknowledged the "smart" or "masterful" design of the curriculum and its recursive questioning, gave specific examples of how it allowed students to engage in grade-level discourse that would have otherwise been beyond their ken, or said that it raised their expectations of what students could understand and do during a literacy block or ELA class. This finding stood in opposition to the

existing literature that identified scripted curricula as rigid and inequitable (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020), and othering (Sleeter, 2012).

Findings: Resistant Reading

When read critically, the study findings confirm some deep and dark assertions about the perils of scripted curricula. After all, students in the case study district were unlikely to feel othered by the curriculum because it centers White-dominant narratives and experiences (Rigell et al., 2022). Organizational trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2020) allowed the district to convince teachers to buy into a "fidelity–for now" implementation period that convinced them the standards-based curriculum was a good fit for their high-transience district. When teachers did speak critically about the scripted curriculum, their concerns were deeper than educational discourse or jargon: they talked about loss of autonomy and creativity. In other words, they spoke about how the policy decision to implement a scripted program undermined their convictions and beliefs about pedagogy and relationship-building (Gutierrez, 2016; Moore & Clarke, 2016).

My "against the grain" reading of the findings presents four significant notions to consider: the ways in which scripted curricula are re-defining our cultural notion of *curriculum*, the role of the CCSS or any officially adopted standards in shaping educational discourse, the way K-12 policymakers and administrators define equity in literacy instruction, the limits to adaptive teaching that are afforded within a scripted curriculum, and avenues for teacher resistance, even in a high-autonomy, high-compliance district.

Redefining Curriculum

Apple (2018) cautions educational researchers that neoliberal reform would craft a narrow definition of curriculum in order to politicize and control it. Participants in this study illustrated how the process might work when they began to define *curriculum* as resources and materials they did not create themselves. Even though some participants said that the scripted curriculum in use in their district went against everything they had been taught, robbed them of creativity or autonomy, or paled in comparison to comprehensive teacher development like Balanced Literacy PD, most participants still conceptualized *curriculum* as a discrete instructional artifact or product. In a critical reading of the findings, the conflation of *curriculum* and *product* is the first step in minimizing teacher preparation and expertise. Even the mechanism for curriculum adoption offered teachers a bounded choice of prepackaged curricular products, what MacGillivray et al. (2004) call the "illusion of choice" (p. 140). The engine driving this new packaged curriculum machine, as illustrated in nearly every participant interview, is *the standards*.

How Standards-Driven Discourse Shapes Education

Across findings, the standards shaped teachers' perceptions of the curriculum, whether they were describing the benefits of recursive standards instruction, their fears about covering all the standards as new teachers, or vertical alignment across grade level standards. Read critically, these findings reveal the standards, rather than the learning needs of students, are driving instruction. When Talia explained her frustration in teaching the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum to students reading multiple years below grade level, she was describing this problem: a false choice between standards or students, curriculum or child (Dewey, 1902). Unlike the children in

participants' classrooms, the standards are identity-neutral, race-evasive and uncritical (Muhammad, 2020). They are fixed, whereas student needs are varied and dynamic. But standards have been at the forefront of K-12 education discourse since at least the publication of the CCSS in 2010, and the CCSS drive state-level assessment and teacher effectiveness data in forty-one states. As Dewey (1902) wrote:

> 'Tis an old story that through custom we finally embrace what at first wore a hideous mien…*It is possible for the mind to develop interest in a routine or mechanical procedure if conditions are continually supplied which demand that mode of operation and preclude any other sort*. (p. Xx, emphasis in original)

Dewey's postulate about routine calls to mind participants' comments that daily instructional routines, year over year and from school to school, contribute to a consistent and vertically-aligned curriculum.

The finding that teachers viewed the curriculum favorably because it covers the ELA standards effectively supports decades of research findings indicating that neoliberal reform has driven assessment. The emphasis on assessment has driven the establishment of widely adopted standards, funneling millions or billions of dollars into the coffers of curriculum publishers selling curricula to schools to satisfy standards that schools and teachers did not create (Au, 2011; Ede, 2006; Moore & Clarke, 2016; ProPublica, 2021). Teachers value a tool that assures them of teaching the standards because their measured effectiveness has been inexorably tied to them (Au, 2011; Ravitch, 2021).

Curriculum Access: Questions of Equity

In their 2020 analysis of the undemocratic nature of scripted curricula, Fitz and Nikolaidis acknowledged that teacher interviews indicated “a conceptual reduction of equity to equality of access, without considering whether students are indeed able to access the subject-matter intellectually” (p. 203) and that scripted curricula “discourage the interventions that are often necessary for academically struggling students to be able to access the subject-matter in the curriculum” (p. 204). The findings from this study stand in opposition to Fitz and Nikolaidis’s (2020) claim; participants explicitly stated across multiple interviews that their struggling students *could* intellectually access grade-level classroom discourse and text analysis. Their sense that struggling students were included in such discourse was part of the reason they were willing to continue using the curriculum. The question of equity raised in my resistant (Learning for Justice, 2013), against-the-grain (Janks, 2019) analysis of the findings was of a different nature: if this curriculum allows students to participate in discourse about texts without empowering them to read those texts independently, is it really a source of equity? If students can participate in analytical discussions in a classroom with a standardized curriculum and a teacher who reads the texts to them or provides audiobook versions, how well does the curriculum advance their literacy? Fortunately for the students of study participants, their district required process reading instruction or support through intervention groups, guided reading, or schoolwide independent reading time, as in Lyra and Emmett’s schools. In other districts without a strong history of Balanced Literacy instruction, would struggling readers show any growth in decoding, fluency, or independent reading comprehension?

Beyond considering equity in reading skill development, investigation into the background of the non-profit begins to address Apple's 2018 exhortation to consider whose knowledge is being culturally reproduced and deemed worthwhile in the curricula as a political site. He referred to neoliberalist school reform as "a culturally restorative project to reinstall what is assumed to be high-status knowledge in schools, defining "important" knowledge as only that which serves the limited needs of economically powerful groups" (p. 685).

Background research into the leadership of Wit and Wisdom's publisher illustrates one way that Apple's (2018) assertion is correct. The CEO of Great Minds, Lynne Munson, is a member of multiple conservative and pro-charter organizations. The arts focus in the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, which centers historically mainstream art from major collections, stems from Munson's agenda to maintain the meritocracy of museology—a subject she has written about extensively, arguing that connoisseurship should take precedence over interest and identity (Munson, 1997). In this regard, the curriculum is prescribing cultural knowledge that is not situated within the students or their community, but situated in cultural repositories with hierarchical standards of good, great, and valuable.

Adaptive Teaching Within a Scripted Curriculum

The study findings both confirm and disconfirm the work of researchers regarding adaptive teaching (Vaughn et al., 2021; Parsons et al., 2018; Vaughn et al., 2015). In their rationale for developing an Adaptive Teaching Inventory (ATI), Vaughn et al. (2021) wrote that "policies that have increased accountability pressures through high-stakes testing, heightened teacher scrutiny, and adherence to scripted curricula have inhibited teacher adaptability" (p. 2). The majority of teachers in the present study stated they could and did modify and adapt the

curriculum according to their students' learning needs, including resequencing, scaffolding, compressing, omitting, and supplementing curriculum components. This finding stands in opposition to Vaughn et al.'s (2021) claim. However, the ATI includes teacher adaptations that recognize and incorporate cultural and linguistic differences in their instruction. No teachers in this study mentioned making any adaptations along linguistic or cultural lines. This finding confirms Vaughn et al.'s (2021) claim about scripted curricula impeding adaptive teaching as well as Fitz and Nikolaidis's (2020) claim that scripted curricula cannot realize the democratic value of *diversity* by nature of its scriptedness. In the case of *Wit and Wisdom*, the scripted nature of the curriculum also incorporates instructional language that is race and color-evasive (Annamma, 2017) and centers Whiteness (Thomas & Dyches, 2019; Rigell et al., 2022).

Two categories of participant comments also fall under the umbrella of adaptive teaching, even though they seem like teacher-centric values on the surface. When Leo, Fern, and Maggie discussed their loss of autonomy and creativity, they were also describing their ability to follow their students' interests and lines of inquiry, and create lessons that honored students' curiosity and funds of knowledge. This finding aligns not only with research literature about adaptive teaching, but with Carl's (2014) finding that teachers using scripted curriculum had less autonomy to meet students' needs. Likewise, Crocco and Costigan (2007) found that scripted curricula impeded the expertise they had accumulated through their EPPs, as when Maggie said of *Wit and Wisdom*, "It just went against everything I had been taught."

Avenues for Teacher Resistance

Finally, while none of the participants in this study claimed to resist the scripted ELA curriculum, they named resistance strategies when I asked them what they might do if they felt

too much conflict to enact the curriculum. Seven participants described strategies that aligned with Gutierrez's (2016) discursive moves to *press for explanation* or *counter with evidence*, saying they would ask *why* they were being required to implement the curriculum a certain way, or offer research evidence about choices they made to teach in ways outside curricular recommendations. Participants used this language when they hypothesized about confronting their academic coach or principal with a conflict between their beliefs and the curriculum. Two participants also referenced *seeking allies* when they discussed the curriculum's impact on their students or on their teaching with peers from their EPPs about the difficulty of the curriculum's core texts for their students who struggle with reading comprehension and fluency. These findings suggest that, while these teachers were not seeking to actively resist curriculum implementation, Gutierrez's (2016) strategies may be practical avenues across content areas and district structures, because they already feel natural to teachers as part of their reflective practice.

When reading with and against the study's findings, I was buoyed by teachers' belief in their district leadership, their belief that their professional expertise was still of value in their schools and district, and their sense of self-efficacy in modifying the scripted curriculum to meet the needs of their students. I was disheartened by the implicit redefinition of *curriculum* as a capitalist product and site of political control (Au, 2011). Despite participants feeling they had autonomy to adapt the curriculum, they had no real voice in its construction, adoption, or implementation.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for research and practice. Teachers, school leaders, teacher educators, and educational researchers may find value in this study.

Teachers

Multiple frameworks (Dyches et al., 2020; Gutierrez, 2016; Santoro & Cain, 2018) suggest and explain ways for teachers to resist scripted curriculum mandates at the system, school, and classroom level. These strategies included understanding how decisions about curriculum are made and how teachers can influence such decisions. They also included the suggestion to press policymakers for explanation and counter with evidence and research (Gutierrez, 2016) when policy decisions are counter to their beliefs about best practices. The study findings suggest that both strategies are practical for teachers who work in districts requiring the use of scripted curricula; participants shared their lack of knowledge of the curriculum adoption process as well as their likelihood to press for explanation if they experienced conflict with the curriculum.

Furthermore, the finding that participants viewed the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum favorably because of its alignment to their standards and its utility in raising their expectations for students also has implications for teachers. *Wit and Wisdom* has been aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Education researchers have decried these standards for a variety of reasons (Au, 2011; Muhammad, 2020; Ravitch, 2021), but perhaps the most relevant critique of the CCSS for teachers comes from Muhammad (2020). In her explanation of her framework for historically responsive literacy instruction, she writes:

> Consider the stagnant achievement over the past 25 years—the result of an overemphasis on skills and drills. Current policies and learning standards that govern schools (such as Common Core State Standards) are focused primarily on skills and knowledge. (p. 10)

Muhammad (2020) proposes a literacy teaching framework that offers teachers a practical model that incorporates critical, sociocultural, and cognitive theories to help students develop both personally and academically. Teachers might consider Muhammad's (2020) framework as a way to think critically about the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, as well as how they develop and revise their perceptions and expectations for students. The framework's learning goals include identity development, skill development, intellectual development, and criticality. Muhammad's (2020) framework offers a practical way to analyze, restructure, or resist the implementation and essential questions of a curriculum like *Wit and Wisdom*.

School Leaders

My findings support Tschannen-Moran's (2020) assertion that organizational trust is essential to new school initiatives. Study participants reported that their buy-in in the implementation process resulted from their sense of reciprocal trust with academic coaches, principals, and district leaders. Additionally, participants reported that they felt the freedom to modify the curriculum in order to meet students' needs, because they work in a district that values their expertise as well as valuing decisions grounded in rationales about best practices for children. School leaders might consider evaluating the level of organizational trust in their districts before requiring teachers to try out new curricula or other initiatives. Leaders at the school or district level should also consider using Vaughn et al.'s (2021) Adaptive Teaching Inventory (ATI) as a measure of teachers' ability to adapt any curricula a district is using to teach responsively according to students' learning needs. Finally, school leaders should carefully consider the disempowerment teachers feel when their required curriculum is not aligned with the time they are allotted to teach the curriculum. At the school or district level, leaders must

ensure that teachers' sense of self-efficacy is not threatened by external impositions of time that do not honor the expectations of any curriculum under consideration.

Teacher Educators

Teacher educators may find value in this study and its implications for teacher preparation. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) may want to establish program-wide definitions of *curriculum* as part of their graduates' pedagogical stance, so that they feel empowered to co-create curriculum with their colleagues and students (Apple, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2016). EPPs might also consider policy courses that teach preservice teachers (PSTs) how curriculum is adopted and how they may advocate for autonomy or for curricula they prefer. Programs may also wish to inform PSTs about resistance frameworks (Dyches et al., 2020; Gutierrez, 2016; Santoro & Cain, 2018) to prepare them for situations which require resistance rather than advocacy to prevent curricular violence (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2013) to students.

EPPs must also show PSTs how to adapt and supplement scripted curricula to meet students' needs and help them grow as readers and thinkers. Adaptive teaching frameworks (Parsons et al., 2018) include consistent assessment, holistic knowledge of students, reflection, targeted instruction, and vision (Vaughn et al., 2015). Teachers have to know students intellectual, academic, and cognitive needs in order to teach adaptively from a skills perspective (Vaughn, 2019; Vaughn et al., 2015); they must understand their students' funds of family and community knowledge in order to teach in a culturally responsive way (Laughter & Aronson, 2016). EPPs will have to show PSTs how to incorporate complex texts and effective teaching strategies for individual learners to offset the potential harm of a one-size-fits-all curriculum with fidelity mandates.

As they prepare PSTs to view the curriculum as a site of advocacy, resistance, or adaptive teaching, EPPs should position themselves as a "conceptual home base" (Smagorinsky et al., 2003), a reservoir for information about research-based practices and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1990) who may be engaged in similar advocacy or resistance. Finally, EPP faculty may wish to consider emphasizing public scholarship, practitioner-facing research, and political activism in their communities (e.g., campaigning for local school boards), because teachers are often too financially and politically vulnerable in de-unionized states to publicly protest or resist policy mandates that are not aligned with best practices.

Educational Researchers

Apple (2018) explained the role of educational researchers in understanding the control of discourse about education this way: "We need to more fully understand the ways in which the curricular, pedagogic, and evaluative principles and practices that go on within schools are 'determined'" (p. 686).

Because the present study was conducted in a predominantly White district with high trust and high autonomy, researchers may also wish to conduct similar research in districts with low organizational trust, more diverse student populations, or no history of successful reading intervention professional development (PD) like the Balanced Literacy initiative that this district implemented for many years prior to the adoption of a scripted ELA curriculum.

In addition to conducting similar research in a different context, educational researchers should consider tools for helping teachers, EPPs, and administrators evaluate the potential for adaptive teaching when a scripted curriculum is adopted and implemented. Vaughn et al. (2021) have developed and tested an Adaptive Teaching Inventory (ATI) to measure teachers' ability to

teach responsively to address students' needs. Educational researchers may wish to use the ATI as a quantitative measure in future studies of teachers using a scripted curriculum.

Conclusion

The goals of this study were to understand teachers' experiences with a scripted ELA curriculum, as well as how their beliefs, values, and expectations influenced those experiences. Findings from this study suggest that teachers required to use a scripted curriculum may do so with a higher sense of self-efficacy in schools and districts with high organizational trust and a high degree of autonomy to modify the curriculum to meet students' needs. Across teacher interviews, participants struggled with their loss of autonomy and creativity as well as the mismatch between the curriculum's pacing expectations and the actual amount of instructional time they had to teach the curriculum.

Teacher participants remarked on the "beauty" and elegant design of the curriculum and its value in affording struggling readers access to high-level discourse and text analysis. They valued its influence in mitigating the instructional challenges of transience and COVID-19 era absences and closures. However, they also acknowledged that, while they felt supported by their district through strong communication, pilot periods with different curricula, and valuable PD around curriculum implementation, they ultimately had no real say in the selection of the curriculum they were required to use with fidelity. Participants also felt frustrated and concerned by the misalignment of allotted and actual time for the curriculum in their instructional schedules. These findings suggest that, while a standardized curriculum based around critical thinking about complex texts has some real pragmatic value for schools and school districts, the

power around its adoption and implementation is imbalanced and favors the desires of the district over the needs of its teachers and students.

Chapter Summary

The implications of the study findings are of interest to teachers, educator preparation programs, school and district leaders, and educational researchers. Similar studies would be valuable in contexts that differed from this one in demographic makeup, professional development strategies for reading teachers, and cultural and political community climates. Educational researchers and district leaders should also consider using a measurement tool like the Adaptive Teaching Inventory (Vaughn et al., 2021) to evaluate teachers' ability to leverage a scripted curriculum to meet the needs of all the students in their classrooms.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Participant Interview Guide

1) What is your current teaching role?
2) What teaching positions have you held prior to your current role?
3) How would you describe your identity as a teacher?
    a) In what ways has this identity changed over time?
4) What is your vision for your teaching?
    a) In what ways has this vision changed over time?
5) How would you describe the administrative structure of your school district?
    a) School?
    b) Grade level?
6) How would you describe your experience with curriculum planning?
7) How would you describe the support you receive in curriculum planning?
8) How would you describe your teaching within the framework of your district?
    a) In what ways do you think your instructional decision making align with district priorities or values?
    b) In what ways does it not align?
    c) To what extent do you follow mandated curricula from the district?
        i) Can you give me an example of what that looks like in your lesson planning / classroom? (e.g., activities/materials/lessons you use; activities, etc. you choose not to use)
    d) What makes you choose to step outside mandated curricula (or not)?
    e) Do you worry about being penalized for not following policies?

f) What are the risks with following or not following the district curricula?

g) How do you mitigate risk? (How much risk are you willing to take on?)

9) Tell me about a time when you used strategic thinking or planning to teach the way you wanted, even though it was outside district expectations.

10) What is your understanding of the curriculum adoption process in your district?

a) What, if anything, do you know about the curriculum publisher?

b) What discussions do you remember about best-practices research during the adoption process?

11) What would you do if you had a conflict with the curriculum?

a) What would be your first response?

b) Would that change what you do in your classroom?

c) What would you do if your admin said you had to align with mandates?

12) Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

Appendix B. Bracketing Interview Guide

1. What is your current professional role?

2. What do you know about scripted ELA curricula?

3. What experience do you have with scripted ELA curricula?

4. What questions do you have about scripted ELA curricula?

5. What do you understand about how scripted ELA curricula are adopted and implemented in reading and ELA classrooms?

6. In what ways do you think scripted ELA curricula might influence teachers?

    a. In terms of their teaching practice?

    b. Emotionally?

    c. Intellectually?

7. In what ways do you think teachers might adapt or resist scripted curricula?

8. In what ways do you think adapting or resisting scripted curricula affect teachers?

    a. Emotionally?

    b. Professionally?

    c. Intellectually?

9. What questions do you have about teachers who resist scripted curricula altogether?

10. In what ways do you think you would be influenced by a scripted ELA curriculum if you worked in a school that mandated its use?

Appendix C. Participant Recruitment Email

Dear ____________,

I am conducting research about teachers' experiences with ELA curricula like Wit and Wisdom, Amplify, and Springboard. I'm hopeful that my research will inform school districts, principals, and teacher education programs as they continue to think about effective curriculum design and supporting teachers.

If you are interested in being interviewed about your experiences with your ELA curriculum, please contact me at arigell@utk.edu or at 865-640-5951.

Thank you!

Amanda Rigell

Appendix D. Informed Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Reading and ELA Teachers' Experiences with a Scripted Curriculum
Researcher(s): Amanda Rigell, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

I am asking you to be in this research study because you are an ELA teacher in a school or district that uses a scripted ELA curriculum. I am conducting this interview as part of dissertation study at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of the study is to learn more about teachers' experiences with scripted reading and ELA curricula. Because scripted curricula are increasingly widely adopted around the U.S., this study hopes to better understand how teachers view their reading or ELA curriculum. The study asks how the curriculum aligns with or contradicts teachers' beliefs about teaching, and how they use the curriculum in either case.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last for two semesters of school. The study is projected to end in Spring of 2022. Your participation will involve one 90-minute interview. In this interview I will ask you about teaching experiences with your curriculum that stand out to you and how your curriculum aligns and/or conflicts with your teaching practice.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in your teaching work as usual and reflect on your experiences in our interviews.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you can contact the researcher, Amanda Rigell, at

arigell@utk.edu or 865-640-5951 and tell me you want to stop participating. The information I have collected from our interview(s) will be destroyed.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but I believe this risk is small because of the procedures I will use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

There is a possibility that you may benefit from being in the study, but there is no guarantee that will happen. Possible benefits include personal growth from reflecting on your experiences with the project. Even if you do not benefit from being in the study, your participation may help me to learn more about how teachers experience teaching within a scripted ELA program. I hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

I will protect the confidentiality of your information by using a pseudonym of your choosing to identify you and the school site(s) in any products coming out of this work. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will take data security measures in the storage, coding, and encryption of all study records. I will be the only person with access to your data.

I will make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave me information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information I collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires me to share the information, I have to follow that law or court's ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

I will keep your information to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from your research data collected as part of the study.

I will not share your research data with other researchers.

What else do I need to know?

While over 100 people will be invited to participate in this study, it is likely that about 20 people will take part in this study. Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information I collected from you. In order to protect your privacy as much as possible, your interview recording will be stored on a standalone device, my transcript of it will be securely stored on a password-protected hard drive or in a document storage account with two-factor authentication, and you will be given a pseudonym for the duration of the project. If I learn about any new information that may change your mind about being in the study, I will tell you. If that happens, you may be asked to sign a new consent form.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Amanda Rigell, arigell@utk.edu, 865-640-5951.
For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:
Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant   Signature of Adult Participant   Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)
I have explained the study to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to be in the study.

Name of Researcher   Signature of Researcher   Date

Table 1. Participants.

Pseudonym	School Pseudonym	Current Role	Education	Years Teaching	Years with *Wit & Wisdom*
Katherine	Greenbriar Elementary	Academic coach	M.S.	27	4
Kelsey	Oakwood Elementary	3rd grade teacher	B.S.	7	4
Talia	Dogwood Elementary	5th grade teacher	M.S.	5	1
Leo	Dogwood Middle	6th grade teacher	M.S.	13	3
Fern	Oscar Jones Elementary	5th grade teacher	M.S.	4	4
Maggie	Hal Hopper Elementary	5th grade teacher	M.S.	9	4
Naomi	Magnolia Middle	6th grade teacher	M.S.	5	3
Chloe	Greenbriar Elementary	1st grade teacher	M.S.	15	4
Daisy	Evergreen Elementary	4th / 5th grade teacher	M.S.	5	3
Emmett	Magnolia Elementary	4th grade teacher	M.S.	25	3
Lyra	Magnolia Middle	8th grade teacher	M.S.	8	3
Tabitha	Dogwood Middle	8th grade teacher	M.S.	12	4

Table 2. Teacher participants' descriptions of their teaching identity and fidelity to curriculum.

Participant	Description of teaching identity	Fidelity to curriculum
Kelsey	I'm an educator. But at the same time, you also kind of serve as a counselor to them. You have to kind of be a friend sometimes. Sometimes you have to be the adult in the situation and be a disciplinary person. I'm their secretary sometimes, a custodian [laughing]… I want my students leaving my room to be prepared for fourth grade, I want them to know the standards and I have high expectations for them.	60%
Talia	[I try to be] the teacher that I wish I would have had. I constantly reflect on, "What did I need? And what did I miss out on?" And that's the way that I like to like to look at it… Having high expectations, not just academically, but for yourself as a person. And tying into a growth mindset.	30-50% (struggling students) 80% (middle-high students)
Leo	I like discussions... And so kind of a lot of: pose a question, hash it out as a table, come back, hold group, discuss some things, move on to the next. I'm very interested in …[the] zone of proximal development, I'm really interested in allowing space for kids to freely write and freely speak, and get ideas out and have discussions.	I'm teaching with someone this year who [is following the curriculum] straight up.
Fern	I've always loved reading, and just the analysis and dissecting little details in books, and finding their deeper meaning. So I really love that I get to do that in teaching language arts… I like that I… make deep thinking in young learners. I like to have the conversation going and just [be] kind of discussion-oriented.	85%
Maggie	I try to make all of my lessons follow the gradual release model: I do, we do you do. … I always try to really focus on group work and finding some sort of student to student interaction in every lesson...Our kids…have a lot of challenges that they face outside of our school, and this is kind of a safe place for them, so just letting them know that I'm here for them. But that also, I'm going to have those high expectations for them and not wavering on [them].	I do it closely with the pacing guide, but just making it work for our kids.
Naomi	I think relationship building is, is the foundation for a good classroom and kind of the key to classroom management.	I follow it to a T in the sense of what our district is asking.

Table 2. continued

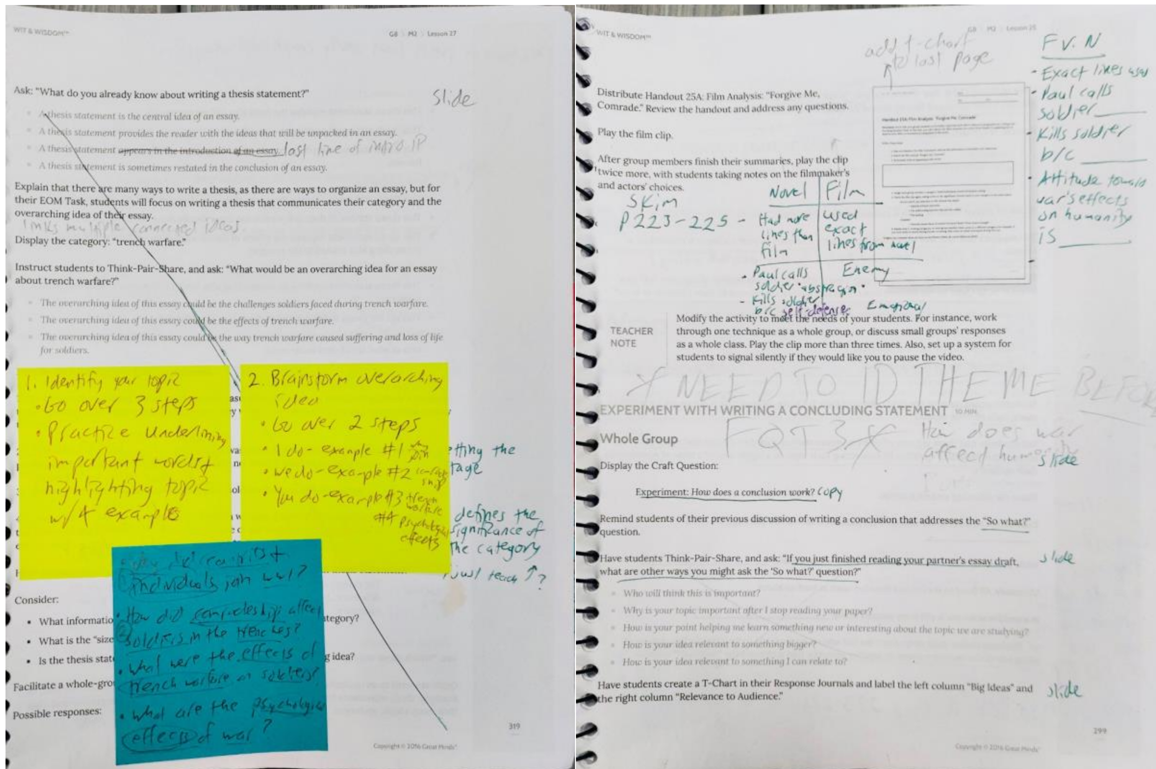
Participant	Description of teaching identity	Fidelity to curriculum
Chloe	I just try to make it more hands on and fun for the kids in any way that I can. But I'm also very strict, and I expect a lot out of them.... I want them to achieve as much as they can each year. And that's really what I focus on. It's not what I think or what I want to happen, it's what needs to happen and what they need to get there.	Take [the deep dives] away, I would say I follow it 100%. I do every lesson.
Daisy	I strive every day to not only help my students with their academics, but to grow in their everyday life. I am constantly helping students with their hygiene, emotional and mental health...I see myself as someone that can help these young children in more ways than one, academically and mentally.	I follow the curriculum very closely.
Emmett	I try to be really diagnostic. I am trying to listen to what they're telling me and figure out what is the thing someone needs to say to this child that you don't think you need to say? What is the thing you think everybody knows that this kid doesn't get it? So feedback is a giant part of what I do.	Less than 85%
Lyra	…[M]y role is not to teach kids so much is to facilitate a place where conversation and learning can happen… I do believe that the kids should be the ones who are kind of learning and helping each other with those sort of things.	85%
Tabitha	What I think I should be doing, is to be there to support my students in learning, in whatever aspect that that is. Whether that is learning the curriculum that I have, whether that is learning how to interact with other people in the room, whether that is just learning how to manage their own lives—to support them in whatever way that I can do that.	100%

Table 3. Example Evolution from Data to Codes to Theme.

Theme 1	Pattern Code	Value Codes	Example from Data
Role of the curriculum	Access to classroom discourse	Standards as keystone or guide	I see the standards and I know what my students need to be taught. The district relies heavily on the standards.
		Access to content through recursiveness	It's very circular…which is freeing, because you don't have to feel like, "Oh, if they didn't get this idea with this text, then I failed." …We're going to keep moving forward. Because I know we'll come back around, we'll get back to it.
		Vertical alignment	[*Wit and Wisdom*] kind of creates that structure that kids crave and thrive in from grade level to grade level and day to day in my classroom.
		Consistency, transience, COVID-19	We have a lot of kids in our district that are pretty transient…so there is a lot of value in that if they leave [school X] and come to [school Y], they're going to have the exact same curriculum… [M]y kids that I had learning over Zoom did great.
	Raised expectations	In-depth questioning	[M]y first year or two I was struggling because I wasn't used to those types of in depth questions. And I was like, "Oh, these sixth graders will not be able to answer that." And then they could, and I was just blown away by their thoughts.
		Scaffolding to meet expectations of curriculum	With the correct supports and right scaffolding, they can get to where *Wit and Wisdom* wants them to be. Sometimes I just have to use my knowledge of what they can do to get them there.
		Expectations have changed	So I think the only thing that really has changed [is] my expectations...the intensity of the curriculum has made me realize that [kids] are capable of harder things.
	New teacher tool	New teachers valued structure	I don't know if I would know how to make a lesson that would hit those depths of knowledge…if I didn't have some type of guide.

Table 3. continued

	Perceived value for new teachers	I feel like it's great for new teachers… it will guide you along…I feel like it's a great tool.



WIT & WISDOM™ G8 | M2 | Lesson 27

Ask: "What do you already know about writing a thesis statement?"

- *A thesis statement is the central idea of an essay.*
- *A thesis statement provides the reader with the ideas that will be unpacked in an essay.*
- *A thesis statement appears in the introduction of an essay.*
- *A thesis statement is sometimes restated in the conclusion of an essay.*

Explain that there are many ways to write a thesis, as there are ways to organize an essay, but for their EOM Task, students will focus on writing a thesis that communicates their category and the overarching idea of their essay.

Display the category: "trench warfare."

Instruct students to Think-Pair-Share, and ask: "What would be an overarching idea for an essay about trench warfare?"

- *The overarching idea of this essay could be the challenges soldiers faced during trench warfare.*
- *The overarching idea of this essay could be the effects of trench warfare.*
- *The overarching idea of this essay could be the way trench warfare caused suffering and loss of life for soldiers.*

Consider:

- What informatio… …tegory?
- What is the "size…
- Is the thesis stat… …g idea?

Facilitate a whole-gro…

Possible responses:

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WIT & WISDOM™ G8 | M2 | Lesson 25

Distribute Handout 25A: Film Analysis: "Forgive Me, Comrade." Review the handout and address any questions.

Play the film clip.

After group members finish their summaries, play the clip twice more, with students taking notes on the filmmaker's and actors' choices.

TEACHER NOTE: Modify the activity to meet the needs of your students. For instance, work through one technique as a whole group, or discuss small groups' responses as a whole class. Play the clip more than three times. Also, set up a system for students to signal silently if they would like you to pause the video.

EXPERIMENT WITH WRITING A CONCLUDING STATEMENT 10 MIN

Whole Group

Display the Craft Question:

Experiment: How does a conclusion work?

Remind students of their previous discussion of writing a conclusion that addresses the "So what?" question.

Have students Think-Pair-Share, and ask: "If you just finished reading your partner's essay draft, what are other ways you might ask the 'So what?' question?"

- *Who will think this is important?*
- *Why is your topic important after I stop reading your paper?*
- *How is your point helping me learn something new or interesting about the topic we are studying?*
- *How is your idea relevant to something bigger?*
- *How is your idea relevant to something I can relate to?*

Have students create a T-Chart in their Response Journals and label the left column "Big Ideas" and the right column "Relevance to Audience."

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Figure 1. Lyra's annotated lesson plan

VITA

Amanda Rigell grew up in East Tennessee. After high school, she attended Emory University and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. She completed her Master's degree in Reading Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In the interim, she taught secondary English Language Arts (ELA) for thirteen years, primarily teaching middle graders. Her research interests include reading engagement and motivation, equitable and inclusive representation of lived experiences in children's and young adult literature, teacher development, and teacher autonomy. She is grateful for support from her family, friends, colleagues, and committee in completing the PhD in Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.