



## **Reacting to the Script: Teach for America Teachers' Experiences with Scripted Curricula**

**By Nicole Mittenfelner Carl**

### **Introduction**

Former Superintendent Arlene Ackerman's departure from the School District of Philadelphia as well as a loss of approximately 320 million dollars created an atmosphere of "needing to do more with less" as the 2011-2012 school year began in Philadelphia (Herold, 2011). As the face of education in Philadelphia's public schools changes in response to budget constraints and politics, current Teach For America (TFA) corps members' roles have also changed. In 2003, TFA placed 160 corps members in Philadelphia, and since then TFA has approximately 300 corps members teaching in the region each year (Teach For America [TFA], 2012, Greater Philadelphia). The Philadelphia Public School Notebook describes the effect of the recent budget cuts on TFA teachers: "Among the more than 1,200 teachers laid off by the District due to cutbacks were 85 of the 90 second-year TFA corps members" (Mezzacappa, 2011). The majority of these second-year TFA corps members have been relocated from school district to charter-managed schools, many of which have adopted scripted curricula (J. Lytle, personal communication, September 28, 2011). While the School District of Philadelphia announced in February of 2012 that they will no longer mandate the implementation of scripted curricula (Herold, 2012), the charter schools in this study were not required to follow this mandate.

This study sought to understand the following question: How do second-year

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TFA teachers placed in charter or turnaround schools in Philadelphia experience scripted curricula in their classrooms? A goal of this study is to examine the different ways TFA teachers experience scripted curricula. An additional aim of this study is to contribute to the overall understanding of the effects of educational reforms, such as scripted curricula, on teachers and their autonomy and efficacy. The goal is not to evaluate TFA or the effectiveness of scripted curricula; rather, this study examines how TFA teachers perceive and experience such curricula.

Wendy Kopp founded TFA in 1990 with the goal that “one day, all children in our nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education” (Kopp, 2001, p. 174). TFA attempts to solve the problem of educational inequity by recruiting “our nation’s most promising future leaders, invests in the training and professional development necessary to ensure their success as teachers in our highest-poverty communities, and fosters their ongoing leadership as alumni” (Kopp, 2008, p. 735). As a part of TFA, teachers, selected through a highly competitive process, commit to teach for two years (Heilig & Jez, 2010; Kopp, 2001; TFA, 2012, *Who We Look For*). After this commitment, TFA’s goal is to “build a massive force of leaders working from inside and outside education who have the conviction and insight that come from teaching successfully in low-income communities” (Kopp, 2008, pp. 734-735). TFA has become an exclusive and selective program that permits corps members “to do good and do well” (Labaree, 2010, p. 54).

This study examines how these second-year TFA teachers experience scripted curricula. My interest in teachers’ experiences with scripted curricula developed out of my practice as a former TFA corps member and middle school language arts teacher in Philadelphia for five years and a current university-based mentor to first-year TFA teachers. Second-year teachers were chosen because while they are still new to teaching, they at least have one year of experience. Additionally, the study explores the perspectives of these second-year teachers because of their experience of being laid off from the School District of Philadelphia.

#### ***Rationale and Significance of the Study***

No Child Left Behind’s (NCLB) focus on standardized testing opened the door for standardized curricula (Milosovic, 2007). Many schools have implemented scripted curricula with the goal of increasing standardized test scores (Gill, 2007). NCLB funding regulations for Title 1 schools essentially require “the use of scripted curriculum materials because these are the only ones that qualify as being scientifically based” (Ede, 2006, p. 30). Title 1 funds are given to schools servicing a high number of low-income families (US Department of Education, 2011). Thus, as other authors have acknowledged (Gill, 2007; Ede, 2006), scripted curricula are more prevalent in schools serving low-income communities. As teaching in low-income communities is part of the commitment TFA teachers make when they join the organization (Heilig & Jez, 2010; TFA, 2011, *Our Mission*), this study focuses on teachers working in schools located in under-resourced communities in

Philadelphia. Scripted curricula, standardized tests, and increased monitoring are a few of the results of current educational reforms. These reforms directly change the roles of teachers and especially impact teacher autonomy and efficacy. NCLB has resulted in reforms that limit teachers' professional judgment: "By scripting the conduct of teachers, the NCLB-inspired...programs can generate harm by closing down the discretionary space teachers need to make responsive and educationally sound judgments in the classroom" (Hlebowitsh, 2007, p. 28).

Scripted curricula, for the purposes of this study, are defined along the lines of "scripting the conduct of teachers" (Hlebowitsh, 2007, p. 28). While scripted curricula are often defined as scientifically based programs such as Success For All (Ede, 2006), Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Lieu, and Peske (2002) define curriculum more broadly to include "what and how teachers are expected to teach" (p. 274). In this sense, many teachers may have what could be considered a prescriptive or scripted curriculum in that they are following a detailed and prescribed instructional model that requires teachers to teach with faithful attention to the script for each lesson. In this paper, scripted curriculum is defined by employing Kauffman et al.'s (2002) definition of curriculum and considering a curriculum scripted to the extent that it limits teacher autonomy. The teachers in this study had a scripted instructional model, a scientifically based scripted curriculum, or both.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The current educational movement implements a variety of reforms including scripted curricula that often limit teacher autonomy. One must consider the extent to which these reforms reflect the purpose of education in the United States and whether they foster educational equity. To understand the complexities surrounding scripted curriculum and its effects on teacher autonomy and efficacy, this framework begins by discussing the purpose of education by considering Dewey's (1916/2011) democratic belief in the importance of a meaningful education and Freire's (1970/2000, 1998) assertion that education is a process of self-actualization. As noted above, scripted curricula are often used with the intention of increasing tests scores (Gill, 2007). Thus, this framework provides a brief examination of the current standardized testing movement; the way current educational reforms change the role of teachers and the consequences of such reforms will also be discussed. Since second-year teachers are the focus of this study, the Kauffman et al. (2002) empirical study of new teachers' experiences with curriculum and the pressures of standardized testing will be examined. First- and second-year teachers remain an important population to consider in regards to teachers' autonomy because many people argue that new teachers benefit from scripted curricula. Additionally, new teachers do not have to adapt in the same way as veteran teachers and may have different perspectives regarding teacher autonomy and scripted curricula. Because part of TFA's mission is to end educational inequity and TFA teachers are the par-

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ticipants in this study, studies of TFA's teacher preparation will also be addressed. Furthermore, TFA teachers may have different perceptions about scripted curricula as a result of their preparation and beliefs. Finally, this framework re-visits the purpose of education and considers issues of equity and opportunity as they relate to scripted curricula.

#### ***For What Purpose: Concerning Teaching to a Test***

Ede (2006) states, "The goal of the education system in the United States has long been to provide an effective public education for all children in order that they may realize their full potential" (p. 29). Ede acknowledges that implementation of this goal is quite controversial. The formation of an environment that nourishes an individual's aptitudes is crucial to education (Dewey, 1916/2011). Furthermore, Dewey makes an important distinction between training and education; for Dewey, education "is a continuous process of growth" (p. 33). Dewey believes that this notion of education is contrary to the view that education is merely preparation for adult life. He asserts that the future is taken care of when the present experiences are "rich" and "significant" (p. 34).

Like Dewey (1916/2011), Freire (1970/2000) believes that education involves "acts of cognition" instead of the transfer of knowledge (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 79). These acts of cognition and inquiry occur in what Freire (1970/2000) terms "problem-posing" education, which is more active than what he terms the "banking concept" of education, which focuses on rote learning rather than active knowledge construction (p. 79). In this paradigm, dialogue is the foundation of problem-posing education because it involves communication, which Freire (1970/2000) considers essential to true education. This method challenges and engages students, and Freire (1970/2000) believes that engagement with real-world problems encourages students to respond to these problems. These ideas run directly counter to the ideology and implementation of scripted curricula.

The current educational environment, as many researchers and practitioners argue, seems to ignore the idea that learning should be rich and significant (Dewey, 1916/2011) or pose problems (Freire, 1970/2000). Instead, it operates in an environment that values preparation for a test over experiential and more meaningful forms of learning. Dewey (1916/2011) asks, "Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, learning by a passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice?" (p. 25). This question, posed in 1916, is still relevant today. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) argue that the accountability movement ignores the "radically local" nature of teaching, which is "embedded in the immediate relationships of students and teachers, shaped by the cultures of schools and communities, and connected to the experiences and biographies of individuals and groups" (p. 10). The focus on standardizing curricula and tailoring teaching and learning to standardized tests serves to train students to take tests rather than engaging them in meaningful and generative learning experiences. One

must consider the extent to which students are being educated to their full potential in this current system.

Freire (1970/2000, 1998) affirms that education is a life-long process, and his understanding of education as a critical process of self-actualization is in stark contrast with what Ravitch (2011) describes as the current goals of education as reflected in NCLB legislation. According to Ravitch, proponents of NCLB believe that scores on standardized tests are the ultimate goal of education. Ravitch asserts that making raising test scores the goal of education is dangerous because people begin to forget about other educational goals including fostering critical thinking skills, developing moral individuals, and learning to apply knowledge to different contexts (Ravitch, 2011). Ravitch explains that instead of focusing on the development of character and ethical ideals, ideals that relate to what Freire (1970/2000, 1998) considers the goals of education, NCLB proponents focused on data and the teaching of rudimentary skills. In the era of NCLB, knowledge has not been considered important, and high test scores are equated with a good education (Ravitch, 2011). This understanding of a good education greatly contrasts with Freire's (1970/2000, 1998) notion that a good education fosters a depth of understanding and Dewey's (1916/2011) belief that education should be rich and significant.

### ***Changing the Role of Teachers***

Ball (2003) describes how teachers express frustration, despair, anxiety, and emotional duress regarding new educational reforms: “[W]ho controls the field of judgment” (Ball, 2003, p. 216) is shifting the nature of public education away from a respect for the teacher's judgment to placing a primacy on other entities including the state. The teachers whom Ball quotes directly experience this shift of control because their autonomy and professional judgment are not valued. Ball states that these current reforms along with constant monitoring have created “performativity,” which he defines as “a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgment, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (p. 216). Ball believes that the current educational reform policies are “changing what it means to be a teacher” and are creating “new kinds of teacher subjects” (p. 217) and suggests that social relations in the culture of performativity “are replaced by judgmental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone” (p. 224). He argues that according to these relations, teachers are valued solely for their results and outcomes and thus become alienated selves (Ball, 2003).

Kohl (2009) also believes that what it means to be a teacher as well as a student is changing. He states,

I believe that the consequence of scripted curriculum, teacher accountability, continuous monitoring of student performance, high stakes testing, and punishment for not reaching external standards is that schools become educational panopticons, that is, total control and surveillance communities dedicated to undermining

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the imagination, creativity, intelligence, and autonomy of students and teachers.  
(Kohl, 2009, para. 4)

Kohl, drawing on Foucault's (1983) understanding of the way institutions serve as panopticons, describes the educational panopticon as "a system in which teachers and students are under constant scrutiny, allowed no choice over what is learned or taught, evaluated continuously, and punished for what is considered inadequate performance" (Kohl, 2009, para. 6). In this prison-like environment that Kohl describes, "students and teachers are forced to live in a constant state of anxiety, self-doubt, wariness, anomie, and even suppressed rage" (Kohl, 2009, para. 6). Herr and Arms (2004) also describe a version of the educational panopticon: "Standardized curricula are mandated; administrators are held accountable for implementing them and therefore bring this sense of surveillance into the classroom" (p. 536). Not only are teachers' roles changing, but also reform policies such as scripted curricula and the culture of performativity have created "a struggle over the teacher's soul" (Ball, 2003, p. 217). Again, one must question the extent to which these reforms, which limit teacher autonomy as well as student creativity and arguably potential, create meaningful learning experiences.

#### **New Teachers**

Many new teachers will not have known a time when the educational climate was not based on constant monitoring and test scores. The Kauffman et al. (2002) study<sup>1</sup> is important because it specifically considers the experiences first- and second-year teachers have with curriculum. Kauffman et al. assert that most new teachers appreciate curricular guidance and support. When referencing autonomy, Kauffman et al. state, "Although much of the literature suggests that teachers value their autonomy and do not want to be told what to do, nearly all of these new teachers appreciated what curricular guidance they had or wished for more" (p. 285). There is, however, a difference between asking for more materials, guidance, and support than being given a scripted curriculum or being told to explicitly teach certain skills using a specific method. Kohl, referencing scripted curricula, explicitly voices the dangers when teachers lose autonomy:

Scripted curriculum turns teachers into mechanical delivery systems. Most teachers I know try to revolt against them, but they have to face what are called "the Open Court police" -- people who wander the halls of schools checking that teachers are on exactly the mandated page, asking set questions rather than discussing ideas or texts, and accepting only the answers provided by the teachers' booklet. Though those monitors obviously can't check all the classes at all the times they induce a state of anxiety since they can enter any classroom at any time without even knocking. This aspect of the panopticon contributes to the erosion of self-respect and pride in one's work by treating teachers as objects with no independent educational knowledge and judgment of their own. (Kohl, 2009, para. 7)

New and veteran teachers experience the pressures that come with standardized testing. The Kauffman et al. (2002) study presents a perspective in which many new teachers wanted additional guidance and support; the authors “found that today’s environment of high standards and accountability created a sense of urgency among new teachers but did not provide them with the support they needed to teach effectively” (p. 279). It is also important to note that “[i]n calling for greater specification, these new teachers stopped well short of asking that their every move be dictated” (Kauffman et al., 2002, p. 285). The study found that new teachers were “often overwhelmed by the responsibility and demands of designing curriculum and planning daily lessons” (p. 291). Kauffman et al. (2002) describe “new teachers—who might have succeeded with more support—to exit quickly for other lines of work” (p. 292). This study initiates important research about new teachers experiences with curriculum; however, “. . .the most common curriculum these new teachers encountered was one that told them what to teach but not how” (Kauffman et al., 2002, p. 288). Had the teachers they spoke with actually been told how to teach, those teachers may have expressed more desire for increased autonomy. More research about new teachers’ reactions to scripted curricula is needed as they may not only experience different challenges than veteran teachers but also have varying perspectives; Beatty (2011) also recommends a need for additional studies of comparative reactions of new teachers to scripted curricula.

### **TFA Teachers**

There certainly needs to be more research about the effects of current educational reforms, specifically scripted curricula, on student achievement as well as on the experiences of new teachers as Kauffman et al. (2002) and Beatty (2011) demonstrate. There is also a need for additional research about new teachers who are certified alternatively, such as TFA teachers (Heilig & Jez, 2010; TFA, 2011, Teacher Certification). This remains an important area of focus in the current arena of standardized testing because of the increasing number of teachers gaining certification alternatively (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Garcia & Huseman, 2009; Feistritz, 2009). It is important to consider the extent to which TFA teachers, who are predominately certified alternatively, desire autonomy in light of the fact that they may not have a background in education or the content area they are teaching.

Alternative certification programs have been, and continue to be, a controversial issue in the field of teacher education (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). A majority of alternatively certified teachers tend to work in under-resourced, urban schools (Veltri, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Scholars (e.g., Zeichner & Schulte, 2001) take issue with this and argue that urban schools have the greatest need for certified teachers. Furthermore, some educators (e.g., Veltri, 2008) also criticize the lack of student teaching and preparation of TFA teachers. Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow

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(2002) found that TFA teachers in New York City rated their perceptions of their teacher preparation lower than teachers in traditional and other alternative certification programs; the authors stated that this may be the result of not being a part of a university certification program. Similar to the university partnership described in Heineke, Carter, Desimone, and Cameron's (2010) study, in Philadelphia, TFA partners with the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education in which TFA teachers gain certification and also have the option of pursuing a master's degree in education during their two-year teaching commitment (Penn GSE/TFA, 2008). Schultz and Ravitch (2013) examine the narratives of teachers at two teacher education programs, a university-based program and a TFA program, at the same university in Philadelphia. Commenting on the two teacher education programs, the authors state,

...the distinctions between these programs are somewhat more blurred than is commonly depicted in the popular press. At this University, teachers in the two programs take similar courses. The most salient distinctions are the timing of the courses, the nature of the mentoring, and their role in the classroom. (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013, p. 39)

Describing why universities, including the University of Pennsylvania, partner with TFA, Koerner, Lynch, and Martin (2008) state that dialogue regarding TFA "can best be described as schismatic" (p. 727). They posit that the conversation should instead focus on "how schools of education might improve programs for all students, including the students in Teach for America" (Koerner, Lynch, & Martin, 2008, p. 727). Schultz and Ravitch (2013) make a similar argument; they state that the different teacher preparation routes, alternative and traditional, should not be set as rivals.

TFA teachers, like many other alternative route teachers, often do not have a degree in education. Following an intensive five-week teacher-training institute, most TFA teachers learn to teach on the job (Heineke, Carter, Desimone, & Cameron, 2010; Mikuta & Wise, 2008). Many studies critique this type of teacher preparation (e.g., Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). Mac Iver, Vaughn, and Katz's (2005) study of new teachers in Baltimore, presents a different view of alternative certification programs:

While many teachers in alternative certification programs did leave the system after gaining a master's degree and certification, they made a contribution during their stay. Teachers in alternative certification programs helped to fill openings in high need areas, and brought particular content knowledge in science, mathematics and Spanish that was difficult for the system to find elsewhere...The Teach for American program, in particular, brought teachers with excellent academic credentials to the system. (pp. 10-11)

Veltri (2008) comments on how TFA teachers specifically face many challenges when they begin teaching including recently graduating from college, attending an intensive five-week training program, and teaching in under-resourced schools.



It is also interesting to note that the National Research Council (2010) states that the research on teacher preparation does not demonstrate that one route or type of preparation fosters better teachers. The effectiveness of TFA teachers' preparation will not be discussed in depth because is not the focus of this study. However, what remains important is how TFA teachers may experience scripted curricula. Recruited for their commitment to closing the achievement gap (Kopp, 2001, 2008), TFA teachers' commitment to end educational inequity may affect their perceptions about scripted curricula. For example, in Heineke and Cameron's (2011) study of TFA alumni, they describe that TFA teachers "expressed disdain" over the disparities of the language curriculum for ELL students versus mainstream students (p. 12). Additionally, TFA teachers are also taught to incorporate standards-based instructional content and rely on student achievement data to assess their teaching (Farr, 2010); this aligns, to some extent, with the accountability movement and scripted curricula programs described above. One aim of this study is to address the dearth of literature regarding new teachers' experiences with scripted curricula in general and TFA teachers' experiences in particular.

***Revisiting Purpose: Is Equity a Fabrication?***

According to Ball (2003), fabrication is one way that some teachers deal with the new culture of performativity:

The term fabrication seems to capture the sense of deliberation involved here, sometimes involving 'bought-in' professional support, and the specificity or purposefulness of the intended effects and the almost inevitable element of cynical compliance inherent in making up responses to performativity. (p. 224)

To use Kohl's (2009) language, this fabrication is a way that teachers respond when forced "to act against their conscience" (para. 11). Kohl does not directly advocate for fabrication; instead, he states, "Fortunately there are many subversive teachers who work in the service of their students and according to their own conscience rather than submit to the coercive education they are expected to provide" (para. 9). These teachers may or may not be practicing what Ball considers fabrication; however, according to Kohl, they refuse to lose their autonomy no matter the cost to ensure that their students' needs are being met. Kohl goes on to state, "What must be raised and answered for is the moral cost of creating joyless schools that resemble panopticons" (para. 11). Another question that must be answered is if teachers, working in the culture of performativity and fabrication, are truly educating all students to their full potential, as Ede (2006) asserts is the goal of education.

Considering the consequences of the surveillance and constant monitoring that Kohl (2009) references as well as the fabrication and performativity that Ball (2003) describes, issues of educational equity must also be examined. Not only are teachers in urban, under-resourced districts are often paid less and expected to do more (Lareau, 2003), but also these same under-resourced schools are more likely

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to adopt reforms such as scripted curricula (Ede, 2006) than schools in wealthier districts. One must consider the extent to which these reforms create inequality rather than promote equity.

Dewey (1916/2011) believes education is the driving force of social mobility. Public schools allow an individual to have an “opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment” (Dewey, 1916/2011, p. 15). Dewey believes education is necessary to a democracy for its ability to foster equity and social mobility. In theory, schools have this purpose; yet, in practice schools are not serving as the great equalizer. Furthermore, when considering equity and social mobility, the quality of education must be examined. Dewey believes that learning experiences should be meaningful and connected to real life; Freire (1970/2000, 1998) also affirms these beliefs. To what extent are students, taught using the same method in the same way, making meaningful connections to the content that nourishes what Dewey would describe as their individual aptitudes? The effect of some reforms, including the loss of autonomy as well as constant assessment and monitoring, on under-resourced communities cannot be ignored, and issues of equity must be considered. Herr and Arms (2004) state, “Proponents of accountability argue that the disaggregation of data from high-stakes testing can reveal who is succeeding and who is not in our schools, forcing schools to deal with the demonstrated inequalities” (p. 534). However, Herr and Arms go on to describe how research demonstrates that curricula tailored to test preparation have a negative effect on students in under-resourced, urban communities. House (1999) also describes that an ongoing examination of such policies, which according to House include school organization, finance, curricula, ability grouping, retention, and testing, “reveal that the policies effectively segregate, differentiate, and provide minorities with an inferior education” (p. 11). As Kohl (2009) describes, reforms such as scripted curricula affect both teachers and students.

### **Research Methods**

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) assert that “teachers and other practitioners are the key to educational change” (p. 1). As the research question originated from my practice as a teacher, this study draws on a practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) approach that sought to create the conditions necessary for teachers to reflect critically on their practice. Building on Lytle’s (2008) understanding of situating educational expertise at the teacher and classroom level, this study seeks to understand how TFA teachers experience scripted curricula in their respective classrooms. This study employs a mixed-methods (Patton, 2002) research design that draws heavily on a qualitative interview study approach (Weiss, 1994; Creswell, 2007).

### **Background and Context of the Study**

The School District of Philadelphia faced many changes as the 2011-2012 school year began (Herold, 2011). Current TFA corps members' roles have also changed, and many second-year TFA teachers in Philadelphia were laid off and placed in charter schools (Mezzacappa, 2011). In addition to the challenges of being a new teacher, many of these second-year TFA teachers were also dealing with new schools and administrations. The teachers in this study also experienced the pressures of standardized testing that Kauffman et al. (2002) describe new teachers facing. Additionally, because many second-year TFA teachers were laid off from their district teaching positions, they have a very real sense of the dispensability of teachers. All of the teachers in this study explicitly discussed the layoffs, and one teacher said, "Teachers can be thrown away at any time, I mean we saw that last year." This message, combined with the messages of scripted curricula, makes many teachers feel devalued and deprofessionalized.

### **Participant Selection**

As a former TFA teacher and as a first-year TFA teacher mentor in Philadelphia, I have unique access to TFA corps members. I purposefully elected not to include first-year TFA teachers in this study because I serve as a mentor to some of them and wanted to ensure that they did not feel obligated to participate. I also chose second-year teachers because they are still new to teaching but have one year of experience. Additionally, because of their situation of being laid off, I believe that the second-year TFA corps members would have interesting perspectives about the effects of current educational reforms.

Participants were engaged purposefully rather than randomly (Maxwell, 2005). I emailed approximately 61 second-year TFA teachers out of the 129 teachers on the list. Because scripted curricula are often used with the goal of increasing test scores (Gill, 2007), I selected the 61 teachers who teach a tested subject, English/Language Arts (Reading) or Math. Of the 61 teachers I emailed, 14 responded. I ultimately interviewed seven teachers teaching in different schools.

### **Data Collection**

A combination of a mixed-methods survey and qualitative interviews were employed. Because I did not know each teacher's specific curriculum prior to the interview, each teacher was given a mixed-methods survey before the interview began to gather information and gauge his or her initial experience with scripted curriculum. I followed up on survey questions in the interviews in addition to following a semi-structured interview protocol (Creswell, 2007).

*Mixed-methods survey.* The survey gathered up-to-date information about the teachers' school, curriculum, and subject taught and also asked questions regarding the extent of their autonomy and their opinions about their curriculum. The

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survey helped generate an understanding of the amount of control teachers have over what they teach as well as gauge their attitudes so more in-depth questions could be addressed in the interviews. The survey asked participants to respond to the extent they agree with 11 statements including: *I determine what gets taught in my classroom. I can make changes to what is taught in my classroom when I deem necessary. I will stay in teaching.* There were open-ended questions on the survey as well that sought context in responses. The survey served as a helpful guide to specifically orient the interviews. It also provided me with data about teacher retention. For example, all of the seven teachers indicated that they would stay in teaching on the survey. A majority of the responses to one open-ended question described relationships with students as their reason for remaining in teaching. When I followed up on this question in the interview, several teachers qualified their answers to say that they will stay in teaching for at least one more year. A few teachers also stated that they would stay in teaching, but that they may consider teaching at a different school because of conflicts with the administration. The ability to follow up on survey questions with the interviews provided a more holistic understanding of teachers' experiences.

*Interviews.* Because the research question centers on teachers' experiences, interviews proved to be the best method to gather this data. I developed a semi-structured interview protocol (Creswell, 2007) that focused on teachers' attitudes and experiences as well as provided opportunities for teachers to discuss specific examples. As stated above, I used the survey to help orient my questions to each teacher's specific experiences, and the interview protocols sought to explore the teachers' experiences and perspectives in relation to scripted curriculum. The open-ended approach to interviewing (Creswell, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Weiss, 1994) allowed me to ask follow-up questions that kept the participants' experiences at the center of the interview. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. Four interviews were conducted in person at a coffee shop or at a quiet location on the University of Pennsylvania's campus so that the interviews could be easily recorded as Creswell (2007) suggests. Three interviews were conducted over the phone.

#### **Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity**

To make sure I accurately represented the participants' experiences, I followed up with member checks (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2004) with two participants. Maxwell (2005) describes respondent validation as the "single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings" (p. 111). I also created two vignettes that represented the emergent themes (Maxwell, 2005) in the data, and I shared these vignettes in peer review sessions (Creswell, 2007).

Having the vignettes questioned and discussed by and with peers helped me to more closely examine the data. The use of both the mix-methods survey and the interviews also helped to triangulate the data by bringing together different sources to answer the research question (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Another aspect of validity considered is what Lincoln and Guba (2003) term fairness. They define fairness by stating that “all stakeholder views, perspectives, claims, concerns, and voices should be apparent in the text” (p. 278). Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba assert that omission of certain voices represents bias. Because of the small scope of this study, some voices were left out; however, no perspectives were intentionally ignored. A recruitment email was sent to all second-year TFA teachers in Philadelphia who teach English or Math, and I interviewed the teachers who responded to my initial recruitment and follow-up emails.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

I transcribed all of the audio-recorded, in person interviews. Detailed notes were taken during the phone interviews, and the notes were filled in as soon as the interview ended. Before transcribing the interviews, I listened to the recordings as Maxwell (2005) suggests situating my understanding and thinking about connections between the interviews and the literature. After transcribing the interviews, I compiled all of the data (the interviews and surveys) and thoroughly read the data as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) recommend. I used memos to “not only capture [my] analytic thinking about [my] data, but also facilitate such thinking, stimulating analytic insights” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). Memos were written after the process of thoroughly reading the data that described my initial thoughts and possible categories I would use to code the data. I then began coding the data using the initial codes, which were all inductive. The initial codes were primarily substantive and reflected the participants’ emic understandings of their experiences (Maxwell, 2005) such as the initial codes *overwhelmed administration* and *classroom management issues*. Throughout this process, I refined the codes and also developed more theoretical and analytical codes such as *inexperienced teacher*, *the time consuming nature of planning*, *knowledge or lack thereof of content*, and *hesitancy to deviate*. Memos were used throughout the coding process to document the refined codes as well as my overall impressions about the data.

### **Findings and Implications**

This section begins by highlighting the key themes that emerged through data analysis. The section also provides examples of a few of the challenges that the TFA teachers in this study encountered and demonstrates some of the complexities surrounding the issue of scripted curricula. The TFA teachers in this study experienced and reacted to scripted curricula in varying ways. However, four primary themes emerged from the data that will be discussed: teacher autonomy, the amount of

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monitoring or oversight teachers experienced, the extent to which teachers deviate from the curriculum, and teachers' concerns regarding meeting their students' needs. After discussing the findings, discussion and implications are presented in the final two sections of the article.

#### **Teacher Autonomy**

The way that the new teachers in the study experienced scripted curricula seems directly related to the amount of autonomy they perceived having; thus, an overriding theme in the data focuses on issues of autonomy. This theme reflects these teachers' varying views and opinions regarding autonomy and the ways they discuss autonomy. A few teachers consider *owning their own classroom* to signify autonomy. Related to the idea of owning one's classroom, another teacher specifically considered autonomy as the ability to exercise professional judgment:

I want more autonomy—I would say I wish I had more time in my day. My schedule is so rigid, and I teach two math blocks, and I am supposed to use [a scripted curriculum] and that is to have my kids count, and they can do that. Why can't I do something like inquiry-based math? I wish I had the opportunity to have professional judgment and knowledge, instead of making me do scripted [lessons]. Why can't I have my kids do a service project? I would like to make my classroom more personalized for my kids.

Some teachers were fearful and cautious about how they exercised autonomy; one teacher stated,

I can make those autonomous decisions in my classroom, but someone is going to come back and say where does this align. How am I utilizing all of the things that they expect? There comes a point when I have to legitimize everything

Another teacher in this study stated, "Many schools do not allow teachers to use scripted curricula as resources and make it their own."

A majority of the teachers wished they had more autonomy, but one teacher, who designed her own curriculum during her first year and used a scripted curriculum during her second year, discussed feeling both extremes. She stated,

The good thing about it is that my school doesn't necessarily dictate how you teach those lessons, so you if have the time and energy to plan lessons to engage your students, you can do that, but some teachers, who don't have that wherewithal, are just teaching to the test....I spend a lot of time trying to make what is going on in my classroom meaningful now and also later in life. I am not sure I would love having everything dictated, not having any freedom to decide what is best for your classroom, yourself, and your students, would be frustrating to say the least. Also, as a second-year teacher, I don't have the audacity to say I know everything, so I would try things that people say work.

This teacher represents the findings of the Kauffman et al. (2002) study, which state that teachers want guidance and support, but they do not want to be told

exactly what to do. Additionally, these teachers, aware of their status as novices, question the benefits of scripted curricula but also lack expertise to know what to do. These teachers also questioned the quality of instruction they provided with scripted curricula:

As a teacher, they gave me this curriculum. This works, don't question it, just use it. I have concerns and gut reactions, but I don't have the resources to know better. The consequences are not just from the administration, but scripted curricula is handed to teachers who are new to teaching and may not have the experience to know what else to do... You say I am doing great job, but is that really what a great job is? At the same time, is this is kind of teacher that I want to be?

Although more research is needed about new teachers and TFA teachers' experiences with scripted curricula, it is clear from this study that these TFA teachers want the autonomy to exercise professional judgment when they believe it is necessary.

### ***Monitoring and Oversight***

In this sample, issues of autonomy directly relate to the amount of monitoring or oversight teachers experienced. As mentioned above, teachers' views concerning autonomy frequently depended on the school context. The teachers were often able to exercise more professional judgment based on how much they were monitored. However, as Kohl (2009) states, even though monitoring agents cannot be everywhere at once, the teachers in this study still feel the pressures of surveillance and accountability. For example, one teacher stated that he had not been observed once this year, yet, he remains hesitant to deviate and exercise professional judgment about the order concepts are taught:

I would skip around if I had the freedom to. If I did skip around, whether anyone would notice, I am not sure. In terms of when [someone] comes in, we are warned, we need to be where we are supposed to be. That would be my only hesitation. Also, the amount of time we give to each concept. It would make much more sense to spend more time on the core concepts.

Some teachers are monitored more frequently, and in some of these schools, the pay of teachers is related to student performance. A teacher at a school practicing performance based pay commented about being observed: "You bet I made sure that everything was aligned. My lesson was hyper aligned to the rubric, and I did really well." The monitoring and oversight at schools, especially at those practicing performance-based pay, effects how and if teachers deviate from the curriculum. The teachers in this study expressed that teachers who have good classroom management and/or their students perform well on tests were monitored less and therefore seem to have more opportunities to exercise professional judgment:

I feel like there are times when I make a judgment call that an objective is not an appropriate objective; it is not what I am supposed to do. There are times when I feel like whole weeks are off, and I have gone to my supervisor, and I change

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the order. On paper, I am not supposed to have that freedom. I take the liberty myself...I feel lucky as someone whose classroom is not considered a hot spot, so I am someone who is not checked in on a lot. Otherwise, other teachers may have trouble making those calls on their own.

Teachers who were considered “hot-spots” were monitored more frequently; this was expressed in other interviews as well: “They trust my judgment a little bit more...it sort of lets me slide under the radar a little bit. They don’t check up on me as much.” The teachers in this study viewed monitoring and oversight in conflicting lights. Many of them expressed frustration when they were observed constantly. However, some teachers expressed a desire for more feedback.

#### **Curricular Deviation**

The teachers’ ability to make autonomous decisions and adjust curricula based on their professional judgment influenced how they experienced scripted curricula. Some teachers took more risks than others, and this often related to how frequently they were monitored, as one teacher stated, “But they are not [in my classroom], and so I take that risk.” When asked if he deviates from the curriculum, a teacher answered,

Do I deviate? Yes. Because that is what my students need...and hopefully I don’t get caught...If I recognize things that my students need, they are absolutely going to get that, and if the [curriculum] doesn’t address that, sorry for the [curriculum]. I am going to do what works in my classroom.

Some schools have the philosophy, as one teacher put it, “If you don’t do it, you are not welcome in our building.” Even teachers who deviated, acknowledged that they were still teaching to a test:

Even though I deviate from the curriculum, the reality is I am teaching to a test. I have a [test] in six weeks, I meet with my principal, and we use a [scripted curricular] model, and everything has to be 100% aligned...Day one, teach problem one, day two teach problem two.

As one teacher recommended,

It is frustrating to see that something is not working but not knowing how to problem solve as well. That should be something TFA should do – train corps members on how to interact with leadership and how to present effective solutions orientated ideas to people in power.

#### **Meeting Students’ Needs**

In this study, the ability for teachers to adjust instruction to best meet the needs of their students is directly connected to their autonomy, the extent to which they were monitored, and their perceived ability to deviate from the curriculum when necessary. Although the teachers exercised their professional judgment to varying



degrees, the TFA teachers in this study discussed how they became frustrated when they were not able to meet their students' needs, as this teacher expressed:

Why do I need to spend time teaching to the test when my kids have proven themselves? They said this is what you teach, and this is what you do, and if we come in and it is not aligned, you will get marked down.

Many of these teachers referenced how scripted curricula do not meet the needs of all of their students. One teacher stated, “[The scripted curriculum] was just for low level students; my high level students were bored. It is very boring and repetitious—very easy questions.” Additionally, the expectation at many of these teachers' schools was that students practice independently in complete silence; a teacher noted that not all students, just like adults, learn best in that manner. This teacher stated,

Look at a PD [professional development] and see how many teachers are really paying attention. If you can't expect teachers to do it, I mean granted teachers are the worst students, if you can't expect adults who are self managers to be able to do this, why do we expect kids to be able to do it?

The teachers in this study were frustrated when the scripted curricula got in the way of meeting their students' needs. Teachers discussed issues of equity as a part of their frustration when they perceived they could not meet their students' needs. Another teacher believed that all students were not being served equally in his school: “[T]here have been initiatives and talk to get rid of the bad kids and send them away, which is then we are just skimming the cream again, which is the common criticism of charters.” One teacher stated,

You don't ask questions, you read what you are supposed to do, and if you don't understand, you read over it again. If someone can do that, a teacher is dispensable, and that is not how it should be, especially for our kids. They need the most, and yet we are giving them robots.

## **Discussion**

The ways these second-year TFA teachers experienced scripted curricula depended on their perceptions of autonomy, the frequency with which they were monitored, how much they deviated from the curriculum, and their desire to meet their students' needs. Analyzing the data illustrates three experiences common to all of the participants. First, the teachers demonstrate a heightened sense of teacher dispensability as a result of the school district layoffs. Second, directly related to this sense of dispensability, the teachers face ethical dilemmas in regards to scripted curricula. The TFA teachers are left with the dilemma of whether they follow the scripted curriculum faithfully or risk deviating and possibly the threat of losing their jobs. Despite studies (e.g., Mikuta & Wise, 2008) that contend that TFA teachers

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view their time in the corps as service rather than a career, the teachers in this study were concerned about losing their jobs and this in turn affected the risks they took in the classroom.

Additionally, as alternatively certified teachers who may not have a background in the subject they teach, the TFA teachers in this study acknowledge that they do not always know the best pedagogical approach. However, the teachers state that they know their students and want to create the best learning opportunities for them. The teachers in this study face moral dilemmas when they perceive that the strict guidance gets in the way of giving students genuine opportunities to learn. These moral dilemmas may be heightened as a result of their preparation as TFA teachers. For example, TFA teachers are encouraged to adopt a sense of urgency to improve education for students in under-resourced communities (Farr, 2010). However, similarly to the new teachers in the Kauffman et al. (2002) study, the TFA teachers in this study maintain that they know that they do not have all the answers and want guidance, yet they become frustrated when the scripted curriculum inhibits them from meeting the needs of their students and creating the meaningful learning experiences that Dewey (1916/2011) and Freire (1970/2000, 1998) describe. The teachers in this study questioned the quality of education afforded by the scripted curricula. As a result, their experiences with scripted curricula include issues of autonomy, the extent to which they were monitored, curricular deviation, and the desire to meet their students' needs.

Third, while some of the teachers deviated from the curriculum more than others, they all experienced the pressures of accountability that Herr and Arms (2004) depict as well as a version of the panopticon as described by Kohl (2009). Furthermore, the descriptions of the state of education portrayed in both Ball (2003) and Kohl (2009) make it clear that school leaders, district officials, and policy makers should revisit the purpose of education and re-think what purpose these current reforms serve. Although Kauffman et al. (2002) assert that new teachers need more support, the teachers in their study as well as the TFA teachers in this one do not desire complete dictation. Schools have the potential to live up to the purpose Dewey (1916/2011) illustrates; however, limiting teacher autonomy by imposing reforms such as scripted curricula does not appear to be the answer. I do not want to believe that schools represent the educational panopticon or are a place in which teachers, as Ball (2003) states, struggle over their souls. However, as teacher autonomy continues to diminish, one must consider the types of teachers who will be attracted to this profession. If this is the way that public education will go, private education is unlikely to follow and subsequently public education will, as Bourdieu (1986) believes, continue to reproduce the status quo instead of change it. The transformative power of schools and teachers that Mills (2008) describes is vital; however, reforms that limit teachers' abilities to exercise professional judgment may also be limiting teacher efficacy and student potential.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, issues of equity must be considered in relation to reforms such as scripted curricula. Administrators, school district officials, and policy makers should seriously consider the local nature of teaching that Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe. The TFA teachers in this study demonstrate that a teacher's ability to meet the individual needs of students is related to teacher autonomy and the ability to exercise professional judgment. A scripted curriculum or a mandated instructional model will never meet all students' needs. Future research regarding new teachers' experiences with scripted curricula is needed to help determine the balance between support and dictation that Kauffman et al. (2002) illustrate. Additional research is also needed to consider if or how TFA teachers differ from other new teachers in regards to experiences with scripted curricula. The teachers in this study did not necessarily always act based on their beliefs in the TFA mission. In regards to scripted curricula, some teachers in this study acknowledged that they did not know exactly what to do, and some were more hesitant to deviate than others for that reason. Furthermore, the teachers in this study witnessed and experienced district layoffs that may have contributed to their hesitancy to deviate. As stated above, these teachers consistently referenced wanting to do what they believed was best for their students.

## **Implications**

This study presents potential implications for TFA to consider addressing scripted curricula in their teacher-training programs. As TFA attempts to effect educational change (Kopp, 2008), one TFA teacher in this study suggested that TFA help corps members become effective agents of change within their schools. It would be useful for TFA to explicitly help corps members present "solutions orientated ideas to people in power," as a second-year TFA teacher recommended.

This study has possible implications for schools, districts, and policies dealing with issues of teacher retention, satisfaction, and professionalism. Although all of the teachers indicated that they would stay in teaching, many noted during the interviews that they were considering changing schools. The moral dilemmas described above as well as issues of satisfaction and professionalism are directly related to teacher retention. For example, the teachers in this study considered changing schools in order to have more autonomy or because of disagreements with their school's educational philosophy.

As alternatively certified teachers, the participants in this study acknowledged that they may not have all of the content or pedagogical knowledge, yet they still know their students and want to be able to make the best decisions for them. These teachers questioned the quality of instruction they provided with scripted curricula. Because increasing numbers of teachers earn certification through non-traditional routes (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Garcia & Huseman, 2009; Feistritzer, 2009), additional research that considers how to support TFA and other

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alternatively certified teachers to deal with significant pedagogical issues—such as scripted curricula—that arise in the era of high stakes testing and accountability is of vital importance.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup> The Kauffman et al. (2002) study interviewed fifty first and second year teachers in Massachusetts including teachers at “traditional public schools and at charter schools; at urban schools and suburban schools; and at elementary, middle, and high schools” (p. 276).

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