



## Conflicting Discourses: A First Grade Teacher's Perceptions of Teaching with a Scripted ELA Curriculum

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In this article, a case study is presented of an urban first grade teacher's perceptions of teaching English language arts (ELA) within a district-mandated scripted curriculum. The teacher was observed during fifteen sessions of whole-class, 90-minute reading over two months and was interviewed four times. All curricular materials were analyzed, including the commercial ELA curriculum and the school district-supplied Common Core State Standards materials. Qualitative analyses revealed that the teacher possessed three discourses, or "distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling...thinking, and believing" (Gee, 2011, p. 177) which she accessed in order to talk about her experiences. The teacher's three discourses were: (1) an academic discourse derived from her Master's program; (2) a professional discourse that developed during her career; and (3) a personal discourse that came to be throughout her life. The teacher's discourses remained compartmentalized and possible reasons are explored, with implications for administrators, policy makers, and teachers in similar situations.

*Keywords:* scripted curriculum, ELA curriculum, Common Core

This is one teacher's story of what it was like to teach first grade in a school that had a mandated curriculum for English language arts (ELA). This story details her perceived frustrations, joys, and innovations as she and her twenty-three first graders navigated the murky waters of, not only their school district's mandated ELA curriculum, but also New York State's recent adoption of the Common Core State Standards. In telling her story, the hope is to provide comfort for others in her position and to give voice to just one of the many teachers in the United States who are now in similar positions of maneuvering multiple standards, programs, and curricula.

With teachers' performance being more directly linked to their students' academic performance, many educators find themselves under almost-constant pressure to teach in a way that prepares their students to take exams. Educational theorist Arthur Applebee (1996) wrote, "It has been very clear in recent years that systems of assessment have a profound effect on the nature of classroom teaching and learning" (p.115). Namely, many

schools have adopted mandated curricula in order to standardize what is being taught and to make sure that all "children are getting the best possible education no matter where they live" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). An unfortunate result of these mandates has been an increase of scripted programs in English language arts (ELA) (MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, & Palma, 2004) in order to create a more uniform approach to meeting the standards. Research has shown that "mandates do not necessarily result in substantive teacher learning, thoughtful instruction, or best classroom practice," (Valencia, Place, Martin, & Grossman, 2006, p. 114) and that by "narrowing the scope of curriculum, teachers' craft is often stagnated" (MacGillivray et al., 2004, p. 138). Additionally, some (Anagnostopoulos, 2003) have argued that even though English teachers do not intend to marginalize their students' discourse, pressure on teachers to prepare students for an exam and to stick to the curriculum often results in marginalization. In essence, an increase in

federal mandates and teacher accountability for their students' test scores, and the resulting dependence on scripted curricula, has created negative impacts on the teaching of English language arts. Research into the perceptions of teachers of ELA can reveal how educators are negotiating working under mandates from their states as well as from their school districts, how their teaching is affected by the use of commercial curricular programs, and what can be done to ensure that children are receiving the best education possible.

This case study was designed to explore the ways in which a first grade teacher in an urban classroom used a scripted English language arts curriculum to teach. Bounded by the first grade classroom environment and the event of ELA instruction, the research questions driving this case study were:

- What discourses does a first grade teacher with a scripted and mandated English language arts curriculum assume?
- In what ways, if any, do these discourses influence her identity as a teacher?

#### **Review of Literature**

The trends that have influenced the field of English language arts have appeared at local, state, and national levels and have been responsible for a variety of fads, practices, and paradigms. Presently, the field of ELA is among a new wave of reforms that are affecting how the subject is taught. Teachers are under immense pressure to help their schools make adequate yearly progress and to prepare students for state exams. At the same time, many schools across the country are rolling out the new Common Core Standards and subsequent curricula. Being stuck in a fuzzy grey area of transition, ELA educators are still responsible for preparing students for state exams while at the same time implementing new practices to address the internationally-benchmarked standards of Common Core. The result is an even higher-stress, higher-stakes classroom environment that makes many teachers feel like plate spinners in the educational circus.

#### **Scripted ELA Curricula**

Living in an era of accountability, school districts are under immense pressure to produce ever-higher test scores. As a result, many schools are adopting commercially-produced ELA curricula to help them manage the difficult task of meeting all of the standard requirements. "Highly-directed (scripted) curricula with pacing guides, 'embedded assessments,' and 'flashy publishers' web pages provide teachers with all of the content, pedagogy, assessments, and even classroom management tools they should need" to prepare their students for assessments (White, 2012, p. 194). Proponents of curricular programs argue that they provide standards for teachers as well as a means by which school districts can ensure that coherent and consistent content is being presented across all classrooms (Ogawa, Sandholtz,

Martinez-Flores, & Scribner, 2003). Commercial curriculum designers, such as Houghton Mifflin, Harcourt Brace, McGraw-Hill, and Pearson have capitalized on the desire for standardization of curricula by creating programs that are designed to align with learning standards. Programs such as Open-Court Reading (McGraw Hill Education, 2005), Soar to Success (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007), and Treasures Reading (McGraw Hill Education, 2006), promise to "make all the right connections to ensure that no child is left behind" (Macmillan-McGraw Hill, 2006).

On the outside, scripted ELA programs seem to be an effective and convenient method for meeting the requirements of educational standards; however, as convenient as this sort of standardization may sound, it is certainly not without risk. Smagorinsky, Lakly, and Johnson (2002) described a scripted program from their research in which "all teachers in all schools [in the school district] would read the same literature on approximately the same day, ask the same questions, use the same assessments, and otherwise provide each student in the district the same instruction" (p. 198). The standardization they described is precisely what scripted ELA programs are designed to create. The authors reported on the resulting "acquiescence, accommodation, and resistance" (p. 187) that a first-year teacher experienced within the program. Similarly, Anagnostopoulos (2003) showed how the state-mandated exam and the district-mandated curriculum in ELA were positioned between students and teachers and worked to "silence students' emergent attempts to engage with and construct understanding" (p. 207) of their English curriculum, sometimes without their teachers' realization.

With so many school districts adopting scripted curricula to manage the requirements of educational standards, it is essential to explore these programs and to consider the effect that scripted curricula have had on teaching practices and the state of the education profession.

#### **Teaching in Scripted Curricula**

As long as there have been ELA curricula, there have been studies about teaching practices and perceptions of working with such programs. Ogletree and Dipasalgne (1975) examined teacher perceptions of working within a Direct Instructional System for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading (DSTAR) program, a very early version of a scripted curriculum. They found that most teachers felt that the program limited their creativity and they felt the need to make modifications to the materials that they were provided. Likewise, in the 1980s, Ball and Feiman-Nemser (1988) found that prospective teachers felt that good teaching did not involve textbooks or teachers' guides, but rather creating lessons and materials individually. This theme of feeling the need to modify or amend the materials that are provided in curricular programs has continued through

current research. Specifically some have found that teachers have been concerned with how to adapt curricular materials in order to meet the needs of “students who have been historically marginalized by the public school system” (Stillman, 2011, p. 149); to make the curriculum more relevant to the students’ interests (Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008); and to address the learning of students for whom English is a second language (MacGillivray et al., 2004). These concerns speak directly to the acknowledgment by teachers that a culturally sensitive curriculum is preferred and that scripted curricula do not allow them to address the varying sociocultural backgrounds of their students as well as their professional needs as a teacher.

A second theme from the research on teaching within scripted curricula was a perceived sense of lost identity as a teacher. Scholars have reported that working with a scripted curriculum has left teachers feeling “very frustrated because [the] curriculum does not resemble what [they] want to do in [their] classrooms” (Smagorinsky et al., 2002, p. 199) and that they were not able to create a teacher identity freely. Likewise, Ainsworth, Ortlieb, Cheek, Pate, and Fetters (2012) reported that first-grade teachers felt that their semi-scripted ELA curricula placed too much emphasis on “test scores” which “precluded the classroom teacher in her art of teaching” (p. 89). Other research has argued that teachers cannot develop and grow if they are “absolved of the thinking about the what, why, and how of their instruction and its effects on student learning,” as sometimes occurs in scripted programs (Valencia et al., 2006, p. 114). Still others have reported teachers being “swept up in a flow of mandates that consumed their thinking, their energy, and for some, even their love of teaching” (Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 545). A true sense of loss is present in the research on teaching identity among scripted language arts programs. As Santoro (2011) stated: “If high-stakes accountability renders the moral rewards of the [teaching] profession inaccessible, it is likely that strong teachers will find little to sustain them in the pursuit of good work” (p. 18). With little to sustain them, some might be faced with the decision to stay or leave the profession.

Finally, research has revealed reports of teachers who were “constrained” (Beatty, 2011, p. 2), “held hostage” (Meyer, 2005, p. 106), “colonized” (MacGillivray et al., 2004, p. 134), and “put...in a box” (Ogawa et al., 2003, p. 166) by their school’s ELA curricula. These words connote an embodied sense of captivity and entrapment and are not emotions that any professional ought to feel upon going to work each day. Many researchers have reported teachers feeling as though they were forced to comply with their school district’s decision to teach with a scripted ELA program or face the potential of being ostracized by other teachers and administrators (Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008) or,

even worse, losing their jobs altogether (Meyer, 2005). Feeling threatened to teach in a prescribed way is surely not something that teachers expect when entering into the profession. Having to teach in a scripted ELA program has been shown to cause these types of emotions and will, undoubtedly, drive some to walk away from or reconsider the profession altogether (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Santoro, 2011; Valli & Buese, 2007).

### **Learning in Scripted Curricula**

The research on student learning in scripted ELA programs is also vast. Some studies have shown that ELA curricular programs, such as Open Court, Success for All, and Direct Instruction under the government’s Reading First Initiative failed to meet the literacy needs of students because they did not address individual needs but, rather, assumed that “the process of learning to read will be identical for every child” (Milosovic, 2007, p. 29). Teachers have seemed to agree with the notion that a good curriculum will allow them to use their professional expertise to tailor instruction for all learners. Likewise, some research mentioned that “the diverse ethnic and cultural makeup of today’s classroom make it unlikely that one single curriculum will meet the needs and interest of all students” (Ede, 2006, p. 31). Others have argued that “the rigid use of a commercial reading program may crowd out silent reading, literature, writing, and discussion from the curriculum, with harmful effects on children’s literacy development” (Yatvin, Weaver, & Garan, 2003, p. 30) as well as that effective teaching does not rely on a script as students need on-the-fly, authentic instruction that changes as do their needs (Allington, 2002).

In order to meet the needs of all learners, a curriculum has to move beyond “low-order skills” and focus more on “higher level, meaning making instruction” that is tailored to the students’ needs (Joseph, 2006, p. 91). Research has shown that scripted ELA curricula tend to lead to a narrowing of skills or a “bracketing” of “students’ learning because [teachers] are not available to them to help address their cognitive, social, and spiritual needs” (Meyer, 2005, p. 105). Instead, “the material struggles of children’s lives are too often rendered invisible” (Dutro, 2010, p. 281) inside of scripted programs that do not welcome ideas outside of what is available contextually. Students have been reduced to a test score, and the chance for teachers to forge meaningful relationships with students in order to know more about their sociocultural backgrounds, has been taken away by mandates and time constraints (Crocco & Costigan, 2007). Conditions such as those described in the research on learning in scripted programs work to perpetuate systems of marginalization and oppression in schools with students placed at the bottom of a rigid hierarchy of power.

### Talk in Scripted ELA Curricula

According to Applebee (1996), “a curriculum provides domains for conversation” (p. 37) opening up a space for dialog between teacher and students. Talk is the means by which students learn about the ways of others, themselves, and the world around them, and teachers are the direct link between students and the curriculum. If, indeed, the curriculum lays the groundwork for talk, it is interesting to consider what scripting a curriculum does to the potential for conversation. Teaching in scripted programs relies heavily on traditional patterns of talk, such as the Initiate-Response-Evaluate (IRE) model, in which the teacher asks a question with an intended right answer, one student responds either correctly or incorrectly, and the teacher confirms or denies his or her response with some form of evaluative remark (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979; Nystrand & Christoph, 2001). Such a pattern of talk might sound like this:

- Mrs. Sam:* Okay class, who can tell me what year Columbus arrived in America? Let’s see, Johnny?
- Johnny:* 1492.
- Mrs. Sam:* Excellent, Johnny. Now who else can tell me the name of his ships? Mary?
- Mary:* The Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria.
- Mrs. Sam:* Very good, Mary, you’re right.

This pattern of talk is teacher-centered rather than student-centered and creates a hierarchy of power in the classroom with the teacher positioned at the top, assuming the job of filling the students’ minds by “making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge” (Freire, 1993). Missing from this model are most of the five principles that Alexander (2006, p. 28) claimed make teaching dialogic:

- 1) participants collectively learn;
- 2) reciprocity among participants’ listening to and sharing ideas;
- 3) support for all ideas from all participants, without the fear of being wrong;
- 4) cumulative building of knowledge and information in oral communication
- 5) purposeful and open dialogue that is structured around a learning goal

Traditional patterns of classroom talk, such as IRE, rely on the teacher’s control of the pace and direction of the talk (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001), recitation of material by students (Cazden, 2001), and multiple exchanges between participants with little connection between exchanges (Mehan, 1979; Wells & Arauz, 2006). The focus in traditional classroom talk is on the teacher and the content rather than on the students and the development of thinking among them.

Classroom talk of a traditional nature does not allow much room for multiple perspectives or points of

view. Instead, traditional patterns of talk perpetuate “a highly routinized *form* of knowledge” (Fine & Weis, 2003, p. 97) in which “the form *is* the curriculum in a sense, since no other curriculum is really available” (p. 98). Learning becomes more about how to “do” school and how to “talk” academic rather than how to grow intellectually and independently. Children’s personal perspectives are traded in for context-based questions and test-style reading passages.

Traditional talk patterns are a feature of many scripted programs and sets up a classroom context of the teacher as the authority source (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995) or the keeper of the official discourse (Gee, 1996). In fact, scripted programs assume the role of authority text in the classroom and often usurp the teacher’s power to “respond to what her children’s behaviors are telling her” (Meyer, 2005, p. 105). When even the teacher feels uncomfortable straying from the scripted language of the program, it’s no wonder that children have to fight to have a voice (Dutro, 2010) within their school’s scripted ELA curriculum.

### Gap in the Research

While research into the many facets of scripted and mandated ELA curricula is extensive, what seems to be missing from the research is specifically how early elementary teachers deal with working within a prescribed program. How does a school district’s mandated curriculum affect an elementary teacher’s discourse? Do elementary teachers feel that there are opportunities for professional judgment and flexibility when teaching with a scripted ELA program? How are teachers’ choices about the their teaching influenced by scripted programs? Do teachers in urban settings believe that scripted ELA programs meet the cultural needs of all of their learners? From a wider perspective, more research is needed in what role politics and national educational reform have on day-to-day life in the classroom. Is there a connection between large reform movements and the discourse of the classroom? Do teachers notice and consider the broader goings on of the education system? This research aims at exploring some of these big questions and to develop a deeper understanding of what it is like to be an elementary teacher who is mandated to use a scripted English language arts curriculum. In doing so, the hope is that more teachers in this position will feel a sense of community and that a conversation can begin about a teacher’s place in the larger political scene.

### Theoretical Framework

In considering this case study, a sociocultural perspective will be used. Specifically, Bakhtin’s concept of discourses will be applied to analyze the data gathered and to consider the role of discourse on one teacher’s identity. Then, a closer look at the theories on social justice education will take place, situating this case study among this larger body of thought.

### **Bakhtin and Gee's Notions of Discourses**

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin (1981) explained that language “gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the process of sociopolitical and cultural centralization” (p. 271). In other words, language represents the coming together of a speaker’s verbal and ideological worlds, and thereby represents him or her as a part of many sociocultural processes. At any given moment of speaking, a person’s words are symbolic expressions of who he or she is, where he or she has been, and what he or she would like to be. This notion of discourse as a symbolic expression of identity will be used to explore the case study at hand of one teacher.

Furthermore, Bakhtin continued, we all possess “languages of social groups, ‘professional’ and ‘genetic’ languages, languages of generations and so forth,” (p. 272) that “may all be taken as particular points of view on the world” (p. 293). The discourses that we each assume have emerged from a variety of worldviews that are developed as we move through different social situations and events. “The word in language is half someone else’s” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293) and this dependence upon others to make language one’s own is what creates the link between speakers. Without others, one would not have or need language:

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speakers’ intentions ... Language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294)

The other’s response to language has the potential to change everything about how the speaker identifies, forever altering his or her discourse and way of being.

In schools, teachers make up a community of professionals who share in a very specific genre of language. They depend on one another to become socially situated among a group with shared interests and goals. As a result of this dependence, speech genres emerge which represent the intersection of many speakers, ideas, and ways of being. In a school, speech genres tend to be recognizable and can consist of very specific language such as “APPR,” “IEP,” “formative assessment,” and “differentiated instruction,” all phrases and terms that might seem foreign to anyone outside of the education speech genre. Becoming an accepted member of a community of teachers entails, to some extent, taking up the discourse of the other teachers around you.

Beyond language, there is also a shared sense of being in a school that contributes to a teacher’s discourse. How the morning message is delivered, what is acceptable dress in the building, the way grade-level meetings are run, who sits next to whom in the teacher’s lounge at lunch—these are all socially-learned practices

that come from belonging to a professional school community. These social ways of being dictate the discourse of a school building and failing to adapt to them can lead to feelings of isolation or exclusion. Each school develops its own speech genres related to the specific student population, geographic location, and the way of life inside the school community. In a Bakhtinian sense, a teacher’s discourse is reflective of all of these elements—the community of professionals, speech genres present in the building, and the specific characteristics of the school—in a fluid and ever-changing way.

Gee (2011) referred to a similar relationship between language and social groups when he wrote, “A Discourse with a capital ‘D’...is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, distinctive ways of writing/reading. These distinctive ways of speaking/listening and/or reading/writing are *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, and believing” (p. 177). Gee’s definition of Discourse takes into account the interactions and ways of acting that individuals demonstrate as a result of their social ways of being. Discourses are “specific socially recognizable identities” (p. 177) that are revealed, not only in how a person speaks, but also in how he or she acts.

Gee acknowledged: “Discourses are not mastered through overt instruction but by enculturation (‘apprenticeship’) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse” (Gee, 1996, p. 170). Teachers learn the discourse of their school from those around them. They are scaffolded by others in their professional community into the behaviors, norms, and discourse of their building. This works to create a sense of belonging and community that has potential to provide, not only support, but also rigid structure that may be difficult to work against. It is important to understand the role of discourse in a school building, how discourse reflects a school community’s social ways of being, and the norms of practice that dictate discourse in schools. Exploring the conditions that impact discourse in schools can help us to understand the choices in language and practice that teachers make.

**Critical interanimation of discourses.** A teacher’s identity is representative of a variety of discourses that have developed throughout his or her life. For example, most teachers have access to the following discourses: an academic discourse, learned while studying in a teacher education program; a professional discourse, taken up as they become part of a school building and district community; and a personal discourse, developed from their own experiences, culture, and backgrounds. With each of these social settings come a worldview and a genre of language to which the teacher is exposed, elements that ultimately contribute to his or her socially-constructed teaching identity. Since “each word tastes of

the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life,” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293) what a teacher says can reflect intentions from any number of contexts. In fact, what each person says is only truly his “when the speaker populates it with his own intention” (p. 294). The task of the researcher is to analyze the language of teachers and to explore what intention they are populating their words with, what worldviews they are symbolizing, and which identity they are taking up to do so. Remembering Gee’s notion of discourse, a researcher must consider an individual’s many ways of communicating coupled with many ways of acting, as well as the “scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse” (1996, p. 170) in order to make sense of the discourse choices teachers make.

When a speaker is aware of his or her many discourses, there is potential for what Bakhtin (1981) called “critical interanimation,” or “[active] choosing [of] one’s orientation among” discourses (p. 296). For example, a teacher who is confident in her professional life will have little discomfort recognizing and using the discourse of both her personal background as well as her academic background as she teaches. Interanimation, or working between and across discourses, leads to critical thinking and the ability to recognize when another discourse may be more appropriate or effective, as well as why different speech genres exist in the first place. When there are limitations or restraints on what we feel we can say or do, we tend to lose the ability to critically interanimate—our words become more someone else’s than our own. Without critically interanimating, a speaker may compartmentalize discourses, purposefully keeping them separate and only calling on them in the contexts where they were learned or where he or she feels they are safely acceptable. In Bakhtin’s words, without critical interanimation, a speaker is “not able to regard one language (and the verbal world corresponding to it) through the eyes of another language” (p. 295). Gee (1996) might add that the social apprenticeship into new speech genres plays a role in critical interanimation as “acquisition must (at least, partially) precede learning” (p. 171). A teacher could very likely acquire the discourse of her building without actually learning all that there is to know about the discourse, where it comes from, and the privilege gained by accessing it.

Research into the nature of discourses assumed by teachers working with scripted curricula can help to uncover the many emotions and concerns that arise from working within such a setting. Likewise, research of this nature can provide a clearer picture for what it is like to teach under mandates and how teachers’ identities are influenced.

### **Finn’s Domesticating Literacy**

When we think of the word *domestication*, it is often in reference to animals. Domesticated pets, wild

animals domesticated in captivity, the domestication of cattle for beef production. Rarely does the word *domestication* bring to mind children. Such a word does not belong near children. It connotes manipulation, oppression, and taming—not conditions we wish for our next generation, especially as pertains to the education they are receiving. However, a close look at the history of education reveals that domestication is not, nor has it ever been, absent from the American classroom (Applebee, 1974; Squire, 2003). It may be hiding in the form of assessment, mandated curricula, or academic discourses.

Finn (2009) described “domesticating education” as “associated with working-class (and, in fact, middle-class) classrooms. Methods are traditional and teacher centered. Discipline and control of students is authoritarian. Ideal students are docile and obedient.” (p. 255) Parallels can be drawn between this definition and the types of teaching and learning that are perpetuated within a scripted ELA program—traditional, teacher-centered lessons, docile and obedient students. Finn described how domesticating teaching practices “invariably accompany the skills and drills ‘solution,’” and “replicate the authoritarian, conformist, powerless societies of intimates that make implicit, context-dependent language and communication inevitable” (p. 128). By following a script that was written to provide middle- and upper-class children with the skills needed to thrive (Dutro, 2010) and that may be providing lower-class children the skills to submit, teachers can unknowingly feed into the system of control and power that has plagued our schools for decades (Anyon, 1981). Finn (2009) added, “Giving children more and more drills in phonics and basic skills has and never will lead to powerful forms of literacy” (p. 128). The skills in scripted programs result in the “highly routinized *form* of knowledge” that Fine and Weis (2003) described: “Knowledge is flat and highly controlled within the school—thus divorced from the true experiences of [students]—and the school simply demands passivity in its face in order to ‘pass’” (p. 98). In this learning environment, so long as children are obedient and passive during ELA, they ought to pass along through the educational system unmarked, unmoved, and perhaps more dangerously, unchallenged.

Most scripted curricula are taught in a very traditional, skills-based manner (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; MacGillivray et al., 2004; Ogawa et al., 2003). Because many ELA programs are designed to prepare children for large-scale assessments, there is often more focus on vocabulary and phonics than on conceptual and critical thinking. This is the focus Finn warned against when he wrote, “Progressive methods are empowering. Traditional methods are domesticating” (p. 251). Methods such as critical reading and questioning ideas are empowering and, incidentally, often left out of scripted ELA curricula or, if present, skipped over by teachers in

favor of skills that are more likely to appear on high-stakes tests, such as comprehension and vocabulary (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Ede, 2006).

A scripted program eliminates the on-the-fly teaching and thinking in which educators are trained, replacing it with “teacher-proof” programs (White, 2012, p. 193) where teachers “tend to become alienated from their reading instruction and begin treating reading instruction as merely the application of materials” (Owens, 2010, p. 117). A scripted ELA program assumes that all students make use of the same patterns of talk as well as the same “discourses,” or “ways of talking, listening, writing, reading, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and feeling in the service of enacting meaningful socially situated identities and activities” (Gee, 2011, p. 177). Such a standardized classroom would be hard to find.

Research in the nature of discourses and practices assumed by teachers working with scripted curricula helps to uncover the perceptions of teachers working within such a setting, as well as some of the injustices that they may or may not recognize in the education system. Likewise, research of this nature can provide a clearer picture of the many influences on a teacher’s practice, and what, if anything, he or she does to adapt to these influences. Teaching comes with its own socially-acquired discourse and teachers can choose to assume, reject, or adapt this discourse according to their own needs and their ability to think critically about their role in the larger system of education. This research examined one teacher’s discourses and the decisions she made during the teaching of ELA with a mandated scripted curriculum.

### **Methodology**

#### **Description of School**

This case study was conducted in a first grade class in an urban public elementary school that is part of a large school district in Western New York. Freemont Public School District (all names of places and people in this study are pseudonyms), serves 34,000 students in nearly 60 different facilities, one of them being Campbell Elementary School, the building in which this research took place. At the time of this study, Campbell Elementary had a demographic distribution of 85% African American, 7% Hispanic or Latino, 5% white, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and the remaining 2% multiracial children (NYSED, 2012). There were 528 students enrolled at Campbell Elementary in Pre-K through eighth grade, 46 of them being in first grade. Eighty-five percent the school’s children were eligible for free lunch and there was an 88% attendance rate in the building.

Regarding student achievement, according to the NYS, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in ELA was not made for the two years leading up to this research by any

of the ethnic groups in this school, leading to the school’s “Restructuring (Advanced) Comprehensive” status. As found in the School Report Card document (NYSED, 2012), Restructuring (Advanced) indicates the following:

A school that was designated as a school in Restructuring (year 2) in the current school year that failed to make AYP on the same accountability measure for which it was identified; or a school that was designated as Restructuring (Advanced) in the current school year that made AYP for the identified measure.

At the time of this study, because Campbell Elementary failed to make AYP for a second year in a row, it had the worst possible status ranking that a school can have in ELA (NYSED, 2012).

#### **Setting and Participants**

The setting for this study was Colleen Hughes’ first grade classroom at Campbell Elementary School. At the time of our interviews, Mrs. Hughes had been a teacher in the district for her entire career—five years—and taught ELA with the mandated curriculum that was used by all teachers in the district. Her class was a representative population of the school’s demographics as listed above from the New York State Education Department School Report Card.

#### **Researcher Role**

In observing the teaching of a current scripted ELA program in a first grade classroom, I “participate[d] in the social life of the community,” in order to gain an “insider perspective,” and to “interact with students and teachers” in the first grade classroom (Glesne, 2011, p. 64). Doing so, I was able to “make the strange familiar and the familiar strange,” (Erickson, 1973, as cited in Glesne, 2011, p. 67) and to gain valuable first-hand perspectives of the interactions that occurred between the class and the curriculum. Being an observer allowed me to take very thorough and detailed field notes, full of the “rich, thick description” that Glesne (2011, p. 49) recommended for increasing a study’s trustworthiness. Likewise, my regular visits and repetition of behavior each time I was there solidified my role as a researcher first, and as an adult visitor to the classroom second.

As someone who came to this research with my own background in teaching with a scripted ELA program, I made sure to continually make reflections in the form of research memos and journal entries in order to recognize any biases I had that might have interfered with my data gathering and analysis. Likewise, I had several colleagues review my interview questions and data analysis regularly to check for any unintentional misleading or insertion of my own opinions. It must also be acknowledged that I was conducting this research out of State University, the same university my participant attended for graduate school. As such, she was likely familiar with the ideologies of State University and, as a result, may have responded to my questions under the

assumption that I held similar ideologies as those of State University. Great measures were taken to remain neutral in my interviews and conversations with Mrs. Hughes and to focus on her opinions and feelings, not mine. I have accounted for moments when this bias might have influenced a specific response.

### Research Design

Creswell (2013) wrote, "...case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (p. 97). The case study approach to qualitative research involves exploring "a real life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information," (p. 97) and allows researchers to identify themes through rich descriptions of the cases analyzed. By observing in a first grade classroom during ELA instruction, I was able to maintain a bounded case for study that focused my exploration specifically on what I was interested in understanding, the teaching that occurred within a scripted ELA curriculum. This study was bounded specifically by the 90-minute English language arts block, and events outside of this bounded system were not included for analysis (e.g. behavior correction, snack time, transitioning between activities).

### Data Collection

For this case study I gathered multiple forms of data in relation to the teaching that occurred within a scripted ELA curriculum. Three formal interviews were conducted with the participant, fifteen 90-minute ELA lessons were observed and detailed field notes were taken, and I was allowed unlimited access to the commercial curriculum program (Harcourt, 2003) used by Freemont School District, as well the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) supplemental materials provided by the district to align with the Common Core State Standards (New York State Education Department, 2013). I also gathered data in the form of other artifacts from the classroom, such as photographs of the space, the building, and other curricular materials.

### Data Analysis

To analyze data gathered from observations, interviews, and classroom artifacts, I used methods adapted from Glesne (2011) Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Saldaña (2013). Analysis consisted of immersion in the data through reading and rereading, then descriptive coding and thematic analysis using a constant comparative method.

#### First cycle of analysis: Descriptive coding.

Saldaña (2013) stated, "Descriptive Coding summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data." (p. 88). The result is a comprehensive list of codes that described simply what is present in the data. This first cycle of analysis was an initial pass through the data, which helped me to eliminate any of the notes that were unnecessary as

well as to "label each passage with a notation system that would designate its original place in the transcript" (Seidman, 2006).

**Second cycle of analysis: Pattern coding.** After I grouped all of my data according to the first cycle descriptive codes I had assigned, I used constant comparative methods to sort data according to "a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of interrelationships, or a theoretical construct from the data" that emerged during first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013, p. 212). These categories emerged from my own intuitive choices and represented "a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting [the] scraps of collected data" that I had gathered (Glesne, 2011).

**Step three: Revisit theory then return to categories.** I continued to sort my data into more concrete themes, viewing them through a sociocultural lens in order to create a more detailed and clearer structure for data analysis. This allowed me to recognize the distinct discourses taken up by my participant. With Bakhtin and Gee's theories on discourse as guides, I developed a theme of conflicting discourses in Mrs. Hughes' language and how these discourses influenced her teaching practice. Specifically, I determined that three discourses emerged:

1. Mrs. Hughes' Academic Discourse
2. Mrs. Hughes' Professional Discourse
3. Mrs. Hughes' Personal Discourse

### Findings

February 28, 2013

After buzzing into the building, I stepped inside and was immediately met with the eerily familiar smells of elementary school—a mix of crayons, cafeteria food, and floor cleaner. I walked up a few steps and encountered a man seated at a small desk. He was wearing a badge and a uniform shirt. He smiled big and said, "You're new, aren't you?" Gosh, did I stick out that badly? I smiled back and said, "I am. I'm Susan and I'm here to meet Mrs. Hughes." He asked, "Are you a student teacher?" I answered, "No, I'm actually a graduate student at State University. I'm here to observe in Mrs. Hughes' class for a few weeks." He laughed and, at the same time, said, "Oh good. 'Cuz I was gonna say, if you're thinking about teaching here, you need to go get your head checked, especially if it's up on that third floor!" I laughed with him without really knowing why while making a mental note to ask Mrs. Hughes what's up on that third floor. I said politely, "Well, I'm happy to be here and I think Mrs. Hughes told me she's on the first floor so I should be safe!"

The preceding passage is from the first entry in my research journal from the first day I visited Campbell Elementary School. Beyond this initial experience, there

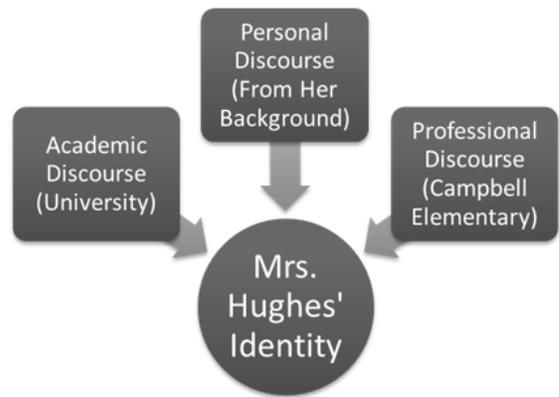
were many other indicators throughout the halls of the building to what I would come to find out about life in this school for both the teachers and the students. For example, each day I entered the building, I was met, not only by the friendly security guard, but also by a large case that ominously displayed a countdown of the number of days left until the New York State ELA and math exams.

Continuing my walk down the hallway to Mrs. Hughes' room, one could find what appeared to be colorful examples of student artwork taped sporadically down the corridors. Only after several weeks of walking by these posters did I realize that they were student representations of the school's behavior matrix, a complex chart of expectations for student behavior when in practically every physical space of the building with regards to attitude, attendance, and academic excellence. Also appearing on each classroom's door was an image of a national college or university's mascot and expressions such as the following, which I saw on a Kindergarten classroom door: "We are College-Bound, Purdue University, Freshman Class of 2025". While this statement is somewhat ironic considering that, statistically, fewer than half of the students in the school district graduated high school in 2012 (NYSED, 2012), it shows but one example of the many ways that children in Campbell Elementary were constantly reminded that hard work would equate to success. Equal parts behavior and academics seemed to be the district's recipe for success.

Within the context of the larger building, I noticed some interesting patterns in Mrs. Hughes' discourse and behaviors. Considering Bakhtin's theory of discourses (1981) and his suggestion that each person's discourse is a "socio-linguistic belief system that defines a distinct identity for itself within the boundaries of a language" (p. 356), it is interesting to compare how Mrs. Hughes spoke of her experiences teaching within a scripted ELA curriculum with what was observed. Exploration into her perceptions of teaching, her students' learning, and what innovations she felt that she made to the curriculum can help in understanding her varied discourses.

### **Mrs. Hughes' Discourse**

A close look at the data showed that Mrs. Hughes had three distinct discourses (Figure 1) from which she drew in order to talk about her experiences and which contributed to her identity as a first grade teacher: an academic discourse, a personal discourse, and a professional discourse. While these discourses often overlapped, each of them also stood alone in many examples. As such, they were analyzed separately.



*Figure 1.* Mrs. Hughes' discourses.

### **Mrs. Hughes' Academic Discourse**

Mrs. Hughes was a graduate of a literacy master's degree program at State University, a research institution located in the same city as her school district. Much of her academic discourse centered on her experiences at State University. She referenced the work of her master's program during our interviews mainly when I asked her about the changes she would make to Campbell Elementary School's ELA curriculum if she were given the chance. For example, I asked her what a reading program would look like if she could design it herself. She responded, "I really really like the guided reading programs that we all learned about in school." Later, she said again, "I love guided reading... And I love Fountas and Pinnell [1996]. And I can't use that ever so it's such a shame." In fact, Mrs. Hughes had many books on guided reading in her private collection—books she had purchased outside of her job despite the fact that she felt she could not teach the strategies found in them.

This frustration at not being able to teach reading in a manner that she clearly preferred, evoked strong emotions in Mrs. Hughes. Her perception was that her school's curriculum did not allow for the type of instruction she learned about in her master's program. It seemed that, because her school had mandated a scripted ELA program, there was no room for Mrs. Hughes to teach guided reading, a desire of hers that she later called "my main wish."

At times, Mrs. Hughes talked about an opposing relationship between what she learned at State University and what she was required to do in her job. For example, when asked if there was anything else she would like to add to our discussion about teaching ELA at Campbell Elementary, she said, "Well, at first I didn't think I would like it because of the whole—what I was told in school. State University does not like scripted." When I probed her for more information about this, she stated, "...A lot of the stuff that's in this particular program [Harcourt's

*Trophies*, 2003] is in the stuff that we learned at State University, just set up differently. And it's honestly not as bad as I thought it would be." While Mrs. Hughes spent much time talking about her "main wish" to teach guided reading, a practice she became familiar with during her academic career and which was absent from the scripted curriculum, she immediately refuted that desire when given the chance, paralleling all of the things she learned in graduate school to what was in the scripted curriculum. While this could have been because of my affiliation with State University and Mrs. Hughes' feeling that she should be opposed to scripted curricula as a State University graduate, it is clear that she felt that scripted curricula and the ideologies of State University were in two separate camps.

Mrs. Hughes acknowledged that the things she expressed a deep desire to teach, such as guided reading, were supported in her academic career, not her professional career. When asked why she felt comfortable teaching outside of the scripted curriculum, Mrs. Hughes responded:

I think a lot of it is my schooling, at State University, because they taught so many different programs or strategies for reading so that I could use those outside of the curriculum...like guided reading or think-pair-share or things like that, you know. Those aren't in the books but I know it's stuff I can do if I, you know, in my toolbox, if I have extra time or, you know, time to do more strategies if they are not getting something.

While the discourse of State University might have helped make Mrs. Hughes comfortable with teaching outside of the script, the strategies she learned there were for when she had "extra time," or when a student needed extra help. Mrs. Hughes stated it best when she said, "I have to teach the curriculum before I go out of the curriculum," clearly giving privilege to the script and her professional discourse, rather than her academic one learned from State University.

While she preferred the discourse of her master's program at State University, Mrs. Hughes seemed to privilege the discourse of her professional career. Her perception, it would seem, was that, in order to meet her professional requirement of teaching with a scripted ELA curriculum, she was not allowed to access her academic discourse. A closer look at her professional discourse can help in understanding this disconnect.

#### **Mrs. Hughes' Professional Discourse**

Mrs. Hughes often revealed a strong tendency toward her professional discourse, the socialized talk and way of life in her job. Specifically, Mrs. Hughes possessed a collective mentality that was created in her building; she expressed an appreciation for the structure of and the planning required in the scripted program; she equated her effective teaching with fidelity to the

curriculum; and she was grateful that her school provided her with the new Common Core supplemental materials.

**A collective mentality.** As happens with most teachers who are part of a larger school building, Mrs. Hughes identified herself as part of a group of professionals at Campbell Elementary. She often started her statements with phrases such as, "We are," "We have to," or "We all," referring to herself as a part of the Campbell Elementary professional group. When I asked her what it was like to work in her building, she replied, "We are like family here....We are very close." While Mrs. Hughes certainly did speak about herself individually, which will be explored in the final section of these findings, much of her identity seemed to come from a collective perspective; she was part of a larger body of professionals.

**Structure of the scripted program.** At times, Mrs. Hughes expressed an appreciation for the scripted curriculum. Though she wished she could use the techniques learned during her academic career, when I asked what she liked about teaching with the scripted program, she said, "I love how it's set up, how it goes from working with the sounds and then it has, it incorporates the same pattern from the sounds you were working on in the morning and into the spelling words. And it just, it flows very nicely." Mrs. Hughes was referring to the fact that, in the scripted ELA curriculum, each day of the week was structured the same, giving the scripted program a pattern that made it easy to implement. The structured approach that the scripted program took was something that Mrs. Hughes appreciated and felt was adequate in meeting her students' needs.

**Planning in the scripted program.** Likewise, Mrs. Hughes spoke of the ease of planning, stating, "I have—all my spelling was premade for every year. And I, everything is done. All those PowerPoints are done and I don't have to reinvent the wheel because I've been doing it ..." Mrs. Hughes was referring here to a series of PowerPoint slideshows that she and the other first grade teachers made to correspond with the lessons on spelling each week in the scripted curriculum. These PowerPoints were a transfer of the teacher's edition overhead materials into a slideshow, which could be projected onto the class whiteboard, allowing the students to do the same word building activity as the manual described while using the classroom technology. Mrs. Hughes described this use of PowerPoints when I asked what innovations she made to the curriculum. In actuality this lesson still followed the script precisely; the material was simply presented through a different mode. Though she may have professed that she preferred the teaching style of guided reading, her preference for the minimal planning effort it took in ELA re-aligned her loyalty with the school district's mandated ELA curriculum. She appeared to demonstrate a preference in her practice toward the professional

program over her professed academic knowledge and beliefs.

**Fidelity to the curriculum.** Mrs. Hughes also defaulted to her professional discourse in expressing her fidelity to the school district's mandated curriculum. When asked about being formally observed by her administrators, she said, "I think next year's going to be one formal [observation] and then one informal...I should say one formal where they announce it and then one unannounced...And if you're teaching and doing your job, then you have nothing to worry about." Here, Mrs. Hughes showed an acceptance for the school district's policy of observing their teachers unannounced. Since the school had a mandated curriculum, she was also equating following the script with "teaching and doing your job." She felt no fear about an unannounced visit, perhaps because she rarely went off of the script; she had "nothing to worry about." Safe teaching, to Mrs. Hughes, was following the mandated program, something she was good at.

**Integration of Common Core.** When I questioned Mrs. Hughes about the writing of the new Common Core supplemental materials that her school district prepared the prior summer, she again talked about the mandated program as something that made her job easier. She said, "Over the summer, the district, they created the supplemental guide to enhance our scripted programs and they're actually great. And they did all of the work for us...you know, they went through all the teacher guides and they aligned them to the Common Core, so that's great." Upon researching the supplemental materials further, I discovered that the school district did not, in fact, create the Common Core-aligned lessons. The curriculum was downloaded from the EngageNY website sponsored by the NYS Department of Education (New York State Education Department, 2013) which claimed to provide "educators across New York State with real-time, professional learning tools and resources to support educators in reaching the State's vision for a college- and career-ready education for all students" that "can be adopted or adapted for local purposes." Though Mrs. Hughes did not seem to fully understand the process behind the creation of the EngageNY, Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) (New York State Education Department, 2013) materials, she did seem thankful to be in a district that handled the task of planning for the standards for her.

When I later mentioned how difficult some of the CKLA supplemental read aloud stories seemed, she replied, "Yeah. But [the students] are doing okay with it, and it's nice to have an additional read aloud because there aren't many read alouds." It was her perception that her students enjoyed the Common Core-aligned lessons and that they benefitted from the read aloud activities. A closer look at a lesson in which the EngageNY supplemental materials were used can provide more

insight into her statements. For example, during the week shown in Figure 2, a CKLA supplemental curriculum lesson was taught based on the story, "Writing in Ancient Egypt" (Figure 2). Although the *Trophies* (Harcourt, 2003) story that week was a non-fiction piece about a veterinarian, the CKLA story was an historical fiction piece focused on a family who lived in ancient Mesopotamia. The following excerpt comes from my field notes from that day:

Mrs. Hughes moved to the rocking chair and told [the students] they were going to continue with their story about ancient Egypt. She asked if anyone could remember the river that they were talking about yesterday. A student raised her hand to say, "The Nile River." Mrs. Hughes responded, "Very good, the Nile River." At this point she opened the white teacher's manual notebook and began to read the story "Writing in Ancient Egypt."

She stopped occasionally to ask questions including, "What does exhausted mean?" from slide 6A-1. When no one answered, she reread the sentence from the story that contained the word: "They were both exhausted from being out in the hot sun all afternoon and relieved to be back on the banks of the river." A student offered, "They were tired." Mrs. Hughes said, "Very good, they were tired."

This excerpt was but one example of what was typically observed during the CKLA read aloud lessons, which Mrs. Hughes believed her students were "doing okay with." The comprehension questions surrounding the advanced language and concepts from these read aloud stories were often met as the question above was: with blank stares and silence.

Though it seemed clear to me that the CKLA supplemental lessons were difficult for her students, Mrs. Hughes seemed thankful for not having to create the materials that would align with the mandated standards on her own and, rather than speak ill of them, she praised their inclusion for being additional stories for the children to hear, positioning them as an enhancement to student learning. It seemed that Mrs. Hughes had grown comfortable with the materials her district provided and, though the discourse about her academic experiences suggested that she believed otherwise, she considered fidelity to the mandated curriculum as simply a part of the job.

***Patterns of talk within the scripted curriculum.***

The observed lessons and materials gathered from the curriculum helped to reveal specific patterns of talk taking place. While a full discourse analysis is outside of the purview of this project, it is still important to make note of some of the most salient patterns, including a very traditional one present in most lessons observed. Mrs. Hughes often had to repeat questions, reread passages,

## 6A Writing in Ancient Egypt

### Introducing the Read-Aloud

**10** reads

---

**Where Are We?**

Choose a different student each day to locate Africa and Egypt on a world map or globe.

**Personal Connections**

Discuss the significance of writing with some of the following questions:

- What kinds of things do you write?
- Is it important to write things down? Why or why not?
- How would your lives be different if there was no writing?

**What Have We Already Learned?**

- **Show image 6A-6: Meret on the banks of the Nile**

Remind students that in the previous lesson, they learned about Meret and her family in ancient Egypt. Have a student point out Meret in the picture. Have them repeat the name *Meret* after you. Besides farming, what else was the Nile used for? (fishing; transportation) Where did Meret and her family live? (in a village near the Nile River)

**Purpose for Listening**

Tell the students that the next read-aloud is about writing in ancient Egypt. Remind them that they learned about cuneiform writing in the read-alouds about Mesopotamia. Tell them to listen carefully to find out whether Egyptian writing was like Mesopotamian writing.

### Presenting the Read-Aloud

**15** reads

---

**Writing in Ancient Egypt**

- **Show image 6A-1: Meret and her father returning**

Meret once in a while accompanied her father to go fishing. Late one night, Meret and her father returned from a long day of fishing on the Nile River. They were both exhausted from being out in the hot sun all afternoon and relieved to be back on the banks of the river. Meret's mother was waiting for them along the shore. When she saw Meret, she scooped the tired girl up and gave her a huge hug.

"I will sing you your bedtime song as we walk home, my child," she told Meret. Meret nodded, wearily looking up at her mother.

When her mother finished singing the beautiful song, Meret asked curiously, "Mother, how did you learn that song?"

"I learned it from my mother, who learned it from her mother," Meret's mother replied. "I learned everything I needed to know by listening to my mother. I will teach you everything you need to know, and I hope that you will be able to listen well."

"I will," Meret answered. "But isn't there another way to pass on information?"

- **Show image 6A-2: Hieroglyphs carved in stone**

"Well, yes," Meret's mother answered. "The kings and scribes know how to draw symbols that represent the words we say. Then, someone else can come along and read these symbols much later and understand exactly what was written."<sup>1</sup>

"But why would we need to write things down, when we can just pass them on by talking?" Meret inquired.



1. Have the students describe what they see in the picture.

2. Explain to students that these symbols are called hieroglyphs. Have students repeat the word after you. Help them to understand that these symbols stand for spoken words, much like the letters in the alphabet can be put together to spell the words we say.

Figure 2. Teacher's manual CKLA, page 68-69. (New York State Education Department, 2013)

and reword the language of the curriculum in order for her students to be able to answer contextual comprehension questions, "Because," in her words, "it's not worded for the kids." The pattern of talk described in the above lesson on Ancient Mesopotamia was a traditional, IRE pattern, which placed the text as the authority source and Mrs. Hughes as the keeper of the right answer found in the manual. This sort of questioning was quite common throughout her teaching of ELA and, though Mrs. Hughes expressed a preference toward a more interactive approach to instruction, the professional discourse of the scripted program influenced her to participate in this more traditional, teacher-centered talk. When children could not remember the very specific contextual details, Mrs. Hughes read again so that they might locate the *right* answer from the text. After the right answer was found, a response of "Very good" or "Excellent" often followed. This same traditional pattern was seen again and again throughout my visits, including in the following passage taken from my field notes:

Mrs. Hughes read aloud from the *Little Bear* story: "He opened his eyes and saw two little squirrels. 'Play with us,' they said. 'No time,' said Little Bear. 'I have to go home for lunch.'" Here, she stopped reading and asked, "Why can't Little Bear play?" A student raised his hand and, when called upon, answered, "Because he has to go home and eat lunch." Mrs. Hughes replied, "Excellent. Can someone find the sentence where it says he has to go home and eat lunch?" She called on another student whose hand was raised. This student read aloud the sentence from page 193 of her book and Mrs. Hughes said, "Excellent, that sentence told us exactly what the answer was."

In this short passage alone, we can see two salient examples of both a traditional pattern of talk and the text being treated as the authority source of knowledge in the classroom. Interestingly, the script of the teacher's manual included two other questions, "Why do you think Little Bear shuts his eyes and lets the wind brush him?" and "How do you think Little Bear looks as he lets the wind brush him? Act it out." While these questions arguably invited children's personal perspectives and opinions into the conversation, as well as an embodied interpretation of the curriculum, Mrs. Hughes was mandated via her district's pacing guide to forego these questions and ask only the context-based comprehension question.

### **Mrs. Hughes' Personal Discourse**

Mrs. Hughes' personal discourse was made up of the various ways that she identified herself as a teacher and as a person. Much of this discourse was revealed when I asked her questions about the kind of teacher she was or what she did apart from the school district's mandates. Even with some very strong personal opinions,

Mrs. Hughes continued to default to her professional discourse throughout my conversations with her.

**Personal identity.** Mrs. Hughes assumed a discourse through which she created a personal identity both within and outside of her professional discourse. She spoke very strongly about the kind of teacher she was. In reference to how she taught prior to the introduction of the Common Core-aligned supplemental materials, Mrs. Hughes stated, "I differentiated no matter what because that's just the type of teacher I am, and I feel that I can do that more now that I am tenured." It seemed that Mrs. Hughes personally perceived of herself as a teacher apart from the mandated program that her school used. Demonstrating this, she later said, "I love teaching language arts, even though it's scripted. Like I said, I add my own twists to it." Here, language arts was something that she loved, but only when she was adding her own innovations or when she taught outside of the script. The phrase, "even though it's scripted," connoted that Mrs. Hughes may have felt that the script was something that took away from her teaching of language arts, which she claimed to love; a sort of necessary evil that she had to "twist" in order to get by. When probed more about these twists, Mrs. Hughes shared: "If we're doing a story on maps, I'll bring in, I have a blow-up globe, I'll bring that in and I'll show it for artifacts that aren't necessarily included in the script but that—I just feel—that add." Later, when I asked her what changes she makes to the curriculum, she responded:

The spelling I change every time. Day one, there is supposed to be a pretest, I don't do a pretest. I do the introduction the way that I do it with the routine that I do because I have found through the years that it is more engaging for the kids and they remember it more than, oh let me see if I can get the word right before I've even been introduced to the word.

Upon close inspection, these "twists" to the script are little more than bringing in an object from home—one that is not truly incorporated into the curriculum or providing depth to the material—skipping questions that she felt were too challenging for her students, or eliminating an element of the program that does not seem to make sense to her. These hardly seem like innovations when one considers some of the impressive research that has been published on multimodal composing in urban classrooms (Miller & McVee, 2012), play and interaction within mandated programs (Kontovourki & Siegel, 2010), and the use of technology to open doors for exploration outside of the classroom (Kist, 2010). Perhaps Mrs. Hughes was unaware of these possibilities or had simply accepted the way of life in the mandated curriculum.

Another part of Mrs. Hughes' personal identity was her need to better herself through "professional learning opportunities," "professional development," and professional magazine subscriptions outside of the

workday. When I asked about the support she received in her building, she mentioned that Campbell Elementary was without a professional reading coach to help them manage the new Common Core State Standards as well as the regular ELA curriculum. Without the help of a reading coach, Mrs. Hughes took it upon herself to subscribe to magazines and continue her learning in order to continue to grow professionally. When her district failed to meet her needs as an educator, she took it upon herself to do so.

**Personal recognition by her school.** Mrs. Hughes personally identified herself as someone with great knowledge, experience, and wherewithal when it came to her profession, and she recognized that her school district capitalized on her strong teaching by giving her the responsibility of teaching the most struggling readers in first grade. She said that for the first grade “differentiated block that we have...I teach direct instruction. So it’s the lowest group and I only have five children.” “Direct instruction,” or DI, was a reference to an intensely scripted reading program that the school mandated for children who were at the lowest level of reading in the grade—in this case, five students who Mrs. Hughes met with each day after the whole-class 90-minute ELA instruction. When I questioned Mrs. Hughes about why she was the first grade teacher chosen to work with the lowest level of readers in the grade, she replied, “They wanted a strong teacher teaching [them]...” It seemed that the school decided that the more academic need students had, the more scripted their instruction needed to be; the more apt a teacher was to follow the intense direct instruction, the more likely she was to be called on to teach these most struggling readers.

Mrs. Hughes thought of herself as a competent, knowledgeable teacher whom her district relied upon in order to help the weakest students in ELA. It could be said that Mrs. Hughes was proud of this fact, while at the same time, stating, “If I was not teaching direct instruction, I would have the area groups [differentiation groups], and I could, I could do guided reading. But I was told I have to teach DI, so.” Here, we can see the direct conflict in discourses: Mrs. Hughes personally wanted to teach guided reading but she was professionally mandated to teach direct instruction. One can almost sense her frustration and, at the same time, her complacency.

#### **Discussion**

Mrs. Hughes possessed three conflicting discourses from which she drew for her identity as a teacher: an academic discourse derived from her time studying in a master’s program; a professional discourse that developed during her time as a teacher in Campbell Elementary School; and a personal discourse that had arguably been evolving for her entire life. Specifically interesting are why she privileged the professional discourse and how she compartmentalized her discourses.

#### **Privileging Professional Discourse Yet Preferring Academic Discourse**

Research has shown that teachers, “ultimately receive professional and personal rewards from the[ir] district for complying with the mandated program,” (MacGillivray et al., 2004, p. 140) including becoming a member of a group of colleagues who all identify with working with a mandated program and a feeling of control and expertise at being able to adequately manage a mandated program. Mrs. Hughes seemed to have placed great value on her identity as a teacher in her building who was willing and able to perform these tasks. By complying with her district’s mandates, she had become someone who other teachers looked up to. In fact, she became someone with enough success at following the scripted program, that her school “rewarded” her by asking her to teach the lowest level of readers in the grade. While this meant very tightly controlled, scripted direct instruction, to Mrs. Hughes, this seemed to be something to be proud of. Her district knew that, as a “strong teacher,” she could follow the script perfectly, so she was given the task of working with the most struggling readers. Mrs. Hughes seemed to align her loyalty with her district’s decision to use a mandated program; something that simply became part of her job and that earned her recognition as a strong teacher.

Another potential implication of working in a school that has a mandated curriculum is the risk of equating of good teaching with following the scripted program. It seemed that Mrs. Hughes had taken this perspective at times. For example, when Mrs. Hughes said, “If you’re teaching and doing your job, then you have nothing to worry about,” in reference to the potential unannounced observation by her administrators, she was acknowledging that her job was to follow the scripted program. “Teaching” and “doing her job” as her school administrators expected was teaching the way they mandated and, despite her “main wish” to teach language arts using methods she had studied in college, Mrs. Hughes was not likely to risk her job by straying too far from the script. She seemed to have taken up the professional discourse that good teaching was equal to following the script. When teachers are audited or observed in order to determine their fidelity to a program that their school district has mandated, they are left with only two options: teach the mandated way or leave. Of course Mrs. Hughes would rather keep her job than leave it—she expressed a deep love for teaching and for her students—and the best way to ensure this was to teach the way her district wanted her to. In her mind it seemed, the best job safety was to teach by the script in the best way she could, something that earned her respect and recognition by her administrators and other teachers, both incentives to continue following the scripted program.

It could be inferred that Mrs. Hughes had great difficulty breaking down a façade of happiness with her

program that she had built over the five years of her teaching career. Being a relatively new teacher, a fact that has been shown in much research to increase her likelihood of stress, frustration, and burnout (Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011; Jones, 2012; Panesar, 2010), Mrs. Hughes was still at a risky point in her career. However, she had a strong sense of what effective reading instruction could and, in her mind, should look like, and this was in stark contrast with what she was mandated to teach. Instead of using our interviews to complain about this situation, Mrs. Hughes chose to speak of the scripted program in a mostly positive manner. It seemed as though she wanted to make it clear to me that everything in her job was fine. She did not express strongly positive feelings toward the scripted program, but she also did not complain about it. However, when she responded to my questions about what she would change, the detailed explanations of what she would do differently were often followed by comments such as, "It's such a shame," or "I was told I have to teach DI". This language was certainly sad to hear, yet much of our time talking was spent on what Mrs. Hughes liked about teaching language arts. It seemed as though she had become complacent. Going against her school district's requests would have been extremely difficult and is something that could potentially cost her the teaching job.

Few could blame Mrs. Hughes for her acceptance of the situation and, indeed, there are many other teachers in her position who privilege the discourse of their schools just as she did. When considering this in light of social justice education, the implication of a teacher who acts with complacency, despite having a deep desire and knowledge of how to teach effectively, is both sad and frightening. Mrs. Hughes was a hard-working, respected professional to whom other teachers in her building turned for help and advice. She knew the details of her ELA curriculum better than many in her building and was called upon to teach the neediest readers in her grade. If a teacher like Mrs. Hughes was willing to privilege the discourse of the scripted program and what has been mandated, what does this say for the teachers who have come after her and will continue to join the teaching force under others like her? Mrs. Hughes had become a point person in her building for teaching other teachers about how to maneuver the curriculum materials; if she was unwilling to recognize that the scripted program was inadequate in meeting the needs of all of her students, she is not likely to help others to come to this conclusion or to assist others in finding new ways of teaching a more culturally relevant pedagogy. This systemic and inherited sense of complacency can come with privileging the discourse of a mandated curriculum and is extremely difficult to stand up against.

It is important to note that it was possible that Mrs. Hughes spoke about her desires to change her curriculum in such a manner because she understood that

I was studying at a university that openly frowned upon the use of scripted curricula, the same university at which she earned her graduate degree. It is possible that she was orienting herself to me as a member of the university community and thus presenting her work to a person she perceived was a representative of ideologies related to teaching that did not support the use of scripted curricula. My identity as a researcher from State University could have had an influence on how she responded to my questions about her scripted curriculum, a curriculum in which she may not have found fault. I went to great measures to ensure that my opinions about scripted curricula were never voiced, and in fact, Mrs. Hughes only knew that my study was about teaching ELA and was never blatantly asked about her scripted nature of her curriculum—she volunteered this information. Still, with these precautions, my position as a researcher from State University likely played some role in the co-construction of the dialogue of our interviews and this bias cannot be ignored. Nonetheless, without access to Mrs. Hughes' thoughts, I can only infer what she meant and present possible explanations for her statements.

#### **Compartmentalized Discourses**

Returning to Bakhtin's notion of critical interanimation it seemed as though Mrs. Hughes constantly contradicted herself, saying, for example, "I love teaching ELA," and in the very next breath, "even though it's scripted". Although there are likely many reasons for why Mrs. Hughes felt the need to qualify that her love of ELA was despite the fact that she had a mandated and scripted curriculum, it seemed that this sort of contradictory talk happened most often when she was talking against the school's mandated ELA program. Someone who is critically interanimated is able "to regard one language (and the verbal world corresponding to it) through the eyes of another language," (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 295) and can make sense of what causes one discourse to be voiced while others are silenced. With regards to Mrs. Hughes, it seemed as though she was unable to reach a level of critical interanimation and, instead, kept her various discourses separate, compartmentalized. As a result, she seemed to perceive of her job as going well, her students as learning adequately, and her twists to the script, including the PowerPoint versions of the scripted lessons, as innovative.

Mrs. Hughes' positive attitude toward her school and its curricula show how important her teaching job was to her. While other teachers may have taken an interview as an opportunity to complain about the many mandates placed upon them, Mrs. Hughes used our time together to talk about the things she liked. This is commendable and concerning at the same time. Why did she feel the need to foreground her loyalty with the school district? While there is a constellation of causes for working complacently in a system of injustice, research of this nature calls attention to the social inequalities against

teachers and students. Feeling that it is one's job to teach with mandated materials is a form of institutionalized oppression. Teachers in this position are side-stepped by their administrators and publishing companies and are robbed of the opportunity to infuse their teaching with their own expertise and skill. At the same time, a teacher's voice is very small up against these entities and it is clear to see how loyalty and complacency become the only means for survival within the larger system.

There were probably many reasons for Mrs. Hughes to keep her discourses compartmentalized. Namely, it seemed as though she had not yet recognized and acknowledged how strongly she desired to teach using the practices she had learned in her academic career. This may have been a result of her still-early career position and a lack of the necessary "survival skills" (Panesar, 2010, p. 12) for meeting the demands of the classroom, including recognizing and speaking her concerns to her school administrators. Mrs. Hughes placed her job—and its resulting professional discourse—before her personal and academic experiences, and she likely felt that letting go of these other discourses was simply a part of being a teacher in Campbell Elementary School. Likewise, she was part of a larger system of acceptance of the scripted program, a system that was likely very difficult to act against. Her work environment was one of pressure, accountability, fidelity, and standardization, not one of innovation, risk-taking, experimentation, and creativity. Mrs. Hughes saw the things she learned in college and the things she appreciated in her personal life as secondary to the school's mandates. These secondary discourses were for "if I have extra time," or "if [the students] are not getting something," rather than being a regular part of her repertoire of practice.

The ability to think critically about one way of being through other ways of being—critical interanimation—could provide great satisfaction, gratification, and a sense that what a teacher has done and learned is valued. Feeling the need to compartmentalize what has been learned and what is personal in order to focus only on what has been mandated professionally can cause tension and feelings of colonization for a teacher. Being a member of group of people who are willing to accept poor conditions could lead to one's own acceptance of these conditions. A sense that *nobody else seems to mind, why should I?* could emerge. At loss in this scenario are teachers who are willing to fight for their rights to be contributing members of their school who are valued for their professional opinions and expertise. Being critically interanimated can allow a teacher to understand how and why he or she chooses to take up the speech genre of the larger building community as well as what propels one to speak against others in the same community. The advantage of this is a deeper understanding of how discourse impacts one's ability to

be creative, individual, and valuable to others in the community.

Conversely, critical interanimation may reveal that one is not valued by his or her school, but, rather, is asked to compartmentalize the discourses that are not part of the school's chosen discourse, as was seen with Mrs. Hughes. This, while disheartening, can lead to recognition of injustice, oppression, and inequity in teaching. Being critical of the discourses one assumes and recognizing apprenticeship into certain social practices can give teachers strength to challenge the inherited injustices that may be passed down to them. Conscious awareness of the discourses at work in one's teaching can lead to reflectiveness and, eventually, to a critical self-awareness and the need to change negative factors.

### **A More Socially Just Curriculum**

There have long been educators who have devoted their lives to fighting for social justice in the education system (Freire, 1993; Dewey, 1934; Finn, 2009; Fine & Weis, 2003; Anyon, 1981). As we move through eras of educational reform and mandates, many have voiced concern over how a school curriculum is designed and whom it best serves. The teaching that was seen in Mrs. Hughes' classroom aligns closely with Finn's description of domesticating literacy (2009), with children being drilled on phonics and test-style questions. This type of learning threatens to perpetuate inequities in American schools and does little more than train students for life in the working class.

As schools become increasingly diverse, the need for curricular redesign to meet the needs of all learners becomes more apparent. The classroom looks vastly different than it did even ten years ago, with students varying dramatically in culture, religion, sexuality, physical ability, socioeconomic status, and language ability. It is no longer enough to be aware of the various backgrounds of students; educators must strive to adopt what Ladson-Billings (1995) called a *culturally relevant pedagogy* consisting of the "ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (p. 483). Culturally relevant pedagogy stems from the ideology that all people learn differently based on their backgrounds and their cultures, and teachers must equip themselves with the tools necessary for maximizing the learning experience for all, not just for some learners.

Ladson-Billings (1995) described *culturally relevant pedagogy* as "a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequalities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469). This two-part perspective on pedagogy—addressing student achievement while helping students develop their own identities—is what many scripted curriculum programs

lack. Student achievement is generally the focus while student identity is assumed. Culturally relevant teaching takes into account the various diversities that exist in a classroom, whether cultural, political, socioeconomical, physical, or demographic, and considers what ought to be taught to learners based on these characteristics. Teaching of this nature is not prescribed, nor is it scripted and rigid. Rather, culturally relevant teaching emerges with the needs of the learners and is an active, changing process that evolves through and with learning.

Secondly, and arguably more importantly, culturally relevant teaching invites students to challenge societal norms, to ask questions of their education, and to work toward a more socially just life. Classrooms where culturally relevant pedagogy is used might recognize a problem in the school or community, such as a disconnect between the stories of the textbook and the reality that is lived by the students. Then, the teacher would work to provide a space to change the curriculum to solve the problem. For example, in Dutro's study (2010), a classroom of third graders was asked what "hard times" meant. The scripted curriculum expected that they would respond within the context of the story they were reading, a story about a Depression-era family dealing with the difficulties of life on a farm during the 1930s. Instead, the children used the open-ended question as an opportunity to write about their own hard times, creating a space within the curriculum to discuss poverty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A culturally relevant teacher might take this one step further and hold a discussion about living with poverty, allowing students to share their stories and feel a sense of support and belonging. As a class, they might explore other books or films that take up the issue of poverty or research local or national groups that assist those living in poverty. While this might seem far outside of the scope of what is typically found in a school's curriculum, this is the type of learning experience that would likely benefit the students in Dutro's study as well as the students in Mrs. Hughes' class, that is, a culturally relevant learning experience.

### **Implications**

Through this project, insight was gained into how an early elementary teacher felt as she worked within a scripted ELA program and how she assumed different discourses when describing her experiences. Crucial to understanding how teachers like Mrs. Hughes—who have studied at top-ranking universities and learned many practices for innovative teaching—ultimately feel the need to compartmentalize their discourses, is to examine the larger political scene as it pertains to education. This understanding can help in examining how federal mandates and teacher accountability, and the resulting curriculum programs, influence the teaching happening in urban schools.

Within the theoretical framework of this study, I examined the ideas of Bakhtin and Gee, two men who

talk at length about how language is connected to identity. They both describe how what we say relates directly to the identity that we construct for ourselves within various social situations. Mrs. Hughes spoke often of how much she loved teaching, her students, and her school. However, she was a member of a school system that did not value her and her colleagues as professionals, but, instead, opted to use a "teacher-proof" ELA curriculum (White, 2012, p. 193) that was planned and packaged for her. Even the new Common Core State Standard-aligned supplemental lessons were designed without her input, becoming a new requirement that she had to address. Mrs. Hughes' language and therefore her teacher identity, was scripted for her. What she said as she taught came from the scripted curriculum. The discourse of the program was expected by her school district and Mrs. Hughes was mandated to follow a pacing guide and was observed to make sure she was being faithful. Teaching outside of the script was not even an option for Mrs. Hughes and so she developed a sense of complacency toward her mandated program. This can happen when one works within a system of power and oppression as was present at Campbell Elementary. Mrs. Hughes did not have a say in what curriculum was selected by her school, nor did she have the right to change the curriculum to meet the needs of her students. As a result, she knew that the only option was to teach in the way she was mandated and this is what she did. This situation of scripted instruction prevented Mrs. Hughes from creating culturally relevant and effective lessons that would meet the needs of her students while also contributing to the school community and the community at large.

Giving voice to those who work daily with commercially manufactured curricula can help other educators recognize ways that they can "attempt to derail these [inequalities] rather than reinforce them, whether intentionally or not" (Fine & Weis, 2003, p. 108). Teachers are professionals who have trained in how best to design and implement curriculum for a diverse body of learners. Senge et al. (2000) reminded us that one of the "most profound purpose[s] that education might have" is "helping young people learn how to create the lives they truly want to create" (p. 167). Teachers are the direct link between curriculum and student (Applebee, 1974) and without the ability to use their expertise to meet each learner at his or her point of need, and guide him or her to creating the life they want, teachers can be left feeling undervalued, overworked, and ultimately frustrated (Santoro, 2011; Stillman, 2011; Thomas, 2012).

It was the goal of this research to listen to a teacher working within a scripted ELA curriculum, to explore what she liked and did not like about this type of teaching, and to contribute to the larger body of research that exists on curriculum and instruction. The knowledge gained in this study has implications for other teachers who are also under mandates to use scripted curricula, for

administrators who desire to provide the best support they can for their teachers, and for policy makers who have the interest of children in mind when they promote and pass federal mandates, such as the No Child Left Behind Act and Race to the Top.

### Conclusion

Mrs. Hughes and other teachers like her work every day to create a balance between what the school district mandates, what they can feasibly cover in one day, and what they know is best for their learners. Standards were created to help ensure that all students receive an equal chance at learning. Curricular programs have been designed to help teachers easily meet the guidelines set out by standards. However, somewhere along this path, practices have been distorted, voices silenced, and professional creativity stifled. The system has changed from one of helping guide teachers to the best curricular choices to one of mandating what is provided to all students. Senge et al. (2000) ask, "What if the goals and dreams [our students] truly want aren't on the menu? Then they're out of luck." (p. 169) When adults become complacent within a system operating around them, and are either unable to or fear recognizing the inequalities of the system, it is always and unfortunately children who lose out.

Studies such as this shed light on the intricate details of how school systems work and show just how entangled teachers become in the world of mandates, scripts, assessments, requirements, and fidelity. While Mrs. Hughes likely did not recognize the domestication of literacy at work in her classroom, her students were being carefully crafted into obedient, rank-and-file members of the working class poor. They were not challenged to think, create, or question anything about the material they were presented. They were not learning skills to help them in the inevitable lifelong struggles for "better schools, better health care, enriched emotional and spiritual lives, powerful political organizations, stronger unions, and greater appreciation of their own culture and the culture of others" (Finn, 2009, p. 197) that they would encounter after leaving school. Rather, Mrs. Hughes' students, via her teaching of the mandated ELA curriculum, were being trained to understand that doing well in school meant getting the answers right, answers that came from the teacher's manual. With every ELA lesson, a sad circle of power was closing, with Mrs. Hughes and the curriculum on the inside, and students, inexorably, on the outside.

Research that delves more deeply into this educational crisis is crucial, particularly in low-income, high-poverty urban schools such as Campbell Elementary. An exploration of several teachers working in similar conditions to Mrs. Hughes might offer a more complete, system-wide look at how urban teachers with scripted curricula perceive their job. Calling attention to the larger political issues at work in schools helps teachers to

understand the choices that they have or do not have professionally. Conditions in schools will only change when educators become aware of, and then willing to fight for, social justice, not only for their students but also for themselves.

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