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Power and Agency in a High Poverty Elementary School: How Teachers Experienced a Scripted Reading Program

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Abstract: This phenomenological investigation was designed to answer the following question: In this school, what were teachers' experiences with a scripted reading program? Seventeen teachers were interviewed at the end of the first year of implementing a scripted program. Four themes emerged from this analysis: (1) The program supported teachers' work with the most struggling students; (2) Teachers' forced enactment of the program led to negative outcomes for students; (3) The program had a negative impact on teachers' psychological well-being; and (4) Teachers are impacted by a hierarchical system that dictates who has the power to make decisions within the institution. Teachers' statements indicated that they demonstrated agency by occasionally diverging from the script or supplementing it in various ways. Still others chose to resist by leaving the school. Using post-intentional phenomenology as a theoretical framework, results are discussed through a sociopolitical lens and suggest that a market ideology can have considerable impact on how literacy instruction is realized in schools.

Keywords: Scripted Reading Program; Phenomenology; Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction; Sociopolitical Context

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Scripted reading programs became popular after the publication of the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000), which presented a comprehensive review of experimental and quasi-experimental research on reading instruction.[1] The findings of this research were codified in the *Reading First* program, which provided federal funds to support reading improvement in schools. *Reading First* required states to provide evidence that their instructional practices would be "research-based," and districts were encouraged to adopt programs that were designed using "scientific evidence."

Many scholars—including one member of the National Reading Panel--have criticized the NRP for ignoring research that examined the sociocultural dimensions of literacy and for promoting structured phonics and phonemic awareness over more balanced literacy approaches (Camilli, Vargas & Yurecko, 2003; Coles, 2000, 2007; Garan, 2004; Yatvin, 2000). Publishing companies, however, were quick to respond by developing curricula that fit the criteria mandated by *Reading First*. Many of these programs went beyond traditional basal reading programs in that they were "scripted"; that is, they specified the exact words and gestures that teachers and students were to use in reading instruction. Hence, they were designed to be "teacher-proof": Anyone could implement the program once they learned how to carry out the script.

This phenomenological study investigates the impact of a scripted program in an urban, culturally and linguistically diverse, low socioeconomic elementary school. Our intent was to explore how teachers within this context experienced a scripted reading program while also facing the challenges

associated with working in a high poverty environment. The focus question for our research was this: In this school, what were teachers' experiences with a scripted reading program? In this article, we first examine the relevant literature and the sociocultural context for the study. We then discuss post-intentional phenomenology as a philosophical stance and present the specific methods used in our investigation. These sections are followed by the results of our data analysis and a critical exploration and interpretation of those data.

Relevant Literature

While numerous articles have been published warning of the potential problems with scripted reading programs and discussing their effects on students (e.g., Commeyras, 2007; Demko and Hedrick, 2010; Ede, 2006; Milosovic, 2007; Powell, McIntyre & Rightmyer, 2006), few have actually documented their effects on teachers. Those studies are briefly examined here. Dresser (2012) presents an action research study in which she worked with teachers to embed Reciprocal Teaching and Narrow Reading into the scripted reading program. An unintended finding of this project was that teachers expressed reluctance toward teacher-designed instruction, even though they felt the interventions were beneficial for their students. Shelton (2010) examined the impact of fidelity to a scripted program, *Reading Mastery*, in two third grade classrooms and concluded that the program provided limited instruction with no opportunities to connect literacy to students' lives. This study analyzed lesson implementation but did not address the impact of the program on teachers.

Parks and Bridges-Rhoads (2012) investigated the ways in which a highly scripted literacy curriculum

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[1] We acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that we can use when referring to individuals in our writing. Throughout this article we use the gender-neutral pronoun "they" in an

effort to recognize the fluid nature of identity and to avoid making assumptions about the ways individuals identify or refer to themselves.

shaped a preschool teacher's instructional practices in mathematics instruction. Findings indicated that the teacher used conversational patterns resembling the scripted curriculum (i.e., prompts) when teaching math, and there was a focus on correct answers versus reasoning or problem solving. Further, the researchers concluded that the scripted program discouraged teacher professional development in that the teacher and paraprofessional "had little support for learning instructional practices that drew out or built upon children's mathematical knowledge and reasoning" (p. 318).

Two qualitative studies addressed the experiences of classroom teachers with scripted programs. Duncan Owens (2010) shared the results of interviews with 12 demonstration teachers who used the scripted program *Read Well*. She found that throughout the year, teachers' initially positive perceptions shifted as they became more frustrated with the program, and in January they began to alter their instruction to better meet the needs of their students. Teachers in her study expressed concern with the scant attention to reading comprehension, the restrictions on student advancement to higher groups, and the prevalence of decodable text versus more authentic literature. Owens also found that implementation of *Read Well* caused a shift in the ways teachers talked about their students, from discussing their individual needs to perceiving their progress in terms of the program. The author concluded that the program had a negative impact on teachers, stating that "the use of scripted programmes has the potential to diminish [their] professional competence, confidence and effectiveness" (p. 117).

Griffith (2008) conducted a phenomenological investigation that examined how the use of *Voyager* impacted teachers' "professional spirits." Prior to implementing *Voyager*, teachers had used a balanced literacy program that included shared reading, guided reading and many opportunities for student independent reading. The four teachers who participated in the study perceived themselves as professionals and were able to articulate clearly their beliefs about how children learn. These teachers reported a range of negative emotions from their experiences with a scripted program, and were frustrated and even insulted by the mandate to use a "teacher-proof" curriculum. Griffith reports that "Three of the four teachers talked of ways to flee the situation either by leaving the school, leaving the district, or leaving the teaching profession altogether" (p. 129).

MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, and Palma (2004) suggest that requiring teachers to implement a scripted reading curriculum is a form of colonization. Applying ideas from neocolonial theory, they argue that power structures within schools serve to control teachers' work. This control is manifested through a process of socialization, where teachers' identities are redefined as "the other," and by limiting their professional autonomy. The authors assert that the power of the colonizer ("the district") is maintained through surveillance:

> Initially, surveillance is framed as helpfulness. . . However, in and of itself, surveillance does not necessarily negate dissent, nor does it relegate the colonized to an officially passive stance. Indeed, any level of resistance from the colonized justifies ongoing monitoring. (pp. 134-135)

By examining the phenomenon of a scripted reading program in a high poverty elementary school, the current study seeks to identify the ways in which the hegemonic structure in schools influences the ways in which teachers experience their work. We found the notion of colonization to be helpful as we examined the data, and will return to these ideas in our concluding thoughts.

Context and Purpose of the Study

We begin to frame this investigation by presenting culturally responsive literacy instruction (CRLI) as a contrasting backdrop to the scripted reading instruction that occurred in this study. In CRLI, teachers build bridges between school and home, using students' language and cultural knowledge to make important conceptual links (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Gutiérrez, 2008; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). A growing body of research suggests that literacy instruction that is culturally responsive can enhance the achievement of underrepresented students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Lee, 1995, 2001; Powell, Cantrell, Malo-Juvera & Correll, 2016; Rickford, 2001).

Another important element of CRLI is developing sociopolitical consciousness, where students and teachers use literacy for social and economic transformation (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008; Powell, 1999; Wallowitz, 2008). Culturally responsive literacy instruction is also committed to sustaining families' languages and cultures (Paris, 2012) and to creating an equitable classroom environment that conveys high expectations and that supports and affirms students' linguistic and cultural knowledge (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

One critical element of CRLI is agency. That is, teachers must have autonomy to take risks and to make changes to their instructional practices based upon their knowledge of the students and families they serve. Hence, at its core, culturally responsive literacy instruction is empowering for both teachers and students. Often, this requires "teaching against the grain" (Simon, 1992)—tossing out conventional instructional materials or using them sparingly so that students' lives are at the center of instruction.

> **"Thus, students learn the conventions of written and oral language through engagement in meaningful reading, writing, and dialogue."**

Similarly, students are empowered to use literacy for real purposes and audiences, e.g., to communicate their points of view, to take a stand, to engage in solving real world issues and problems. Thus, students learn the conventions of written and oral language through engagement in meaningful reading, writing, and dialogue.

The first author of this paper serves as an instructional coach in elementary schools, working side-by-side with teachers to assist them in implementing CRLI. Two years ago, she worked at a high poverty, diverse elementary school in a medium-sized Midwestern city that served grades 3-5. The community surrounding the school had experienced a great deal of violence, and police were collaborating with local churches and schools to wage an anti-violence campaign. Powell worked with fifth grade teachers and students on several initiatives designed to empower students to join this campaign. For instance, students wrote anti-violence essays and raps and several presented their ideas and performed at a "Take Action Day," which was attended by local dignitaries and members of the community. They also wrote essays on how to improve the local park, and several students read their essays to members of the city council. Through all of these projects, students were involved in meaningful writing and were guided in how to craft an argument for a real audience. That same year, fourth grade students wrote letters to the editor on a national pipeline project that was slated to be built through our state. This project was highly controversial, and students heard from opponents and proponents before writing their letters, several of which were published in local newspapers.

In addition to authentic writing projects, teachers at the school were committed to exposing their

students to authentic children and young adult literature. Fifth grade teachers read texts such as *Chains* (Anderson, 2010) and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Douglass, 1999) with their students to enhance their social studies units. Third and fourth grade teachers were also committed to reading young adult texts, including multicultural literature, and guiding students' understanding of these texts.

We provide a brief summary of the literacy instruction leading up to this study because, in October of the study year, everything changed. When the scripted reading materials finally arrived, teachers were required to abandon their literacy instructional practices and to read and write authentic texts at odd times during the week— whenever they could manage to fit it in. Following the advice of district administrators, the school had made the decision to purchase a phonics-based scripted curriculum, and student assessment determined that most of the students in the school should be placed in a targeted reading intervention program referred to as "corrective." Students were divided into small groups for "corrective reading" each day, with the most struggling readers meeting with reading specialists for their reading instruction.

Purchase of the program also included a coaching component. A company coach observed in classrooms several times during the year and gave feedback to teachers on the degree to which they were implementing the program with fidelity. Lessons consisted of exact scripts that teachers and students were required to repeat along with specific accompanying gestures. Teachers were trained on signaling and other elements of the program and were told not to diverge from the manual.

It should be noted that the primary school also began implementing the same scripted program. The first author had served as a culturally responsive literacy coach there the previous year, during which authentic literacy instruction had been encouraged. In the prior year, K – 2 students had written class newspapers, letters and personal narratives and were reading children's literature and even short novels. Thus, teachers went from a situation where they were encouraged to implement authentic literacy instruction, to one in which they were told to follow a script.

As teachers began implementing the scripted program, it was clear that many had strong feelings about it. While some saw its benefits, many resented the fact that, in their view, they could no longer practice and grow in their craft as literacy instructors. It is important to state up front that Powell was not a detached "participant observer" in these dynamics, but rather remained clearly partial to more authentic and meaningful literacy instruction. Her role during that year became one of aiding teachers in overcoming the barriers they felt with the program, helping them determine ways of guiding students' literacy development in more authentic ways during the few minutes they had carved out during the week for additional instruction.

As the year progressed, many teachers were becoming more frustrated with the mandate to implement the program with fidelity, and they perceived that it was not meeting all of their students' needs. Although some teachers were satisfied with some aspects of the program, others felt the program served some students well but not others. Thus, the aim of our research was to capture teachers' experiences with a scripted reading program as it was implemented in a high poverty, diverse elementary school.

Philosophical Perspective

Given the purpose and nature of the study, we selected Phenomenology as our method of inquiry. Phenomenological research "describes the meaning

for several individuals of *their lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). A central idea in phenomenology is the notion of intentionality, which implies an inseparable connectedness between humans (subjects) and the world (objects). That is, humans are *in* the world, not separate from it. Vagle (2014) writes that "When one studies something phenomenologically . . . [o]ne is studying *how* people are connected meaningfully with the things of the world" (p. 27).

Phenomenology acknowledges that researchers, too, come with their own experiences from being in the "lifeworld," e.g., the historical, sociocultural and political environment in which we engage and interact and which is at the heart of our intersubjective experience (Husserl, 1954/1970). Therefore when examining a particular phenomenon, researchers can never assume a "neutral" or "objective" stance. Thus, doing phenomenological research requires researchers to give voice to their own experiences with the phenomenon and to "bracket" or "bridle" their pre-understandings and assumptions. Bracketing implies an explicit process of becoming aware of and "setting aside" one's assumptions about the phenomenon being investigated so they do not influence one's understanding of how participants (e.g., "co-researchers") experience that phenomenon. Similarly, bridling is a process of interrogating one's assumptions throughout the investigation so that the researcher remains open to any meanings that might emerge. Finlay (2009) suggests that "[r]esearchers' subjectivity should . . . be placed in the foreground so as to begin the process of separating out what belongs to the researcher rather than the researched" (p. 12).

Finlay (2009) further writes that "[t]he researcher needs to avoid preoccupation with their own emotions and experience if the research is not to be pulled in unfortunate directions which privilege the researcher over the participant" (p. 13). Admittedly,

this was identified as a problem early in our research investigation, as the scripted reading program severely limited the ability of the CRLI coach (the first author) to assist teachers in implementing culturally relevant literacy practices. At the same time, Finlay suggests that

> [o]ne possible way of avoiding this trap is to embrace the intersubjective relationship between researcher and researched. . . If this more explicitly relational approach to phenomenological research is adopted, data is seen to emerge out of the researcher-coresearcher relationship, and is understood to be co-created in the embodied dialogical encounter. (p. 13)

Indeed, the relationship between researcher and participants and their emotional connection to the phenomenon became an advantage in that it led to rich conversations that allowed us to uncover a depth of meaning that might otherwise not have been possible. At the same time, it often became apparent that we had to honor the teachers' voices and "bridle" our own assumptions, both as we engaged in those conversations and as we analyzed the data.

Through the process of bridling and continuous reflection throughout the research process, it became clear to us that we needed to frame our emerging understanding through a post-structuralist lens. That is, we wanted to do more than simply describe the "essence" of the phenomenon; rather, we felt the teachers—through the very act of agreeing to communicate with us—were taking a political stance against hegemonic forces that controlled their daily work. Similarly, comments in several of the interviews implied a form of resistance to this control and a frustration over their lack of autonomy. Thus, we found Vagle's (2014) notion of "post-intentional phenomenology" to be highly appealing.

Vagle (2014) describes post-intentional phenomenology as the basis for a political philosophy where "phenomenology [is put] into play, or interplay, with more disruptive theories/methodologies" (p. 115). In gathering our data and conducting our analysis, we attempted to capture the "lifeworlds" of the teachers—to give them a space where their voices mattered, where they could freely express their understandings, assumptions and emotions about the phenomenon. This act in itself we viewed as political, for these participant co-researchers were taking risks within an environment where criticism was discouraged and where they experienced sanctions for making their opinions known.

In his conceptualization of post-intentional phenomenology, Vagle (2014) examines three post-structuralist aspects. First, post-structuralism assumes that "all things are connected and interconnected in all sorts of unstable, changing, partial, fleeting ways" (p. 118). In our own work as critical theorists, we take this to mean that humankind is connected to a web of larger cultural, social and political structures—structures that are grounded in hegemonic forces within our society that both divide and oppress. Second, post-structuralism allows us to move beyond the rigid, "stable essences" of previous phenomenological work and to seek "lines of flight"—those ways of exploring phenomenon that "explode" our thinking. Vagle writes that "[t]he concept of lines of flight can help us think differently in phenomenology about lived experiences and knowledge. It assumes that knowledge takes 'off' in ways that we may not be able to anticipate" (p. 119). Finally, as post-

intentional phenomenologists, "we are encouraged to make every effort to identify and boldly follow possible lines of flight toward something either not-yet-discovered or unknown" (p. 119).

From our perspective, such lines of flight can move us into the political as we explore participants' in-the-world experiences within the educational institution, an institution that we argue is influenced by sociopolitical forces beyond its walls. Hence, post-intentional phenomenology challenges Cartesian ideology by elevating the voices of those who are marginalized as they reflect upon their experiences—experiences that are always confined within and shaped by larger social structures. In other words, it allows us not only to examine the relationships between subjects (humans) and objects (other humans and things in the world), but also the ways in which hegemony defines and influences those relationships.

> **"From our perspective, such lines of flight can move us into the political as we explore participants' in-the-world experiences within the educational institution, an institution that we argue is influenced by sociopolitical forces beyond its walls."**

In the pages that follow, we provide details on the methodology used in this research project along with a detailed examination of the process used in data analysis. We then present our findings and examine those findings through a critical lens.

Method

There are many variations of methodological approaches that have been described in the literature, all claiming to use Phenomenology as their investigative method. One of the pioneers in psychological phenomenology, Amedeo Giorgi, asserts that there are three basic and interlocking steps in the phenomenological method: (1) phenomenological reduction, (2), description, and

(3) search for essences (Giorgi, 1997; as cited in Finlay, 2009, p. 7). Others take a more creative approach in analyzing the data, preferring less mechanistic procedures (e.g., Koonce, 2012; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 1990). All phenomenological investigations, however, move from looking at the whole (a holistic reading of the text), to examining the parts (studying the details), and then moving back to the whole. The movement from whole to part throughout the analytic process is not necessarily done sequentially but rather dynamically, as one explores and reflects upon the meanings that are revealed in each protocol. We elected to use Giorgi's six steps (as described in Valle & Halling, 1989) to analyze the data in order to uncover essential meanings in the interview protocols. In this section, we outline the details of how we conceptualized and conducted the investigation and the steps we used to transform the data using Giorgio's stages of psychological reflection.

Selection of Participants

Because the purpose of Phenomenology is to clarify the nature of a particular phenomenon, it is typically recommended that at least three participants be interviewed (Englander, 2012). If the aim of the research is for greater generalization, then a wider sample, representing different understandings and interpretations, is required. Studying the nature of a phenomenon, however, "involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning" (King, 2014, p. 170). Thus, the number of subjects recommended for a phenomenological investigation is typically small. Further, unlike other forms of research, participants are not selected randomly; rather, purposive sampling is used in order to elicit data relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

Seventeen elementary teachers were interviewed for this study. To get a range of perspectives, teachers were intentionally selected who taught at different grade levels and who held various areas of expertise. The fact that the first author knew all of the participants personally greatly facilitated the recruitment process. She began by recruiting teachers who had expressed opinions about the program and seemed eager to share their experiences. Other teachers (e.g., special educator, reading interventionists and ESL teachers) were recruited in order to get a broader perspective on the phenomenon of a scripted program across different student populations. All of these teachers were very willing to participate in the study. Finally, four of the primary teachers who taught in another building were recruited. One of these teachers served on a district-wide committee with the interviewer and had expressed strong concerns about the program publicly; the other three agreed to take part during a chance encounter with the first author. The fifth primary teacher was recruited in order to balance the investigation by including a teacher from every grade. All participants were required to sign a consent form as part of the Institutional Review Board approval process. Appendix A provides information on each participant.

The Interviews

King (2014) suggests that the phenomenological interview should be considered to be more of an "inter-view," e.g., an "interchange of views between people on a topic of shared interest" (p. 172). While interviews are socially contrived events versus natural encounters, they nevertheless provide the opportunity to exchange ideas and explore complex issues. In the current research project, the researcher had served as a mentor and coach to most of the participants and, as noted previously, was also emotionally connected to the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, it was essential that she

"bridle" her own assumptions throughout the interview and data analysis process.

During each interview session, bridling was accomplished in several ways. First, interviews were intentionally conducted in pairs or small groups. This allowed for more productive conversations where participants engaged in back-and-forth interchanges around common topics, and these topics often diverged into other topics and ideas not anticipated by the researcher. Participants were paired with members of their instructional team and/or friendship circle in an effort to promote rich and natural conversations. Second, the researcher took on a stance of engaged listener, assuming a "phenomenological attitude" by consciously refraining from interrupting the flow of conversation and redirecting only when necessary. Third, the very nature of the relationship between researcher and co-researchers allowed participants to redirect the researcher—a process, as Walford (2001) suggests, where "interviewers and interviewees co-construct the interview" (cited in King, 2014, p. 172). Such moments within the interview itself provided opportunities for the researcher to interrogate her own assumptions about and interpretations of the phenomenon.

The interviews, then, became opportunities to explore the "lifeworlds" of the teachers as they experienced the scripted reading program. An interview guide was used and served as a reminder during each interview to pursue particular topics (see Appendix). The interviews themselves, however, were unstructured as participants co-constructed meaning, building on the thoughts of one another to arrive at a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Data Analysis

Consistent with phenomenological methodology, data analysis went from reading each protocol to get a sense of the whole, to examining details of each protocol to extract meaning, to then applying those details to the central question (returning to the whole). Each interview was transcribed, and the first author transcribed a second time so that teachers' exact wordings could be captured. This process allowed her to delve deeply into each oral protocol to the point where it was possible to reconstruct voice inflections upon subsequent readings of the written text, e.g., to reconstruct not only *what* was said, but *how* it was said. We believe that this is an essential component of phenomenological research. Researchers must be able to delve deeply into the emotional meanings for participants in order to extract deeper and hidden meanings. For four out of eight of the protocols, three individuals subsequently read each written transcript to "get a sense of the whole" and then parsed them into meaning units. A new meaning unit was demarcated whenever there was a change in subject matter or activities being described.

Next, we stated in a concise way and in our own language the meaning that dominated each unit. This is what Giorgi (1975a, 1975b) describes as *the first transformation*. We developed statements that depicted the essence of the meaning unit, "the meaning that dominates the natural unit" (Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 54). These statements were written in third person (i.e., The teachers express... The teachers believe...). In this first transformation, we tried to denote the substance of what the participants were saying and to retain the psychological character of the teachers' own words. We found this first transformation to be quite tedious as we often had multiple conversations about the meanings being conveyed by participants' statements in an effort to be precise in our interpretations. Indeed, this process served as another layer of "bridling" as these conversations helped us to name our own assumptions about the data. The first author completed these three steps

with the remaining four protocols, referring back to meaning unit statements already established and creating new statements when necessary. The second author then reviewed these protocols and any discrepancies were discussed until consensus could be reached.

The second transformation consisted of considering each meaning unit in relation to our central question: *What were teachers' experiences with a scripted reading program?* In this stage, the first two authors worked together to describe each meaning unit in relation to the larger research question. We also eliminated those transformations that were unrelated to the question. The third transformation consisted of a general structural description that was trans-situational; that is, we attempted to go beyond the specific situation described within specific protocols and to capture how the meaning units were related to each other and to the whole protocol. These structural transformations were used to identify the constituents or themes that emerged from the descriptions. Examples of the first three transformations can be found in Appendix B.

Findings

The third transformation resulted in seven trans-situational statements. By combining and subsuming some of the statements, they were reduced to a total of four higher-order themes: (1) The program supported teachers' work with the most struggling students; (2) Teachers' forced enactment of the program led to negative outcomes for students; (3) The program had a negative impact on teachers' psychological well-being; and (4) Teachers are impacted by a hierarchical system that dictates who has the power to make decisions within the institution. Each of these themes will be discussed in turn.

Support for the Most Struggling Students

The first theme was not the most prominent, but is noteworthy nonetheless: most of the teachers we interviewed expressed that the program was supportive for their very lowest readers. They noted that it provided a great deal of structure and reinforced phonics skills that some of their struggling readers lacked. Some also mentioned that they liked some of the components of the program. The following statements were typical:

Excerpt One:

James: [K]ids that were having major problems with decoding, that's what was holding them back, I've seen major gains because comprehension wasn't the issue for them. It was decoding.

Excerpt Two:

Kendra: I wanted them to feel successful. And so on some level they enjoyed it because they could do it. They could understand it, it wasn't so hard for them that they felt embarrassed to read out loud or anything like that.

These comments reveal that teachers found some benefits to the program, particularly for students who were appropriately identified and for students who needed targeted instruction in phonological skills.

Forced Enactment Led to Negative Outcomes for Students

A more pronounced theme, however, was a consistent belief expressed in the interviews that the program was damaging for many of the students. This belief was communicated in a variety of ways and tended to dominate teachers' conversations. Teachers said the scripted program emphasized accuracy over higher-level thinking. Further, most of the students in the intermediate grades were placed in "corrective reading," which was phonics-based

using contrived texts. There were many statements throughout the interviews in which teachers expressed frustration over the way the program defined reading, resulting in many students being placed below their actual reading levels. Further, teachers had no say in students' placements; rather, they were determined by a single test that accompanied the program. The following statements are typical of teachers' frustration over the placement process.

Excerpt One:

Lacey: I had kids who scored above the 70th percentile who were put in the intervention program...which starts on the third grade level.

Interviewer: They scored on the MAP test?

Lacey: On the MAP test and on the state test they scored distinguished and proficient. And they were...One of them was the 85th percentile on MAP and she was in a third grade intervention program.

Interviewer: And that was due to...

Lacey: The program where they were tested at the beginning said she belonged in this third grade group.

Nicole: And the reason why is. . . Here's some reasons why. She could have self-corrected herself.

Lacey: She did. And self-corrections are errors.

Nicole: Self-corrections are errors. She could also have skipped articles, pronouns...in this program those are errors. So this child who is scoring so well, but understands that she doesn't need the words "of," "the," "it," and "they" and omits them, and now she's being punished because she understands she doesn't need them?

Yeah. So she's there because of omitting words, fluency, self-corrections.

Lacey: She's in there because the program has failed her.

Nicole: The program has failed her.

Lacey: Yeah. And she's not the only one.

Excerpt Two:

Erica: Well then I think they also took students who were ELLs, that didn't speak any English over the summer. And the second day of school, I'm talking about Martinique [pseudonym]. I'm not saying that she is on level. I'm not saying that she is a third grade reader; but she is not a first grade reader.

Hannah: I feel like we are wasting their time.

Erica: She had spoken Spanish all summer long. She comes back to school, and she's asked to read a, a – fluency. And one of her things is she re-reads a lot, and those are errors. So I haven't seen her test, but I guarantee that her re-reads are probably what made her have too many errors and [she] had to stay in first grade. But she re-reads because she says that, um... she even asked me why it's an error. She said, "I'm re-reading because I want to make sure I understand the sentence." She even told me that. And I had to explain to her why a re-read is an error. Why is a re-read an error?

Hannah: Because we are testing word-calling, not comprehension.

Several teachers were concerned that the program did not promote higher level thinking, which was particularly problematic given the need to address the new, more rigorous common core English language arts standards. Many teachers used the term "robotic" to describe teachers' and students'

actions, and some shared that this low-level thinking even transferred to math in that students were not prepared to think critically. Interestingly, some teachers described how their students knew the work they were being given was not intellectually challenging.

Excerpt One:

Carmen: So then when the last week of school [got here] we were writing about the Lorax. What would you do if you found the last tree? And my students said, "How do we start?" And I literally wanted to take a fork and pull my eyeballs out. I said "Start it however you want." They said, "Okay, but how do we start it?"

Georgiana: They didn't know how to think, because they weren't taught how to think.

Mary: Right. That's really sad.

Excerpt Two:

Carmen: We would shut down [the program] and then expect to do math and we would be like all right, now we can work in groups, we can do stuff. And they couldn't do math. They would not think for themselves in math because all morning long I would say "No, the answer is dog. What's the answer? Dog."

Georgiana: And so they'd come up and they'd expect you to give them the answer and that was frustrating. And it was just... it was just frustrating to them because they didn't understand.

Carmen: They shut their brains down.

Another sub-theme that emerged from the protocols was a lack of student motivation resulting from the program. The following comments are typical.

> **"They didn't know how to think, because they weren't taught how to think."**

Excerpt One:

Carol: And they were like, "oh God, here are those actions again Ms. T." I mean I had kids literally... one child raised his hand and he goes, like he would have an attitude every day at this time. So one day I pulled him aside and I said, "okay. I have to be honest. I don't like this part of the day either, but the better we do it the first time around the less time it takes for us to get through this. How about we just do this together. If I do it quick, and you do it quick, we'll be done with it quicker." And he was like all right let's do this. And he was like "Let's roll." ...And I would look at him every day and [say] "We got this?" "Yeah. We got this." ... That's kindergarten telling you "I don't like this part of the day Ms. T."

Excerpt Two:

Jennifer: I mean we had kids before this program came, we were reading books about the Underground Railroad. And they really loved that. So then I did another book on Harriett Tubman, and then we went from Harriett Tubman to George Washington Carver because they just loved it and they just kept asking questions and wanted more information. So then that happened, the program, we adopted the program and I literally, I felt like they looked at me like I was crazy, because they go from reading a book, they literally go from reading a book and writing to listening to letter sounds in isolation and copying those down.

We believe it is important to mention a sub-theme that appeared in one of the protocols that was woven throughout the teachers' conversation, the concern that they were not able to develop students' social skills. Here is an excerpt from that protocol.

Mary: And they don't cooperate. You know from our goal at the beginning of the year, and my hopes, our hope was by the end of the year that we would have communities. We made communities where they worked together, they're kind to each other.

Carmen: Nope.

Mary: Um, and we just kind of obliterated that by controlling over half of their day, and telling them what to say, when to say it, how to say it. …And so I think whoever made that decision, I mean they didn't have the information to see long term what the consequences were gonna be.

Georgiana: They do not get positive social interactions [at home], a lot of our students, and now they're not getting it in school either. And so it's really hard as a teacher knowing that they're not getting these positive interactions at home and now they're not getting positive interactions here. And they have no idea how to work with one another at all. And it is so sad.

Finally, teachers were concerned that the program would hinder their students' progress in literacy. Many teachers compared their students' literacy achievement to previous years, when they had more flexibility and autonomy in making instructional decisions. Many were also concerned about the progress of their English learners because the program prohibited the use of authentic texts.

Excerpt One:

Anna: So I could see their interest waning and my frustration rising because I knew I was going to send them forward nowhere near prepared to enter third grade at the level they needed to…that I knew if I had the freedom to teach correctly that I could send the majority of those students darn close to grade level, if not above.

Excerpt Two:

Amy: And I feel like we're forgetting comprehension. And my fifth graders are going to middle school and they're gonna be word-callers and speed readers but they don't comprehend, and that's not okay.

Excerpt Three:

Carmen: It was hard, too, for some of my ESL low students when they would give you words. And some of the words in the story that were so similar, they would do like "dog" and "bog" in like the same story, and my students couldn't understand that story because "dog," like why are you putting "dog" and bog," like it was forced phonics that they couldn't comprehend because they're trying to figure it out. …They were just trying… is that a "d" or a "b"? Holy crap! Why are they putting so many d's and b's in the same story? That they would get so frustrated.

The teachers' statements above are representative of the many concerns they had about the negative ways in which the program impacted students. Teachers believed that not only was students' reading progress hindered through the program's narrow conceptualization of reading that emphasized word-calling over comprehension, but students' psychological and social well-being was also affected. Their students came from impoverished environments and were behind their grade-level peers in reading achievement, yet the program's placement process coupled with an emphasis on low-level thinking frustrated teachers' attempts to close the gap. Further, the robotic nature of the program negatively influenced student motivation and also hindered social interactions in the classroom—interactions they believed were particularly important for their students who lacked the conventions of classroom discourse. Thus, they felt the program had many damaging consequences

for their students who were still discerning the significance of literacy for their lives and who needed to acquire skills for working productively with peers.

Impact on Teachers' Psychological Well-being

A third theme that emerged from the interview protocols was the negative impact on teachers' psychological well-being as they experienced the implementation of the scripted reading program over the course of the year. As we read and re-read each protocol, we continued to be struck by the level of emotion that was evident, both in *what* teachers said, and *how* they said it. Teachers were clearly angry and resentful that they lacked the professional autonomy to make instructional decisions for their students. Some expressed frustration that they were unable to practice their craft; others experienced guilt and even pain. In the pages that follow, we provide salient examples of this particular theme that show the psychological impact the program had on teachers who were forced to implement it to fidelity, feeling that it was often harmful to their students.

Excerpt One:

Nicole: So for the first time in my—and I've taught 13 years—for the first time in my 13 years, I am not going to the bookstores to buy clearance books; I am not collecting a class set of books; I am not reading on my own so that I can prepare the kids for the next book coming; I am not investigating different texts so that I can bring them all together and show how they wind themselves together to make good literature. I'm not doing any of that anymore. I show up, I read a blue script, and that is it. I have read so many books about what great reading looks like, and I get excited. I am one of those people that I believe that if you're in my classroom, you will be excited about reading. That's my goal...My

personality is gone. My expertise as a reading teacher is gone.

Lacey: The excitement's gone.

Nicole: The excitement, the love.

Lacey: Yeah. Love.

Nicole: The passion.

Lacey: It's where love went to die.

Nicole: Yes. We are in reading hell. This is that purgatory level that reading teachers go to [when] they don't get to do what they want to do. This is what it is.

Lacey: This is it.

Excerpt Two:

Carol: I mean last year with my students last year I could do that [encourage reading books from book baskets] from day one, and so their engagement began on day one and only grew toward the end of the school year. This all of a sudden happened and I felt guilty, and I'm like I had these books on my shelf, I have left them on the shelf the entire year. I felt like an awful teacher.

Excerpt Three:

Mary: You can walk into my classroom when I'm teaching [the program] and you would think that I loved it. Because to my kids, you know, I was trying to be as enthusiastic as I could be. "Here's another story about the bragging rats. Let's see what they're going to do today!" You know and just trying as hard as I could when it was so painful. I mean the whole thing was just painful and sad the entire year.

In some cases, teachers' motivation for teaching was seriously affected. The following example is from a

conversation between a veteran teacher and two teammates who were in their first and second years of teaching.

> **Mary**: Seeing her coming in those first couple of months of school and even the very beginning so excited, [having] all of these wonderful ideas, and then [the program] came along for both of 'em and it's just... it was a very sad...

> **Georgiana**: Squelched my passion.

> **Mary**: ...just very, very sad to see that happening to them.

> **Georgiana**: So this year, this school, this program has completely ruined my hopes of ever teaching again. I have quit. I have no intent of ever going back and becoming a teacher. It has ruined me.

> **Mary**: But she will. She will. I keep telling her she will. She'll be a teacher again. It's gonna take a while to heal because it's just crushed your spirit.

> **Georgiana**: No. I mean, my spirit is crushed.

> **Carmen**: It's just that it's given me no hope in the education system. This is what we think works? This is what our leaders and our educators that are supposed to look out for children are doing? No one is looking out for the children. No one is listening to the teachers. I went to college and spent about 80 some thousand dollars to be treated like a robot and for my opinion not to matter.

As researchers, we were struck by the emotion that came through in several teachers' comments. Many of the teachers we interviewed chose to work in a diverse, high-poverty school, yet they were forced to comply with the program's script, which made it virtually impossible for them to practice their craft. As professionals, they were keenly aware that the

program was not meeting their students' needs, yet they felt powerless to change the situation. The outrage at being treated as unskilled workers, the lack of autonomy, and the sheer tediousness of implementing a robotic script led to psychological stress that was expressed throughout the protocols.

Who Has Instructional Decision-Making Power?

A fourth theme that emerged from teachers' interviews about their experiences with the program was consistent evidence that teachers are impacted by a hierarchical system that dictates who has the power to make decisions within the institution. Many of the teachers' comments in the interviews communicated their frustration over administrative decisions relating to the program. They expressed frustration about the mandate to follow the script precisely, inflexibility in student placements, a lack of materials, administrators' choice on which components of the program to purchase, and inconsistency in program implementation. Here are some typical comments:

> *Excerpt One:*

> **Whitney**: ...But the person who tested her must not have been able to understand what she was saying, 'cause, like I said, she kind of has a lisp. So I'm wondering if that's what it was because she had to have a lot of errors to test into Corrective A. So I voiced that in the beginning, another teacher voiced that, and nothing was done. And so honestly, I feel like we've wasted her year. Honestly I do.

> **Amy**: And I think that's a lot of the part of sticking rigidly to a scripted program, because we have data, the program says to do this. So we did this.

> *Excerpt Two:*

Kayla: When my kids were going into the new program, there were not books. So for a program that is promoted to push kids, you must not have thought these kids were gonna be pushed 'cause you didn't order the books for it.

Some teachers also felt school administrators were "victims" in that central office administrators encouraged them to purchase the program, and once purchased, they did not have the freedom or the power to abandon it. Thus, a hierarchy of power relations was revealed in the protocols, with teachers being at the bottom of the hierarchy, school administrators being in the middle, and central office administrators being the ultimate decision makers—while all conforming to the procedures mandated by the published materials. The following statements are representative:

Excerpt One:

Nicole: And that was another thing that was said. "Oh, the district's buying this for us. The district wants us to have this." And then we find out that we spent $110,000 on a program that none of us wanted.

Excerpt Two:

Kendra: But I'm wondering if our school and our coaches might be in a situation where they, you know, once this decision was made to go forward with this program and the funds were being spent on it, were they not really in a position to tell us, "Okay, you don't have to do that."

Jennifer: I don't think they were in a position to.

Kendra: So we were all I think feeling really stuck.

Jennifer: I think the administration felt probably just as stuck as we did.

At the same time, the teachers we interviewed were not willing to remain completely powerless; rather, they practiced agency by supplementing the program in various ways. Some diverged from the script periodically when they knew their children were unable to comprehend the text. Others provided additional literacy experiences for their students. Still, teachers were discouraged from deviating from the script—reinforced by periodic observations by the program's coach—and with only a couple of exceptions, students' placements remained "fixed." The following examples are representative.

Excerpt One:

Lacey: Fifth grade has been sneaking and reading chapter books in secretive ways. And that's sad when you have to sneak and read a novel. So that's how we've changed, is that, we've seen where this program is failing our students, and have tried to make up for it in other times of the day.

Excerpt Two:

Kayla: We were reading about a famous baseball player... And the kids wanted to know was it a real person. I said "I don't know. Let's look it up." Would I have gotten, I won't say in trouble, but would they have said something about it? Yeah, they would have. But the kids wanted to know that. ...Unannounced they come in and they have a sheet of what your book looks like and they can follow to see if you're on script or off script. And it was noted that I may not have done this or... Like they want... If a kid missed one word, you're supposed to have them go back and reread. To me that messes up the story.

Excerpt Three:

Lacey: And I had sent out an email and said, and I said, "Sometimes I ask questions connected to

skills from common core. Is that okay?" And I was told, "Not if it takes away from the program."

Still other teachers actively resisted by refusing to follow the script with fidelity and/or by leaving the school. In fact, some teachers were told that if they could not support the program, they should find another position.

Excerpt One:

Carol: And so what was told to our staff in one of our planning meetings, and I heard it was at first grade so I'm assuming it was at second grade as well, was if you don't feel that this is where you need to be because of this program, then next year you probably need to move on.

Anna: Yep. You're exactly right.

Excerpt Two:

Carmen: Towards the end of the year when I was really seeing that this was not working with my students, I would do silent vote. Do you want to do language? Do you not? Give me thumbs up, give me thumbs down. They would all give me a thumbs down, because none of my children enjoyed the program. So we would instead do, I would teach language in a different way on the smart board; hence why I quit working at the school.

We believe it is significant that six of the 17 teachers interviewed left the school that year. The three tenured teachers left voluntarily; it is unknown and beyond the scope of this study as to why the others did not renew their contracts. Four of the six

teachers are no longer in the classroom, while two are teaching at other schools.

Ultimately, however, it was the publishing company that had sovereignty in the hierarchical power structure. Viewing each protocol both individually and collectively, we were struck by the power of the market to determine what occurred in these classrooms. Company coaches were free to snatch the manual from teachers during observations in order to demonstrate "proper" implementation of the script, thereby undermining the teacher's authority. The school district trusted the company completely, believing that if the program was implemented with fidelity, literacy scores would improve. In the discussion that follows, we explore this phenomenon more closely, drawing on teachers' comments and examining them through a critical lens.

"In our investigation of teachers' experiences with a scripted reading program, teachers expressed that while the program benefited some students positively, it led to negative outcomes for most students."

Discussion

Unlike non-scripted reading programs, where skills and content are pre-determined yet teachers have some flexibility in how to guide student learning, scripted programs dictate precisely what teachers (and their students) are to say and do. In our investigation of teachers' experiences with a scripted reading program, teachers expressed that while the program benefited some students positively, it led to negative outcomes for most students. Teachers experienced a wide range of reactions, e.g., guilt, anger, pain--and were frustrated by their inability to meet students' academic and emotional needs. It was evident from teachers' comments that they felt caught in a hierarchical web that left them relatively powerless and that marginalized and even dismissed their professional knowledge.

Teachers' work does not exist in a vacuum, but rather occurs within a larger sociopolitical context that can have a profound effect on their lived experiences within the educational institution. It is important to acknowledge that schools are expected to promote dominant knowledge, which often results in restricting and even rejecting the cultural knowledge of historically underrepresented groups. Hence, educational institutions are not neutral sites (Apple, 1993; Freire, 1970/1993; Kincheloe, 1993; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987). Giroux (1988) writes that "[f]ar from being neutral, the dominant culture in the school is characterized by a selective ordering and legitimating of privileged language forms, modes of reasoning, social relations, and lived experiences" (p. xxx).

A dominant ideology also defines how literacy—and hence, literacy instruction—is conceptualized (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993: Perry, 2012; Powell, 1999). In his work with New Literacy Studies, Street (1995) differentiates between "autonomous" and "ideological" models of literacy. The autonomous definition, which has been embraced by schools and publishing companies, suggests that literacy is a neutral tool that consists of a series of discrete skills that can be atomized, packaged, and delivered to students. In contrast, an ideological perspective views literacy as social practice that is grounded in specific contexts. Hence, as Freire and Macedo (1987) have suggested, "Literacy and education in general are cultural expressions. You cannot conduct literacy work outside the world of culture because education in itself is a dimension of culture" (p. 53). Within the cultural world of school, dominant conceptualizations of literacy and literacy instruction are manifested daily through the realities of classroom life.

It could be argued that scripted reading programs are an extreme representation of an "autonomous" model of literacy in that they appear to be

"objective" while eradicating students' and teachers' voices. The socially and culturally embedded uses of literacy found in students' homes and communities are deemed irrelevant; rather, literacy is reduced to mastering a series of decontextualized skills and recalling discrete bits of information. Such managed curricula ultimately deskills teachers by eroding their decision-making authority.

Because the scripted program had such a negative impact on teachers, we believe it is important to interrogate the sociopolitical context within which teachers work so as to expose and critique the forces that serve to diminish teacher agency. It is interesting that some teachers were aware of the ideological forces that affected their practice. For instance, when asked why so many students were placed in "corrective reading," Kayla replied, "somebody needed to sell some books." Similarly, after seeing the corporate reading coach selling math curriculum at a mathematics conference, Hannah remarked that she clearly was not a reading specialist: "She's a salesperson; probably their top salesperson. Because she sold you all, a whole school... She sold a primary school first, second, third, fourth, fifth. That is a coup."

Teachers also acknowledged that such programs are viewed as antidotes to teacher incompetence, and are particularly popular in high-poverty schools, where student achievement tends to be lower. Anna remarked:

> Well, but I mean it's been said enough. I'm not sure it's been said in your team meetings that we obviously do not know how to teach reading because our students are at the level that they are. So they feel that this program, as scripted as it is, provides the structure for our teachers to enable them to become good reading teachers. And um, you know, and that was said.

A number of scholars have examined the political ties between business and education, suggesting that the demand for published literacy curricula—which has become a highly lucrative enterprise--may be economically motivated (e.g., Allington, 2005; Apple, 1993; Coles, 2000, 2003, 2007; Edelsky & Bomer, 2005; Garan, 2004; Goodman, 2014; Metcalf, 2002; Osborn, 2007). Berliner and Glass (2014) note that "News Corp CEO Rupert Murdoch has called public education a '$500 billion sector in the U.S. alone that is waiting desperately to be transformed'" (p. 6). Hence, literacy has been redefined from a sociocultural process that elicits collaborative inquiry, emotional response, critique, and even transformation, to a mechanistic practice that can be readily commodified into a series of measurable skills (Edelsky & Bomer, 2005; Irvine & Larson, 2007; Powell, 1999; Spears-Bunton & Powell, 2009). Corporate authority is justified through the perpetuation of a false notion that public education in the United States has largely failed (Berliner & Glass, 2014). Goodman (2014) puts it this way: "[T]he attack has aimed to paint universal public education as a failed institution: It cannot even teach children how to read" (p. 24).

In our study, the influence of the market was palpable. We were struck by the dominance of a market ideology that was manifested in a blind trust in the program to promote student literacy achievement. Interestingly, the trust in the script was so pervasive that before the program arrived in the fall, teachers reported that they were even told to apply its linguistic structures and gestures to an older reading series they were using. One teacher (Hannah) complained, "I'm not a book writer. I can't take their book and . . .follow the structure of this scripted program. But that's what we were made to do." The corporate coach had the ultimate voice in terms of how literacy instruction was carried out in classrooms. Thus, the corporation became the "professional authority" in terms of what was best

for students, trumping several teachers who held advanced degrees and even a college professor.

Indeed, administrators were so convinced that the program would eventually "work" that they were willing to accept lower test scores in the interim:

> **Mary**: And [our principal] kept saying "But, you know what, [the program] is going to take a while. They said our scores might go down before they will get better." And I don't know what they are expecting because I don't think the scores are ever going to get better unless we change the way we're teaching.

Teachers, then, were caught within a hegemonic system that gave an inordinate amount of power to the publishing company. Central school administrators trusted the corporation to deliver, believing that a program that claimed to be research-based would lead to higher test scores. School administrators, in turn, while they had some decision-making authority, felt obliged to use the scripted program that had been purchased for their schools and to assure that it was implemented with fidelity. On the bottom of the hierarchy were the teachers, who essentially had been stripped of their professional autonomy.

Others have written about the irony of the educational structure, where teachers are expected to be professional experts yet are systematically deskilled and controlled (e.g., Giroux, 1988; Kincheloe 1991; Luke, 1988). Giroux (1988) writes that school life is organized "around curricular, instructional, and evaluation experts who do the thinking while teachers are reduced to doing the implementing" (p. 124). While a hegemonic order has always existed in schools, corporate America has become increasingly influential in crafting educational policy.

What is often missing in discussions of reading failure is a deliberate misrepresentation of what

many have identified as the real culprit underlying student underachievement—persistent poverty (Berliner, 2009; Duncan Owens, 2010; Portes & Salas, 2009; Shannon, 2014). Hence, one could argue that poor literacy achievement among marginalized populations is not an educational issue, but rather a social one. Such problems require collective agency to solve, including a commitment to educational parity in funding and resources (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Luke, 2003). We argue that improving literacy outcomes for historically marginalized students also necessitates implementing more culturally appropriate and critical literacies where teachers and students use written and spoken language to engage in higher order thinking and to grapple with real-world problems and solutions (Powell, 1999; Shannon, 2014). Such literacy instructional practices would value students' cultural knowledge and lessen the gap between literacies inside and outside of school (McLean, Boling, & Rowsell, 2009; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). Perpetuating the myth that the "reading problem" can be solved through the market, however, increases profits while simultaneously diminishing the power of teachers to use literacy in transformative ways.

Limitations

Phenomenological studies are designed to capture the meaning of the lived experiences of those being interviewed. As noted previously, phenomenology involves purposive versus random sampling in participant selection, and therefore data are limited to the experiences of the selected participants. Further, the number of subjects is typically quite small. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that other teachers who were not interviewed might have had very different experiences with the program.

In addition, some researchers might argue that in utilizing Vagle's (2014) notions of post-intentional phenomenology, the "lines of flight" we pursue in our interpretations go beyond the data itself. We

recognize that our analysis takes a decidedly critical stance. At the same time, we argue that this analysis is very much grounded in teachers' statements, and in fact, ignoring the teachers' perceptions of the political nature of their work would be a misrepresentation of their statements.

Finally, while we took measures to bridle our own experiences and perspectives, it is possible that they nevertheless affected our interpretations and/or our conversations with teachers in ways in which we were unaware. We suggest, however, that research can never be completely objective, for our perspectives determine the very questions we ask and how we seek answers to those questions. Such is the nature of research in general, and phenomenological research in particular.

Conclusion

This article presents a phenomenological study that addresses how teachers in an urban, high-poverty elementary school experienced a scripted reading program. While teachers found the program had some benefits for their struggling readers, their overwhelming perception of the program was negative. The overarching theme of the study was that there existed a hierarchical system that determined who had the power to make decisions within the institution, including what components of the program to purchase and how it was to be implemented in classrooms.

We have argued that the dominant force within this hegemonic system was the corporation. Administrators were convinced that the scripted program would be a panacea for raising literacy scores, and subsequently, teachers were required to implement it with fidelity or risk being sanctioned. The placement test that accompanied the program took precedence over data from other reading tests, resulting in many students being placed below their actual reading levels.

We have argued that implementation of a scripted reading program epitomizes the power of the market in that it provides an extreme yet tangible example of how corporations can exert control over schools. Not only were teachers and students constrained through the language of the script itself, but they were also continuously monitored to assure exact implementation. Corporate coaches periodically appeared on site, sometimes even taking books out of the hands of teachers when they did not implement the script precisely. The layers of control became highly visible: the corporation made the decisions, school administrators required teachers to comply, and teachers feared reprisal if they did not follow the rules. Thus, like MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, and Parma (2004), we concur that such control represents a form of colonization, as teachers are "redefined as unskilled" (p. 137) and forced to endure continuous surveillance. In examining this phenomenon of teachers' experiences with a scripted reading curriculum, we can make visible the often obscure ways in which hegemony works in schools to disempower teachers and deny agency.

Yet it is important to note that reading programs and the corporations that manufacture them are rarely held accountable for student failure; rather, when test scores do not improve, teacher incompetence is generally implicated. What is interesting is that this occurs even with highly scripted programs. Alternately, achievement gains are generally attributed to the program rather than to teacher effectiveness. The teachers in our study were keenly aware of this dilemma. Lacey told us:

> When my scores come back, even though fifth grade has been sneaking and reading chapter books, and even though I've been

interjecting common core reading skill based questions, at the end of the year when they look at MAP growth they'll say, "Congratulations. That program worked."

When teachers are stripped of their professional identities, they have three choices: They can acquiesce, they can subtly oppose, or they can actively resist. Most of the teachers in our study tended to subtly oppose by supplementing the program in various ways in an attempt to meet the needs of their students. Teachers' comments also suggested that some of their colleagues acquiesced by following the program precisely and accepting the loss of their professional authority. In reflecting on responses of her colleagues, one teacher noted, "Like I don't have to think about it. I can just know that tomorrow I can walk in, have my copies already made 'cause I've already done it for the full week and be done with it."

"Most of the teachers in our study tended to subtly oppose by supplementing the program in various ways in an attempt to meet the needs of their students."

A few, however, actively resisted by leaving the classroom altogether. Although teacher turnover is a significant problem in U.S. schools in general, retaining teachers in high-poverty schools is especially difficult. Almost half of the nation's teachers leave the profession within 5 years, and in high poverty schools, teachers are 50% more likely to leave than in low-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2003). Contrary to perceptions that teachers leave high-poverty schools due to frustrations with difficult-to-teach students, research suggests it is the social conditions under which teachers work—such as school climate, principal leadership, and collegial relationships— that are most important in determining teacher turnover, not student demographic variables (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Much has been written about literacy as a sociocultural process, a view that acknowledges that reading and writing are human activities composed and used within authentic social contexts (Compton-Lilly, 2009; Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Gee, 2001; Gutiérrez, 2007; Heath, 1983; Hourigan, 1994; Street, 1995). The marketing of literacy, however, has reduced it to a mechanistic process that can be easily commodified and consumed. Such decontextualized curricula ignore the cultural and linguistic practices of students and families and marginalizes teachers' professional knowledge. Even more problematic, trusting the corporation to solve what are in reality complex socioeconomic problems can result in the colonization of teachers and an erosion of their professional autonomy. The psychological impact of highly scripted programs can be the ultimate determinant for some teachers as to whether they want to remain in a field that devalues their knowledge and expertise, ultimately compelling them to face the frustration and humiliation associated with corporate control.

Thus, we concur with Moje and Lewis (2009) in arguing for a sociocultural perspective in literacy research. Literacy instruction is not neutral, but rather is inherently political. This study shows that we cannot ignore larger sociopolitical forces, for even the best instructional practices can be undermined by a hegemonic system that trusts the power of the market over teachers' personal and professional wisdom. At the same time, it is important that educators recognize that even within this system, they can find spaces to practice agency, as many of the teachers in our study were able to do. It is also important to recognize that our educational institutions are not simply preparatory schools for the workplace, but rather are sites for educating a citizenry in "civic courage," (Giroux, 1988, p. xxxii), where teachers are free to practice their craft and students are encouraged to question, challenge, and engage in transformative action.

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Appendix A

Participant Information

Name (pseudonyms)	Highest Degree Attained	Ethnicity	Years of Teaching Experience	Grade Level/Teaching Area
Carol	MA Counseling	Caucasian	6	K
Georgiana	BA Elem. Ed.	Caucasian	First year teacher	1st
Carmen	BA Elem. Ed.	Caucasian	2	1st
Mary	Doctorate, Early Childhood and Elem. Ed.	Caucasian	24 (18 in elementary classrooms)	1st
Anna	MA Information Systems Tech.; M. Ed.	Caucasian	4	2nd
Nicole	MA Instructional Leadership	Caucasian	13	3rd
Hannah	MA Teacher Leader	African American	6	3rd
Erica	MA Teacher Leader	Caucasian	8	3rd
Kayla	MA Counseling; trained as Reading First Coach	African American	24	4th
Natalie	BA Elem. Ed.	Caucasian	First year teacher	4th
Lacey	MA Reading and Writing	Caucasian	6	5th
Susie	Rank I (equivalent to Ed. Spec.) Elem. Ed.	Biracial Asian/Caucasian	25	5th
Kendra	MA Ed. Technology; MA Educ. Leadership	Caucasian	11	Reading Interventionist
Jennifer	MA Counseling	Caucasian	7	Reading Interventionist

James	BA Special Ed. and Soc. Sts. 5-9	African American	2	Special Education
Amy	MA Tchg. English as a Second Lang.	Caucasian	5	ESL
Whitney	MA Teacher Leader with ESL endorsement	Caucasian	6	ESL

Appendix B

Examples of Data Transformation

Statements from Teacher Interviews	First Transformation (Meaning Unit)	Second Transformation (Interrogation: What were teachers' experiences with a scripted reading program?)	Third Transformation: General structural description (trans-situational; beyond the specific situation)
Nicole: The kids who grew the most are those kids that are at that decoding stage. Why did they score the greater points, is because now they're actually able to read the text, some of the text. They're able to use those decoding skills to read. And guess what? Even if they read a paragraph, that's more than they read coming in when they're only at first grade level. So that's why those kids grew.	Teachers believe students with decoding problems benefited from the program.	Teachers felt the program benefited low achieving students.	The program supported teachers' work with the most struggling students.
Kayla: When she was across the street, when she was in first grade,	Teachers feel the way the program conceptualizes reading results in	Teachers were upset that many of their students were misplaced and were	Teachers' forced enactment of the program

second grade, when she was in first grade, she used to go to second grade just because they didn't have a group high enough for her. They just had to. . . She had like maybe 4 or 5 kids that were way up above fourth grade reading, including some of the kids that were in my classroom this year that they put in corrective reading. They didn't need to be in corrective reading. I have two kids who were in gifted. . . **Natalie**: She was in Corrective Reading A. **Kayla**: Yes. Yes. I have three kids who are in the gifted program that were in corrective reading.	students being placed below their actual reading level.	forced to use instructional materials below their actual reading levels.	led to negative outcomes for students.
Interviewer: So how did it make you feel as a teacher? **Carol**: Inadequate. I felt that I would walk in that morning and I was setting my students up for failure. I did not feel that I was coming in and preparing them to be great learners. I felt like I was not providing them what they deserved. I felt guilty a lot of times. Like I said, I broke down several times reading in this	Teachers report feeling guilty teaching the program because they believe it is setting up their students for failure.	Teachers were regretful that they were not able to help their students grow as readers.	The program had a negative impact on teachers' psychological well-being.

program, because I would be behind a book. I'm not a "behind the book" teacher.			
Natalie: But see, I couldn't say anything. This was my first year of teaching. **Kayla**: No, she didn't. I did. **Natalie**: Yes. We had to use her voice as our voice, 'cause I mean. . . **Kayla**: It doesn't make sense. **Natalie**: And I'm the type that, I do what I'm told. That's just how I am. **Kayla**: I understand that, 'cause we need a job. **Natalie**: Yes.	Teachers express a reluctance to resist because of fear of reprisals.	Teachers felt threatened if they did not adhere to the script.	Teachers are impacted by a hierarchical system that dictates who has the power to make decisions within the institution.