Breaking Away from the Script: A Process of Modifications and Support

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Abstract

Research on talk in the classroom typically reveals that teachers dominate talk and control talk patterns (e.g., Cazden, 2001, Nystrand, 2006). This uninviting picture occurs even when teachers maintain they are promoting talk. The issue of classroom talk becomes all the more relevant to examine in light of the push for schools to adopt scientifically-based reading programs, which tend to be scripted in nature. This qualitative study examined nine elementary school teachers' decision making processes in literacy instruction while using a mandated, scripted program. Through open, axial, and selective coding, data revealed the participants were concerned that the scripted program did not meet the needs of the majority of their students. Adaptations to the scripted program were made possible through reflective practice, a risk-free environment, and support from the principal. The impact of the findings on classroom discourse is discussed as well as implications for administrators and teacher educators.

Breaking Away from the Script: A Process of Modifications and Support

In 1997, Congress commissioned the formation of the National Reading Panel (NRP), a group of 14 individuals whose job it was to determine how children learn best to read and what research says about the best way to teach children to read. Employing "scientifically-based" methods, the NRP produced a lengthy report about what constitutes reading and how best to teach it. Scientifically-based research—that which involved rigorous, systematic and objective procedures—constituted the basis for determining reliable ways to teach reading. The contents of the report have been criticized extensively by both teachers and scholars alike (e.g. Allington, 2002; Cunningham, 2002; Shannon, 2007) due to the overemphasis on isolated skills and minimal emphasis on comprehension and the notion that reading can be taught as a "prescribed, sequential formula" (Garan, 2002, p. 3). However, the NRP report remains a guiding force of federal educational mandates through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

Based on the findings of the National Reading Panel, President George W. Bush proposed the No Child Left Behind Act to Congress as a comprehensive educational reform. One component of NCLB is an initiative called *Reading First*. Reading First is a state grant program that promotes the use of scientifically-based reading research to improve reading instruction for K-3 students and to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of the third grade. As a grant program, school districts are eligible to apply for federal funding if they adopt "proven" instructional and assessment materials that are "scientifically-based" according to Reading First, NCLB, and the National Reading Panel. Consequently, many school administrators have chosen to adopt "proven" reading programs that are scientifically-based. This has resulted in drastic changes in curriculum, including an increase in constrained curriculums (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006).

Many of the scientifically-based reading programs are designed as one-size-fits-all solutions to reading instruction, tend to be narrow in focus, and are teacher-centered rather than student-centered, not allowing for teacher flexibility (Groves, 2002; Miller, 2002). Such controls restrict teacher agency, reducing both feelings of efficacy and teacher effectiveness (Valli & Buese, 2007). Teachers often described feeling constrained by scripted, "teacher-proof" reading programs (Brint & Teele, 2008). This lack of agency diminishes the role of teachers as professionals, whereby teachers are rarely trusted to make instructional decisions based on student needs, but rather are forced to rely on set reading programs and scripts (Haberman, 2007; McGill-Franzen, 2005). This may also result in a reduction of teachers' desire to improve their knowledge of reading, instruction, and student needs (Shannon, 1987). Additionally, Calkins (2001) argued that when teaching reading is externally controlled, teachers simply feel that they are managing someone else's program. These restrictive programs undermine the "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1994, p. 184) that teachers come into the classroom with, and diminish the intuitiveness of teachers.

Research on talk in the classroom typically reveals that teachers dominate talk and control talk patterns (e.g., Cazden, 1988, Nystrand, 2006). This uninviting picture is often perpetuated and accentuated with the adoption of scientifically-based reading programs, which tend to be scripted in nature. This study examined the decision making processes of teachers who were required to use a scripted instructional program. Three research questions guided the study:

1. What decisions do teachers make about using a mandated, scripted instructional program across a school year, and how do these educators describe that decision-making process?
2. What changes, if any, occur with instruction across the school year?
3. What factors influence teachers' decision-making processes across the school year?

Theoretical Perspectives

Social constructivist theory and decision making theories guided this qualitative study. Through social constructivist theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990), we understand that learning occurs within a social context. This theory of learning and development emphasizes the social and contextual aspects of learning and the dynamic nature of cognitive processes as they occur within culturally mediated social activity. Social constructivism is a theory that focuses on the learner and the social processes that affect learning and development (Marin, Benarroch, & Gomez, 2000; Adams, 2006).

Through a social constructivist lens, the information and multiple strategies used to arrive at decisions emanate from the social and cultural experiences of the individual. Proposed by Simon (1955, 1979), bounded rationality takes into consideration the notion that due to time constraints and cognitive limitations it is impossible for humans to consider all existing decision outcomes and make complete and purely rational choices. The suggestion is that humans function rationally within practical boundaries and make choices that are good enough to suit their needs, but are not necessarily optimal choices. The term Simon used to describe this phenomenon is "satisficing" which is a blend of *sufficing* and *satisfying* (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996). When faced with complexity and uncertainty, the satisficing criterion allows decision makers to find a solution that is "good enough" (Simon, 1979, p.3) among all known dimensions. These two theoretical perspectives guided the inquiry into teachers' decision-making processes while using a mandated, scripted instructional program.

Method

This qualitative study is based upon a larger data set collected during the course of a school year. The larger data set consisted of quarterly interviews and observations of nine teachers in a rural elementary school. Nineteen hours of classroom talk and sixteen hours of interview time was recorded. Data related to instructional time with the scripted program, which comprised approximately half of all data, was examined for this study.

Setting

This study was conducted over a ten month period during the 2009 – 2010 school year at Wood Acre Elementary School (all names are pseudonyms). Wood Acre was located in a rural community in the northeastern United States. As the only elementary school in the district, the school had approximately 600 students enrolled in grades pre-kindergarten through four. The average class size was 22 students.

Regarding language arts curriculum materials, the school just began implementing a new reading instructional program called Fundations for grades K through 3 as part of their language arts block. As a supplemental phonics program, Fundations was designed for daily, 30-minute lessons. All K through 3 teachers were required to teach this as part of their 90-minute language arts block. Similar to Fundations, components of the Wilson Reading System for phonics instruction was implemented in grade four during the year of this study.

Participants

The participants included nine teachers as well as the school principal (see Table 1). My intent was to include teachers that represented various years of experience and grade levels. Ultimately, nine teachers agreed to participate, and all completed the entire ten month study. Participants represented grade levels kindergarten through four, as well as various years of experience. The most experienced teacher had been teaching forty-two years, while the newest teacher had been employed three years. The principal had been working at the school for eight years.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Name	Grade/Position	Years of Experience
Donna	K	20
Maria	1; Reading Recovery	10
Claire	1; Reading Recovery	9
Becca	2	26
Karen	K-4; Special Ed	27
Stephanie	K-4; Reading Specialist	42
Allison	3	3
Sherri	3	14
Janine	4	9
Mr. Ryan	Principal	8

Data Sources

A number of data sources were collected throughout the study period. These data consisted of interviews with the principal, interviews and field notes from observations with each teacher, and additional artifacts related to reading programs and instructional practices. Participants were observed while teaching the Fundations lessons, and were interviewed about their instructional methods. Observations and interviews were audiotaped for accuracy of analysis.

Interviews. Four interviews per participant occurred throughout the school year, one per marking period, in approximately September, November, February, and May. The purpose of these interviews was to discover what decisions teachers had made in the teaching of reading, and how they came to make such choices. Interviews were conducted periodically during the

school year to determine if teachers' decisions changed over the course of the year, and if so, how and why. The principal was also interviewed four times throughout the school year. The purpose of these interviews was to explore how and why the various reading programs were implemented in the school, and the principal's perceptions of the implementation of the reading programs.

Field notes. Field notes were recorded during reading instruction observations, focusing on the instructional practices of teachers. Four observations were conducted per teacher participant. Similar to the interviews, the observations occurred over the course of the school year, approximately once per marking period in September, November, February, and May. Primarily, the observations served to support, refute, and triangulate data gathered from the interviews. Additionally, observations were used to determine if a teacher's instruction changed over the course of the school year, and if so, how.

Artifacts. Additional artifacts such as curriculum materials (e.g., teacher lesson plans, reading plan guides, materials distributed to children, professional development materials, etc.) supplemented the interviews and observations to add depth and understanding to instructional methods, decisions, and materials used by teachers.

Data Analysis

All data related to the Fundations program were bracketed and extracted from the larger data set. Data were examined for themes using open, axial, and selective coding methods (Creswell, 2007). Audio files of interviews and observations were reviewed multiple times for accuracy of analysis. Several themes emerged regarding teachers' processes of use of the Fundations program. These themes included concern with scripted teaching, adapting instruction, and supports for modifying the scripted program. Data were revisited for evidence of additional support of these themes.

Findings

Data revealed the participants were concerned that the scripted program did not meet the needs of the majority of their students. As such, teachers sought to modify the implementation of the Fundations lessons. Adaptations to the scripted program were made possible through reflective practice, a risk-free environment, and support from the principal.

Concern with Scripted Teaching

All participants expressed frustration with the newly mandated program, primarily because of its scripted nature. Karen noted, "It's a scripted program" and did not meet the needs of most of her students. Speaking about the negative effects on the students, Cindy uttered her frustration noting, "It's like drug abuse, being a scripted program." Maria acknowledged the need for a program to teach phonemic awareness, but noted that the Fundations program was extremely cumbersome:

Fundations is intensive phonemic awareness. We need a vehicle for that. A bicycle would have worked, a small little car, even a golf cart. But they got us all mastodons. We have

now this huge Fundations vehicle which is going to consume our time, consume our energy. It's not an efficient vehicle for this.

In our first interview in September, Mr. Ryan, the principal, expressed his concern with Fundations being a scripted program. Indeed, the Wilson website states that the program "provides an organized, sequential system with *extensive controlled text* to help teachers implement a multisensory structured language program" [emphasis added]. Yet, Mr. Ryan's hopes for teacher manipulation of the script were evident as he stated in the first interview,

It's a new program, obviously, and it's a scripted program. And this is what I also tell teachers, you know, anything that's scripted including a core curriculum program like you see, there's a script to it. You know there are those that are going to sit and read the script verbatim. And then there are those that are going to do it verbatim for the first few times and get a feel for it and then you're going to start to not follow the script but you're going to manipulate the script so it becomes good teaching.

A careful examination of this quote revealed that Mr. Ryan believed that scripted curriculums do not necessarily provide good instruction, as he stated, "manipulate the script so it becomes good teaching." Therefore, he indicated he wanted teachers to make changes to the scripted program to benefit students. Even so, teachers discussed their frustrations with staying on script because they thought it was the correct thing to do to maintain the fidelity of the program. For example, Stephanie, the Reading Specialist, stated,

It is supposed to be for the, what is it…fidelity that it be done according to the manual? Now I'm sure I'm off script. I'm working very hard to get close to script and that is a problem not only with me but with other people that I have spoken with. At first I thought I was the only one who's having trouble with getting on the script properly. And there are others that are having a problem getting, you know, exactly to the script.

Janine, a fourth grade teacher, expressed that many teachers were trying to stay with the script as a result of trying to learn the new program. She anticipated that changes would be made once teachers were more familiar with Fundations:

I heard in the meeting yesterday that some people want to be very structured as far as, since this is the first year, that they want to do it to the program. And then once they have run through it for a year, then use the flexibility after that…but until they know the program really well.

The main concern teachers cited about the new program was the lack of flexibility they had while following a scripted program. The data revealed the primary pattern of discourse during the scripted lessons as one of teacher direction or initiation followed by student response. In turn, the teacher would begin with another direction, and the pattern would ensue. There was minimal evidence of student generated questions, which would have had the potential for inviting learning and teaching (Dillon, 1986). In general, lessons conducted with the scripted programs followed the typical pattern of formulaic and choppy student talk in the classroom (Cazden, 2001). Within this pattern of discourse, there was little possibility for teachers to respond in a manner contingent on students' utterances (Boyd & Rubin, 2006; Smith and Higgins, 2006).

An example of this formulaic talk can be seen during a letter formation lesson in Donna's kindergarten class in December. Each child in the room has a personal white board with four pictures and lines on it (see Figure 1). Donna was walking around the room with the Fundations teacher's manual in hand.

Figure 1. Depiction of Fundations Writing Tablet in Donna's class

Donna: Please put your marker on the sky line. Please put your marker on the sky line.

Student 1: Sky line?

Donna: Straight line *down* to the grass line. Stop at the grass line. Pick up your marker,

go up to the…[glances at teacher's manual]…plane line…

Student 2:   …and cross.

Donna: …and cross. Please tell me the letter you just wrote.

Students: [shouting] T!

Several talk incidences are noteworthy in the above example. First, when a student asked a question (Sky line?), the request was ignored by the teacher. Second, Donna's attention was focused on the teacher's manual throughout most of the lesson. She often glanced at it and read verbatim from the text. Finally, we see one student anticipated the next direction, saying it out

loud before the teacher does. It appears this lesson has occurred before, and the student knows what is coming next, due to the repetitive nature of the program.

Another example of the choppy discourse evident with this scripted program was seen in Becca's second grade class during a vowel lesson. Becca was sitting at the front of the classroom next to a chart with vowels and corresponding pictures. She pronounced the vowel, the word, and the vowel sound. The students then parroted back the phrase.

Teacher: Y, cry, /i/
Students: Y, cry, /i/
Teacher: Y, baby, /e/
Students: Y, baby, /e/
Teacher: I, hi, /i/
Students: I, hi, /i/
Teacher: O, no, /o/
Students: O, no, /o/
Teacher: U, blue, [hesitates] /oo/
Students: U, blue, [hesitantly] /oo/
Teacher: Those U's are so tricky! U, pupil, /u/
Students: U, pupil, /u/

This lesson continued in the same manner for a total of five minutes, with Becca reading from the Fundations teacher's manual, and the students repeating her sounds and words. This transcript provides evidence that this "interaction" was merely an echoing of the teacher. Not only was the sound repeated, but the inflections, tone and hesitations were mimicked exactly as the teacher had said them.

While above discourse patterns may provide the learner with the benefit of practicing letter formation or verbalizing vowel sounds, this type of instruction does not promote deeper understanding. If we consider that meaning making occurs through dialogic interactions (Bakhtin, 1981), we see that there is little possibility of understanding occurring in the above types of exchanges because there is no responsiveness between listener and speaker. As Wertsch (1991) noted, Bakhtin viewed meaning making "as an active process rather than as a static entity. He insisted at many points that meaning can come into existence only when two or more voices come into contact: when the voice of the listener responds to the voice of the speaker" (p. 52). While the website states that these exchanges are "very interactive," this may only be true in that there is turn taking occurring between students and teachers; yet this is not the same as truly learning through interaction. Through a social constructivist perspective, learning is a social process; one that is "created through the process of social exchange" (Au, 1998, p. 299). This process has to be responsive to be meaningful (Bakhtin, 1981), which is not what was evident in many of the exchanges between teacher and student when the Fundations manual was followed. Therefore, unless teachers chose to supplement the Fundations program by engaging students in additional dialogue about letter sounds, phonics, writing, or spelling, the instruction followed a teacher/student parroting interaction, as indicated above.

After seeing such examples, one may ask, why did the teachers follow such scripts, especially since they each voiced concern over the poor instruction that was being provided? The

data provided several reasons for this. First, teachers were trying to become familiar with the new program. As Maria noted, "It's huge verbiage." Teachers were literally walking around the classrooms with the teacher's manuals so they could become familiar with the lingo of the program. A second reason was to maintain the fidelity of the program. The teachers were told that if they followed the program as designed, their students would succeed. A third reason for following the script was the perception that the administration expected it to be followed verbatim. Fourth, while participants realized this instructional practice was not necessarily the best, they were making decisions that were "good enough" given the constraints of their situation. Simon (1955, 1979) referred to this as "satisficing."

In spite of these reasons for following the script, participants described the angst they felt about it. Becca noted, "It's stressful, very stressful." Becca also indicated her annoyance with the edict, describing her language arts instruction as starting "with Fundations, and that was a directive, so that wasn't a choice." Sherri commented, "Most of the teachers here hate it [the new program]." Claire described the conflicting feelings she had about the program, stating, "I will always do what I've been asked to do. Obviously, they're my bosses. But how can I fit that in with my philosophy and my beliefs that I know is the best practice for students?"

The above feelings emerged very quickly within the first months of using the new program, and continued until mid-year. By the third round of observations and interviews, which occurred in January and February, there was a notable change in the manner of instruction with Fundations and in the participants' attitudes about using it. Claire described the change like this:

> Originally we thought it was verbatim and um, with all of the issues that I had found with it, I went right to my principal and said, 'These are the issues I have. I'm not trying to be insubordinate but these are the changes I've made.' And he's fine with that and said, 'Well, why isn't everyone else doing that?' I said, 'Because you told us to do this program. People are going to do it verbatim.' So, it was kind of one of those things that I finally got to the point, 'cause it was right after Christmas when I had gone to him and said 'Listen'…and I had told him flat out, 'I couldn't have come to you in September because I was so angry, you know.'

Interestingly, Karen was the only participant to state that they did not have to use the program verbatim, stating, "none of us have been told [to use the program] verbatim." However, the majority of the remainder of the participants felt they needed to do so.

Breaking Away from the Script – Adapting Instruction

While all teachers were required to use the new program, Mr. Ryan indicated that teachers had autonomy in *how* to implement Fundations, and they could choose how to integrate parts of it into their existing instructional methods for the teaching of reading. Mr. Ryan mentioned he gave teachers agency in the hopes they would make choices that benefited the students in their own classrooms. He acknowledged that Fundations was just one component of the reading curriculum:

> I don't think it's a magic pill. I don't think it's a magic dust… I just think it's a starting point…now you can start to build off that, and what it looks like now may be nothing what it looks like in the future but we can at least say it started there.

Mr. Ryan's statement of, "what it looks like now may be nothing what it looks like in the future" indicated his recognition that there would be a process of change and modifications as teachers became accustomed to the new program. In our third interview, which occurred mid-way through the school year, Mr. Ryan described "unrest" among teachers, which prompted the organization of a meeting to address concerns with the scripted nature of Fundations. In late January, a group of teachers invited the principal to attend a scheduled meeting so he could hear their concerns. Mr. Ryan recalled the events in great detail:

> Well, what ended up happening was there was quite a bit of uneasiness and unrest amongst a large group of teachers. Well, they called a meeting and they invited me to go to hear their issues. So I did. And what was interesting to me right off the bat was that their perceptions of what I was expecting them to do and what I intended for them to do were totally different. Their expectations were that they thought that I wanted them to go verbatim all the way through. What I wanted them to do was to follow the program but use their autonomy that if they, for example, they use the dry erase board the day before and the kids really seemed to get it, and the program called for them to do the dry erase boards that day, they had the autonomy not to do that; to do the magnetic boards, or to do something else or to follow another component of the program. And they weren't doing that. They were just continuing to plug along and becoming very frustrated because they were not feeling as if they could make that change. Well, that's not what I had meant. You can change it. Just make sure you follow the program. So they were hearing one thing and I meant something different.

So even though Mr. Ryan was saying he did not intend for teachers to use the program verbatim, teachers still felt the need to do so. This meeting with the principal appeared to be a turning point for teachers as they began to make more adjustments to how they implemented the program. Several months later, Mr. Ryan indicated he saw encouraging results from this meeting with teachers, commenting, "I would like to say that the results of that conversation seem to have been positive." These "positive" results were most evident in teachers' attitudes about the program, timing and focus, and pacing of instruction. Indeed, teachers did go through a process of modifications throughout the school year, taking into consideration the needs of their students.

Attitude. There appeared to be a shift from a view of Fundations as being all-consuming to being just a small piece of the language arts puzzle. For example, Donna stated this clearly, shrugging her shoulders, "You know to me it's like such a little part of it. Like in some classrooms you know, it's become this big huge end all be all. But for me it's just that little part of it. So I think it's fine for kindergarten." Similarly, Karen described how she saw the process of modifications occurring with other teachers. She described, "Well, they weren't [flexible] in the beginning, but now they're….I guess I was one of the ones that always said, do what you feel your kids need. You don't have to do every piece of it. You don't have to say, you know, everything that's scripted for you. You know your kids. Do what you think is, what you know they need. So, it's a supplement." During her third interview, Donna also described "not feeling so negative towards it [Fundations]."

Timing and focus. Fundations was designed for a 30 minute block of time. Teachers described their frustration with lessons taking 45 minutes or longer to implement. As the year progressed, several participants described how they made the decision to limit this block of instruction to 30 minutes, whether or not all components of each lesson had been addressed. For example, Becca described how she changed her timing of the lessons from over 45 minutes to 30 minutes, stating, "Now I can say, 'Okay, get up, put away, let's go.'"

In many cases, the decision to restrict each lesson to 30 minutes necessitated picking and choosing among various options for any particular lesson. Claire described how this decision reduced her anxiety about not covering all parts of the lesson, commenting, "I have changed the Fundations, the word work, um, letters just a bit. I'm not…I follow the program but I'm not doing every single component every day…and with that, I don't feel the stress and the angst over it." Likewise, Donna, described how this looked over the course of a week, and how this allowed her to spend additional time "with actual reading" with her students:

> I start out by the book, and the lessons are set up for a week at a time. So, on Monday I'm by the book. Tuesday, seeing what else they still need. By Wednesday, I don't feel like I have to do every single thing the book says. If they got it, I move on. Because I really, especially this time of year, I want to have more time back here at the reading table with actual reading. That's [Fundations] just a little building block of it.

Pacing. Many participants expressed the changes made to pacing with the Fundations lessons. Janine described her perspective on the modifications to pacing of lessons, stating,

> That [Fundations] has to be presented this way. But, if it says you have to spend 45 minutes on this lesson, but your kids are not starting down here [gesturing with hand down to the ground]…your kids are beyond that. You don't have to spend 45 minutes doing this primary lesson.

Additionally, Karen described how she made changes, particularly in the pacing of the program. She stated,

> I do it a little bit differently…it's scripted. I don't do it exactly as it says because sometimes it moves a little too quickly for these kids so that sometimes I key it back a little bit. I add some other activities to make sure they've got a concept…I mean we work really hard on the trick words, which are the sight words, every day. The program doesn't ask you to do those [everyday]. So, it's scripted, but I tweak it to be what's appropriate for these guys."

Taken as a whole, these modifications and changes that participants made to the Fundations program are indicative of the adaptive nature of decision-making (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1993). Reflecting on this process of learning to teach with a new program, Mr. Ryan anticipated a greater comfort level with the program with Fundations for the next school year. He stated, "I think there will be…again, with anything new, there will be a comfort level. They already know what to expect. So, I think it'll be a little bit easier and move a little smoother."

In the following example, we see a similar letter formation lesson as presented earlier in this paper. This lesson occurred in Donna's kindergarten class in the month of March. Donna,

the kindergarten teacher, has asked the students to take out their writing materials. Before she begins the lesson, she encourages students to draw on their tablets. Throughout this lesson, Donna walked around the room, without the Fundations teacher's manual.

> Donna: You have one minute to draw whatever you want. You can write your name on there, you can color in those clouds…color in the grass…
> [Students draw pictures including one of the teacher, "love notes," decorations, spaghetti and meatballs, and more. During this time, Donna was walking around the room engaging students in conversations about their pictures and writings.]
> Donna: Okay, ready? Here we go. Please put your marker on…the plane line. Straight line *down* to the grass line. Trace back up – don't pick up your marker! Trace back up, up, up…aim to the plane line…and curve around back down to the grass line…and…don't pick up your marker! Trace back up, aim towards the plane line…make *another* hump…down to the grass line. What's the letter?
> Students: [shouting] M!
> Donna: Tell me…Whoa – freeze – tell me the picture that goes with that.
> Students: [some students glance at the letter/picture chart on the wall] Man!
> Donna: I want to make sure you said the right letter. M. You should have an M…Boys and girls, make another M next to that please.
> [Donna observing as students are working]
> Student 1: I did another M! Can I do another M?
> Donna: Just two please. Now you just wrote the name of my favorite candy. Whadja just write?
> Student 2:   Man!
> Student 3:   Marshmallow!
> Student 4:   M!
> Donna: You wrote it right there – M and M. M and M, like the candy!
> Students: Oh! M and M's!
> Donna: Now take a good look at your paper, because if you're shopping over the weekend, feel free to buy me a bag of my favorite candy!

It is critical to note the differences between the two examples of letter formation lessons—one in which the script is followed verbatim and one in which the teacher infused additional comments. In the first example, the teacher was proceeding through the lesson regardless of student comments and responses. In the second lesson, the teacher was engaging students in conversation and making real-world connections with the instructional material. This happens in two specific ways in the above "M and M" lesson. First, Donna begins the Fundations lesson with one minute of free drawing. During this time, students are applying their knowledge of symbols and letters and are speaking with each other and the teacher about their products. There is no evaluative feedback during this time. As suggested by Smith and Higgins (2006), classroom talk needs to be conversational and allow for teachers to react with exclamations and personal responses, which we see evidence of in this data. Secondly, in the above "M and M" lesson, Donna extends the lesson by helping students make real-world connections to the material they are learning. She does not merely evaluate the outcome but encourages students to apply that knowledge. Rather than just forming the letter "M" and remembering it for the sake of knowing it, Donna's use of purposeful questions has the potential to lead to relevance and depth

of understanding (Wilkinson, 1970). This is an example of the teacher scaffolding understanding, which is an effective way of using traditional teacher questioning (Boyd & Rubin, 2006), and is often absent from scripted programs. What counts as knowledge is shaped by the questions teachers ask (Nystrand, 2006). Furthermore, questions which lead to stimulating thought may lead to internalization of new knowledge (Dillon, 1982). As such, this example of the adapted lesson is qualitatively different from the previous scripted lesson.

Regarding classroom discourse, the contingently responsive teaching in this second example is more effective in promoting student talk than mere recitation or question and answer as seen in the first example (Boyd & Rubin, 2002). Student talk is essential for learning, inquiry, collaboration, and assimilating knowledge. Discourse, which engages students in critical thinking and discussions, helps to create more opportunities for students to engage in higher-level thinking and reasoning (Soter et al., 2008). It is imperative for teachers to become knowledgeable in strategies to improve classroom discourse, especially in an era where more and more scripted curriculums which restrict responsive classroom talk are becoming pervasive (Gutierrez, 2000).

Supports for Modifications

Teachers expressed the desire to break away from the script in order to meet student needs. While the program was required for use in each classroom, participants began the process of modifying the script as the year progressed. This was made possible through evidence of reflective practice as well as support from the principal in providing a risk-free environment.

Indications of reflection. Within the process of modifications that teachers engaged in with the Fundations program throughout the year, participants did not specifically acknowledge that they reflected upon their practices to make changes. In fact, only one teacher, Janine, mentioned the word "reflect" during the multiple interviews conducted during the study. She did so as she was talking about considering what changes she may make for next year, forecasting, "I would say probably…but it will still take me, since fourth grade is still new, it'll still take me to the end of the school year to go back and reflect." When asked to elaborate on what reflection means to her, Janine replied, "How to do it better and what types of materials that I'm using and if it really worked. Did they learn what they were supposed to be learning? Did they have fun? You know, was it highly motivating for them?" Therefore, in Janine's response, there are indications of thoughtful action (Dewey, 1933), which may result in changes to her curriculum.

Schon (1983, 1987) made a distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. In another example, Allison clearly described the differences between these two types of reflection when she spoke of planning for language arts instruction: "I think off the top of my head because a lot of teaching is spontaneous. You can only plan so much and your plans will only go so far." Therefore, thinking "off the top of my head" is reflection-in-action, and "your plans" is indicative of reflection-on-action.

Even though these are the only explicit references to the word "reflection," careful analysis of the data indicated that participants were continually engaged in reflective practice while adjusting to teaching with Fundations. Dewey (1933) noted that reflection begins when

teachers experience a conflict or difficulty. Indeed, there was a plethora of evidence pointing towards the conflicts and difficulties teachers experienced with Fundations, as reported previously. When these difficulties arose, participants described how they chose to "face the situation" (Dewey, 1933, p. 102) rather than dodge it or rise above it (Dewey, 1933). In many cases, in support of social constructivist theories, teachers relied upon each other for support and were active learners (Mallory & New, 1994) in discovering how to fit the Fundations program into their existing language arts curriculum. If we consider the influences on decision-making, it is imperative to examine the overall social context of this learning environment. One factor that surfaced from the data was the fear of risk taking, and the risk-free environment of the school.

A risk-free environment. Moroye and Uhrmacher (2009) stated, "Risk taking refers to venturing into the unknown" (p. 85). In the current study, we see evidence of the unknown occurring as teachers faced the mandate of adopting a scripted program. Research indicates that teachers are more likely to engage in greater innovative efforts and change their classroom practices when they perceive that experimentation is encouraged and anticipated (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Little, 1982). Additionally, a climate of experimentation and risk taking provide empowering opportunities for teachers to shape the educational environment (Lightfoot, 1986).

Mr. Ryan mentioned his attempts to establish a risk-free environment for his faculty. He explained how this was one of his goals since the time he became principal, stating, "One of the things that I have tried to do since I've been in this building is to create an environment where people can take a risk and not feel as if they're going to be reprimanded or in some way, shape or form, yelled at…for their mistake." Recalling the meeting that teachers organized to discuss their concerns with Fundations, Mr. Ryan expressed his disappointment that teachers thought they would get in trouble for making adaptations to the program:

> I go back to the meeting that we had. You know there was this idea that if they didn't do it exactly the way that it was written that there would be ramifications. Well, okay, what ramifications did you see that would cause you to believe that there would be ramifications? Did anybody get written up? You know, was I standing in the room, you know, writing memos to them about what they did or didn't do?

He reiterated what he perceived to be his non-threatening demeanor again when he recalled how teachers thought they needed to teach the Fundations program verbatim:

> There was still this concept in people's minds that no, it's got to, if I don't do it exactly the way it said, I'm gonna get in trouble for it. Well, no. You not saying it verbatim according to the book is not going to be something that I'm going to come in and hammer you about.

Data from participants indicated that teachers did indeed feel like they were free to do what they wanted in their classrooms regarding reading instruction without fear of repercussions. For example, when talking about making changes to the Fundations program, Becca stated, "It's not the end of all ends and it is something that I don't think any police are gonna come get me if I don't do it that day." Likewise, Maria stated, "No one comes in to see what you're doing." However, Janine indicated that there was some accountability as she commented, "As long as [the kids'] scores keep going up and there's growth and they do well on the tests, the district doesn't

care what you use." Therefore, we see an atmosphere in this school where teachers are encouraged to be autonomous and take risks, yet they are held accountable for the progress of their students.

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study have the potential to provide insights into a variety of areas in the field of education, including classroom discourse, administration, and teacher education.

Classroom Discourse

Classroom discourse is essential to consider because it has the potential to enhance reading comprehension instruction and literacy development, and it helps shape student learning (Nystrand, 2006). As the data indicated, the primary pattern of discourse during the Fundations lessons was that of teacher direction or initiation followed by student response. In turn, the teacher would begin with another direction, and the pattern would ensue. There was minimal evidence of student generated questions, which would have had the potential for inviting learning and teaching (Dillon, 1986). Within the pattern of discourse during the Fundations lessons, there was little possibility for teachers to respond in a manner contingent on students' utterances (Boyd & Rubin, 2006; Smith and Higgins, 2006) unless the teacher broke away from the scripted instructional plan. It was only when a teacher infused her own instructional practices into the Fundations lesson that she was able to estimate "what students know and what they don't know…steering the discourse in particular directions and exploring alternative interactional trajectories in the course of action" (Lee, 2006). It was at this point that the space for teachable moments occurred as the teacher deemed necessary. Otherwise, the discourse of Fundations was representative of the typically formulaic and choppy student talk in the classroom (Cazden, 2001).

As noted above, each daily Fundations lesson was designed to be presented in a 30 minute time frame. It may seem trivial to consider the discourse that occurs within this short period of time; however, if we consider that a typical school day in the United States is seven hours long, the Fundations lesson accounts for one fourteenth of the daily interaction. More significantly, if the entire language arts block is 90 minutes altogether, one third of this time is lost for the opportunity to make meaning through dialogic interactions (Bakhtin, 1981). Of even greater concern is the impact that a second 30 minute block of time would have on students designated for additional academic intervention services when they receive a "double dose" (according to Stephanie) of this instruction. Therefore, the findings related to classroom discourse during Fundations lessons indicated the need for teachers to have the knowledge of how to adapt the program to make it meaningful by engaging students in authentic dialogue.

Understanding the value of student talk was an area of need that emerged from the data. There was no mention of this type of professional development available to teachers, nor was there any mention of being consciously aware of classroom discourse. According to Soter et al. (2008), discourse which engages students in critical thinking and discussions helps to create more opportunities for students to engage in higher-level thinking and reasoning. It is imperative for teachers to become knowledgeable in strategies to improve classroom discourse, especially in an era where more and more scripted curriculums which restrict responsive classroom talk are becoming pervasive (Gutierrez, 2000).

Implications for Administration

Results from this study provide insights for how administrators may assist teachers in their decision making processes in reading instruction. These insights are applicable under conditions when administrators allow choice in material and instructional methods and/or when particular reading programs are mandated. The implications relate to the climate of the school, choice of programs, and the need for a literacy expert.

School climate. According to Short, Miller-Wood and Johnson (1991), a climate of experimentation, which is essential for change to occur in schools, involves risk taking. Likewise, Barth (1990) noted, "Considerable research suggests that risk taking is strongly associated with learning" (p. 513). Therefore, for teachers to learn and make changes to their instructional practices, they need to feel secure enough to experiment and take risks in their classrooms. We see evidence at Wood Acre that Mr. Ryan intentionally established a risk-free, punitive-free environment. While he mandated the use of Fundations, he did not regularly monitor the implementation of this program, but trusted that teachers would make sound instructional choices.

Interestingly, even within this risk-free atmosphere, teachers were initially hesitant to make changes to the Fundations lessons. This could be due to the hierarchical structure of the principal/teacher relationship—one in which teachers perceived the need to obey authority without question. An explanation for the change in attitude about Fundations among teachers could be attributed to Mr. Ryan's explicit reassurance during the January group meeting that teachers could modify the program as needed. This affirmation may have allowed teachers to truly believe they were permitted to question what they assumed to be the original mandate of teaching Fundations verbatim. Therefore, administrators may have to actively seek to establish a professional orientation (Tschannen-Moran, 2009) within their school environment, which gives teachers autonomy to use professional judgment in response to the diverse needs of their students (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

Choice of reading programs. In an era of increased accountability for teachers, administrators and schools, and in an age when "scientifically based" reading programs are becoming so prevalent, it is imperative that administrators choose new reading programs with caution. Administrators may view such programs as magic bullets to improve student performance, as if "materials can teach students to read" (Shannon, 1987, p. 308). However, one-size-fits-all programs which limit teacher autonomy and effectiveness should be avoided (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Groves, 2002). What works for some students may not be appropriate for all.

Additionally, when considering the adoption of new programs, it is imperative that administrators defer to experts in the appropriate field of education. If a new math program needs to be adopted, seek assistance from math experts within the school; if the music program is being revamped, it would make sense to confer with the music specialists in the school. Likewise, when a reading program is under consideration, the school personnel most versed in literacy should be consulted for advice. This was not the case at Wood Acre. The decision to adopt Fundations was made without the advice from faculty who were experts in literacy. This propels us to the need for literacy experts in the school.

Utilizing literacy experts. Elementary school teachers have the responsibility to be knowledgeable in a multitude of subject areas. While reading is considered a foundational subject, the average teacher receives just two reading courses in their undergraduate preparation (Lyon, 1997). Therefore, this points towards the need for school personnel who have received extensive training in literacy to support the continual learning of colleagues in the school. Ironically, at a time when literacy experts are needed for support, we see a diminishing role of such specialists at Wood Acre.

Implications for Teacher Education

The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge in teacher education in two important ways. First it is imperative that preservice education programs address the multifaceted aspects of literacy, speaking to both content and pedagogy. Second, teachers need to be prepared to understand how educational policies affect programming, and how they can teach effectively in such a system.

Comprehensive literacy. The teaching of literacy is a multifaceted undertaking. There has been an ongoing debate about how best to teach reading that spans well over half a century (Flesch, 1955; Smith, 1965; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This debate revolves around the role of phonics instruction in the teaching of reading. On the one hand, scholars believe there should be a heavy emphasis on phonics; on the other hand, there are proponents of meaning-based or whole language approaches to teaching reading. Those who advocate the phonics-based approaches contend that children cannot learn to read without stressing phonics and decoding. Those who support meaning-based approaches argue that the ultimate goal of reading is comprehension, and without comprehension, you end up with children who are word-callers with no understanding of what they have read (Cramer, 2004). Specifically, preservice teachers need to be aware that reading is more than a set of discrete skills as implied by many of the "scientifically based" reading programs.

The position of the International Reading Association (2002) clearly indicates the need for a variety of evidence-based reading instruction that employs effective strategies from both ends of the reading continuum: "There is no single instructional program or method that is effective in teaching all children to read…it is the convergence of evidence from a variety of study designs that is ultimately scientifically convincing" (p. 1). Several scholars refer to such an approach, in which a combination of phonics instruction is imbedded within a meaning-based program, a balanced literacy approach (Cramer, 2004) or a comprehensive approach (Vacca, Vacca, Gove, Burkey, Lenhart, & McKeon, 2009). However, according to Lyon (1997), in preservice teacher education programs, "teachers are frequently presented with a 'One Size Fits All' philosophy that emphasizes either a 'whole language' or 'phonics' orientation to instruction" (p. 8). Therefore, preservice teachers need to be well versed in all aspects of literacy.

Teaching in today's world. In this study of teacher decision making in reading instruction, we see evidence of what Wills and Sandholtz (2009) referred to as "constrained professionalism" – a condition "in which teachers retain autonomy in classroom practices, but their decisions are significantly circumscribed by contextual pressures and time demands that devalue their professional experience, judgment, and expertise" (p. 1065). Teachers at Wood Acre experienced autonomy in their own classrooms, but with the addition of the Fundations

reading program, they underwent a process of decision making that was influenced by the additional contextual pressures and time demands. It is crucial that preservice teachers be prepared to work under such conditions. This can be assisted by an awareness of issues surrounding program adoption and knowledge about best practices.

Conclusion

At Wood Acre Elementary School, we see teachers who are navigating the challenges of teaching with an unfamiliar mandated reading program. We also see a principal who respects his faculty as professionals, and thus allows them to maintain autonomy in their classroom instructional practice. Yet, the data indicated that teachers needed supports to modify the scripted program to meet the needs of their students.

As Shavelson (1983) noted, it is important to examining the decisions of teachers because these choices directly influence teacher behavior which therefore impacts the education students receive. This study confirms that decisions are not made merely by rationally weighing all possibilities, but rather, choices are made which are "good enough" given the multitude of factors of the circumstances at any given time. Additionally, this study adds to the body of knowledge of teacher decision making as it illuminates the supports necessary to assist teachers' literacy instruction. The presence of the aforementioned supports is imperative for improvements in instructional practices, particularly with the challenges of highly scripted "scientifically based" programs. This study provides an encouraging example of how teachers navigated the adoption of a scripted program, and adapted instruction to meet the needs of their students.

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